A marriage of convenience: women and the post office in New South Wales, 1838 to 1938

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A Marriage of Convenience: Women and the Post Office in New South Wales, 1838 to 1938

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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The University of New South Wales

December 2009

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Abstract

My thesis focuses on the experience of postmistresses, female telegraphists and unpaid female "assistants" in the New South Wales (N.S.W.) postal and telecommunications departments from 1838, and in the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department from 1901 to 1938. In the work I explore the system of patronage providing for women in financial distress, the "sedentary" nature of postal work, and the post office as a "domestic" or private space. At the same time, I attempt to explain how female official post and telegraph employees in N.S.W. came to be granted equal pay with men in the early 1860s. I also investigate how they managed to retain the concession, despite mounting opposition to working women. My research includes an analysis of the reasons why they failed to take an active part in the Victorian-led campaign for wage equality under the federal government from 1900, and an investigation of the relative decline in vocational prospects for female official staff from the early years of the 20th century. Lastly, I consider the survival of women in allowance/non-official post offices into the 1930s, and the bureaucracy's belated recognition of female "assistants" who managed these outlets on behalf of male office-holders.

Over the course of 100 years, the fortunes of female post and telegraph staff in N.S.W. waxed and waned in an episodic fashion. From the late 1830s, the system of influence furnished needy middle- and middling-class women with socially acceptable employment in the postal and telecommunications service at a time when there were few job opportunities for females in their social strata. As official post and telegraph mistresses, the women exercised extraordinary supervisory power over male members of staff and shared in the prestige attached to telegraphic work. Thanks to their relative "immobility", they secured a foothold in the postal department in a period when many working men lived transient lives removed from the allegedly emasculating effects of domesticity and indoor employment. Equal pay from the early 1860s distinguished female official employees in N.S.W. from their peers in the other Australian post and telegraph utilities. The concession can be traced to the bureaucratic autonomy of the N.S.W. postal service. Women on the permanent list preserved their right to wage equality by subsidising uneconomic operations and by

calling on the support of politicians and bureaucrats with a residual commitment to patronage, meritocratic principles notwithstanding. Arguably incapable of proving themselves the equal of male co-workers and their colleagues in Victoria, female Post Office employees in N.S.W. lacked the credentials needed to fully participate in the merit-based quest for wage equality under the Commonwealth. As a result, male union officials were left to represent their interests. By the 1930s equal pay had reduced official postmistresses and female telegraphists to a tiny minority in the departmental workforce. The failure of feminists to secure legislation extending wage equality to all working women added to their vocational isolation. While trained female telegraphists experienced a gradual decline in status with the removal of Morse-key equipment from official post offices, unskilled women in non-official outlets gained in earning power with the introduction of elementary telegraphic devices and telephone switchboard services. Despite the system of veteran preference that accompanied the Great War, women continued to find work in allowance/non-official facilities, given the limited employability of many ex-servicemen. For much of the century, female postal workers went largely unacknowledged – a function of the overarching emphasis on the male wage. In later years the authorities began to treat official postmistresses and some unpaid female "assistants" in allowance/non-official offices as workers in their own right, thanks to their sex's enhanced financial and social standing.

During the period the character of the female-run post office slowly evolved. Having provided women with a suitable work environment for many years, the postal outlet gradually cast aside its private or domestic mantle, taking on a public or commercial face in response to demographic change and the expanding business interests of female staff.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go first to my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Anne O'Brien, for her enthusiasm for the subject of my thesis, her expert guidance, and her kind words of encouragement along the way. Anne's unfailing optimism carried me through the slow times when progress seemed to elude me. At particular points in the writing process, she proposed changes to the text that rendered my argument more persuasive.

I would also like to thank my former employer, Australia Post, for a job that alerted me to the significant contribution of women to the post and telegraph service in New South Wales and that provided me with the material required to construct a thesis. As the corporation's historian, I enjoyed privileged access to a vast quantity of documentation covering postal and telecommunications operations during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The contents of files and reports furnished me with innumerable insights into the working lives of postmistresses and female telegraphists. Their sometimes-moving experiences inspired me to document their careers.

Edmund Rutledge at the Sydney office of National Archives of Australia, the official repository for Post Office and other Commonwealth Government records, deserves a mention. Ever attentive to the needs of researchers, Edmund helped me to navigate my way through the changes in file classification systems over time and identified items he thought might be of interest.

I am very grateful to my family and friends for their support, in word and deed, during my Ph.D. candidature. An I.T. expert, my brother Graham assisted me in overcoming multiple computer problems. Many a time I called on him to recover "lost" material or to remove a virus – tasks well beyond my technical capacity. Lastly, I must acknowledge the love and constant support of my mother and my dear friend, Cheryl. Both women demonstrated the greatest faith in me and my ability. Given the trials and tribulations of thesis writing, both believed I could complete the task I had set myself and never failed to tell me so at every opportunity. Like my "sedentary" postmistresses, they were "always there".

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Glossary of Terms

Allowance Postmaster or Postmistress	An individual paid a departmental allowance to operate a post office, often in conjunction with another business.
Allowance Post Office	A postal facility operated by a person in receipt of a departmental allowance and frequently housing another business.
Assistant	An individual who assisted a postmaster or postmistress in a paid or honorary capacity.
Chief Office	Headquarters of the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department based in Melbourne.
Clerical Assistant	A designation introduced around 1904 covering junior telegraphists and other officers.
Commonwealth Postmaster-General	Federal government politician responsible for national postal and telecommunications services.
Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department	Federal government department established in 1901 following abolition of the six colonial postal and telecommunications instrumentalities.
Exempt Employee	A worker without access to leave, superannuation and other provisions under public service legislation.
General Post Office	Chief postal and telegraph centre located in the capital city of each colony/state.
Head Office	Headquarters of the N.S.W. Post Office Department, N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department, N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department, and N.S.W. Branch of the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department. Based in the Sydney General Post Office (G.P.O.).
Machine Telegraphy	Semi-automated telegraphy using Wheatstone, Creed, Duplex, Quadruplex, Multiplex, and carrier wave technology.
Non-Official Employee	A worker without access to leave and other entitlements under public service legislation, who often had business interests outside the post and telegraph department.
Non-Official Postmaster or Postmistress	See Allowance Postmaster or Postmistress.

Non-Official Post Office	See Allowance Post Office.
N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department	Telecommunications instrumentality under the control of the N.S.W. Postmaster-General from 1867.
N.S.W. Post Office Department	Government body established in 1828, constituting official recognition of the postal service in N.S.W.
N.S.W. Postmaster-General	Permanent head of the N.S.W. Post Office Department prior to 1865, and the politician assigned the postal portfolio from that date and the telecommunications portfolio from 1867.
N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department	Instrumentality established in 1893 following the amalgamation of the N.S.W. Post Office Department and the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department.
N.S.W. Superintendent of Telegraphs	Permanent head of the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department from 1861.
Official Employee	A permanent government employee subject to the provisions of public service legislation and without external business interests.
Official Post Office	A postal facility operated by the department in government-owned or rented premises.
Official Postmaster or Postmistress	An employee charged with managing an official post office.
Operator	An employee trained in Morse-key, alphabetical (A.B.C.), or machine telegraphy.
Postal Assistant	Designation given to an official or temporary employee who performed lesser postal duties in an official post and telegraph office.
Postal Clerk	Designation given to an official employee who undertook significant postal and telecommunications work in an official post and telegraph office.
Post and Telegraph Master or Mistress	An officer in charge of an official establishment providing postal and telecommunications services.
Semi-Official Postmaster or Postmistress	An individual who managed a post and telegraph facility under contract with a right to limited employee entitlements.
Semi-Official Post Office	A postal and telecommunications outlet conducted on a contract basis, and often located in a former official office.

Switchboard Attendant	An individual employed to operate a telephone switchboard in an official post office or a dedicated telephone exchange.
Telegraphist	See Operator.
Telephonist	See Switchboard Attendant.
Temporary Employee	A worker theoretically hired for a set period of time with some employee entitlements.

Footnote Abbreviations*

A.C.P.T.O.A.	Australian Commonwealth Post and Telegraph Officers' Association
A.D.B.	*Australian Dictionary of Biography*
Allow.	Allowance, as in Allowance Post Office, or Allowance Postmaster or Postmistress
A.P.	Australia Post
A.P. Hist. Archives	Australia Post Historical Archives
A.P.O.	Australian Post Office
Appt	Appointment
A.P.T.A.	Australian Post and Telegraph Association
Circ.	Circular, as in Circular Memorandum
Comm. and State	Commonwealth and State
Dep. Director	Deputy Director
Dep. P.M.G.	Deputy Postmaster-General
Dep. Pmr	Deputy Postmaster
Dept	Department

* This list covers the abbreviations used by the N.S.W. and federal post and telegraph departments, along with those devised by me for the purposes of the thesis. It does not include the standard Latin terms such as *ibid.*, *loc. cit.*, etc. The utilities employed the abbreviation "P.M." for both Postmaster and Postmistress. I have opted for "Pmr" (Postmaster) and "Pms" (Postmistress) to avoid ambiguity.

The footnotes and the bibliography generally conform to the instructions contained in 'Essay Guide', School of History and Philosophy, University of N.S.W., updated May 2008. After consulting my supervisor, I have departed from the Guide in respect of book citations, replacing the colon (:) with a comma (,) when detailing the place of publication and the publisher (eg St Leonards, Allen & Unwin). The substitution is intended to enhance readability in cases where a footnote deals with multiple publications, and a semi-colon (;) separates each reference. For the sake of brevity, particulars of the instrumentality responsible for internal communications (letters, memoranda, file notes, etc) do not appear in the footnotes. Without exception, the items were generated by either the N.S.W. Post Office Department (1828–1893), the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department (1857–1893), the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department (1893–1900), or the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department (1901–1975). Regrettably, the correspondence files I have cited do not contain details of addressees in all instances.

D.I.	District Inspector
D.O.	District Office
D.P.I.	District Postal Inspector
F.C.T.	Federal Capital Territory
G.P.O.	General Post Office
Inspr	Inspector
M.B.E.	Member of the Order of the British Empire
Memo	Memorandum
Metro	Metropolitan, as in Metro No. 1, D.O.
M.H.R.	Member of House of Representatives
M.L.A.	Member of Legislative Assembly
M.L.C.	Member of Legislative Council
M.P.	Member of Parliament
N.A.A.	National Archives of Australia
Non-Off.	Non-Official, as in Non-Official Post Office, or Non-Official Postmaster or Postmistress
N.S.W.	New South Wales
P.A.	Postal Assistant
P.C.	Postal Clerk
P.I.	Postal Inspector
Pmr	Postmaster
Pms	Postmistress
P.M.G.	Postmaster-General
P.M.G. Dept	Postmaster-General's Department
P.O.	Post Office
P.R.O.	Public Relations Office

P. & T. Mr	Post and Telegraph Master
P. & T. Ms	Post and Telegraph Mistress
P. & T. O.	Post and Telegraph Office
Q.	Question, as in question asked in Royal Commission
Sec.	Secretary
Snr D.I.	Senior District Inspector
Snr I.	Senior Inspector
Supt of Tels	Superintendent of Telegraphs
Teleg.	Telegraphist
T. Mr	Telegraph Master
T.O.	Telegraph Office
U.P.	University Press

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Introduction

This thesis deals with female post and telegraph employees in New South Wales (N.S.W.) over the 100-year period from the appointment of Mary Ann Rutledge, Australia's first paid postmistress, on 12 February 1838, to December 1938, just nine months prior to the outbreak of the Second World War.[1] It covers postmistresses, telegraphists, postal clerks and postal assistants on the official or permanent list of the N.S.W. and Commonwealth Public Services who were employed in official, or government-run, post and telegraph offices. The dissertation also embraces women who operated semi-official post offices and non-official/allowance outlets, typically in conjunction with other businesses. At the same time, I include the unpaid female assistants to non-official/allowance postmasters who often managed facilities in the name of male kin.[2] In the general absence of a surviving record, I have chosen not to consider female temporary employees working in official offices, except in rare instances where reference is made to them in departmental files or publications.[3] Because of the inadequacies of extant documentation and the limited nature of their duties, receiving office keepers, who provided the lowest grade of postal amenity, also fall outside the ambit of my research.[4] Similarly, I have ignored railway employees in post and telegraph offices on station platforms, hired, as they were, by an instrumentality other than the postal and telecommunications utility. Although my

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[1] Letter from Colonial Sec. to G.P.O., Sydney, approving the engagement of Mary Ann Rutledge as Pms at Cassilis P.O., 12 February 1838, Extracts from Register of Inward Correspondence, G.P.O., Sydney, 7 January 1834 – 6 March 1845, p. 108. The footnotes contain several abbreviations and a few deliberate omissions. For details, see Footnote Abbreviations, pp. x–xii, especially footnote *, p. x.

[2] From 1862 postal outlets managed by persons other than public servants on the permanent list were designated non-official offices. See, *Post Office Staff List, 1889*; & *Supplement to the N.S.W. Government Gazette*, no. 508, Thursday, 2 July 1896. From about 1911 to 1927, the establishments were alternatively styled allowance post offices. In January 1927 allowance and receiving facilities were renamed non-official post offices following the upgrading of receiving outlets to allowance standard. Semi-official offices were established from around 1908. Staffed on a contract basis, they earned insufficient revenue to justify official status, but were more profitable than non-official amenities. See, N. C. Hopson, *New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Post Offices*, rev. edn, Sydney, self-published, 1984, p. i & p. ii.

[3] The N.S.W. Post Office Department and the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department customarily destroyed details of temporary employees after they left the service. Moreover, the government archival authorities have chosen not to schedule records of temporary staff for permanent retention.

[4] Receiving offices in N.S.W. pose problems in terms of study. Annual fluctuations in earnings saw outlets upgraded to non-official/allowance offices or revert to receiving centres on a regular basis, making it difficult to determine the status of facilities at any one time. In any event, departmental files contain few details of receiving office staff. Receiving office keepers maintained a community mail

research deals with postmistresses and assistants performing telephone switchboard duties, it does not extend to designated telephonists in official post offices and purpose-built exchanges. Given the multitude of women hired as telephonists and the distinct history of telephony in Australia, a separate study of telephone exchange staff would appear to be warranted. Moreover, female telephonists constituted a separate employment category with increasingly feminised duties. Where necessary, reference is made to female post and telegraph staff in the other Australian colonies/states. Little attention is paid to Queensland, where women were generally denied access to postmistress and telegraphist positions on the permanent list.[5]

Putting aside the structural "tidiness" inherent in a century-long study, I have chosen to conclude my investigation in 1938, given the significant shift in female Post Office employment that accompanied the outbreak of war. While few female official employees remained on strength by that time, the international conflict saw hundreds of women recruited to replace male workers who had entered the armed forces. Their jobs included sorting mail, delivering letters and telegrams, bookkeeping, and general office work. From the outset, the new recruits were given to understand that they were temporary appointees and would have to resign once victory had been achieved and the men returned from active service.

A number of scholars have devoted research to female Post Office employees in Australia and Britain. In her M.A. thesis and in other writings, Claire McCuskey deals with official postmistresses and telegraphists in the Victorian postal and telecommunications utility from the 1850s to the 1930s, underscoring the interdependent, sometimes symbiotic, relationship between employer and employee.[6] In her doctoral submission and in several publications, Desley Deacon critiques the state's role in shaping the gender composition of the N.S.W. Public Service through

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bag for collection by the mail contractor. In return they received a small commission on the sale of postage stamps.

[5] Elise Barney, Postmistress in Brisbane, gained control of postal services in Queensland with the establishment of that colony in 1859. No woman appears to have occupied the position of official postmistress or telegraphist in Queensland following her departure in 1864. See, Desley Deacon, 'Elise Barney (1815–1883) postmistress', in Heather Radi (ed.), *200 Australian women, a Redress anthology*, Broadway, Women's Redress Press, 1988, p. 17.

[6] Claire McCuskey, 'Women in the Victorian Post Office', in Margaret Bevege (ed.) *et al.*, *Worth Her Salt*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1982; & Claire McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian

the experience of official postmistresses and female telegraphists.[7] Sociologist Samuel Ross Cohn has written a Ph.D. thesis in which he explores occupational sex-typing in the British General Post Office and the Great Western Railway between 1857 and 1937. He tests both the theory that employers exclude women from strongly unionised workplaces, and the counter argument that they purposely introduce females to these environments in an effort to pacify the labour force. Cohn investigates whether his subjects failed to attain their career potential because they voluntarily left their job to marry, or because their employer induced them to resign in order to contain the wages bill.[8] In a journal article, sociologist Keith Grint scrutinises the decision to grant equal pay to a handful of women in the British Post Office from 1920 – a concession extended to all female employees of that organisation from 1961.[9]

I depart from the above researchers in several areas. Whereas they are only concerned with official staff, I take account of non-official/allowance postmistresses and female "assistants" who subsidised departmental services, while bolstering family incomes and perpetuating patronage. Unlike Deacon and McCuskey, I examine female postal employment in the context of attempts to overcome convictism in government. I also address the transient nature of the male working population and the fears surrounding social anonymity. Moreover, I seek to explain why female official employees in N.S.W. were the first and only women in the Australian colonial postal and telecommunications services to be granted equal pay prior to Federation – a boon without parallel at the time and something that has so far escaped analysis. I go on to look at how the N.S.W. women managed to retain the concession until 1901 and why they chose not to actively participate in the Victorian-led campaign for equal pay under the federal government. I plot in greater detail than either Deacon or McCuskey

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Post Office', M.A. Thesis, Dept of History, School of Humanities, La Trobe University, Melbourne, April 1984.

[7] D. Deacon, 'The Employment of Women in the Commonwealth Public Service: The Creation and Reproduction of a Dual Labour Market', *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, vol. XLI, no. 3, September 1982; Desley Deacon, 'The Naturalization of Dependence: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers 1830–1930', Ph.D. Thesis, Dept of Sociology, Australian National University, Canberra, 1985; Desley Deacon, *Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers 1830–1930*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1989; & Desley Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context: Conflicting masculinisms in the New South Wales Public Service Bill debates of 1895', in Susan Magarey (ed.) *et al., Debutante nation: Feminism contests the 1890s*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1993.

[8] Samuel Ross Cohn, 'Feminization of Clerical Labor in Great Britain. A Contrast of Two Large Clerical Employers: 1857–1937', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1981.

the gradual erosion of employment equality beyond Federation. My work includes an examination of the abortive effort by female employees from 1908 to achieve genuine parity with male colleagues. Unlike Deacon and McCuskey, I view the post office as both public and private space, having regard to the concept of separate male and female spheres and the multiple roles assigned to female employees-cum-wives, sisters, daughters and carers. In particular, I explore the blurred boundary between "working women" and homebound "dependants", and between commercial property and the family domain. Contemporaneously, I analyse the aversion among many males to indoor work in the feminised post-office environment.

The subject of my thesis is manifestly worthy of study. From an organisational and industrial-relations perspective, the readiness of senior bureaucrats, departmental employees, politicians, clergymen and leading citizens to patronise women in need of post and telegraph employment helps to explain the delay in implementing a public service meritocracy and the reluctance of many female workers to identify with the union movement. Official postmistresses and female telegraphists in N.S.W. were a privileged minority, gaining equal pay a full century before most working women in Australia. The same exceptional group of workers boasted unrivalled supervisory control over male staff and shared in the public esteem reserved for telecommunications experts. My work is important in dealing with females engaged in paid and "unpaid" labour in non-official/allowance offices – a large occupational cohort that has been ignored by scholarly researchers until now. In considering their part in augmenting household income, I add to the historiography surrounding the 'statistical invisibility' of working women and open up the circumscribed concept of the male or family wage.

In exploring the system of influence found in the N.S.W. post and telegraph utility, I examine the European precedent providing for the engagement of widows and daughters of government officers, as well as the employment assistance given to female immigrants and other "respectable" women in financial distress. Jill Matthews observes that respectability was and is a subjective, ill-defined, ever-changing

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[9] K. Grint, 'Women and Equality: The Acquisition of Equal Pay in the Post Office 1870–1961', *Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 1, February 1988, p. 87 & p. 88.

construct sustained by regular surveillance.[10] I argue that partial employment policy constituted an alternative to the inadequate welfare provisions of the time.

My thesis includes an examination of efforts from the 1850s to replace public-sector patronage with a meritocracy. Arthur McMartin stresses that influence and merit were not mutually exclusive concepts in colonial Australia, pointing out that morally based patronage was implicitly underpinned by a system of merit in which paper qualifications were not the sole measure of an individual's worth.[11] I contend that owing to senior management's vested interest in influence, female post and telegraph employees in N.S.W. continued to look to patrons rather than to their own abilities long after their Victorian peers had embraced meritocratic principles. Ann Curthoys observes that many women are complicit in the maintenance of patronage and other forms of patriarchy, prevailing on strong men to look after them. Typically, they underestimate their own potential while overestimating male power.[12]

Deacon claims that women acquired telegraphic positions in smaller outlets by default and without specific regard for their merit, thanks to the hierarchy's preoccupation with head office affairs, the political insignificance of the postal and telecommunications utilities, and the lack of a uniform employment policy in a disorganised civil service.[13] These three factors, she argues, conspired to preserve the paternalistic system of recruitment.[14] While administrative indifference favoured female employment, I suggest that many women secured telegraphic work by virtue of their expertise, rather than their connections.

The thesis explores women's capacity for agency. I examine the cultivation of patrons, protests over terms of employment, and the assorted devices used by female assistants to assert their right to employee status. As for the currying of favour by

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[10] Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth-Century Australia*, North Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1984, pp. 6–8, p. 69, p. 78 & p. 86.
[11] Arthur McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', in J. J. Eddy and J. R. Nethercote (eds), *From Colony to Coloniser: Studies in Australian Administrative History*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger in association with the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration, 1987, p. 58.
[12] Ann Curthoys cited in Rosemary Pringle, 'Destabilising patriarchy', in Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian feminisms*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 207.
[13] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, pp. 67–69, p. 75 & p. 77.
[14] *ibid*., p. 59.

female immigrants, James Hammerton highlights the resourcefulness of poor, middle-class, female arrivals from Britain, casting doubt on the veracity of contemporary images of helpless and 'distressed gentlewomen'.[15] On the subject of patronage by senior government officials, Rosemary Pringle rejects the Weberian theory of rational bureaucracy, suggesting instead that organisational power is subjective and frequently sexualised, turning on mutual gratification and pleasure.[16] I argue that female Post Office employees in N.S.W. protected their interests through personal appeals to bureaucrats and male unionists, rather than through collective industrial action. In choosing the former strategy, they were conscious of their limited bargaining power *vis-a-vis* male colleagues.

I pursue several lines of enquiry in relation to gender equality in the postal and telecommunications service. Besides investigating the circumstances surrounding the granting of equal pay, I examine the apparent threat posed to the male wage by inexpensive female labour, as well as the effects of office segregation on women's claims to employment parity. Daphne Spain points out that a woman working in a female–only environment had limited wage and vocational prospects. All too often her expertise was devalued simply because it was acquired from another woman, her occupation reduced to the status of "women's work".[17] Deacon argues that, in contrast to their Victorian and foreign counterparts, female telegraphists in N.S.W. were engaged irrespective of their capacity to provide cheap labour.[18] I contend that in N.S.W. women were hired on comparatively low wages expressly to staff uneconomic postal and telecommunications outlets, equal pay notwithstanding. Over time, postmistresses and female telegraphists settled for something less than genuine equality in return for security of tenure. Given their superior salary, and because of an apparent inability to prove themselves the equal of men and their female peers elsewhere in Australia, N.S.W. women opted to remain at arms length from the national, merit-based campaign launched in 1900 for wage parity under the Commonwealth.

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[15] A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration 1830–1914*, London, Croom Helm, 1979.
[16] Rosemary Pringle's view is consistent with Foucault's link between sexuality and power. Pringle cited in Anne Witz and Mike Savage, 'The gender of organizations', in Mike Savage and Anne Witz (eds), *Gender and Bureaucracy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1992, p. 27.
[17] Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 202.
[18] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 69 & p. 70.

On the subject of employment equality, I discuss the contemporary concept of skill and the ideas surrounding sexual difference. The discussion is premised on the assumption that skill is a social construct shaped by notions of gender and race.[19] I suggest that women gained telegraphic employment in the absence of a consensus regarding the qualities required to perform the work. Few in number, female telegraphists were subject to constant scrutiny, their errors duly noted. Rosabeth Kanter suggests that 'token women' in male-dominated organisations are exposed to intense surveillance and disproportionate performance pressures as a consequence of their conspicuousness or minority status.[20] In an attempt to illuminate perceptions surrounding skill and gender difference, I review contemporary jokes and cartoons about female employees in the context of their alleged threat to male workers. Paula Hamilton observes that humour is more frequently a barometer of tension in society than of contentment, and a prescribed way of airing controversial issues in the culture.[21]

My work explores the twin issues of employment freedom and personal liberty. I consider the relative sovereignty enjoyed by female post and telegraph staff, the changing expectations surrounding leisure, and concern for the sanctity of family life. I argue that female workers enjoyed considerable administrative and personal autonomy, thanks to the "domestic" character of the post office, their financial and moral stake in the non-official/allowance postal outlet, and the decentralised nature of departmental operations. While the patriarchal order prevented female official employees from fully participating in union life, allowance postmistresses were generally free to associate with organised labour, courtesy of their apolitical standing and close community connections.

In analysing the post office as a public and private space, I take stock of the ambiguous nature of the workplace and examine the perceived threat posed by a "domestic" work environment to male identity. Spain observes that a woman confined to domestic space is physically and psychologically removed from the male world of

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[19] Raelene Frances, *The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Melbourne, Cambridge U.P., 1993, p. 3, p. 65 & p. 94.
[20] Rosabeth Kanter cited in Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, p. 24.
[21] Paula Hamilton, 'Domestic dilemmas: Representations of servants and employers in the popular press', in Magarey (ed.) *et al.*, *Debutante nation*, p. 71 & p. 72.

work, preventing her from accessing the information and skills needed to enhance her career.[22] I contend that female departmental employees in single-sex offices were both advantaged and disadvantaged by their confinement, gaining a niche in a sometimes hostile labour market while experiencing occupational marginalisation. In time, the private space in postal outlets grew more public in response to entrepreneurial forces.

The six chapters constituting my thesis are arranged chronologically and thematically, and, in some cases, embrace overlapping periods. In the first chapter, which covers the mid 1820s to the late 1880s, I discuss the development of a system of influence, the notion of female respectability, and the interdependent relationship between employer and employee, as well as the issue of equal pay. At the same time, my study deals with the evolution of the state, women's underwriting of departmental services and the "quarantining" of female staff. In the second chapter, I examine the appointment of the first female telegraphists in N.S.W. from the mid 1870s, opposition to women operators, the peripheral nature of female unionism, and evidence of deskilling, concluding my research in the latter half of the 1880s. The third chapter is given over to the experience of female employees in the context of the 1890's depression, the declining birth rate, and preparations for Federation in 1901. I devote considerable attention to the refusal of N.S.W. women to support Victorian efforts to achieve wage equality under the federal government. In the fourth chapter, I trace the decline of equal employment provisions from 1902 to 1914 and the onset of world war. My research focuses on the failed attempt to win real, as opposed to token, workplace equality, and the lack of electoral support for Vida Goldstein's campaign to secure universal equal pay through federal parliament. It also engages with the growing divide between private and commercial precincts in the post office. Next, I look at the demand for postal employment during the Great War and into the 1920s, women's sacrificial role in national emergencies, and the ongoing quest for vocational equality. My study includes a critique of the system of veteran preference and an examination of Postal Institute membership, an exploration of the divisions between women's organisations, and an analysis of the shift in feminist tactics with respect to equal pay. In the final chapter, I address the impact of the Great Depression from 1929 on female employment, discuss the emphasis on salesmanship, and look into the

[22] Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, p. 14, p. 15 & p. 107.

fixation with youth and beauty. My work bears on the media's growing influence in appointments and takes into account the declining importance of female respectability for vocational purposes. Lastly, I examine the department's increased preparedness to treat unpaid female "assistants" as employees.

The motivation to write this thesis stemmed largely from a desire to make profitable use of valuable, previously untapped, original documentation. For several years I was employed as the N.S.W. historian for Australia Post, the joint successor of the Postmaster-General's Department (P.M.G.), along with Telstra (the former Telecom), now a publicly listed telecommunications company.[23] As an Australia Post employee, I enjoyed exclusive access to a huge volume of primary source material stored in Sydney Head Office following the closure of the Historical Section to the public in 1988. Items included correspondence files, original transcripts of written communications, staff registers, discipline and conduct registers, printed circulars and memoranda, and staff magazines. Many records gravitated to me after 1988 with the consolidation of regional administration centres and the rationalisation of postal outlets. During my candidature, much of the documentation was moved to off-site storage facilities pending possible transfer to the Sydney office of National Archives of Australia, the official repository for federal government records. (For details, see Bibliography, footnote *, p. 399). Prior to its dispersal, the N.S.W. historical collection represented the largest single body of information on 19th- and early-20th-century postal operations in Australia, thanks to official interest in the history of communications in the colony/state, and the zeal with which former P.M.G. and Australia Post historical officers set about gathering items.[24]

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[23] The Australian Postal Commission (trading as Australia Post) and the Australian Telecommunications Commission (trading as Telecom) were established in 1975 with the abolition of the Postmaster-General's Department. Both organisations were corporatised in the 1980s, becoming government business enterprises. Telecom was subsequently renamed Telstra. In the 1990s the federal government divested itself of its interest in Telstra, subject to certain conditions, allowing the corporation to be listed on the stock exchange.

[24] As early as the late 1930s, the N.S.W. Branch of the Australian Postal Institute (A.P.I.) invited members to donate records and three-dimensional artefacts to an historical collection. In the early 1950s, the A.P.I. passed the material to the Postmaster-General's Department, and Edward (Ted) Walter of the Drafting Section was placed in control of the items. Mr Walter was later appointed to the position of N.S.W. Historical Officer and charged with collecting further documentation and researching the history of the postal service in the interest of public relations. In the other states, the historical record is less complete owing to the arbitrary disposal of files prior to the introduction of effective archival legislation and the absence of dedicated historical staff. Because of the relative lack of extant records covering early Victorian postal operations, Claire McCuskey was obliged to work

During the course of my research, I examined a vast quantity of material. Over 400 post office correspondence files were scrutinised, providing a detailed insight into the workings of an expanding bureaucracy. Approximately 220 proved to be especially useful for my purposes, highlighting the changes in the relationship between employer and employee over time, while hinting at the political, economic and social forces abroad. From the outset I sought to ensure that the records were representative of postal and telecommunications operations in N.S.W. Accordingly, I selected files covering offices in urban and rural areas and in settled and remote regions throughout the jurisdiction.

The material I chose contains a personal record of women who are otherwise unknown to us, the odd newspaper item or other third-person account notwithstanding. In this respect my sources differ from those available to James Hammerton, Penny Russell and other students of middle-class womanhood who have had diaries, biographies and autobiographies with which to work.[25] A number of files contain the words of semi-literate, working-class women who have left us with little written evidence of their existence.[26] Their letters and memoranda offer a broader perspective on the past than do the writings of unrepresentative elites or minorities that were frequently drafted with an eye to posterity.[27]

Like Desley Deacon and Claire McCuskey, I have consulted records in the public domain. References include the annual reports of the colonial and federal postal and telecommunications instrumentalities, proceedings and reports of royal commissions and other official enquiries, contemporary newspapers and union publications. To facilitate interpretation, I have availed myself of scholarly publications on women and work, gender relations, and political, economic and social history.

My work is punctuated by a range of conventions and abbreviations. For the sake of brevity and simplicity, I use the generic terms “Post Office” and “department” when

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with the limited contents of correspondence registers and with accounts of female staff in independent literary sources. See, McCuskey, ‘The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office’, p. viii.

[25] See, for example, Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*; & Penny Russell, *‘A Wish of Distinction’: Colonial Gentility and Femininity*, Melbourne, Melbourne U.P., 1994.

[26] See, Jan Gothard, *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia*, Carlton South, Melbourne U.P., 2001, pp. 5–7.

[27] See, for example, Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, p. 13 & p. 14.

referring to the relevant colonial government bodies, namely the N.S.W. Post Office Department, the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department, and their successor, the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department. The same conventions are applied to the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department from 1901. Similarly, I use the contemporary initialism "P.M.G." as an adjective in relation to the department and its employees. In the early years of the 19th century, the designation "Postmaster" often appeared as two words (ie Post Master): the same applied to "Postmistress", but less frequently. Official records indicate that, by the 1850s, the N.S.W. postal authorities had settled on "Postmaster" and "Postmistress". I opt for the later spelling throughout the work in the interest of uniformity. Prior to the early 1880s, the title "Postmaster-General" was generally spelt without a hyphen.[28] Thereafter, it usually featured the grammatical device.[29] For the sake of consistency, I spell it with a hyphen. With a view to assisting readers, I include a glossary of terms pertaining to departmental operations and a list of footnote abbreviations.

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[28] See, for example, *Post Office (Report from Postmaster General), 1855*, Sydney, 1856, p. 26.
[29] See, for example, *Twenty-Eighth Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1882*, Sydney, 1883, p. 24.

Chapter One: A Marriage of Convenience, 1838–1888

In the first chapter I deal with the appointment of Mary Ann Rutledge and other women to paid positions in the N.S.W. Post Office Department from the late 1830s to the late 1880s, and the contribution of unpaid female help to postal services in N.S.W. over the same period. Initially held by former Sydney postmaster James Raymond from 1835, the office of N.S.W. Postmaster-General became a political portfolio from 1865 in response to the findings of the 1862 Board of Inquiry. Henceforth, the day-to-day management of the Post Office was entrusted to the Secretary, or head bureaucrat.[1] In this work I take stock of Claire McCuskey's study of Victorian postmistresses that points to an interdependent relationship between employer and employee. Under the terms of this relationship, the authorities offered 'respectable' females a relatively secure, socially acceptable vocation in return for a comparatively inexpensive, largely compliant workforce.[2] For my part, I examine the postal department's use of sedentary immigrant women to counter the convict work regime and the migratory habits of the male population. At the same time, I explore the role of patronage in finding employment for widows, spinsters and married women in financial need. Alan Atkinson suggests that the conservative elements in colonial N.S.W. cultivated a system of influence in an effort to curb the negative impact of rampant convictism and *laissez-faire* economics on the social fabric.[3] Carole Pateman and Michael MacConnell observe that paternalism in its many forms gradually shifted from the private to the public domain with the growth of the state from the 1840s. The phenomenon saw bureaucrats assume the role of surrogate fathers, dispensing assistance to worthy "dependants".[4] All the while the relationship between beneficiary and patron remained a social, rather than a legal, arrangement, the former having no enforceable claim on the latter.[5] On the subject of patronage, my findings support

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[1] Hilary Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works: The Administration of New South Wales, Vol. 1, 1842–1900*, Sydney, University of N.S.W. Press, 2005, p. 163.
[2] Claire McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', M.A. Thesis, Dept of History, School of Humanities, La Trobe University, April 1984, p. 7, p. 9 & p. 12.
[3] Alan Atkinson, 'Time, place and paternalism: early conservative thinking in New South Wales', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 90, April 1988, pp. 6–9.
[4] Carole Pateman and Michael MacConnell cited in Rosemary Pringle, 'Destabilising patriarchy', in Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian feminisms*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 202.
[5] Arthur McMartin, *Public Servants and Patronage: the Foundation and Rise of the New South Wales Public Service 1786–1859*, Sydney, Sydney U.P., 1983, p. 52.

Penny Russell's argument that there was a crisis in human relations from the mid 19th century – a consequence of the Gold Rush and the social anonymity that accompanied it.[6] The crisis manifested itself in xenophobia and a heavy investment in established relationships between familiar parties.

My work takes account of the contemporary concept of female respectability. Arthur McMartin notes that an applicant's good character remained an important criterion for government employment, notwithstanding efforts to introduce a meritocracy.[7] Claire McCuskey and James Hammerton point out that 'genteel' and other respectable women in colonial Australia could work as postmistresses or engage in other occupations without compromising their reputation, regardless of the prevailing middle-class ideology of female idleness.[8] John Ferry and Kirsten McKenzie argue that honour among males was of critical importance in colonial business, whereas a woman's good name largely centred on romantic or social relationships.[9] On this point and others, I analyse the agency exercised by postmistresses in defending their respectability, taking into consideration the orthodoxy informing female passivity.[10]

In the first chapter, I examine the conditions surrounding the granting of equal pay to female official employees in the N.S.W. Post Office Department from 1862. My investigation bears on the lengthy tenure of paternalistic bureaucrats, the discriminatory wages policy of other Australian communications utilities, the role of independent businesswomen in N.S.W., and the non-gendered nature of postal work.

Contemporaneously, I investigate the post office as a "female" space, as a public and private domain, and as a commercial and domestic precinct. With the "feminine" character of the postal outlet in mind, I note David Goodman's research on the Gold

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[6] Penny Russell, *'A Wish of Distinction': Colonial Gentility and Femininity*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1994, pp. 3–11.
[7] McMartin, *Public Servants and Patronage*, p. 54 & p. 58.
[8] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 11 & p. 12; & A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830–1914*, London, Croom Helm, 1979, pp. 58–63 & pp. 81–83.
[9] Unlike men, women seldom took legal action to protect their reputation in the workplace. The few suits initiated by them were usually of a matrimonial or sexual nature, including breach of promise or unlawful seduction. See, John Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1999, p. 95; & Kirsten McKenzie, 'Of Convicts and Capitalists: Honour and Colonial Commerce in 1830s Cape Town and Sydney', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 33, no. 118, 2002, p. 220.
[10] See, Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, pp. 58–63.

Rush and his observation that the authorities looked to female domesticity as a way of containing the apparent threat posed by shiftless, unmarried men to the political and social status *quo*.[11] At the same time, I acknowledge Marilyn Lake's work on competing masculinities and the urge among working men to escape the "female" environment for the sake of male identity.[12]

Prior to 1835, men entrusted with the management of post offices outside of Sydney were known as Deputy Postmasters. When, in that year, James Raymond, Postmaster in Sydney and head of the N.S.W. Post Office Department, formally adopted the title of Postmaster-General, males in charge of 'country' or provincial establishments assumed the designation of Postmaster.[13] From the outset women put in control of postal facilities took the title of Postmistress.

Accessible, Socially Acceptable Employment

Employment opportunities in the N.S.W. Post Office Department – which had been officially recognised as a government instrumentality in 1828 – expanded from 1835 with the introduction of measures designed to put the utility on a better financial footing. In that year Governor Bourke approved a bill that effectively reduced postal charges, increased the demand on departmental services, and added to the amount of revenue collected by the organisation. Styled "An Act to provide for the conveyance and postage of letters", the law standardised urban postage rates and instituted a schedule of fees for inland letters based on weight and distance.[14] Moreover, the statute gave the department the exclusive right to handle all letters and parcels weighing no more than nine ounces, thereby ensuring that most international and

[11] David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the* 1850s, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1994, pp. 167–170.
[12] Marilyn Lake, 'The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context', in Susan Magarey (ed.) *et al.*, *Debutante nation: Feminism contests the 1890s*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1993, pp. 3–7.
[13] *The City's Centrepiece: the history of the Sydney G.P.O.*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1988, p. 14. James Raymond's predecessor, George Panton, was referred to as the Postmaster-General in some documents. See, Andrew Houison, *History of the Post Office together with an Historical Account of the Issue of Postage Stamps in New South Wales Compiled Chiefly from the Records*, Sydney, Charles Potter, Government Printer (facsimile edn, Marrickville, View Productions, 1983), 1890, p. 7.
[14] Urban rates applied to Sydney only. Charges on inland letters ranged from four pence for 15 miles to 12 pence for 300 – a penny more for every additional 100 miles or part thereof. See, *ibid.*, p. 9 & p. 11.

domestic mail attracted postage. For some years ships' captains had handled overseas letters for individuals seeking to avoid postage. Similarly, some coach operators with mail contracts had circumvented the postal service, delivering "contraband" letters for commercial gain.[15] Before the 1835 statute was enacted, sea captains involved in speculative ventures would often retain commercial mail consigned to the postal department with an eye to profit. The practice led many businessmen to entrust their correspondence to people outside the Post Office. The 1835 law compelled masters of vessels to surrender all postal articles upon arrival and to take charge of all letters upon departure, or risk a penalty – provisions intended to stem the loss of potential revenue and restore public confidence in the department.[16] The increase in official takings resulting from the reforms helped to offset the high cost of postal privileges. Under colonial standing orders, several government officials, military officers, and the entire penal population were exempted from paying postage.[17] Further, British servicemen in N.S.W. could send a private letter anywhere in the world for the discounted rate of a penny.[18] The growth in income made possible by the 1835 act enabled the utility to bear the financial burden of having to deliver newspapers free of charge from that year.[19] Moreover, it allowed for the opening of additional post offices over the next decade and beyond, fuelling the demand for labour. By the end of 1838 the department had just 40 outlets, whereas by the close of 1848 it boasted 101. The record suggests that at least five of the office managers in 1848 were women.[20] The enhanced job prospects from 1835 were a function of efforts to popularise and protect the postal service and maximise its earnings.

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[15] Letter from James Raymond to Colonial Sec., 24 February 1830, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 322. The Post Office mail monopoly was also designed to check the activities of dishonest individuals who impersonated government letter carriers (postmen) and collected postage on mail entrusted to their care. See, letter from James Raymond to Colonial Sec., 2 February 1830, *ibid.*, p. 309.

[16] In return for their co-operation, ships' masters received a penny for every incoming and outgoing item. See, Houison, *History of the Post Office*, p. 10; & letter from James Raymond to Alexander McLeay, Colonial Sec., 12 October 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 218. The Colonial Secretary's surname was alternatively spelt "Macleay".

[17] The officials who enjoyed a postage exemption or the privilege of franking included the Governor, the judges of the Supreme Court, the Government Surveyor, and the Military Secretary. See, letter from James Raymond to Pmr, Bong Bong, 12 October 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 215. Convicts could send letters free of charge, provided they were franked by the Superintendent of Convicts, were open for vetting, and did not contain enclosures. See, Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell Stewart, 'Introduction', in Lucy Frost and Hamish Maxwell Stewart (eds), *Chain letters: Narrating convict lives*, Carlton South, Melbourne U.P., 2001, p. 3. In 1838 the Post Office handled 84,775 franked items without charge. See, Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 65.

[18] The penny was payable at the time of posting. See, Houison, *History of the Post Office*, p. 5.

[19] Alan Atkinson, 'Postage in the South-East', *The Push from the Bush*, no. 5, December 1979, p. 22.

[20] Houison, *History of the Post Office*, Table A, p. 105. Staff details for the period are incomplete: more women may have kept post offices by 1848. The five postmistresses identified were: Eliza Pearson,

The embossed cover, the first pre-paid postage device in the world, contributed to the expansion of job opportunities in the N.S.W. Post Office Department by boosting the instrumentality's takings.[21] Invented by Postmaster-General James Raymond and available from November 1838 for use within the town limits of Sydney, the embossed cover consisted of a sheet of paper bearing the government coat of arms on which a letter could be written, then folded to form an envelope.[22] Prior to the introduction of embossed covers, the addressee, rather than the sender of a letter, was usually required to find the postage, either upon delivery or upon collection from the post office. Often addressees refused to pay and take possession of their mail, or could not be located, given the transient habits of many colonists.[23] Pre-paid postage provided the postal utility with an immediate and guaranteed source of revenue, along with the economic wherewithal needed to grow.

Middle- and middling-class women in financial distress found a livelihood in the N.S.W. Post Office Department at a time when many females were unemployable because of an inadequate education.[24] Unlike many clerical-based jobs, the position of postmistress was a relatively uncomplicated occupation requiring little more than written English and simple numeracy skills. Tasks included the sorting and postmarking of postal items, the maintenance of registers recording mails received and despatched, account keeping, the sale of postage stamps, the ordering of office stores, and the posting of public notices. The character of Mary Mahony in Henry Handel Richardson's novel, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, highlighted the plight of genteel women with limited schooling who were desperate for respectable employment. Based on the author's postmistress mother, Mrs Mahony is drawn to

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Camden; Mary Kerr, Cassilis; Susannah McNaught, Merriwa; Jemina Wickham, Parramatta; and Eliza Hildebrand, Stonequarry. See, N. C. Hopson, 'Lists of Postmasters, 1829–1848', incomplete, extracted from official records held by the State Records Authority of N.S.W., 1985; & Appointments Register, c. 1833–1861, alphabetical pagination. Despite losses from the late 1840s, the Post Office Department continued to expand due to the favourable mail contracts negotiated by James Raymond. See, Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 94.

[21] The N.S.W. embossed cover pre-dated the British Penny Black, the world's first postage stamp, by almost two years. See Houison, *History of the Post Office*, p. 25.

[22] *loc. cit.* & *ibid.*, p. 29. Embossed covers sold for one shilling and three pence a dozen. See, letter from E. Deas-Thomson, Colonial Sec.'s Office, Sydney, to James Raymond, 15 October 1838, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 27.

[23] Letter from James Raymond, G.P.O., Sydney, to Colonial Sec., 7 September 1838, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 26.

[24] I understand the middling class – a social stratum identified by R. S. Neale – to be interposed between the middle class and the working classes. See, R. S. Neale, 'Class and Class Consciousness in

postal work after taking stock of her limited job prospects. In conversation with friend Mrs Spence, she observes: 'There seems literally nothing a woman can do except teach and I'm too old for that'.[25] Management of a post office suited middle-class women with educations that extended no further than 'the accomplishments' – a cluster of subjects that included drawing, music appreciation, dance and embroidery. Of little employment value, these subjects were intended to prepare girls for polite society, marriage, childrearing and leisured womanhood. From the early 1800s, the daughters of administrators and large landholders received tuition in the accomplishments at private "seminaries" set up by poor gentlewomen.[26] Girls from wealthy emancipist families were just as badly equipped for paid work, their education limited to impromptu housewifery lessons at home preparatory to marriage.[27] The small minority of middle-class girls who were enrolled in church-based and secular private schools received a less scholarly education than boys, with a heavy emphasis on moral development and household skills.[28] Although females gained admission to state-funded national and denominational schools from 1848, they were generally prevented from studying the more demanding scientific subjects available to males. Moreover, many girls were kept from attending classes by parents who looked upon them as a source of free household labour.[29] For its part, the postal service effectively expanded the female labour market.

More specifically, the N.S.W. Post Office Department provided employment assistance to widows in financial difficulty. In Britain and Continental Europe, government had long accommodated the female dependants of deceased civil servants, soldiers and sailors in recognition of the latter's service to the state, appointing women to post offices and other agencies.[30] The *petty bourgeois* tradition

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Early Nineteenth-Century England: Three Classes or Five?', in R. S. Neale (ed.), *History and Class: Essential Readings in Theory and Interpretation*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1984, pp. 143–164.

[25] Henry Handel Richardson, *Myself When Young*, London, Heinemann, 1948, p. 25; & Henry Handel Richardson, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony Ultima Thule*, London, Heinemann, 1929, p. 283.

[26] Catherine Hall, *White, male and middle-class: explorations in feminism and history*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, p. 89 & p. 90; Majorie Theobald, *Knowing Women:Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-century Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1996, pp. 14–30; & Noeline Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny: The Education of Women in New South Wales*, Kensington, N.S.W. U.P., 1986, p. 5.

[27] J. J. Auchmuty, '1810–30', in F. K. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, Melbourne, William Heinemann Australia, 1974, p. 62; & Kyle, *Her Natural Destiny*, p. 7.

[28] At select convent-based Catholic schools established from the 1850s, pupils were prepared for a virtuous life as a wife and mother. See, *ibid.*, p. 72 & p. 73.

[29] *ibid.*, pp. 20–22.

[30] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 8 & p. 9.

of allowing widows to take charge of their dead husbands' businesses complemented the practice.[31] Recipients of departmental favour included Elise Barney, wife of Captain John Barney, who assumed control of Brisbane Post Office following the death of her postmaster husband on 25 November 1855.[32] In N.S.W. and elsewhere, the not-infrequent age difference between men and women at the time of marriage contributed to the number of widows seeking paid work. Throughout much of the 19th century, men customarily delayed matrimony until such time as they had the economic means to support a wife and family, with the result that they took substantially younger brides and often predeceased their spouse. In Australia the high male mortality rate on the frontier – a consequence of riding accidents, timber felling mishaps, and other misadventures – compounded the incidence of early widowhood.[33] Regular business downturns and bad seasons on the land eroded the earnings of many male breadwinners, putting pressure on their widows to find paid work. For widow Eliza Pearson, Postmistress at Camden, the postal department provided sustenance during the economic recession of the 1840s, following her husband's failed attempt at farming.[34] In many cases testator law rendered employment a necessity. Lacking any legal claim to their spouses' business or estate, widows were frequently subject to family trusts designed to protect the inheritance of offspring. Often they had to exist on an inadequate income from their husband's investments without access to the capital. Some women had a life interest only in their dead partner's property and lacked sufficient funds to maintain it, their access to the estate sometimes conditional on an undertaking not to remarry. Other widows were left destitute without any legal right to the assets they had brought to the union.[35] As well as helping women in such situations, the postal department lent vocational assistance to widows whose husbands had failed to properly secure their wives' future by means of formal financial facilities. In N.S.W., many men refused to embrace savings accounts, life insurance and friendly societies, relying instead on their work, property and family connections

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[31] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 98.
[32] Desley Deacon, 'Elise Barney (1815–1883) postmistress', in Heather Radi (ed.), *200 Australian women, a Redress anthology*, Broadway, Women's Redress Press, 1988, p. 17.
[33] Beverley Kingston, 'Women in Nineteenth Century Australian History', *Labour History*, no. 67, November 1994, pp. 88–91.
[34] Alan Atkinson, *Camden: Farm and Village Life in Early New South Wales*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P. Australia, 1988, p. 42.
[35] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 119. Pre-nuptial settlements allowed some women from the ruling class and wealthier *bourgeoisie* to retain assets brought to the marriage. See, *ibid.*, p. 98.

to provide for dependants after their death.[36] The Post Office came to the rescue of widows affected by adverse demographic, legal and economic forces.

The postal department also came to the aid of single women of limited means, including the daughters of deceased government employees. At the time few occupations were open to middle- and middling-class spinsters with the exception of teaching and the "unprotected" outworking trades of dressmaking and millinery. Underemployment was common in the clothing industry due to the gradual development of mass production techniques and the frequent changes in fashion. Lacking the bargaining power of males in unionised workplaces, female outworkers often endured very low wages and oppressive conditions.[37] As well as furnishing an alternative to dressmaking and millinery, the Post Office offered employment to genteel spinsters unable to find work as governesses, given the premium placed on common domestic help and single male labour in N.S.W.[38] The department provided single women with an autonomous income at a time when many were beholden to men for their subsistence. After the death of her father, an unmarried daughter usually had no legal claim to his estate, most of his property and savings going to her brothers. Spinsters often needed to pursue paid work owing to the inadequate allowance set aside by male siblings to keep them.[39] For single women of modest means, the Post Office afforded the prospect of economic sovereignty.

From the late 1830s, a few married women found a livelihood in the N.S.W. postal service, notwithstanding the widespread assumption that most wives were adequately supported by husbands and had no need to follow employment. On 12 February 1838, the postal authorities appointed Mary Ann Rutledge, policeman's wife and Australia's first paid postmistress, to the post office at Cassilis in the Hunter Valley.[40] Her

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[36] Patricia Annette Curthoys, 'Securing Against Risk In Mid-Nineteenth Century New South Wales, Maitland, 1846 To 1871', Ph.D. Thesis, University of N.S.W., Kensington, December 1995, p. 8, & pp. 136–139.

[37] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 56; & Document 1.9, 'A lonely immigrant seamstress writes home', letter from Isabella Gibson, Jamieson St, Sydney, to her sister, 19 June 1834, in Marian Quartly (ed.) *et al.*, *Freedom Bound 1: Documents on women in colonial Australia*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 24.

[38] Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, p. 58 & p. 59.

[39] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 98.

[40] Letter from Colonial Sec. to G.P.O., Sydney, 12 February 1838, Extracts from Register of Inward Correspondence, G.P.O., Sydney, 7 January 1834 – 6 March 1845, p. 108; & Vann Cremer, 'Cassilis Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, p. 1 & p. 2.

earnings supplemented the poor wage received by her husband, Constable John Rutledge.[41] In August 1847 the postal department chose Eliza Hildebrand, wife of Chief Constable Thomas Hildebrand, for the job of postmistress at Stonequarry. Thanks to her employment, she too was able to bolster household income.[42] Then the wages of policemen and other public servants were drawn from the Police Fund, which depended on colonial revenue derived chiefly from import duties and port dues. In all, the Fund accounted for seven-eights of total takings.[43] Many colonists opposed the financing of the police force from local receipts rather than from imperial coffers, and objected to direct taxation. Accordingly, the government had little incentive to increase pay rates.[44] Widespread drunkeness, corruption and negligence in the constabulary, which was largely composed of convicts and ex-convicts, rendered the community less receptive to the financial needs of the police, even though higher pay might have attracted better quality recruits.[45] For their part, the policemen at Cassilis were described as inefficient and ill disciplined in reports to the Colonial Secretary.[46] Without the prospect of a wage rise, country police officers often undertook extra paid duties, including those of poundkeeper and bailiff.[47] From early on, female postal employment effectively subsidised male livelihoods.

Management of a post office allowed middle- and middling-class women to earn a living while maintaining their respectability and social status. Thanks to the British tradition whereby females were permitted to operate a postal service from home, postmistresses avoided the stigma that attached itself to women who went "out to

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[41] *Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, Maitland, 23 September 1843, p. 4. The government's decision to grant a special gratuity of 50 pounds to Mrs Rutledge and the public appeal to assist her after her husband was murdered on 5 May 1843 by an escaped convict pointed indirectly to the inadequacy of the victim's wage. See, *loc. cit.*; & *Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, Maitland, 15 July 1843, p. 3.
[42] Hopson, 'List of Postmasters, 1829–1848'; & *Sydney Herald*, Sydney, 29 March 1842, p. 2.
[43] Auchmuty, '1810–30', p. 71.
[44] Michael Roe, '1830–50', in Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, p. 91.
[45] J. B. Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies: A history of early New South Wales*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1983, p. 145.
[46] F. D. Hayes, *Cassilis: the frontier village*, Merriwa, Merriwa Council, 1984, p. 60.
[47] Thomas Kerr, Chief Constable at Cassilis in the mid 1840s, held the office of inspector of slaughter houses and acted as court bailiff. See, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 30 September 1846, p. 3; & *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 17 March 1847, p. 3. His wife was made Postmistress in June 1847. See, *Maitland Mercury & Hunter River General Advertiser*, Maitland, 2 June 1847, p. 2. Prior to the early 1860s, only a few married women ran postal outlets in N.S.W. They included Mary Ann Rutledge and Mary Kerr at Cassilis, and Eliza Hildebrand at Stonequarry.

work".[48] In cases where the interior space was inadequate, women would dispense postal services through an open window to customers standing outside, thereby preserving the intimacy and sanctity of the dwelling.[49] Like postmistresses, dressmakers, milliners and music teachers retained their reputation by labouring in a domestic setting. Mary Richardson – who served as Post and Telegraph Mistress at Koroit in Victoria from 1878 – kept her moral standing in society while residing in premises attached to the post office. Both she and live-in daughter, author Henry Handel Richardson, boasted a broad circle of friends and received frequent visits from the town's leading citizens. In the latter's words: 'anybody who was anybody called'.[50] In common with other forms of office work, postal duties allowed gentlewomen to dress in a ladylike manner, setting them apart from female factory hands in utilitarian attire. Moreover, postmistresses conformed to the feminine ideal in having clean white hands at a time when the working class was associated with the manual handling of goods. On another level female postal employees retained their respectability through controlled exposure to social inferiors. Thanks to a relatively short working day and a counter that separated staff from customers, postmistresses were largely insulated from the labouring class. Here they had an advantage over teachers and nurses who were in frequent close physical contact with the lower orders over long periods.[51] Postmistresses also maintained their moral and social status by occupying centrally located premises in the High Street, where better quality traders catered for the gentry, merchants, professionals and prosperous farmers.[52] Camden's postmistress, Eliza Pearson, worked from her home situated in the centre of the village close to the Anglican Church and the inn. The building stood on valuable land

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[48] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 4. From the 1830s, women in Britain who engaged in outside employment were criticised by middle-class reformers for allegedly neglecting their domestic duties. Contemporary literature suggested that women in financial need might preserve their respectability if they conducted a business from their residence. See, *ibid.*, p. 91 & p. 92.

[49] Note signed by Wyndham Davies, P.I., 1 April 1882, SP32, Manly, fol. B 2879/20 MA 1882. As late as 1895, Gabriella Carroll, officer-in-charge at Hornsby, served customers through an open window. See, report by E. J. Young, 13 February 1895, SP32, Hornsby, fol. 15 Feb 95/B 1601.

[50] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 11 & p. 12; & Richardson, *Myself When Young*, p. 25.

[51] Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850–1914', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 158; & Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 64. Like postmistresses, female telegraphists and clerks avoided lengthy exposure to the lower classes. See, Meta Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure: women, bureaucracy and the post office, 1870–1920', in Mike Savage and Anne Witz (eds), *Gender and Bureaucracy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1992, p. 77.

[52] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 109.

and was initially surrounded by vacant lots that fetched fairly high prices at auction.[53] Parramatta's postmistress, Jemina Wickham, was similarly advantaged, occupying a weatherboard cottage in George Street between the Woolpack Inn and the Court of Justice in the commercial and legal heart of town.[54] In short, the reputation of a postmistress turned on a domestic work environment and "a good address".

Because of the ambiguous physical and social nature of her workplace, a postmistress might participate in public life without compromising her moral standing. As both a public and private space, the post office allowed female staff to commune with customers and government officials and keep abreast of the latest news, while generally conforming to the fashionable middle-class, and increasingly working-class, notion of retiring, housebound womanhood.[55] Postmistresses who occupied government buildings constructed to serve multiple purposes for the sake of economy came into regular contact with other public officers. Mary Ann Rutledge appears to have operated the post office at Cassilis from the court-house erected in 1835, sharing the space with magistrate Alexander Busby, court officials, and policemen.[56] From June 1849 Mary Finn, Postmistress at Hartley, worked out of a building that doubled as a police station and contact centre for the court-house opposite, exposing her to matters of public interest on a daily basis.[57] The growing number of miscellaneous tasks that fell to country postal officials ensured that postmistresses remained in close touch with the outside world. As well as performing their usual duties, and in the absence of dedicated officers, they acted as registrars of births, deaths and marriages, dispensed electoral material, and collected intercolonial customs dues. In N.S.W., postmistresses participated in civic life in a period when the masculinization of public

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[53] In July 1841 land in Camden sold for an average of 50 pounds a lot, despite the onset of a depression. Lots in nearby Elderslie fetched just a third of that amount. See, Atkinson, *Camden*, p. 44.
[54] Julia McConnochie, (ed.), *Women of Parramatta*, Parramatta, The Ladies Auxiliary of the Parramatta Trust 1975–76, 1977, p. 31.
[55] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 65.
[56] Mrs Rutledge's successor, storekeeper John McKinlay, and his replacement, John O'Regan, were appointed clerks to the local bench, suggesting that the post office was located in the court building. See, Cremer, 'Cassilis Post Office History', p. 1 & p. 2; & Hayes, *Cassilis*, p. 52.
[57] Mary Finn was appointed following the death of her husband John, Postmaster at Hartley, on 13 February 1849. See, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 16 February 1849, p. 4. The precise date of her engagement is unclear. Her bond was signed on 6 June 1849, whereas her declaration of secrecy was made on 16 February 1852. See, Appointments Register, c. 1833–1861, alphabetical pagination, "H" for Hartley. The police station-cum-post office was erected by the Finn family and rented to the government. See, *ibid.*; *Newsletter of the Australian Society for Historical Archaeology Inc*, vol. 37, no. 2, June 2007, p. 3; & 'Hartley Historical Site – Conservation Management Plan, Vol. 2',

places in Britain and Australia saw females relegated to the periphery of community affairs, prevented from attending political meetings held in hotels, lodge halls, and other venues within a prescribed male domain.[58] Postal employment enabled women to step outside a closeted environment with relative impunity.

Immigrant Women step into the Breach

In the years following Mrs Rutledge's appointment, the N.S.W. Post Office Department found a ready supply of labour in the guise of free and assisted female immigrants. Some of the women who paid their own way from the United Kingdom to N.S.W. accompanied husbands anxious to better themselves in a new land, while others landed in Australia as the wives of government officials. Eliza Pearson, Camden's future postmistress, arrived in 1825 with her husband James, a music teacher who became clerk to the Cawdor magistrates' court and subsequently postmaster at Camden.[59] Free immigrant Elise Barney, who later managed Brisbane Post Office, sailed to Australia with her husband, a former army officer, and her young family in 1847. They had planned to join her brother-in-law, George Barney, a civil engineer who had been commissioned to establish a penal colony at Port Curtis, only to find that it had been abandoned before their arrival.[60] The postal department also drew on a pool of female labour made available through the bounty scheme. Operational from 1830, the system of assisted migration was intended to satisfy the demand for free labour in N.S.W., and check the perceived threat to the political and social order posed by convict and emancipist elements. Under the scheme thousands of men, women and children gained passage to Australia on the strength of recommendations from British and European agents acting for colonial employers.[61] Participants included Matilda Winter, Merriwa's future postmistress, who travelled to N.S.W. as a domestic servant.[62]

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http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/cmpHartleyVol2InventoryPts.pdf , 10 November 2009.

[58] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 103 & p. 131.

[59] James Pearson became Postmaster in 1841 after the Cawdor bench moved to Camden. See, Atkinson, *Camden*, p. 32.

[60] Deacon, 'Elise Barney (1815–1883) postmistress', p. 16 & p. 17.

[61] Roe, '1830–50', p. 89 & p. 90.

[62] Letter from Matilda Winter, Pms, Merriwa, to P.M.G., 18 January 1866, SP32, Merriwa, fol. 870/22 JA 1866.

The postal department employed immigrant women in the absence of suitable female workers in the local population. Prior to the introduction of assisted emigration, few women travelled to Australia. During Governor King's tenure from 1800 to 1806, just 83 free women (excluding soldiers' wives), female children and infants set foot in N.S.W. While free migrants composed 25% of the adult female population by 1828, most new arrivals were the relatives of army officers, soldiers, civil servants or landholders with little cause to pursue paid work, their primary duty the running of a household.[63] Before the advent of the bounty scheme, the enhanced job and marriage prospects brought by the industrial revolution and the transmigration to cities dissuaded most British women from seeking a new life in a penal colony.[64] Wholesale immigration provided a labour resource previously unavailable to the authorities.

Middle, middling and working-class immigrant women filled positions in the postal service that were of no interest to female members of the colonial elite. Rather than seek employment, the wives and daughters of military officers, large landholders, magistrates and senior administrators were almost wholly concerned with the supervision of domestic servants, the setting of meal times, and the selection of interior furnishings in keeping with the growth in conspicuous consumption.[65] In Britain and Australia, the gendered concept of separate spheres that consigned gentlewomen to a leisured existence conferred legitimacy on their activities.[66] Instead of paid work, females from the colonial ruling class took an active interest in charitable institutions. Bodies claiming their patronage included the Female School of Industry, which was founded in 1826 to provide poor girls with a basic education that would equip them for a life of domestic service, and discourage the politicisation of the working class. These charitable endeavours constituted part of a larger effort to impose order on colonial society at a time when commerce-enriched emancipists were

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[63] Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, *Gentle Invaders: Australian Women at Work 1788–1974*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1975, p. 22 & p. 23.
[64] David Kent and Norma Townsend, 'Deborah Oxley's 'Female Convicts': An Accurate View of Working-Class Women?', *Labour History*, no. 65, November 1993, p. 185.
[65] Russell, '*A Wish of Distinction'*, p. 1 & p. 3.
[66] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 89. While country gentlewomen, such as Elizabeth Macarthur, often managed the farm when their husbands were absent, they did so as unpaid supervisors, setting themselves apart from their paid workers. See, Ryan and Conlon, *Gentle Invaders*, p. 22 & p. 23.

demanding democratic rights and greater access to government.[67] In this environment ruling-class women were "non-employees", defined by what they were not.

Female immigrants furnished the N.S.W. Post Office Department with a seemingly compliant workforce, enabling it to counter a threat to employer authority. From the early years of European settlement, a chronic shortage of labour had given rise to an independent attitude among working males towards bosses. Men frequently left positions without notice for other jobs offering higher wages or better conditions – this despite the draconian Master and Servant Act of 1828 that contained heavy penalties for abandoning an employer.[68] Early deputy postmasters often exhibited an autonomous attitude towards the department, withholding office takings in response to the utility's failure to pay the agreed commission. For some years government had suffered financial embarrassment owing to the shortage of hard currency and the economic instability caused by speculation in the import market. This activity caused fluctuations in the amount of revenue generated from customs duties and road and ferry tolls, affecting the administration's ability to meet the wages of public servants from month to month**.** The practice of retaining takings was an ongoing problem, apparent in a memorandum sent by George Panton, Postmaster in Sydney, to John Erskine, Deputy Postmaster at Newcastle, in October 1828. The writer expressed his dissatisfaction in the following terms:

> I am sorry to observe you are so very neglectful of the Government order in this land, and that you should always be so … backward in complying therewith. I have particularly to request that you will furnish me with your …collections for… Septr, otherwise I shall be again under the necessity … to report you to the Government.[69]

Despite Panton's reprimands, the deputy postmasters could act with little regard for the consequences. Given the premium on labour, the courts often ruled against employers for failure to pay workers' wages.[70] By the time James Raymond, Panton's

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[67] The Female School of Industry was founded under the patronage of Eliza Darling, wife of the then governor. See, Elizabeth Windschuttle, 'Discipline, Domestic Training and Social Control: The Female School of Industry, Sydney, 1826–1847,' *Labour History*, no. 39, November 1980, pp. 1–6. The charities fortified the position of the governing class by facilitating communion between female patrons, while excluding women of inferior social rank – this in a period when the class structure was blurred by the presence of wealthy emancipists. See, Russell, '*A Wish of Distinction'*, 1994, p. 1 & p. 3.
[68] Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, p. 78.
[69] Letter from George Panton to John Erskine, Dep. Pmr, Newcastle, 11 October 1828, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 56 & p. 57.
[70] Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, p. 101 & p. 102.

successor, had assumed office, the independent demeanour of postal employees had become endemic. In December 1829 Raymond wrote to Colonial Secretary Alexander McLeay about the continued failure of James Orr, Deputy Postmaster and Clerk to the Court of Requests at Parramatta, to prepare the return mail for Sydney under the pretext of legal business. In the letter Raymond explained that he was powerless to advance the interests of the service while "the deputy postmasters feel they can with impunity, refuse to adopt the rules and instructions transmitted from this office".[71]

Respectable female immigrants appeared to offer a manageable alternative to male staff. The propensity to see them as a compliant labour resource stemmed both from the concept of separate spheres, whereby women were expected to adopt a passive position in relation to worldly affairs, and from evangelical Christianity that stressed female humility and self-sacrifice.[72] The then tendency to look upon distressed gentlewomen as helpless and self-effacing underpinned the assumption that female immigrants would make for a docile and accommodating workforce.[73] On the face of it, migrant women had much to recommend them.

They certainly looked to be better suited to postal work than female convicts. Low literacy rates aside, the dominant view of convict women as prostitutes, thieves or drunkards, who were typically disobedient and refractory, generally precluded them from departmental employment.[74] Even though many female convicts were industrious and law abiding – some going on to assume a significant place in the commercial life of the colony after completing their sentence – the negative perception of female prisoners persisted.[75] On moral grounds alone, many women in N.S.W. were deemed ineligible to run a postal facility.

Females provided the Post Office Department with a reserve labour force, relieving hard-pressed clerks to the local bench of their postal responsibilities. In the early years

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[71] Letter from James Raymond to Alexander McLeay, Colonial Sec., 10 December 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 267.
[72] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 60 & p. 61. Evangelicals believed that women were innately more vulnerable to immorality than men. They were therefore expected to exercise moderation and be self-vigilant in their dealings with the outside world. See, *ibid.*, p. 77, p. 85 & p. 86.
[73] Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, p. 12.
[74] Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, p. 56.
[75] Monica Perrott, *A Tolerable Good Success: Economic Opportunities for women in New South Wales*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1983, pp. 58–61.

of settlement, the authorities often prevailed on court officials to provide a postal amenity, given the general dearth of labour. In a penal colony where law enforcement was paramount, their legal duties took precedence. From the late 1820s, court work grew more onerous with a dramatic rise in the number of suits brought against businessmen and loan defaulters whose speculative ventures in the import market had proved unsound.[76] Postal services suffered accordingly. For his part, James Orr, Deputy Postmaster at Parramatta, repeatedly failed to despatch the return mail to Sydney owing to "pressure of (court) business".[77] Over time, the postal department came to acknowledge the burden placed on dual-office holders. In January 1838 James Raymond agreed to allow Martha Baxter, wife of Captain Benjamin Baxter, Postmaster at Port Philip and clerk to the bench, to perform the postal duties in her husband's name, leaving her spouse free to attend to court matters.[78] Likewise, in September 1840, Margaret McAlister assumed the role of Cawdor postmistress, relieving James Pearson, court clerk, of his postal tasks.[79] Women enabled the Post Office to command the full attention of staff.

A Housebound Existence

The postal authorities took advantage of the sedentary lifestyle of middle- and middling-class women as they sought to overcome the operational problems caused by male mobility. In Britain the confinement of socially superior women to the home from the early 1800s distinguished the higher orders from the working masses, which generally relied on the earnings of females employed in outside occupations. The concept of separate spheres, popularised by John Ruskin and other social theorists, furnished the ideological basis for the housebound existence of middle- and middling-class women. According to this prescriptive construct, men had an innate need to explore vocational and other opportunities in the outside world. Conversely, women were best suited to an immobile life indoors, providing male breadwinners with nurturant, if temporary, domestic asylum from the cares of public life.[80] In N.S.W.,

[76] Auchmuty, '1810–30', p. 71.
[77] Letter from James Raymond to James Orr, Dep. Pmr, Parramatta, 3 December 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 260.
[78] 'History of the Victorian Post Office', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Melbourne, 1959, p. 4.
[79] Edward N. Walter, 'Picton Post Office – Historical Notes', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, p. 1; & Extracts from Register of Inward Correspondence, G.P.O., Sydney, 7 January 1834 – 6 March 1845, p. 144.
[80] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 60, p. 61 & p. 65.

men commonly preferred outdoors pursuits to an occupation that confined them to four walls, giving rise to criticism of "absentee" postmasters. In October 1829 James Raymond wrote to John Erskine, Newcastle's deputy postmaster, after receiving complaints about his failure to attend the office. The Sydney postmaster chastised Erskine for going away on shooting trips, noting that no one was available to distribute mail "known to be in the office and sent for at a great inconvenience and distance".[81] In N.S.W., male mobility and the pursuit of leisure activities can be traced to the convict right to 'free time' and to the pre-industrial work regime, which included the observance of St Monday and other arbitrary holidays.[82] Raymond recognised the need to ensure that facilities were attended on a full-time basis for the sake of public confidence. Writing to the Colonial Secretary in May 1830, he observed: "a post office differs from almost every other public establishment. The round of current business must be performed or public disappointment inevitably ensues".[83] Accordingly, as early as October 1834, the Western Australian postal authorities appointed Sarah Lyttleton, wife of army surgeon E. L. Lyttleton, to the position of unpaid postmistress at Albany. Mrs Lyttleton ran the post office from her home, leaving her busy husband free to call on patients.[84] In the institutionalised absence of men, the postal department looked to sedentary women.

Thanks to housebound middle- and middling-class women, the N.S.W. Post Office Department overcame problems caused by the separation of workplace from residence. For some years postal operations had been compromised by the tendency for male staff to reside in separate quarters rather than on the premises. Following his transfer from Newcastle to Maitland in 1830, John Erskine took lodgings at an inn, while Alfred Glennie, Deputy Postmaster at Patrick's Plains, lived some distance from his place of work. Residents who called for their mail often found the post office unattended, prompting regular complaints from members of the public.[85] In Britain

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[81] Letter from James Raymond to John Erskine, Dep. Pmr, Newcastle, 1 October 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 207.

[82] Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, pp. 44–47; & John Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750–1850*, Burnt Mill, Longman Group UK, 1986, p. 134.

[83] Letter from James Raymond to Alexander McLeay, Colonial Sec., 21 May 1830, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 373.

[84] 'The Story of Sarah Lyttleton, Albany's first unpaid Post Mistress', *Albany Advertiser*, Albany, 18 September 1974, p. 2; & Dianne Dunlop, 'Albany Post Office, Early History, Mrs Sarah Lyttleton first Postmistress 1834–35', 7 January 1964, p. 1.

[85] The post office at Maitland was located at the police station. See, 'Maitland Post Office History', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, January 1963, p. 5 & p. 6; letter from James Raymond to

the growth of commercial capitalism and the process of industrialisation had seen the gradual disappearance of the workplace-cum-residence. These developments stripped the home of its productive capacity, with the erection of purpose-built manufacturing and retail facilities, and the construction of dedicated living quarters outside the inner city.[86] In placing sedentary middle- and middling-class women in charge of postal outlets, the authorities were assured of a reliable workforce for whom workplace and domicile were one and the same. The rescue of Martha Baxter, "assistant" to Port Philip's postmaster, and her children by boat, when the building in which she both worked and slept was surrounded by floodwater in March 1839, underlined the oneness of office and residence.[87] While women spent their day at home, they countered economic and social forces hostile to the conduct of a postal service.

The System of Influence

Throughout most of the 19th century, postal employees in N.S.W. remained indebted to a system of patronage for their livelihood. In May 1836 James Raymond placed unassisted immigrant William Thompson in charge of Bathurst Post Office following representations by the local magistracy to the Postmaster-General on his behalf.[88] Similarly, in September 1844, Raymond appointed Jemina Wickham to the position of postmistress at Parramatta by way of providing for the widow – her postmaster husband having left her without an adequate income.[89] In Britain the conferral of government livings had been in gradual decline from the early 1800s, commencing with the reforms introduced by William Pitt to professionalise the civil service. They put an end to favour-based practices that included the buying and selling of offices and the granting of sinecures as salary supplements or as substitutes for retirement pensions. In N.S.W., government continued to award livings because of insufficient funds to pay every individual on the civil list.[90] In April 1809 Isaac Nichols was appointed Sydney's first postmaster on the understanding that he could retain all the

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Colonial Sec., 23 January 1830, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 299; & letter from James Raymond to Alfred Glennie, Dep. Pmr, Patrick's Plains, 20 January 1830, *ibid.*, p. 295.

[86] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 51, p. 56, p. 60, p. 61 & p. 110.

[87] Christine Gibbs, *History of Postal Services in Victoria*, Melbourne, A.P., 1984, p. 2 & p. 3.

[88] 'Postal History of Bathurst and District', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, p. 4.

[89] Edward N. Walter, revised by John J. Olsen, 'History of Parramatta Post Office', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, 1963, p. 5.

[90] Arthur McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', in J. J. Eddy and J. R. Nethercote (eds), *From Colony to Coloniser: Studies in Australian Administrative History*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger in association with the Royal Australian Institute of Public Administration, 1987, p. 56 & p. 57.

postage he collected in place of a fixed salary, the money augmenting his earnings as Assistant to the Naval Officer.[91] Patronage persisted in deference to the vast distances between the seat of government in Sydney and the widely dispersed settlements in the interior – circumstances that gave rise to a decentralised administration. Given the slowness of communications, the authorities smiled on reliable people in remote areas who could be entrusted with official business without the need for immediate supervision.[92] In short, postal employment was a paternalistic function of the financial and geographical constraints imposed on government.

Arguably, the postal department's patronage of female immigrants represented an attempt to lessen the impact of convictism on the labour market. George Panton, Sydney's second postmaster, expressed reservations regarding the probity of penal employees. In June 1828 he wrote to Colonial Secretary Alexander McLeay to advise him that, since the advent of the Inland Posts, he had been compelled to engage an assigned convict to deliver the mail. Panton deemed the man unworthy of "such a responsible and tempting situation", noting that "letters containing considerable sums of money do necessarily pass through his hands". Accordingly, he called on McLeay and the Governor to appoint "a proper and responsible person" to replace the assignee.[93] The convict work regime gave postal officialdom particular cause for concern. Over time, prisoners had exploited the shortage of manpower to extract concessions from employers, including the allocation of task work and free time for personal gain or leisure.[94] The work practices were at fundamental odds with the operation of the postal service, given the unpredictable arrival of mails and the need for constant attention to duties. In 1829 a literate convict by the name of Elliott assigned to letter delivery duties in Parramatta refused to work in what he considered his own time, preferring instead to perform chores in the police superintendent's office and to act as an agent for the local newspaper. In a memorandum to James Orr,

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[91] Isaac Nichols charged postage of one shilling on every letter, two shillings and sixpence on every parcel weighing 20 pounds or less, and five shillings on every item exceeding that weight. Addressees collected their mail from his house. See, General Order issued by Headquarters, 25 April 1809, reproduced in Houison, *History of the Post Office*, p. 1 & p. 2. Nichols was permanently appointed on 23 June 1810, and postage rates were reduced. See, Government Order signed by J. T. Campbell, Sec., Headquarters, Government House, 23 June 1810, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 2.
[92] McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', p. 55.
[93] Letter from George Panton to Alexander McLeay, Colonial Sec., 13 June 1828, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 22.
[94] Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, p. 36, p. 37 & pp. 44–47.

Deputy Postmaster at Parramatta, James Raymond dismissed any claim the man might have had to employment autonomy, opining that a prisoner was not at liberty to "throw up the appointment and thereby derange the principal [*sic*] of regularity that is so desirable to be established throughout the department".[95] Raymond was, in effect, challenging the sovereignty of educated and skilled convicts, often with a background in journalism or printing, whose services were coveted by administrators and the press. From the early years of European settlement they had reserved the right to negotiate hours, rations and duties with employers.[96]

Sydney's postmaster also had to contend with the spread of the convict mentality into the wider community. In a letter to Alexander McLeay of November 1829, James Raymond complained about his assistant's refusal to work outside regular hours, including on Sunday. He wrote: "Mr Young … entertains a notion that he is entirely independent of my control on that day (ie Sunday) and on any day beyond the prescribed hours in the … Post Office rules". The clerk's absence threatened Raymond's plan "to adopt as nearly as possible the system pursued in the English Post Office" and "to attend the delivery of all foreign mails without any exception of Sunday".[97] The official record makes reference to Young's prior suspension and "one year's servitude" for reasons not made clear.[98] In declining to work on Sunday, Young was observing the convict community's embargo on Sabbath employment and seeking the same free time enjoyed by prisoners outside normal working hours.[99] In favouring immigrants, the postal department circumvented an institutionalised and unsympathetic work culture.

James Raymond's opposition to penal work practices and corresponding regard for immigrant employees can be linked to his personal relationship with Governor Ralph Darling, an ardent critic of convict society. The leader of the Exclusivist element in N.S.W., Darling opposed the political and social aspirations of emancipists and

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[95] Letter from James Raymond to Colonial Sec., 18 December 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 272 & p. 273; & letter from James Raymond to James Orr, Dep. Pmr, Parramatta, 10 October 1829, *ibid.*, p. 212 & p. 213.
[96] Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, p. 50 & p. 89.
[97] Letter from James Raymond to Alexander McLeay, Colonial Sec., 9 November 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 241. Earlier, Raymond had written to Young about his refusal to observe prescribed office hours. See, memo from James Raymond to Mr Young, 6 October 1829, *ibid.*, p. 210.
[98] Letter from James Raymond to Colonial Sec., 21 September 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 199.
[99] Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, p. 29, p. 37 & p. 42.

supported free immigration as a way of diluting the influence of convictism on the local population. As the governor he had the authority to confer favour on particular individuals, especially in relation to more junior positions.[100] A patron of James Raymond, Darling provided for the future postmaster immediately upon his arrival from Ireland in April 1826. He had given the Colonial Office an undertaking to assist Raymond, his wife and his nine children, after his charge managed to solicit free passage to Australia through the offices of Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Darling initially appointed Raymond to the job of coroner at Parramatta on a salary of 50 pounds a year, augmented by an allowance of 184 pounds p.a. Subsequently, he chose him to fill the post of searcher and surveyor of customs.[101] In the circumstances Raymond might have been expected to share his patron's opposition to the political demands of the emancipists from 1827. Central among these demands were the establishment of a popularly elected legislative assembly and more say in the allocation of convict labour, hitherto the near preserve of the squatters. Persistent agitation prompted Darling to remove the assigned convict help from the offices of the *Monitor*, a pro-emancipist newspaper critical of his administration.[102] Raymond's efforts to win support from the landed magistracy for alterations to the mail run serving Windsor and hinterland provide circumstantial evidence of his identification with the Exclusivist cause. Following calls in the emancipist press for the previous service to be reinstated, Raymond wrote to local magistrate Samuel North on 16 November 1829. In the letter he cited that morning's edition of the *Sydney Gazette*, which reported that Windsor's residents were dissatisfied with the changes. Raymond solicited North's opinion regarding the alterations, stressing that they were "but calculated to meet the views of the gentry and inhabitants". According to him, his only objective was to serve the government and public "regardless of all self interested newspaper squibs".[103] Arguably, for Raymond, recruitment policy became a matter of partisan significance.

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[100] McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', p. 57.
[101] Vivienne Parsons, 'Raymond, James (1786?–1851)', in Douglas Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 2: 1788–1850, I–Z, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1967, p. 365.
[102] Sandra Blair, 'The Felony and the Free?: Divisions in Colonial Society in the Penal Era', *Labour History*, no. 45, November 1983, p. 6; & Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, p. 117.
[103] Letter from James Raymond to S. North J.P., 16 November 1829, Letter Book, 1828–1830, p. 243 & p. 244. A retired army officer, Samuel North wielded substantial influence as Windsor's unofficial "mayor". See, Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 61.

During James Raymond's tenure, large landholders and magistrates exercised considerable influence in the appointment of Post Office personnel. Mostly of middle-class origin, they included military officers, professionals, 'Oxbridge' graduates, and the sons of merchants and prosperous farmers. Many large landholders had arrived in N.S.W. from Britain as unassisted immigrants with the intention of becoming successful squatters or agriculturalists, some bringing substantial funds with them to invest in their enterprises. Several went on to occupy places on the bench. According to the lists of Civil Appointments of Trust for the years 1838 to 1842, British immigrants held all 18 police magistrate positions, while of the 154 other magistrates, 142 had come from overseas, the balance native born.[104] These same men enjoyed disproportionate representation in the N.S.W. Legislative Council, determining the political development of the colony according to their needs in the absence of a strong manufacturing lobby.[105] Although philosophically opposed to aristocratic patronage, middle-class males defined their masculinity in terms of their ability to manipulate the political and social environment through their economic power.[106] They therefore remained open to the exercise of influence if it enabled them to achieve their ends.

In all probability, magistrate and major landholder Alexander Busby saw to the appointment of Mary Ann Rutledge to Cassilis Post Office. The son of surveyor and civil engineer John Busby, Alexander Busby emigrated from Britain to N.S.W. with his parents, taking up land in the Hunter Valley in 1831 with a view to growing tobacco.[107] Busby named the area Cassillis in memory of his maternal great-grandfather, youngest brother of David Kennedy, 10th Earl of Cassillis.[108] Mrs Rutledge's engagement was indicative of an effort by country magistrates to control their district, evidenced elsewhere in their regulation of local trade and convict labour, and their recruitment of police constables.[109]

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[104] Donald Carisbrooke, 'The Influence of the "Gentleman Settlers" in Australia in 1838', *The Push from the Bush*, no. 11, November 1981, p. 24, p. 28, p. 31 & p. 32.
[105] *ibid*., p. 23, p. 24 & p. 28.
[106] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 168; & McKenzie, 'Of Convicts and Capitalists', pp. 200–202.
[107] G. P. Walsh, 'Busby, John (1765–1857)', *A.D.B.*, online edn, Australian National University, 2006, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A10173b.htm, 10 November 2009.
[108] Golden Highway, http://www.golden-highway.com.au/cassilis.htm, 9 November 2009. In later years the second 'l' in Cassillis was dropped. See, *ibid*.
[109] Hirst, *Convict society and its enemies*, p. 145. In the case of Cassilis, police protection was vital if the activities of local bushrangers were to be curbed. See, Hayes, *Cassilis*, p. 60.

The record shows that Eliza Pearson, Postmistress at Camden, owed her appointment in August 1841 to the influence wielded by James and William Macarthur, sons of immigrant John Macarthur, owners of Camden Park Estate and appointees to the local bench. Significant figures in colonial society, the Macarthurs recommended the widow for the postmistress position and provided the necessary sureties.[110] In such cases the recruitment of female Post Office employees represented an assertion of middle-class male identity.

Like James Raymond, some magistrates appear to have favoured female immigrants in an attempt to overcome the taint and demands of convict society. Arguably, Eliza Pearson's appointment to Camden Post Office was a manifestation of the Macarthurs' concern to counter the influence of convictism in colonial life. Members of the Exclusivist faction, James and William Macarthur feared 'wild democracy', seemingly evident in the electoral clamour of the emancipists and the English agricultural riots of the 1830s.[111] To contain the phenomenon they set out to create a model community of free settlers rooted in order, deference and respectability.[112] In recommending Mrs Pearson for the job of postmistress, the brothers looked to shape Camden's development along the lines of their ideal society, their interventionist approach reflected in a village plan that had the post office and the Anglican church at its centre.[113] Eliza Pearson satisfied their definition of a respectable citizen, coming, as she did, from a 'genteel' family with purported links to wealthy wholesale traders in corn, iron and salt. Apart from managing Camden Post Office, her late husband had been the choirmaster at Sydney's St James Church, enhancing the aura of propriety surrounding her.[114] The dignity Mrs Pearson brought to the office contrasted with the pretentiousness of wealthy emancipists who laid claim to respectability through legal suits and conspicuous consumption.[115] For some leading citizens, the employment of immigrant women was a corollary of their opposition to penal culture.

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[110] Appointments Register, c. 1833–1861, alphabetical pagination, "C" for Camden; & Atkinson, *Camden*, p. 32 & p. 33.
[111] J. D. Heydon, 'Macarthur, James (1798–1867)', in Douglas Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 5: 1851–1890, K–Q, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1974, p. 153.
[112] Atkinson, *Camden*, pp. 33–39.
[113] *ibid*., pp. 40–43.
[114] *ibid.*, p. 32 & p. 33.
[115] McKenzie, 'Of Convicts and Capitalists', pp. 209–212. The Macarthurs' concern to contain convictism and democracy was apparent in their sponsorship of immigrants from the winegrowing regions of Germany with a reputation for deference and hard work. See, Ruth Teale, 'Macarthur, Sir William (1800–1882)', in Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 5: 1851–1890, K–Q, p. 124 & p. 125.

The desire to establish a society based on individual enterprise and economic self-sufficiency underpinned the favour shown to immigrants. Like many landholders, James and William Macarthur were troubled by the high cost of administering the British Poor Law and the state of dependency it created.[116] Opponents of the Poor Law criticised the system of "outdoor relief", arguing that it reduced wage rates and retarded the development of economic sovereignty among beneficiaries. The ideology of self-help, which gained in currency during the 1830s, buttressed opposition to institutionalised welfare.[117] Anxious to discourage the growth of a Poor Law mentality in N.S.W., the Macarthurs sought to promote a society premised on self-reliance and accountability – imperatives apparent in their employment "contract" with Eliza Pearson.[118] Under the terms of the compact, the brothers provided the widow with a living, remitted their portion of the large debt left by James Pearson, and furnished his wife with a rent-free cottage.[119] In return for their assistance, the Macarthurs expected Mrs Pearson to support her family through a post-office store selling drapery, cabbage-tree hats, confectionery and medicines. To bind the arrangement, the widow surrendered her postal salary to the brothers, retaining a small commission on the sale of postage stamps.[120] For Eliza Pearson, employment constituted both a privilege and an obligation.

In dispensing favour, senior civil servants, major landholders, and magistrates assumed the role of a *de facto* aristocracy in the absence of an Old World landed elite. In adopting the paternalistic ways of the British gentry, they sought to express their social and alleged moral superiority *vis-a-vis* the emanicipist population.[121] The individuals concerned believed that they were performing a valuable civil service, given the social anonymity of colonial society. Then white settlement in N.S.W. was largely made up of former convicts, seemingly without a heritage, along with recently arrived immigrants, about whom little was initially known. In this environment the

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[116] T. H. Kewley, *Australia's Welfare State: The Development of Social Security Benefits*, South Melbourne, Macmillan of Australia, 1969, p. 1.
[117] Walter A. Friedlander, *Introduction to Social Welfare*, 3rd edn, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1968, pp. 21–24; & Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 57, p. 58 & p. 138.
[118] Atkinson, *Camden*, pp. 33–39.
[119] Vann L. Cremer, 'History of Camden Post Office', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, p. 5 & p. 6.
[120] Atkinson, *Camden*, p. 48. The first adhesive stamps printed for the N.S.W. Post Office, known as the Sydney Views, were issued from 1 January 1850. See, Houison, *History of the Post Office*, p. 42.
[121] G. C. Bolton, 'The Idea of a Colonial Gentry', *Historical Studies*, vol. 13, no. 51, October 1968, p. 327.

indulgence of a government official, squatter or magistrate was of considerable assistance to new arrivals needing to establish themselves in the colony. Patronage by the governing class complemented a broader system of influence based on letters of introduction and credit that partly compensated for the shortage of hard currency and the immature state of colonial banking.[122] In N.S.W., favour was sustained by the peculiar circumstances of colonial society.

The Gold Rushes

Employment prospects in the N.S.W. Post Office Department increased dramatically with the discovery of gold in 1851. Due to the heavy influx of immigrants from Britain, Continental Europe, the United States and China – all intent on making their fortune – the Australian population, excluding indigenous inhabitants, almost trebled to 1,200,000 in the ten years from 1851, prompting a corresponding increase in postal outlets.[123] In 1848 N.S.W. claimed 101 post offices.[124] By the close of 1855, the number of outlets had climbed to 155, rising to 435 a decade later.[125] The growing volume of mail ensured that postal work was readily available. In 1858 the number of letters for the United Kingdom increased by 11% over the previous year, while the number of items received from Britain grew by nearly 28%.[126] Overall, the colony witnessed a substantial rise in per capita use of the postal utility. In 1854 the department processed about eight letters per person, rising to 10 items a year later.[127] The heavy demand on postal services stemmed mainly from the intake of literate middle-class migrants, many of whom arrived alone – circumstances that resulted in a regular exchange of correspondence with family and businesses back home.

Successive gold discoveries after 1851 led to the appointment of women to postal positions vacated by transient males with an autonomous attitude to work in the get-rich-quick environment. The men included William Newell, Postmaster at St Mary's, who resigned around March 1856 to pursue 'fresh field and pastures new' after

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[122] McKenzie, 'Of Convicts and Capitalists', p. 209, p. 217 & p. 219.
[123] T. H. Irving, '1850–70', in Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, p. 138 & p. 139.
[124] Houison, *History of the Post Office*, Table A, p. 105.
[125] *Post Office (Report from Postmaster General), 1855*, Sydney, 1856, p. 10; & *Post Office (Eleventh Annual Report, being for the year 1865)*, Sydney, 1866, p. 4.
[126] *Post Office (Fourth Annual Report from The Postmaster General), 1858*, Sydney, 1859, p. 6.
[127] *Post Office (Report from Postmaster General), 1855*, p. 10.

succumbing to 'gold fever'.[128] Some of his peers abandoned their offices without notice, a few absconding with the takings. The sudden departure of postmasters for new strikes continued despite pay rises and a prohibition on resignations before the end of each month.[129] The labour shortage caused by the gold finds led many workers to question employer authority and disregard workplace rules.[130] In the Sydney G.P.O., postal clerks exhibited a cavalier attitude to management, ignoring prescribed office hours and absenting themselves without permission.[131] Middle- and middling-class women promised to provide a more reliable and less capricious workforce. In October 1853 the department placed Anne Stamer in charge of the post office at Glebe following the departure of John Clissold, who had been made the suburb's first postmaster just 16 months earlier.[132] On 1 March 1859, Mary Anne Brown took over the Pitt Town outlet, replacing Thomas Grono who had taken office only four weeks before.[133] Official figures underscore the improved vocational prospects for women after the discovery of gold. Whereas in 1848 females had managed at least five post offices in N.S.W., by 1857 they controlled a minimum of 16 of the 198 facilities then operating – this despite the reluctance of officials to assign women to outlets in coarse mining settlements.[134] From an employment perspective, the Gold Rushes placed a premium on female immobility and passivity.

Progress, Moral Enlightenment and the State

Gold aside, the N.S.W. Post Office Department offered greater employment opportunities to both men and women as a consequence of the ideologies surrounding progress and 'moral enlightenment'. The concept of progress originated in industrial Britain where it implied both material and moral improvement. There it underpinned campaigns for better housing, enlarged sewerage systems, and protective factory and

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[128] Patricia Hosking, 'History of St Marys Post Office: The Postmasters and Postmistresses of St Marys 1840–1898', Penrith Library, p. 6 & p. 7.
[129] Memo from "J.K." to Corresponding and Accounting Branch, 16 July 1852, Extracts from Postmaster-General's Minute Book – May, 1852 to Oct., 1868, p. 2.
[130] Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, p. 149 & p. 150.
[131] Memo, 12 June 1855, Extracts from Postmaster-General's Minute Book – May, 1852 to Oct., 1868, p. 66.
[132] John Olsen, 'Glebe Post Office History', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, 1971, p. 2.
[133] Appointments Register, c. 1833 to 1861, alphabetical pagination, "P" for Pitt Town.
[134] *ibid.*; *Post Office (Third Annual Report from the Postmaster General), 1857*, Sydney, 1858–9, p. 2; & McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 5. The precise number of postmistresses in 1857 is unclear owing to incomplete entries in the Appointments Register.

mine legislation, along with attempts to reform a moribund postal service.[135] In N.S.W., the social theories of Charles Harpur and other proponents of moral enlightenment complemented the idea of progress. They believed that all people had the potential for personal and collective development and that the state should actively facilitate the betterment of humanity. In their opinion the mail service was vital for human development, providing the facility to unite people and dispense self-improving knowledge.[136] The reform agenda adopted by Major William Christie, N.S.W. Postmaster-General from May 1852, was partly inspired by the dual ideologies of progress and moral enlightenment. Christie resolved to render the postal service of greater utility to all, inviting the public to identify areas of need and to make suggestions "in the interest of the Post Office Department" and, by implication, the whole community.[137] For many rural dwellers, the establishment of a post office represented a significant milestone in the cultural life of their town, given their faith in the capacity of public amenities to enhance the civic environment and check the excesses of individualism.[138] In August 1861 J. Latimer called on the Postmaster-General to open a facility in Teesdale, his request suggesting a belief in the power of a postal outlet to improve the moral tone of the community: -

> Your honor will see the necessity of establishing a post office here when I inform you that this is a village … making great progress in civilization. We have a National School and a general store … and a post office would be a great anxiliary in the furtherance of the district.[139]

The establishment of a postal amenity at Thornthwaite in December 1861, with Annabella Goodman in charge, underscored community expectations with respect to the state. In this instance local residents had petitioned Thomas Dangar M.L.A. for a post office and a dedicated mail route through the district. He observed that the petitioners had "an urgent claim on the Government for their fair share of Postal arrangements" and stressed the importance of the proposed mail line that would

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[135] J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain 1832–51*, Glasgow, Fontana Collins, 1971, pp. 162–165.
[136] Michael Roe, *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia 1835–1851*, Parksville, Melbourne U.P., 1965, p. 6, p. 148, p. 149 & p. 159.
[137] *Post Office (Report from Postmaster General), 1855*, p. 24.
[138] Roe, *Quest for Authority*, p. 156.
[139] Letter from J. Latimer, No. 1 Swamp via Carcoar, to P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 1 August 1861, SP32, Teesdale, fol. 7741/8 AU 1861.

connect Thornthwaite to Scone and link the towns west of Merriwa to those on the Great Northern Road.[140] For many, postal services had become a necessity of life.

State paternalism was well entrenched in both Britain and Australia by the late 1840s. In both places the authorities recognised the social benefits stemming from a universal postage rate. In 1849 Governor Fitzroy approved an act that provided for a uniform postal charge on all letters up to half an ounce, abolishing the schedule of charges based on weight and distance.[141] In drafting this law, the government aimed to ensure that residents in remote areas were not disadvantaged in social and educational terms by physical isolation. The colonial administration took its lead from Rowland Hill, head of the British Post Office, who had introduced a universal postage rate nine years earlier. He believed that rates based on distance were a tax on progress and that a common charge of a penny a letter would contribute to educational and moral development, particularly in isolated rural districts.[142] Just as interested in the welfare of country people, the government in N.S.W. had required the postal department to deliver newspapers free of charge to rural locations from 1835.[143] State paternalism also led to the provision of money order facilities at post offices from 1863. Concerned to curb the negative effect of transient male labour on the social fabric, Major Christie suggested that the initiative would allow working men to send money to poor relatives, "which would otherwise be spent in reckless dissipation and debauchery".[144] As late as 1871, N.S.W. Postmaster-General Joseph Docker demonstrated a commitment to the concept of moral enlightenment, installing savings bank facilities in postal outlets to encourage "provident habits" in the population.[145] These provisions coincided with a shift in paternalistic activity from the private to the public sector in response to the excesses of the *laissez-faire* economic system and the distress caused by the depression of the early 1840s. In N.S.W., James Macarthur, and

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[140] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Annabella Goodman as Pms on 31 December 1861, SP32, Thornthwaite; & letter from Thomas Dangar M.L.A., 43 Hunter St, Sydney, to P.M.G., Sydney, 26 September 1861, *ibid.*, fol. 9400/26 SE 1861.

[141] The legislation set the inland rate at two pence a letter and postage on town letters at one penny. Ships' letters cost three pence per item. See, *Post Office (Report from Postmaster General), 1855*, p. 6.

[142] M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office since 1840*, London, The Athlone Press, 1985, pp. 7–12.

[143] Newspapers could be committed to the post without charge, provided they were no more than seven days old. See, Houison, *History of the Post Office*, p. 9.

[144] *Post Office (Eighth Annual Report, being for 1862)*, Sydney, 1863, p. 7; & *Report from the Postmaster General, on the Post Office, for 1856*, Sydney, 1857, p. 13. Postal bureaucrats in Britain saw money orders and postal orders in a similar way. See, Daunton, *Royal Mail*, p. 91.

[145] *Post Office Seventeenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1871*, Sydney, 1872, p. 11.

later James Martin and other conservative politicians, denounced the impact of untrammelled private enterprise on morality and social life. With their assistance, the government passed laws from the late 1840s that required the state to assume responsibility for the welfare of juvenile offenders and provide for compulsory small-pox vaccinations.[146] In short, the Post Office had become a vital agency in an overarching social charter.

Married Women

Although policemen's wives had kept postal outlets for many years, and other women had acted as unpaid assistants to postmaster husbands for some time, the N.S.W. Post Office Department did not employ significant numbers of married women until the 1860s. The subsequent change in the pattern of recruitment – irrespective of a growing regard in the working class for dependent womanhood – coincided with an economic recession and a series of strikes on the Hunter Valley coalfields called in response to wage cuts brought on by declining demand.[147] In May 1862 the department appointed Jane Peters, wife of miner Cornelius Peters, to the post office at Borehole.[148] Her earnings provided a welcome boost to family finances in a period when there was little in the way of employment, other than domestic work, available to women in coalmining communities.[149] Like Jane Peters, Matilda Winter, Postmistress at Merriwa in the Hunter Valley, relied on her pay to meet household expenses, her husband's meagre wage insufficient to keep her eight children in comfort. In light of her situation, Head Office reappointed Mrs Winter to her job in February 1869 after shelving plans to transfer the postal duties to the wife of Merriwa's telegraph master.[150] On the goldfields, where everyday items fetched high prices, married women often took outside work to balance the budget, offering

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[146] Atkinson, 'Time, place and paternalism', pp. 1–6.
[147] Letter from C. Merewether, General Manager, A.A. Company, to Australian Agricultural Company, Newcastle, 26 April 1862, SP32, Borehole, fol. 3761/29 AP 1862.
[148] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Jane Peters as Pms on 12 May 1862, 10 May 1862, *ibid.*, fol. 4233/13 MY 1862.
[149] Winifred Mitchell and Geoffrey Sherington, 'Families and children in nineteenth-century Illawarra', in Patricia Grimshaw (ed.) *et al.*, *Families in Colonial Australia*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1985, p. 112.
[150] Letter from Michael and Matilda Winter, Merriwa, to A. Bell M.P., 10 February 1869, SP32, Merriwa; telegraph from W. Read, Pmr, Merriwa, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 16 February 1869, *ibid.*, fol. General Post Office/FE 17 1869; note signed by Edward Cracknell, Supt of Tels, 17 February 1869, *ibid*., fol. 1728/FE 26 1869; letter signed by S. H. Lambton, G.P.O., Sydney, 17 February 1869, *ibid.*; note signed by James Dalgarno, Chief Clerk, 24 February 1869, *ibid.*; & *proforma* Notice of Re-Appt of Matilda Winter as Pms on 25 February 1869, *ibid.*, fol. 1853/MR 4 1869.

housekeeping, laundry and sexual services to the large "digger" population.[151] If some working men had begun to embrace the ideology of female dependency, the ideal was discounted in places where male incomes were inadequate.[152]

For much of the 19th century, teachers' wives donned the mantle of *de facto* postmistress, effectively supplementing their husbands' wage. Since the salaries paid to schoolmasters were frequently very modest, the education authorities allowed employees to augment their income by keeping a post office, provided it did not interfere with their teaching responsibilities. Typically, the teacher's wife dispensed postal services from the school residence in her husbands' name, sometimes co-opting pupils to deliver letters after classes finished for the day. In small schools, wives often performed unpaid work to help husbands earn a living. Many taught young children to read, or conducted sewing classes for older girls.[153] In December 1855 schoolmaster William Piddcock had to resign as postmaster at St Peter's due to his wife's ill health, underscoring her critical role in the maintenance of postal amenities.[154] Twenty years later Mr Gow, a teacher at Teesdale, refused to accept the job of postmaster on the grounds that he was "a single man" and unable to call on a wife's assistance.[155]

Like widows and spinsters, married women gained positions in the postal service on the strength of their sedentary existence. In nominating Annabella Goodman, his servant's wife, for the job of postmistress at Thornthwaite, Joseph Docker M.L.C. took stock of her living habits. In a letter to the department of December 1861, Docker outlined his wishes:

> If any objection presents itself to the appointment of a female I should … recommend her son Thomas Goodman aged twenty five … The reasons why I should prefer the … mother are, that she is never absent from home while the other vocations of the son would lead to his temporary absence.[156]

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[151] Ellen McEwen, 'Family history in Australia: some observations on a new field', in Grimshaw (ed.) *et al.*, *Families in Colonial Australia*, p. 191; & Goodman, *Gold Seeking*, p. 79.
[152] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 65.
[153] Noeline Williamson, 'The Employment of Female Teachers in the Small Bush Schools of New South Wales, 1880–1890: A Case of Stay Bushed or Stay Home', *Labour History*, no. 43, November 1982, p. 2.
[154] Letter from William Pidcock, Sub Pmr, St Peter's, Cook's River, 12 December 1855, SP32, St Peters, fol. 55/9147 13 Decr.
[155] Letter from Mr Gow, Public School, Teesdale, 11 March 1876, SP32, Teesdale, fol. B1633/14.3.76.
[156] Letter from Joseph Docker, Thornwaite, 23 December 1861, SP32, Thornthwaite, fol. 11848/27 DE 1861. Thornthwaite is frequently referred to as "Thornwaite" in early departmental correspondence.

In December 1864 Head Office chose Elizabeth Kirkman to run the postal facility at Ellenborough on the basis of her domestic immobility after her father pointed out that she was "always at home", whereas her husband was often absent. A petition from local residents in support of Mrs Kirkman's application confirmed the situation.[157]

Workplace Sovereignty and Local Knowledge

During the 1850s and much of the 1860s, postal employees exercised considerable authority and autonomy at a local level. In the absence of district supervisors to oversee a rapidly expanding postal network, the department had to call on rural postmasters and postmistresses to nominate suitable persons to manage neighbouring outlets. In December 1862 Major Christie asked Mary McLaren, Postmistress at Cassilis, to identify someone to take charge of the Turee Creek office. She suggested single woman Mary Elliot for the job.[158] The postal utility also looked to country employees to recommend replacements upon their resignation. When Sarah Sneden, Postmistress at Millfield, gave notice in February 1866, she nominated local storekeeper Charles Beany as her successor.[159] Without an intimate knowledge of the region, Head Office deferred to country staff on the subject of mail contracts. In August 1867 Chief Clerk James Dalgarno prevailed on Mary McLaren to draft a suitable timetable for the proposed mail service between Cassilis and Denison Town.[160] Thanks to expediency, women were afforded significant power and freedom in the workplace.

Some country postmistresses took advantage of local knowledge and the shortage of labour to further their interests. In November 1864 Mary Gordon, Postmistress at Tomago on the Hunter River, advised Head Office of her intention to resign, explaining that she was unable to locate a boatman prepared to collect the mail from the steamer for five shillings a week. Major Christie recognised that the post office

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[157] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Elizabeth Kirkman as Pms on 13 December 1864, SP32, Ellenborough, fol. 583/18 Jan 65; letter from John Wallis, Upper Hastings, to P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, 21 October 1864, *ibid.*, fol. 12060/OC 29 1864; & petition from Upper Hastings residents to P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 22 October 1864, *ibid.*, fol. 11998/OC 29 1864.

[158] Memo from W. H. Christie, P.M.G., to M. A. McLaren, Cassilis P.O., 16 December 1862, SP32, Turee Creek, fol. B538; & letter from M. A. McLaren, Pms, Cassilis, to P.M.G., 22 December 1862, *ibid.*

[159] Letter from Sarah Sneden, 7 February 1866, SP32, Millfield, fol. 1513/9 FE 1866.

[160] Letter from J. McCubbin, Denison Town, 17 August 1867, SP32, Turee Creek, fol. 6149/23 AUG 1867; & note signed by James Dalgarno, Chief Clerk, 26 August 1867, *ibid.*

would have to be closed if a replacement could not be found for Miss Gordon. Unable to assess the situation for himself and aware that the postmistress had him at a disadvantage, Christie asked her to suggest an acceptable porterage rate in the circumstances. Either that, or nominate a successor. Miss Gordon proposed that her salary be increased from 25 to 50 pounds a year to cover the cost of hiring a willing boatman. She stressed the risk in attending the steamer *Collaroy* under Captain McDiarmid, which seldom yielded way to smaller craft.[161] Mary Gordon's continued tenure and a lack of further correspondence on the subject suggest that the authorities agreed to her request. Unlike many working women, female Post Office employees were well placed to mobilise local intelligence in a way that advanced their positions.

Postmistresses enjoyed a level of personal sovereignty that most female workers could only imagine. As the effective owners of a postal business, they were relatively free to plan their day, notwithstanding the constraints imposed upon them by the mail contract service. Because the modest dimensions of most office interiors made partitioning impractical, postmistresses moved between workplace and private space without impediment. In this respect they differed from teachers employed in urban infants and primary schools who were confined to the classroom and exposed to the constant scrutiny of senior staff. They also enjoyed a measure of freedom unavailable to domestic servants who toiled under the watchful eye of mistresses and were allowed little free time.[162] The "domestic" setting in which they worked enabled postmistresses to avoid the strict supervision endured by female factory hands – women thought to be especially vulnerable to moral degradation because of their non-residential occupations.[163] The employer/employee paradigm had a weaker hold on female postal workers than it had on other working women.

Patronage and the system of decentralised administration brought several "post-office families" into being. From the mid 1860s, John Emblin ran the postal facility at Armidale with the help of his wife, Mary, and his single daughters, Martha,

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[161] Letter from Mary Ellen Gordon to W. H. Christie, 26 November 1864, SP32, Tomago, fol. 13247/NO 28 1864; letter from W. H. Christie, P.M.G., G.P.O., to Mary Ellen Gordon, Pms, Tomago, 29 November 1864, *ibid.*, fol. 13566/DE 7 1864; & memo from M. E. Gordon, Tomago, to W. H. Christie, 5 December 1864, *ibid.*, fol. 13566/DE 7 1864.
[162] Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson (Australia), 1975, p. 32.
[163] *ibid.*, p. 58 & p. 59.

Antoinette and Mary Jnr.[164] In the Sydney suburb of Gladesville, Sarah Howell and her daughter, telegraphist Sarah Howell Jnr, offered a combined postal and telecommunications service from the late 1880s.[165] Like other family businesses, a post office afforded the prospect of economic and social advancement, if not absolute independence from employers.[166] Accordingly, family members were prepared to labour long hours and offer extra assistance during busy periods. From 1882, two of Emblin's daughters worked alternating shifts over a 12-hour day to meet a fourfold increase in demand for money orders caused by recent mining activity.[167] In Gladesville Sarah Howell Jnr often left the Morse key to relieve her mother at the counter, one or other women attending the office from 5.00 am, six days a week.[168]

Equal Pay

On 1 September 1862, the N.S.W. authorities established official post offices with a view to providing a money order service to the public effective from 1 January 1863. In subsequent years the facilities operated in both purpose-built government buildings and rented accommodation. In light of the greater financial responsibility attached to money order business, the postal department placed the official establishments under the control of public servants without any connection to other businesses, thereby ensuring that employees gave the office duties their full attention. The department left the smaller outlets without money order provisions – henceforth known as non-official offices – in the hands of non-official staff. Although several facilities eventually acquired money-order amenities, most retained their non-official standing. The men and women put in charge of the official establishments enjoyed official or permanent officer status, with access to generous government sick leave, recreation leave and furlough entitlements. Moreover, the authorities allowed the women the same rate of pay as men, determining their level of remuneration on the basis of office

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[164] Vann L. Cremer, 'Armidale Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, May 1981, p. 24, p. 29, & p. 35; memo from G. de Milhau, Armidale, to Sec., G.P.O., 26 September 1885, SP 32, Armidale, fol. B 11017/29 SEP 85; & memo from John Emblin, Armidale, 1 October 1885, *ibid.*

[165] Letter from S. Howell, T.O., Gladesville, to P.M.G., Sydney, 18 March 1889, SP32, Gladesville, fol. 18 MAR 89/B3357; & letter from Sarah F. Howell to Supt of Tels, 25 February 1891, *ibid.*, fol. 4494/17 APR 91.

[166] Michael J. Winstanley, *The Shopkeeper's World, 1830–1914*, Manchester, Manchester U.P., 1983, p. 44; & Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, p. 98.

[167] Letter from John W. Emblin, Pmr, Armidale, to G. de Milhau, P.I., Sydney, 11 February 1882, SP32, Armidale, fol. B 1631/17 FE 1882.

[168] Report overleaf by unidentified official, 16 May 1891, SP32, Gladesville, fol. 6545/2 JUN 91.

earnings without reference to gender.[169] This concession was to elude female official staff in the other Australian colonial postal administrations until 1902, when wage parity was extended to all official postmistresses and female telegraphists. Up until that time, women on the permanent list outside of N.S.W. were subject to a gender-based wage differential, receiving lower salaries than their male peers.

Prior to the setting up of official offices in N.S.W. and the other Australian colonies, postmistresses had availed of equal pay – sometimes just a few pounds a year – in keeping with British tradition. In Britain managers of sub-post offices, the equivalent of non-official outlets, received the same wage, irrespective of sex.[170] The record does not indicate precisely how much Mary Ann Rutledge, Australia's first paid postmistress, earned. Be that as it may, she commanded the same 20% commission on postage for local mail – then the only form of remuneration – as her male predecessor, Cassilis postmaster Thomas Jessett.[171] Whereas female non-official staff throughout Australia continued to enjoy wage parity following the introduction of official outlets, N.S.W. was the only administration to extend the concession to female employees on the permanent list.

The N.S.W. postal department drew the first official postmistresses from the ranks of existing personnel. Three of the 19 outlets upgraded to official status by the end of February 1863 were worked by women who had previously run busy postal businesses in regional centres and the Sydney hinterland.[172] Some postmistresses laid claim to very impressive incomes, courtesy of equal pay and a commission on money-order transactions. All benefited from a pay rise intended to compensate for the loss of the stamp sales gratuity received prior to office conversion. Already on a sizeable

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[169] *Post Office (Eighth Annual Report, being for 1862)*, p. 7; *Post Office (Ninth Annual Report, being for 1863)*, Sydney, 1864, p. 3; & 'Appendix H', *ibid.*, p. 27.
[170] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, p. 280; & McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 40.
[171] Cremer, 'Cassilis Post Office History', p. 1. In 1840 John McKinlay, Mrs Rutledge's immediate successor, was paid 19 pounds, two shillings and ten pence p.a. Details courtesy of Roberta Wilson-Murray of Cassilis who transcribed information from the original Register of Inward Correpondence, G.P.O., Sydney, 7 January 1834 – 6 March 1845, held by the State Records Authority of N.S.W.
[172] 'Appendix E', *Post Office (Ninth Annual Report, being for 1863)*, pp. 12–16; & 'Appendix H', *ibid.*, p. 27. Of the 23 official offices operating in N.S.W. by 1876, six were managed by women. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 69.

wage, Eliza Daly, Postmistress at West Maitland, saw her salary grow by 50 pounds p.a. to 300 pounds p.a. in 1863 with the upgrading of her office to an official outlet.[173]

The granting of equal pay to female official employees in September 1862 can be traced to the bureaucratic freedom enjoyed by Postmaster-General William Christie. In contrast to the situation in Victoria, where the office of Postmaster-General had passed to a politician in 1857 and was subject to the vagaries of parliament, the N.S.W. Post Office Department remained under the control of Major Christie as permanent head until 1865, when he retired and politician James Cunneen took charge of the instrumentality. For much of his tenure, Christie decided recruitment and remuneration policy, albeit subject to the approval of the Under Secretary for Finance and Trade from the late 1850s.[174] Under him, female officers were generally well regarded, evidenced in the generous testimonial received by Brisbane postmistress Elise Barney from T. K. Abbott, then Secretary of the Post Office Department, upon the separation of Queensland from N.S.W. in 1859.[175] In this respect Christie's administration differed from that of Thomas Murray-Prior, who became Queensland's Postmaster-General in 1866. In 1864, while serving as bureaucratic head of the postal service in Queensland prior to entering parliament, Murray-Prior had Mrs Barney demoted to the money order branch. Thereafter, no other woman worked as an official postmistress in that colony.[176] Protective of his staff, Christie resisted efforts by Colonial Treasurer Elias Weekes M.P. to rationalise outlets, along with employees. Furthermore, he argued before the Post Office Board of Inquiry set up by Weekes in 1862 that the referral of matters to Treasury would hinder operations. Christie held office until 1865 due to the delay in implementing the Board's recommendation that the position of Postmaster-General be made a political appointment.[177]

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[173] 'Maitland Post Office History', p. 9.
[174] 'Mitchell, Sir William Henry Fancourt (1811–1884)', in Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 5: 1851–1890, K–Q, p. 263; & Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 161 & p. 163.
[175] Manfred Cross, 'Barney, Elise (1810–1883)', in Diane Langmore (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, supplementary vol.: 1580–1980, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 2005, p. 20.
[176] H. J. Gibbney, 'Murray-Prior, Thomas Lodge (1819–1892)', in Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 5: 1851–1890, K–Q, p. 323; & Cross, 'Barney, Elise (1810–1883)', p. 20.
[177] Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 161 & p. 163. Weekes' resignation from the ministry due to ill health and the defeat of the Robertson and Cowper government in 1863 delayed action on the Board's findings. See, R. W. Rathbone, 'Weekes, Elias Carpenter (1809–1881)', in Bede Nairn (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 6: 1851–1890, R–Z, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1976, p. 375.

It was fortunate for female official staff that the granting of equal pay from 1862 predated the development of a cheap female labour market in the combined postal and telegraphic utilities operated by the other Australian colonial governments. In N.S.W., the Postmaster-General assumed control of telecommunications in 1867, allowing for an extension of wage parity provisions to cover female telegraphists engaged from the 1870s.[178] In most of the other colonies, the Postmasters-General took charge of the telegraph service from the late 1860s or early 1870s. The physical amalgamation of postal and telegraphic functions in those jurisdictions coincided with the appointment of their first official post and telegraph mistresses on relatively low salaries.[179] Previously, in Victoria, women had been largely excluded from official post offices due to the rough living conditions found on the goldfields.[180] Unlike their intercolonial peers, the department heads in South Australia and Western Australia retained the title of Postmaster-General beyond the 1860s. Despite their relative independence, they, along with the head bureaucrats in Victoria and Tasmania, became increasingly subject to the will of economy-minded politicians from the early 1870s.[181] Legislators and technical experts noted the experience of the commercial telegraph companies and the Post Office in Britain, which suggested that female operators would accept lower rates of pay than males. Meanwhile, the press promoted the potential of cheap female labour in the telecommunications sector. A correspondent writing in the *Age* of 22 March 1872 proposed that the first Victorian women to attend Morse classes at Melbourne's Industrial and Technological Museum be posted to uneconomic offices that did not justify higher-paid male staff. Both T. W. Jackson, Victoria's Deputy Postmaster-General, and Charles Todd, South Australia's Postmaster-General, felt that females were unworthy of equal pay,

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[178] *Post Office Thirteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1867*, Sydney, 1868, p. 14; & Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 163. The integration of postal and telegraph functions in N.S.W. commenced from 1 January 1870. See, *Post Office Fifteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1869*, Sydney, 1870, p. 5 & p. 7.

[179] The postal and telegraphic utilities in each colony were combined as follows: – Tasmania, 1857; N.S.W., 1867 (effective from 1870 and incomplete, with separate bureaucracies until 1893); Victoria, 1869; South Australia 1870; Western Australia, 1871; & Queensland, 1879. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 6; & Joan Frew, *Queensland Post Offices 1842–1930 and Receiving Offices 1869–1927*, Brisbane, self-published, 1981, p. 44.

[180] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 5.

[181] G. W. Symes, 'Todd, Sir Charles (1826–1910)', in Nairn (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 6: 1851–1890, R–Z, p. 280; & 'Death of Mr F. A. D. C. Helmich', *West Australian*, Perth, 11 July 1900, p. 6. In Queensland no woman worked as an official telegraphist. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 64 & p. 65.

insisting that they were only half as productive as males.[182] For N.S.W. women, the concession arrived none too soon.

A number of factors figured in the claim by female permanent officers to equal pay. Gender-neutral in nature, postal employment called for basic clerical, administrative, financial and commercial skills – the preserve of neither sex. In this respect it countered the trend towards a gendered wage differential that had accompanied the decline of domestic production from the 18th century and the relegation of women to low-paid, "female" occupations with limited bargaining power.[183] The active involvement of women in the early commercial life of N.S.W. helped to prepare the way for wage parity. From the early 1800s, several emancipist and immigrant women conducted successful enterprises, many of which were "masculine" or, at least, non-gendered in character. The female entrepreneurs included publicans, some of whom invested in butcheries and bakeries. Other women joined their husbands in business partnerships, operating shops, mail-coach services, and later postal outlets.[184] In 1858 Anne Fuller took on the postal facility at Gerringong, she and her husband having opened a general store in the town some years earlier.[185] Equal pay in the N.S.W. Post Office represented a reversal of the tendency to marginalise women workers.

The case for equal pay gained in credibility from the 1850s as post office work came to be characterised by a division of labour independent of gender. Whereas some postal establishments grew in importance with the rapid development of regional centres and the convergence of mail routes on certain towns, others outside populated areas languished. The situation made for considerable disparity in the salaries and responsibilities of staff, irrespective of sex. In 1855 William Thompson, Postmaster at Bathurst – then the principal service centre for the western slopes and plains – received 220 pounds p.a. based on business transacted and stamp sales.[186] At the time

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[182] *ibid.*, p. 8, p. 80 & p. 81.
[183] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 46.
[184] Perrott, *A Tolerable Good Success*, p. 58 & p. 59. 'Currency lass' Jane Watford and her free-settler husband, James, ran a mail coach service between Sydney and Bathurst from 1832, as well as a number of staging inns in Parramatta into the 1850s. See, Chris Rapp, 'Jane Watsford Currency Lass', in Patricia Thompson and Susan Yorke (eds), *Lives obscurely great: historical essays on women of New South Wales*, Sydney, Society of Women Writers (Australia), N.S.W. Branch, 1980, p. 7.
[185] Letter from Anne Fuller, Pms, Gerringong, to P.M.G., 24 December 1859, SP32, Gerringong, fol. 8258/28 DE 1859.
[186] Appointments Register, c. 1833–1861, alphabetical pagination, "B" for Bathurst.

he had charge of an assistant and at least one letter carrier.[187] Eliza Daly, Postmistress at West Maitland from February 1853, prospering in what was the Hunter Valley's pre-eminent financial and service hub and the primary staging post for all north-bound mail.[188] Because of her facility's status as a major revenue earner, the widow drew the substantial sum of 250 pounds a year, her salary augmented by a percentage on stamp sales. Mrs Daly supervised two paid helpers, incidentally her son and daughter.[189] Highly paid officers, such as William Thompson and Eliza Daly, occupied an opposite pole to managers of small country outlets without assistants and without the wherewithal to generate much revenue. From April 1856 Frederick Ferrier alone provided a postal service to the village of Breeza for just 10 pounds a year, while from January 1857 Harriet Ferguson single-handedly worked the Mangrove Creek amenity for 12 pounds p.a.[190] The N.S.W. Post Office exposed both men and women to a dichotomous employment regime.

The rapid turnover of Postmasters-General in N.S.W. following William Christie's departure meant that practical control of the postal department remained largely with senior management. Consequently, wage equality went unchallenged by the political heads. In the unsettled parliamentary environment then prevailing, the portfolio of Postmaster-General became an object of trade. Politicians frequently used it to consolidate factional alliances and shore up individual constituencies through improved postal services and job opportunities for supporters and their relatives.[191] Between October 1865 and October 1872, the office of Postmaster-General changed hands no less than six times – some incumbencies lasting only a few weeks.[192]

In the other Australian jurisdictions, Postmasters-General typically enjoyed longer tenures, allowing them to place their personal stamp on the bureaucracy and resist any attempt to follow the N.S.W. example. In Victoria, where the political landscape was

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[187] 'Postal History of Bathurst & District', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, p. 5.
[188] Curthoys, 'Securing Against Risk', pp. 16–23.
[189] 'Maitland Post Office History', p. 8, p. 9 & p. 11. West Maitland Post Office, the facility run by Mrs Daly, was known as Maitland Post Office prior to 1852. See, N. C. Hopson, *New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Post Offices*, rev. edn, Sydney, self-published, 1984, p. 36 & p. 63.
[190] Appointments Register, c. 1833–1861, alphabetical pagination, "B" for Breeza and "M" for Mangrove Creek.
[191] Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 150 & p. 155.
[192] James Cunneen held the portfolio for just three months before the government fell, while Atkinson Tighe had tenure for a mere three weeks. See, David Sharpe, 'List of Postmasters and Postmasters General of NSW & Aust.', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, March 1979.

slightly more stable than in N.S.W., five politicians managed the communications portfolio between October 1865 and October 1872, generally over lengthier terms. The longest-serving, James McCulloch, held office from May 1864 to May 1868. Meanwhile, in Tasmania just two parliamentarians acted as Postmaster-General.[193] In South Australia only two public servants occupied the apolitical post, James Lewis from 1861, and Charles Todd from 1870. In Western Australia public servant Franz Helmich retained the title of Postmaster-General for the entire period.[194]

Women in Non-Official Offices

While female employees on the permanent list benefited from equal pay, other women in N.S.W. ran small non-official post offices for wages many men deemed unacceptable. In newly established communities, storekeepers anxious to boost business competed with one another to operate the postal outlet. A customer who called in to buy a stamp or to collect their mail might be persuaded to depart with a bag of flour or a new pair of boots. Even so, shopkeepers-cum-postmasters frequently complained that the postal allowance was insufficient to compensate for the onerous duties, prompting several to resign. Then, managers of small postal facilities received between 10 and 30 pounds p.a.[195] In February 1856 storekeeper John Grime resigned as Casino's postmaster due to the unsatisfactory wage. The local magistrates advised Major Christie that they were unable to find a replacement owing to "the smallness of the salary, it being quite inadequate to the amount of work performed".[196] Discontented shopkeepers often neglected their postal responsibilities in favour of their business interests. Postal Inspector T. W. Levinge reported in July 1861 that they failed to lodge privacy declarations covering assistants, kept unclaimed letters, and overlooked the maintenance of date stamps.[197] In December 1862 the department appointed Mary McLaren to Cassilis Post Office after the departure of William Piper,

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[193] Victorian Ministers, http://www.burkeandwills.net.au/Royal_Society/.../Victorian_Ministers.htm, 5 October 2009; Sally O'Neill, 'Meredith, Charles (1811–1880)', in Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 5: 1851–1890, K–Q, p. 239 & p. 240; & 'General Post Office, 2nd April 1867, Public Notice', signed Thos D. Chapman, *Mercury*, Hobart, 9 April 1867, p. 4.

[194] Symes, 'Todd, Sir Charles (1826–1910)', pp. 280–282; & 'Death of Mr F. A. D. C. Helmich', *West Australian*, Perth, 11 July 1900, p. 6.

[195] Appointments Register, c. 1833–1861, alphabetical pagination.

[196] Letter from John Grime, P.O., Casino, to P.M.G., 24 February 1856, SP32, Casino, fol. 56/428, 8 March 1856; & letter from Alex. Mackellar J.P. and (–) Wilson J.P., Police Office, Casino, to P.M.G., Sydney, 20 June 1856, *ibid.*, fol. 56/1125, 12 July 1856.

[197] 'Appendix H', 'report from T.W. Levinge, P.I., G.P.O., Sydney, to William Christie, P.M.G., 3 July, 1861', *Post Office (Sixth Annual Report, being for 1860)*, Sydney, 1861, p. 18.

storekeeper. Her predecessor objected to having to work late into the night, dispensing letters and preparing mail for early-morning dispatch – all for just 25 pounds a year. In the circumstances his business came first.[198] In August 1865 Headquarters chose Sarah Sneden to run Millfield's non-official facility for 12 pounds p.a. The teaching assistant replaced storeholder Henry Crother who resigned after his small allowance was withheld for failing to submit the monthly account.[199] For as long as men rejected departmental terms of employment, women constituted a cheap source of labour.

For many women, management of a non-official post office remained an attractive proposition, furnishing them with an income, however small, while allowing them to fulfil their role as carers. In November 1872 the department chose widow Bridget Davoren for the job of postmistress at Collector, enabling her to meet her financial commitments while attending to seven young children at home.[200] Given the increase in marriage and birth rates that followed the Gold Rushes, the facility to accommodate the needs of offspring was of critical importance. Postal work also enabled spinsters to look after old or ailing parents while augmenting household income. The likelihood of a single daughter having to care for a parent increased from the 1850s due to the extended period of childbearing (around 17 years).[201] From March 1867 "assistant" Miss Rose Stanner helped her father, the postmaster at Hunter's Hill, to earn a living while nursing her ill mother.[202] Because of the ability to meet economic and family demands concurrently in a "domestic" setting, women working in post offices largely escaped the tensions experienced by female factory workers who were forced to juggle competing priorities.[203]

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[198] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Mary Agnes McLaren as Pms, 1 December 1862, SP32, Cassilis, fol. 11905/NOV 4, 1862; letter from William Piper, undated, *ibid.*, fol. 3121/8.5.1862; & letter from William Piper to 'Sirs', undated, *ibid.*, fol. 6813/21.7.1862.

[199] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Sarah Sneden as Pms on 16 August 1865, 1 September 1865, SP32, Millfield, fol. 9345/8 SP 1865; & letter from Henry Crother, former Pmr, Millfield, to P.M.G., 22 November 1865, *ibid.*, fol. 11 9 58/25 NO 1865.

[200] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Bridget Davoren as Pms, 11 November 1872, SP32, Collector, fol. B 4578/16.11.72; & letter from P. Dunn, Goulburn, to Mr Butler, M.L.A., Attorney General, Sydney, 5 November 1872, *ibid.*

[201] Margaret Anderson, '"Helpmeet for Man": Women in Mid-nineteenth Century Western Australia', in Patricia Crawford (ed.), *Exploring Women's Past: Essays in Social History*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1983, pp. 89–93, & p. 99; & Margaret Anderson, 'Marriage and children in Western Australia, 1842–49', in Grimshaw (ed.) *et al.*, *Families in Colonial Australia*, p. 54 & p. 55.

[202] Vann L. Cremer, 'Hunters Hill Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, p. 2 & p. 4; letter from James Stephen Stanner Snr to P.M.G., P.O., Sydney, 22 February 1867, SP32, Hunters Hill, fol. 682/2 Feb 1867; & report by G. de Milhau, 6 June 1872, *ibid.*, fol. C 2440/11.6.72.

[203] Fay Wright, 'Single carers: employment, housework and caring', in Janet Finch and Dulcie Groves (eds), *A Labour of Love: Women, Work and Caring*, London, Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1983, p. 92.

Non-official post offices also offered women an agreeable alternative to unpaid labour at home. In Sydney unmarried daughters often had to perform the domestic duties owing to the perennial shortage of paid help, while in rural areas housework was commonly coupled with farm chores.[204] Unable to afford hired labour, many selectors enlisted female kin to work the land. In grazing districts women assisted in the busy lambing and shearing seasons, while on grain farms they helped with the harvest and ran the property in quieter periods when their menfolk took seasonal work on other holdings.[205] Arguably, for many women, the possibility of a life outside the home or farm gate outweighed the remunerative shortcomings of non-official employment.

Several women found work in non-official post offices as a result of the perceived threat posed by domesticity to male identity. Over time, many men came to see family life and its attendant responsibilities as morally debilitating, robbing them of their innate need for independence and the chance to fully participate in the wider world. For some males, home was a stymieing environment full of petty concerns and unnecessary conflict that prevented them from realising their intellectual and social potential. Later this point of view found expression in J. F. Archibald's *Bulletin* magazine.[206] Fear of losing one's personal autonomy and social potency prompted some men to abandon their families for an idealised frontier that promised a hedonistic and morally uplifting existence untrammelled by obligations to kin.[207] In December 1857, Mr I. McIntyre, Postmaster at Merton (Denman) in the Hunter Valley, resigned from office to travel "into the Interior" in search of a new life.[208] While some males sought permanent refuge in 'The Bush' as an antidote to domesticity, others looked to minimise their time at home. In the case of selectors, the tedious ritual of planting, harvesting, stocking and lambing added to the oppressive nature of everyday existence.[209] From the early 1870s, Peter Lawson (Niels Larsen), Postmaster at New Pipe Clay Creek (renamed Eurunderee in 1877), escaped his

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[204] Belinda Probert, *Working Life: Arguments about work in Australian society*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1989, p. 79.
[205] Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, p. 53 & p. 61.
[206] Lake, 'The politics of respectability', p. 3 & p. 4.
[207] Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity 1870–1920*, Carlton South, Melbourne U.P., 2001, pp. 18–24.
[208] Letter from I. McIntyre, P.O., Merton, to W. H. Christie, P.M.G., Sydney, 7 December 1857, SP32, Denman, fol. 12 DE/1857.
[209] Lake, 'The politics of respectability', pp. 3–6; & Sue Rowley, 'Things a bushwoman cannot do', in Magarey (ed.) *et al.*, *Debutante nation*, p. 188, p. 189, p. 194 & p. 195.

selection at every opportunity to avoid family quarrels, working as an itinerant carpenter on neighbouring properties. In his absence, wife Louisa – who later became a leading feminist and newspaper publisher – ran the post office.[210] Women gained employment by default in a period when many men coveted freedom and mobility.

Family life aside, men frequently preferred outdoor work to an office job. In both Britain and Australia, the relative decline of agriculture and the rise of commerce from the mid 19th century led many males to regard clerical duties and other indoor vocations as intrinsically effete and a threat to masculinity since none called for physical strength or obvious risk-taking.[211] Conversely, outdoor occupations were viewed as healthy and sexually unambiguous. The staffing arrangements at Balmain Post Office reflected the male aversion to indoor pursuits. There Catherine Chape managed the administrative tasks from June 1857, while her husband, postmaster Alexander Chape, delivered letters, spending most of the day in the open air.[212] A similar situation prevailed in Coonabarabran. Prior to her spouse's death in September 1869, schoolmistress Julia Cockburn ran the postal outlet, leaving her postmaster husband free to perform mail contract duties out of doors.[213] The domestic character of the post office was assured while men shunned the work environment.

Patronage Perpetuated

From the early 1850s, the N.S.W. Post Office Department provided for the widows and single daughters of deceased employees to compensate them for the lack of organised welfare provisions. In the Annual Report of 1857, Postmaster-General William Christie lamented the government's failure to introduce a superannuation fund that would assist the relatives of clerks and other men on the established list. In the circumstances Christie urged parliament to pass the proposed Pension Bill that allowed for an employee contribution totalling 4% of salary, supplemented by an

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[210] Xavier Pons, *Out of Eden: Henry Lawson's Life and Works – A Psychoanalytic View*, North Ryde, Sirius Books, 1984, p. 158. In November 1857, William Clement, Postmaster at Richmond River Heads, resigned owing to his frequent absence from home. See, letter from William Clement, P.O., Richmond River Heads, to P.M.G., 17 November 1857, SP32, Ballina, fol. 1924/27 NOV 1857.

[211] Male office workers often suffered a crisis of machismo, reflected in the bitter observation: 'Born a man; died a clerk'. See, Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls', p. 158.

[212] Appointments Book, c. 1833–1861, alphabetical pagination, "B" for Balmain; & letter from Catherine Chape, P.O., Balmain, to P.M.G., 25 March 1874, SP32, Balmain, fol. B 1528/1.4.74.

employer contribution of the same amount.[214] In the absence of financial aid for the female dependants of deceased postmasters, Christie appointed Eliza Daly to West Maitland Post Office in February 1853 following the death of her husband.[215] In a similar gesture, he arranged for Catherine Armstrong to take charge of the Bungonia outlet in April 1862 after her father's demise.[216] Under Major Christie, paid work became an institutionalised alternative to formal welfare relief.

If senior Post Office officials retained a degree of administrative autonomy due to the quick succession of parliamentary Postmasters-General, postal employment in N.S.W. increasingly became the subject of political influence after the granting of responsible government in 1856.[217] The politicians of the day were primarily interested in their immediate constituents, a proper party system based on shared principles and policies having yet to evolve. In each parliamentary faction, members conspired with one another to secure jobs and services for their electorates, exercising favour individually and collectively.[218] Responsible government meant a reduction in the discretionary powers of senior management, with the referral of all appointments and proposals for offices and mail routes to the Under Secretary for Finance and Trade for final approval. While that official answered to the Colonial Treasurer, a member of parliament, recruitment remained vulnerable to political manipulation. The recommendation of the 1862 Post Office Board of Inquiry that the office of Postmaster-General be vested in a legislator (effective from 1865) reduced the department's powers of patronage in favour of politicians. It gave the latter ultimate control over appointments and promotions, leaving the head bureaucrat (Secretary) to oversee the daily activities of the utility.[219]

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[213] Letter from Julia Cockburn, acting Pms, Coonabarabran, 7 September 1869, SP32, Coonabarabran; *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Julia Cockburn as Pms, 1 September 1869, *ibid.*, fol. 8123/SP 28 1869; & report by G. de Milhau, 14 September 1869, *ibid.*, fol. 7717/SP 14 1869.
[214] *Post Office (Third Annual Report from the Postmaster General), 1857*, p. 11 & p. 12; & 'Appendix', 'Provisions for Incorporation in the Proposed Pension Bill', *ibid.*, p. 13 & p. 14.
[215] 'Maitland Post Office History', p. 8, p. 9 & p. 11.
[216] Letter from William Christie, P.M.G., to Under Sec. for Finance and Trade, Treasury, 23 April 1862, SP32, Bungonia, fol. 3394.
[217] Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 163.
[218] Irving, '1850–70', p. 149.
[219] Rathbone, 'Weekes, Elias Carpenter (1809–1881)', p. 375.

The appointment of Annabella Goodman to Thornthwaite Post Office in December 1861 provided evidence of political interference in departmental affairs.[220] Her engagement followed receipt of a petition signed by Joseph Docker M.L.C. and other residents calling for a post office to be opened on his property. In return for the department's co-operation, fellow politician Thomas Dangar M.L.A. promised to help pass the necessary funds through parliament. He confessed that the proposal was politically inspired, observing: "the two important districts in My Electorate would be benefitted".[221] In December 1872 Scone's postmaster, Francis Isaac, reported that Docker's property had been sold and that the new owner wanted the postal outlet closed at the end of the year when the postmistress planned to resign. Reflecting on the expedient nature of the office, Isaac recalled that the previous owner, although a petitioner, had been less than enthusiastic about the facility: "I have heard Mr Docker say that he never wanted a P.O. there. It was the doing of Mr Thos Dangar when he was the Member for the Electorate".[222] In this instance postal employment was conditioned by the realities of political life.

Some women owed their appointment to the influence wielded by members of *The Australian Club*. Founded in 1838, the club provided a venue where 'Country Gentlemen' could discuss their mutual concerns 'without the taint of trade'.[223] Despite the rural orientation, it attracted members from a range of callings, one of whom was Postmaster-General William Christie, its first paid secretary-treasurer.[224] In common with male middle-class establishments in Britain, the club generated a sense of common interest among individuals by denying lesser beings access.[225] Fellow members customarily approached Major Christie to secure the appointment of nominees to post offices in their communities. In November 1862 William Busby,

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[220] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Annabella Goodman as Pms on 31 December 1861, SP32, Thornthwaite.

[221] Letter from Thomas Dangar M.L.A., 43 Hunter St, Sydney, to P.M.G., Sydney, 26 September 1861, *ibid.*, fol. 9400/26 SE 1861; letter from W. H. Christie, P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, to Under Sec. for Finance and Trade, Treasury, 27 December 1861, *ibid.*, fol. 11982/31 OC 1861; & E. Docker, 'Docker, Joseph (1802–1884)', in Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 4: 1851–1890, D–J, p. 79.

[222] Report by Francis Isaac, Pmr, Scone, undated, SP32, Thornthwaite, fol. B5205/27 12 72. Docker may not have wanted the postal outlet on his land, but might have thought it politic to retain it, occupying, as he did, the office of Postmaster-General from January 1866 to September 1868, and again from December 1870 to May 1872. See, Docker, 'Docker, Joseph (1802–1884)', p. 79.

[223] Quoted in J. R. Angel, *The Australian Club 1838–1988: The First 150 Years*, Sydney, John Ferguson, 1988, p.119 & p. 121.

[224] Among the original club members were 31 landowners, 12 merchants, 11 military officers and 29 senior civil servants. See, *ibid.*, p. 125 & p. 294.

brother of Alexander Busby, urged the Postmaster-General to consider Mary McLaren for the job of postmistress at Cassilis after the sudden resignation of the postmaster.[226] In commending Miss McLaren to the Under Secretary for Finance and Trade, Christie appeared to draw on his knowledge of Busby as a club member, explaining that he was "a magistrate of the District … in whose recommendation I have every confidence".[227] The procedural process surrounding the opening of Thornthwaite Post Office underlined the relationship between department and club. Anxious to expedite the matter, the Postmaster-General instructed his staff on 19 December 1861 to enquire whether Joseph Docker, petitioner and fellow member, was attending the club on that day and have him nominate a suitable person to run the facility.[228] Christie did not attempt to separate club business from departmental affairs, offering members privileged access to officials. In June 1862 he penned a note to Head Office on club letterhead, informing his staff that Richard Cox, magistrate and club member, wished to meet the postal inspector to discuss the removal of the outlet at Cunningham Creek to Keen's Swamp.[229] During Major Christie's tenure, *The Australian Club* served as a *de facto* recruitment agency and contact point for the Post Office.

Localism played a significant part in the engagement of postal staff. The sudden influx of migrants following the discovery of gold contributed to a state of collective unease, forcing communities on the defensive for want of information about individuals and their origins.[230] In this environment long-term residency counted for much. In recommending Mary McLaren for the postmistress position at Cassilis, William Busby noted that she had lived "with her parents in the centre of the village" since birth.[231] Favour in this context turned on the ability of the authorities to regulate the behaviour of permanent inhabitants, whereas, in the case of newcomers who might soon move on, their powers were limited. Accordingly, Senior Sergeant Thorpe of the local police rejected overtures in July 1864 from Mr Oakey, "an itinerant serenader", to run the post office at Darlington (near Singleton), pointing out that he had recently

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[225] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 157 & p. 186.
[226] Letter from W. Busby to Major Christie, 1 November 1862, SP32, Cassilis, fol. 10835/NOV 5 1862.
[227] Letter from W. Christie, P.M.G., to Under Sec. for Finance and Trade, Treasury, 12 November 1862, *ibid.*, fol. 62/287.
[228] Note detached signed by William Christie, 19 December 1861, SP32, Thornthwaite.
[229] The death of the postmistress at Cunningham Creek prompted the proposed relocation. Note signed by William Christie, 3 June 1862, SP32, Ilford, fol. 4923/JU 3 1862.
[230] Russell, *A Wish of Distinction*, p. 10 & p. 11.
[231] Letter from W. Busby to Major Christie, 1 November 1862, SP32, Cassilis, fol. 10835/NOV 5 1862.

arrived in the district and was allegedly implicated in a mail robbery at "Grass tree hill."[232] Individuals with an established financial and moral stake in the community fared better. In July 1863 Charles Gruggen, sheep inspector of Wallabadah, wrote to the Postmaster-General. He argued for the retention of local postmistress Mrs Burke in response to objections from Thomas Dangar M.L.A. regarding her plans to move the post office from her store to her husband's hotel. Gruggen rejected Mr Dettmer, a newly arrived storekeeper nominated by Dangar to replace Mrs Burke, claiming that she was "much better for the inhabitants … than a perfect stranger" who had been in business for a week and might leave at any time. Unlike Dettmer, the postmistress had "lived in Wallabadah for years" and had earned the residents' respect.[233] Faced with the unknown, communities embraced the familiar.

Up until the mid 1860s, the relationship between department and employee was a largely personal one. As late as 1865, Head Office staff numbered no more than 71, allowing for relatively intimate exchanges between senior management and workers in the field.[234] Major Christie had a close relationship with Catherine Armstrong, Bungonia's postmistress, after the death of her father.[235] In June 1863 she asked the Postmaster-General for a pay rise to compensate her for the heavier workload brought by the change from a thrice-weekly to daily mail service. Christie noted that the office return lodged by Miss Armstrong justified a higher allowance, but was unable to act immediately owing to inadequate funds. Accordingly, he took it upon himself to ensure that Treasury raised her wage as soon as practicable. Christie saw the situation as one requiring his personal attention, remarking: "if she will leave it to me I will see what I can do for 1864 – & shall recommend that any increase granted shall date from Jan next".[236] In December 1864 the postmistress gave notice, unable to wait any longer. The tone of her letter of resignation suggests that she believed she was dealing with Major Christie alone: "having left the matter (ie the issue of a rise) *in your hands*

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[232] Letter from Charles Thorpe, Senior Sergeant, Police Station, Singleton, to Samuel Baker, Pmr, Singleton, 17 July 1864, SP32, Darlington (near Singleton), fol. 7555/JY 19 1864.
[233] Letter from Charles Gruggen, Wallabadah, to P.M.G., 24 July 1863, SP32, Wallabadah, fol. 8504; & letter from Thomas Dangar, 43 Hunter St, Sydney, 17 July 1863, *ibid.*, fol. 8122/JY 18 1863.
[234] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1865*, Sydney, 1866, p. 82 & p. 83.
[235] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Catherine Elizabeth Armstrong as Pms on 28 April 1862, SP32, Bungonia, fol. 4062/8 MY 1862.
[236] Letter from Catherine E. Armstrong to P.M.G., Sydney, 4 June 1863, *ibid.*, fol. 6292/(–); letter from Pms, Bungonia, to P.M.G., Sydney, 15 October 1863, *ibid.*, fol. 11 4 56; & note overleaf signed by William Christie, P.M.G., 11 November 1863, *ibid.*, fol. 11 4 56.

(my emphasis)".[237] The Postmaster-General reacted in a way that implied a personal obligation: "I hope P.M. will go on – I have already recommended that the Salary from Jan 1864 shall be 18 pounds per annum tho' I cannot get back the Return approved from the Treasurer yet … I wish to do what is right."[238] Arguably, the code of chivalry popularised in contemporary literature informed management's commitment to female staff. The medieval tradition, with the protection of women at its core, enabled middle-class males to demonstrate their moral superiority over working-class men.[239] On another level, the personal relationship between senior managers and postmistresses is explicable when viewed in terms of female financial dependency. While the law generally denied widows and single daughters a right to their dead husbands' or fathers' assets, women had to look to men for their subsistence, their fate resting on the goodwill of the male trustees administering the estate.[240] Patronage persisted while personal obligation and a power differential buttressed the nexus between employer and employee.

The Rise of Meritocracy

Despite the persistence of patronage, a recruitment system based on quantifiable merit began to make inroads into the public sector from the second half of the 19th century. The concept of meritocracy originated in 18th century Enlightenment thought, which questioned the practice of conferring favour solely on the basis of inheritance or moral pedigree, and was shaped by Evangelical opposition to influence in public affairs.[241] In Britain and Australia, the belief that men were incapable of fully participating in the political nation without sufficient education lent weight to the argument in favour of merit.[242] Opposition in Britain to patronage prompted changes in civil-service recruitment policy from the 1850s. The Northcote and Trevelyan reforms, instituted in the name of greater efficiency, emphasised training and qualifications and centred on a series of entrance and promotion examinations.[243] In an attempt to raise the standard of public servants in N.S.W., Governor Bourke had

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[237] Letter from Pms, Bungonia, to P.M.G., Sydney, 1 December 1864, *ibid.*, fol. 13435/DE 6 1864.
[238] Note overleaf signed by William Christie, P.M.G., 6 December 1864, *ibid.*, fol. 13435/DE 6 1864.
[239] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 98.
[240] *ibid.*, p. 119, p. 120 & p. 177. Married women had a claim on their spouse's property only if a settlement agreement had been reached between the parties in the equity court. See, *ibid.*, p. 97.
[241] McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', p. 60 & p. 61.
[242] Roe, *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia 1835–1851*, p. 152.
[243] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, p. 241 & p. 242.

introduced an entry test for establishment posts and a system of merit-based promotion in the 1830s. However, up until the mid 1850s, local efforts to implement a meritocracy had been largely subsumed by partisanship and political self-interest.[244]

By then the N.S.W. Post Office Department had adopted a limited reform agenda. The findings of the 1851 Inquiry into the management of the Post Office played a major part in precipitating change in employment policy. Those charged with looking into the department – then still under the control of an ageing James Raymond – criticised the negative impact of favouritism on the organisation, observing: "Party spirit prevails to a considerable extent, and its baneful influence pervades, more or less, the whole Establishment".[245] They noted that Raymond's son had charge of the accounts section and questioned the accuracy of the financial records, pointing to the lack of proper checks and the failure to deal with delinquent country postmasters.[246] With the Inquiry's recommendations in mind, Major Christie instituted an internal selection process for establishment staff based on ability and experience rather than influence. Henceforth, requests for promotions were considered according to merit and seniority.[247] Contemporaneously, supervisors were required to regularly report on "the zest, industry, & general efficiency" of clerical officers.[248]

Even so, many workers not on the official or permanent list obtained employment on the strength of personal qualities, coupled with practical or educational qualifications. In January 1865 Reverend Proctor urged the department to appoint Margaret Gane to Bungonia Post Office, describing her as "capable, as regards ability and integrity".[249] In March 1879 George Pullman, Postmaster at Moonbi, nominated Kate Seckold as his replacement. He noted that she was "a good scholar and a very respectable person".[250] The belief among many patrons that certain employee attributes derived from an individual's personal morality led to the bracketing of abstract virtues with

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[244] McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', p. 59.
[245] Extracts from *Report of Inquiry into the Post Office*, Sydney, 1851, p. 1.
[246] *ibid.*, p. 7 & p. 2. The 1851 Inquiry precipitated James Raymond's departure. Francis Merewether M.L.C. took temporary charge of the utility on 10 June 1851. He was succeeded by Major William Christie on 1 May 1852. See, Sharpe, 'List of Postmasters and Postmasters-General of NSW & Aust.'.
[247] *Post Office (Report from Postmaster General), 1855*, p. 15.
[248] Memo, 31 January 1853, Extracts from Postmaster-General's Minute Book – May, 1852 to Oct., 1868, p. 21.
[249] Letter from Rev. Proctor, Parsonage, Bungonia, to P.M.G., Sydney, 3 January 1865, SP32, Bungonia, fol. 64/4 Jany 1865.
[250] Letter from George Pullman, Moonbi P.O., 17 March 1879, SP32, Moonbi, fol. B 2152/18 3 79.

practical or educational credentials. In N.S.W., reservations surrounding the selection of establishment staff solely on the basis of formal qualifications ensured that the character of applicants continued to figure in appointments even after the introduction of entrance examinations. Many government officials held to the conviction inherited from Britain that public servants should be gentlemen, if not by birth, then by conduct, noting that educational attainments alone were no guarantee of good conduct and character.[251] An opponent of meritocracy, British postal bureaucrat and novelist Anthony Trollope asserted that a system of influence at least ensured that beneficiaries remained accountable to patrons, whereas under an exam-based regime, no one was responsible for their behaviour. Further, a meritocracy discounted qualities that were not amenable to examination, disadvantaging 'men of strong native talent, energy, and zeal … (but) … deficient in ordinary knowledge'.[252] Virtue and merit were neither mutually exclusive nor ends in themselves.

Respectability

Women aspiring to postal positions had to remain ever vigilant to ensure that they stayed within the bounds of respectability. The belief among evangelical Christians that females were innately more vulnerable to moral regression than males made for a state of constant surveillance and heightened concern for one's reputation.[253] While in N.S.W., Anthony Trollope visited the rough gold-mining town of Gulgong where he was informed of the efforts of the local postmistress to preserve her moral standing. Upon receiving an invitation to a public ball, the alleged beauty only consented to attend if the town's barmaids were denied entry. When her request went unheeded, she elected to remain at home rather than be seen to commune with women of a lower moral order.[254] The department and the community subjected female employees to strict scrutiny in light of society's heavy investment in the presumed morality of domestic womanhood. The temperance movement, in particular, looked to female domestic virtue as a way of moderating male behaviour and protecting home life from the ravages of drink. Nevertheless, the values that underpinned its campaign to

[251] McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', p. 54 & p. 61.
[252] Daunton, *Royal Mail*, p. 243.
[253] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 77.
[254] Extract from Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand*, in Barry Watts, *The Australian Letter-Writer's Companion and Address Book*, North Ryde, Angus & Robertson, 1987, page for surnames beginning with "G".

contain alcoholism remained in constant conflict with women's alleged susceptibility to excess.[255] In the prevailing environment, personal lapses attracted severe penalties. In November 1872 Head Office relieved Ann Larrymore, Postmistress at Morpeth, of her job after receiving complaints from the public regarding the administration of the post office.[256] Upon visiting the facility, Inspector Clarke found Miss Larrymore "upstairs in bed quite intoxicated", having apparently been in a drunken state for a full week.[257] Generally, women with any connection to alcohol had minimal claim to respectability and were viewed with suspicion. In September 1880 poet Henry Kendall wrote to the department demanding the removal of Mrs Logan who kept the post office at Camden Haven in her husband's name. Kendall complained that the facility was attached to a wine shanty and that the *de facto* postmistress was failing to give postal customers her full attention. By that time liquor licensing laws prohibited publicans from running postal outlets. Following an investigation, Head Office removed Mrs Logan and transferred the postal amenity to Fagan's store where Kendall worked as an assistant manager.[258] A pre-condition of employment, respectability remained a tenuous attribute.

Women laid claim to post office work at a time when notions of respectability were in a state of flux. By the second half of the 19th century, confusion abounded over what constituted a gentlewoman, prompting a debate as to how low in the social scale one might be found, and what occupations this person might follow. Although distinctions were still made between classes and between respectable, or otherwise, work, "a lady" was increasingly identified, less by breeding, wealth or social rank, and more by behaviour – a worthy woman demonstrating restraint, moderation and consideration for others.[259] In February 1861 Jullian Cormick, Postmaster at Casino, advised the department that publican Maria Meanly, the widow of his predecessor, John Meanly,

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[255] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 9.
[256] Letter from J. Clarke, Morpeth, to Sec., G.P.O., 8 November 1872, SP32, Morpeth, fol. C 4658/11.11.72.
[257] Report by J. Clarke to Sec., G.P.O., 6 November 1872, *ibid.*, fol. 1766/NOV 7 1872, Electric Telegraph, Sydney; & letter from Miss Larrymore, Morpeth, to S. H. Lambton, Sec., G.P.O., 30 November 1872, *ibid.*, fol. B 4839/2.12.72.
[258] Kendall Post Office Historical Notes', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, p. 2; letter from S. H. Lambton, Dept Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, to Inspector General of Police, 14 October 1880, enclosing extract of letter from Henry Kendall, Camden Haven, undated, SP32, Camden Haven, fol. C 80/7382; & letter from John Logan, Pmr, Camden Haven, 24 September 1880, *ibid.*, fol. C 80/6210.
[259] Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, p. 32, p. 33 & p. 35.

had approached him about taking over the post office. Cormick agreed to make way for her. Mrs Meanly planned to employ a clerk to attend to the postal duties.[260] Despite her occupation, Major Christie believed she had "to some extent a claim on the P.O. Department".[261] Local magistrate Alexander Mackellar backed Mrs Meanly's application, remarking: "I know of no more worthy or careful person to whom that office can be entrusted". Christie went on to commend her to government "as the Widow of a previous Postmaster."[262] The fluid nature of respectability stemmed, in part, from the need to cater for the daughters of lower middle- and working-class families who now had access to teaching and other paid pursuits, courtesy of greater social mobility.[263] For his part, magistrate William Busby happily recommended Mary McLaren, a stonemason's daughter, for the postmistress position at Cassilis, noting that she was "extremely reputable in her conduct".[264]

Even so, a father's lack of respectability often prevented a single daughter from obtaining employment. In April 1862 the postal department rescinded the appointment of teacher Annie Millar to Denham Court Post Office because of her disreputable father.[265] Miss Millar's dismissal followed complaints from local residents concerned for the sanctity of the mail. They petitioned the Postmaster-General, pointing out that the mail bag was left in her residence where her alcoholic father had access to their letters. James Chisholm of Camden Park wrote to Major Christie on the subject. While expressing personal confidence in the postmistress, he opined that she "never could be answerable for their (the letters') safe custody so long as her father occupied the house".[266] In the circumstances Christie chose storekeeper Catherine Wynne to replace Miss Millar following representations from Clement Lester, agent for landholders Ann Cordeaux and Richard Blomfield, on her behalf. Mrs Wynne took office despite a poor education and the clergy's endorsement of the

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[260] Letter from Jullian Cormick, Pmr, Casino, to P.M.G., Sydney, 18 February 1861, SP32, Casino, fol. 1626/20 FE 1861.
[261] Note in margin signed by Major Christie, 22 February 1861, *ibid*., fol. 1626/20 FE 1861.
[262] Letter from Alex. Mackellar, Police Office, Casino, to P.M.G., Sydney, 11 March 1861, *ibid.*; & letter from W. Christie, P.M.G., Sydney, to Under Sec. for Finance and Trade, 20 March 1861, *ibid.*
[263] Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, p. 34.
[264] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Mary Agnes McLaren as Pms, 1 December 1862, SP32, Cassilis, fol. 11905/NOV 4, 1862; & letter from W. Busby to Major Christie, 1 November 1862, *ibid.*, fol. 10835/NOV 5 1862.
[265] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Annie Millar as Pms, 11 April 1862, SP32, Denham Court, fol. 3363; & note by Major Christie, 8 April 1862, *ibid*.

incumbent.[267] Elizabeth Coulter, daughter of Irvine Coulter, Gosford's former postmaster, also suffered because of her father's conduct. In June 1868 anonymous correspondent "Observer" alleged that Coulter had opened letters in his care. The writer opposed Miss Coulter's appointment in his stead, bracketing daughter with father: "when you give it (the position) to her you give it to her father". Head Office chose not to offer Elizabeth Coulter the job so as to preserve community goodwill.[268] Single women struggled to achieve public standing in their own right while social convention dictated that they reside in the family home until they married.[269] At the time, the reputations of father and daughter were seen as indivisible.

Likewise, a husband's disreputable behaviour could adversely affect a wife's relationship with the department. In August 1876 Sarah Howell, Postmistress at Gladesville, received a severe reprimand from the department for failing to prevent her alcoholic husband from performing postal duties, after being instructed to hire outside help.[270] A few months earlier, Head Office had received a complaint from a local resident objecting to the unseemly language used by Mr Howell when handing over the mail to the ferry boat captain at King Street Wharf. Chief Clerk James Dalgarno suspected that Howell, a violent man, had induced his wife to ignore the directive, implying that she had no control over him and could not be expected to act independently.[271] Other women suffered because of disreputable spouses. In October 1880 Rose Harle applied to run St Leonard's Post Office in place of her husband, after he was suspended for misappropriating money. Departmental Secretary Stephen Lambton declined her request since she was powerless to prevent Harle from gaining entry to the facility – this despite her willingness to make up the deficiency, the need

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[266] Petition signed by Clement Lester, Ann Cordeaux and others, *ibid.*, fol. 3395/17 AP 1862; & letter from James Chisholm, Camden Park, 19 July 1862, *ibid.*, fol. (–)/ 7662.
[267] Letter from W. Christie, G.P.O., Sydney, to Under Sec. for Finance and Trade, 9 April 1862, *ibid.*, fol. Treasury No 2118/AP 11 1862; letter from Clement Lester, Denham Court, 7 April 1862, *ibid.*, fol. 3095/8 AP 1862; & letter from George N. Wood, Parsonage, Denham Court, to Colonial Treasurer, 30 April 1862, *ibid.*, fol. 3858/1 May 1862.
[268] Letter from "Observer", Gosford, 4 June 1868, SP32, Gosford, fol. 4311; & note overleaf signed by James Dalgarno, Chief Clerk, 15 June 1868, *ibid.*, fol. 4311/15 JU 1868.
[269] Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, pp. 89–92 & p. 98.
[270] Report by James Dalgarno, Chief Clerk, 23 August 1876, SP32, Gladesville, fol. C 4932/29.8.76; letter from Mrs Howell to P.M.G., 14 March 1876, *ibid.*, fol. C 1504/11.3.76; & note overleaf signed by "B.C.", 16 March 1876, *ibid.*
[271] Letter from (–), Kings St Wharf, to Sec., G.P.O., 10 March 1876, *ibid.*; & report by James Dalgarno, Chief Clerk, 23 August 1876, *ibid*., fol. C 4932/29.8.76.

to provide for five children, and overtures from the clergy on her behalf.[272] The legal primacy afforded males in marital matters prevented females from exercising vocational independence and moral force in such circumstances. Under the law of coverture, husband and wife were treated as a single entity, denying women access to personal property and, by implication, the right to self-determination.[273] While women were tied to men of bad repute they were damaged by association.

The relationship between department and employee resembled that of master and servant. It too relied on the continued goodwill of the employer and turned on an employee's personal propriety. Like domestic servants, postal workers occupied a position of trust and were hired for themselves, and not just for their labour.[274] A bad reputation had the potential to damage an individual's job prospects and their family's standing in the community. For these reasons alone, Matilda Winter, Postmistress at Merriwa and former servant, mounted a vigorous defence of her morality after the local magistrates alleged that she had tampered with the mail.[275] Protesting her innocence, Mrs Winter wrote to the Postmaster-General in January 1866, drawing attention to her references:

> I am sending home to the emigrant office in London for Carrahters [*sic*] from the age of 3 years untill [*sic*] I was 19 years that being the age when I left home to come to this country ... I dare say that when you have seen the Carrahters … you will see that I am not quite so foolish to meddle with other people's affairs & thereby Injure my own & my Children's Prospects in Life.[276]

Matilda Winter's situation was analogous to that of a servant who depended on a favourable reference from their employer to secure another position.[277] To shore up her good name, the postmistress pointed out that her patron had invested considerable faith in her, observing: "if I had not been considered a trustworthy person Mr A. Busby of Cassilis would not have asked the office for me". Mrs Winter enlisted the

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[272] Letter from Rose Harle, P.O., St Leonard's, to S. H. Lambton, G.P.O., Sydney, 22 October 1880, SP32, St Leonards, fol. B 9353/22.10.80; note signed by Stephen Lambton, 17 December 1880, *ibid.*; & testimonial from Rev. James Kennedy, Presbytery, North Shore, 22 October 1880, *ibid.*
[273] Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 116.
[274] *ibid.*, p. 178.
[275] The magistrates complained that letters were wet and mutilated. See, letter from (–) Shepherd J.P. and James Bettington J.P., Merriwa, to P.M.G., 8 January 1866, SP32, Merriwa, fol. 440/11 JAN 1866.
[276] Letter from Matilda Winter, Pms, Merriwa, to P.M.G., 18 January 1866, *ibid.*, fol. 870/22 JA 1866.
[277] Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann*, p. 35; & Paula Hamilton, 'Domestic Dilemmas: Representations of Servants and Employers in the Popular Press', in Magarey (ed.) *et al.*, *Debutante nation*, p. 77.

support of local landowner Mary Anne Scott, who described her as "honest, obliging and attentive" in a written submission to the court.[278] Women whose livelihood depended more on character than on labour remained forever vulnerable.

Because of the public confidence placed in them, postmistresses were especially anxious to preserve their moral standing. As the trustees of government funds and private property, postal employees were expected to observe financial proprieties and respect the business interests and personal lives of residents. The dismissal of Amelia Pearson, Postmistress at Camden and local midwife, after she was found to have misappropriated office takings underscored the need to maintain one's good name.[279] Conscious of the damage done to her future, Miss Pearson wrote to the Postmaster-General in June 1880, asking for the chance to redeem herself:

> I do …Sir, appeal to your sense of justice to take into consideration the effect your decision must have upon my after life. I am most thoroughly roused to a true sense of my position, and its deplorable prospects. I humbly entreat you if you do not feel it possible to reinstate me, that you will give me another appointment, so that my character may be upheld in the eyes of the world and that I may have the opportunity to redeem my lost chances of advancement … [280]

As a member of one of Camden's oldest families, Amelia Pearson had much to lose. The granddaughter of the town's first postmistress, Eliza Pearson, she had succeeded the ageing widow in June 1879 in recognition of her grandmother's long and faithful service. In a close-knit community where access to paid work was based on familial and social connections, the damage done to her job prospects was substantial. In his study of Camden, Alan Atkinson observes that the settlement was characterised by a multiplicity of relationships, or, in his words, "a web of material interest, memories and obligations", rendering employment contingent upon the ongoing confidence of the inhabitants.[281] For women who relied on community goodwill for a living, reputation was a valuable commodity.

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[278] Letter from Matilda Winter, Pms, Merriwa, to P.M.G., 18 January 1866, SP32, Merriwa, fol. 870/22 JA 1866; & letter from Mary Anne Scott, Merriwa, to Bench of Magistrates, 14 February 1866, *ibid.*
[279] John Wrigley (ed.), *Camden Characters*, Camden Historical Society, 1990, p. 30.
[280] Cremer, 'Camden Post Office History', p. 24.

The relationship between women and the N.S.W. Post Office Department following the appointment of Mary Ann Rutledge, Australia's first paid postmistress, was fortuitous, expedient, and occasionally opportunistic in nature. The postal authorities furnished needy middle- and middling-class women with employment at a time when there were few openings for females in their social strata and only limited matrimonial prospects. Home-based postal work allowed the women to engage in public life while retaining their respectability. As a consequence, postmistresses straddled the commercial and domestic domains. Moreover, a decentralised postal system conferred substantial administrative power and freedom on female staff. In return for a livelihood, women provided the Post Office with a ready source of sedentary and essentially compliant labour in a period when many male workers followed a migratory and independent life, and at a juncture when the state was assuming greater responsibility for community amenities. Gradually, women filled the void left by men unwilling to accept low wages or fearful of the risk posed by domesticity and indoor work to their sense of self. In rural areas females facilitated the delivery of postal services, met the challenges posed by the Gold Rushes, and helped to consolidate government control in isolated communities. Well placed to provide the postal bureaucracy with operational intelligence, some postmistresses took advantage of the situation to improve their condition. Their self-interested outlook suggests that the contemporary model of retiring womanhood was less than hegemonic in the Australian context. The relative freedom that distinguished the N.S.W. postal administration allowed for the granting of equal pay to female official employees in 1862. Fortunately for them, the die had been cast before the move towards cheap female labour – apparent in the other Australian communications utilities – could gain traction in the N.S.W. postal and telegraphic services. The entrepreneurial impulse among early colonial women, the gender-neutral character of postal work, and a non-gendered wage differential, pathed the way for equal pay in N.S.W. A quick succession of Postmasters-General in N.S.W. from 1865 ensured that female official employees retained the remunerative concession. Meanwhile, the "domestic" orientation of postal employment enabled women to supplement household income and escape the demands of home and farm, while fulfilling their carer responsibilities.

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[281] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Amelia Pearson as Temporary Pms, 9 June 1879, SP32, Camden, fol. B 4581/7.6.79; & Atkinson, *Camden*, p. 205.

The system of patronage that underpinned the relationship between women and the Post Office Department was purposeful and enduring, if arbitrary and tenuous in operation. From the patrons' perspective, the engagement of respectable female immigrants promised to moderate the impact of convict culture and the excesses of the free market. Furthermore, favouritism in employment allowed patrons to exercise a degree of control in a society largely composed of strangers. On another level, bureaucratic patronage ensured that the female dependants of deceased officers enjoyed a measure of financial security, while enabling postmasters' wives to augment the male wage. Despite moves towards a meritocracy, influence survived – a consequence of senior management's personal commitment to staff, club connections, social fluidity, the role of women in subsidising services, and the expansive interpretation of merit. Helped into employment by way of their character, postmistresses needed to protect their good name in order to preserve their livelihood. Without an autonomous identity, the female recipients of patronage lacked firm foundations in their dealings with officialdom, their employability conditioned by the reputation of male relatives, the fragility of respectability, and the power differential between patron and beneficiary. A marriage of convenience, the relationship between women and the Post Office in N.S.W. proved to be both mutually advantageous, and intrinsically unequal.

Chapter Two: Words on the Wire, 1867–1890

In Chapter Two I examine the condition of women employed by the N.S.W. Post Office Department and the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department from 1867, when the Postmaster-General's portfolio was extended to include telecommunications operations.[1] My study embraces women working in dedicated telegraph stations, those in charge of dual postal and telecommunications facilities, official assistants, the wives hired to help husbands in post and telegraph offices, and the females assigned to single-purpose postal outlets. The investigation concludes in 1890, just prior to the onset of depression.

In this section I explore the political, economic and social imperatives surrounding the appointment of female telegraphists or "operators". During the period concern for the male wage grew more apparent, with increasing numbers of men demanding a level of remuneration sufficient to keep their families without recourse to female earnings. My work is informed by Desley Deacon's assertion that the N.S.W. government employed female telegraphists on equal pay irrespective of their potential to provide cheap labour, setting it apart from the other Australian colonial administrations.[2] At the same time, I address her contention that females obtained responsible, well-paid positions in smaller telegraph outlets by default, while senior management focused exclusively on Head Office affairs. According to this proposition, women left to their own devices typically resorted to the time-honoured system of influence in their quest for employment.[3] Deacon's argument conforms to Claire McCuskey's assertion that the engagement of female telegraphists in Victoria was simply an extension of the patronage model that had seen needy women hired as postmistresses.[4] I go on to discuss the case for and against female telegraphists in terms of their alleged skills

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[1] Two years earlier the Postmaster-General had relieved the Treasurer of responsibility for the Money Order Office. In 1871 he took charge of the newly established Government Savings Bank. See, Hilary Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works: The Administration of New South Wales, Vol. 1, 1842–1900*, Sydney, University of N.S.W. Press, 2005, p. 163.

[2] Desley Deacon, *Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers 1830–1930*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., p. 69 & p. 70.

[3] Deacon argues that the 'backwater' status of the post and telegraph portfolio and the lack of a uniform recruitment policy in a disorganised and decentralised civil service were also factors in the appointment of women to the telegraph utility. See, *ibid.*, p. 59, p. 60, p. 68, p. 69, p. 72, p. 75 & p. 77.

[4] Claire McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', M.A. Thesis, Dept of History, School of Humanities, La Trobe University, April 1984, p. 47.

and employee attributes. Many of the contrasting vocational qualities ascribed to men and women were essentially contradictory or ambiguous in nature. On the subject of sexual difference, Mary Poovey makes the point that 19th-century gender ideology was incomplete and 'fissured' by competing priorities.[5]

While acknowledging opposition to female telegraphists on the basis of skill, I investigate those forces that operated to ensure their ongoing tenure. Accordingly, I take account of patronage and the ever-changing nature of the state as it sought to accommodate conflicting political and social pressures in the community.[6] On the question of patronage, Deacon argues that the new middle-class technocracy largely replaced the old influence-peddling administrative elite after the granting of self-government in 1856.[7] Here I note Gerald Caiden's contention that telegraphists were not beholden to influence in employment by reason of their demonstrable technical qualifications.[8]

My work also includes an examination of the relationship between female supervisors and their male underlings, as well as an appraisal of the prospects for advancement. In terms of relationships, Daphne Spain suggests that women employed in the same capacity as men had a greater rapport with the opposite sex than females engaged in gender-specific duties.[9] On the subject of advancement, deskilling generated by organisational and technological change has been shown to adversely affect opportunities for promotion. In her study of the clothing and footwear industries, Raelene Frances notes, however, that the introduction of new equipment advantaged some women by enabling them to acquire additional competencies.[10] Spain stresses

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[5] Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 2 & p. 3.
[6] Anne Witz and Mike Savage, 'The gender of organizations', in Mike Savage and Anne Witz (eds), *Gender and Bureaucracy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1992, p. 35.
[7] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 67.
[8] Gerald E. Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.: A Study of White Collar Public Service Unionism in the Commonwealth of Australia 1885–1922', Occasional Papers No. 2, Dept of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, 1966, p. 9.
[9] Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 3 & p. 197.
[10] Raelene Frances, *The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Sydney, Cambridge U.P., 1993, pp. 3–7, p. 25 & p. 156.

that an employee's "visiposture", or their level of visual and physical exposure to the employer, is a significant factor in determining their career prospects.[11]

As in the previous chapter, I explore the operation of female agency, including resistance to change and efforts to redefine the ambiguous border between public and private space. The hostility displayed by postmistresses anxious to protect their interests in the face of plans to combine postal and telegraphic services brings to mind Michel Foucault's observation that institutions generate their own opposition.[12] On the question of space, I depart from McCuskey's view of the post office as an immutable commercial/domestic divide.[13] Marjorie Theobald lends weight to the case for spatial fluidity in the period, observing that female teachers "commuted" between the domestic space of the school residence (notionally female) and the public arena of the classroom (notionally male), blurring the boundary in between.[14]

Enter the Telegraph

Women were afforded the opportunity to pursue a career in the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department with the decision to place the Postmaster-General in charge of telecommunications from 1 July 1867. Introduced to N.S.W. in December 1857, the telegraph service had been previously operated by the Internal Communication Department under the control of the Secretary for Public Works.[15] When Joseph Docker assumed the office of Postmaster-General nine years later, he did so with a view to amalgamating postal and telegraphic amenities in the interest of economy and efficiency.[16] Though only partial, the integration of the utilities, effective from 1 January 1870, promised to reduce overheads by allowing for a rationalisation of staff

[11] Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, p. 217 & p. 218.
[12] Michel Foucault cited in Witz and Savage, 'The gender of organizations', p. 28.
[13] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 53. McCuskey concedes that the appointment of women to official offices, their occupation of detached departmental residences, and the need to work alongside males may have tested the limits of respectability and the sedentary existence, but fails to explore the issue in detail.
[14] Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-century Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., p. 177.
[15] *Post Office Thirteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1867*, Sydney, 1868, p. 14. A telegraph line from Sydney to Liverpool**,** the first Morse connection in N.S.W., opened on 30 December 1857. See, Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 163.
[16] *Post Office Thirteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1867*, p. 14.

and properties. The latter was an important consideration given the decline in government revenue that had accompanied the economic downturn from the mid 1860s.[17] The authorities anticipated that combined postal and telecommunications outlets managed by official telegraph masters would lead to improvements in administration and accountability. Postal Inspector Vickers Moyse argued that integrated offices under official personnel could only be for the better, pointing to the procedural ignorance of many non-official postmasters and their preoccupation with personal business affairs at the expense of service.[18] Edward Cracknell, N.S.W. Superintendent of Telegraphs from 1861 to 1893, opposed the full amalgamation of functions on the grounds that postal staff often lacked the skills needed to run a telecommunications centre. Hence, the postal and telegraph departments remained separate, albeit related, entities until his death. Cracknell did, however, permit postal employees with Morse training to manage joint facilities. Intent on minimising expenditure and extending the telegraph network, he proposed that non-official post offices be equipped with alphabetical or A.B.C. instruments that did not require specialised training to operate.[19] Women were engaged as telegraphists against a background of measures designed to contain costs and optimise service delivery.

Females found employment in the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department on the strength of their purported physical and mental attributes. In the Australian colonies, as in Britain, most authorities subscribed to the view that middle-class women were well suited to Morse-key manipulation because of the manual skills they had presumably acquired at the piano and in needle work. Furthermore, females allegedly possessed a quickness of eye and ear that enhanced their aptitude for telegraphy.[20]

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[17] *Post Office (Eleventh Annual Report, being for the Year 1865)*, Sydney, 1866, p. 11; & *Post Office Fifteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1869*, Sydney, 1870, p. 5. The amalgamation process initially included the conversion of about 35 post offices to official status. See, *ibid.* p. 7. As early as 1858, William Christie, Postmaster-General, had suggested that postal and telegraphic functions be combined "under the one roof" in the interest of economy and efficiency. See, *Post Office (Fourth Annual Report from the Postmaster General)*, 1858, Sydney, 1859, p. 11.

[18] According to Moyse, it was "almost impossible to have the postal duties attended to in a correct manner in a store". See, 'Appendix J', 'V. Moyse, The Postal Inspector, Southern District, Wagga Wagga, to The Secretary, General Post Office, Sydney, 15 July, 1868', *Post Office Thirteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1867*, p. 39.

[19] 'Appendix K', 'Report of the Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs on the progress and general condition of Electric Telegraphs in New South Wales, to the 31st December, 1867', *ibid*., p. 42. By December 1870, 62 postal and telecommunications establishments in N.S.W. had been combined. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 67.

[20] *ibid*., p. 37 & p. 38; & Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 1973, p. 146 & p. 261.

The job opportunities available to women in the N.S.W. telegraph service also turned on the psychological qualities ascribed to their sex. Many employers believed that women were intrinsically painstaking and exacting, and hence suited to tedious, monotonous or repetitive work. Conversely, males were bolder and more impatient, expecting immediate results for their efforts.[21] This gendered perception of the sexes informed the decision in 1875 to employ women as perforators in the Chief Telegraph Office (C.T.O.) located in the Sydney General Post Office (G.P.O.), and in separate facilities at Albury and Tenterfield.[22] While women were charged with the unending task of placing punch-coded messages on tapes, men were assigned the relatively quick and instantly gratifying job of "feeding" communications through the Wheatstone equipment and receiving replies. Female telegraphists were both beneficiaries of, and hostages to, a concept of gender difference.

The partial amalgamation of postal and telecommunications functions ushered in employment opportunities for the wives of telegraph masters. In a report to government of 18 August 1868, Edward Cracknell proposed that they be given the job of *de facto* postmistress, leaving their husbands free to manage telegraphic operations. Advocating a division of labour, Cracknell realised that telegraph masters could not be expected to perform both postal and telecommunications tasks satisfactorily.[23] In their own small way, wives employed in combined offices resisted the decline of the family as a productive unit.[24]

Female Telegraphists and their Supporters

Women seeking work as telegraphists or "operators" in N.S.W. found a champion in Saul Samuel, who occupied the office of Postmaster-General on three separate

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[21] Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850–1914', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986, p. 158; & Meta Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure: women, bureaucracy and the post office, 1870–1920', in Savage and Witz (eds), *Gender and Bureaucracy*, p. 70. Frank Scudamore, Second Secretary of the British Post Office, along with the Chairman of Britain's Electric and International Telegraph Company, subscribed to the gendered view of employee attributes. See, Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work*, p. 165.

[22] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1875*, Sydney, 1976, p. 105 & p. 109.

[23] 'Appendix K', 'Report of the Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs on the progress and general condition of Electric Telegraphs in New South Wales, to the 31st December, 1867', *Post Office Thirteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1867*, p. 42.

[24] Belinda Probert, *Working Life: Arguments about work in Australian society*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1989, p. 75.

occasions between December 1872 and August 1880.[25] A liberal and practical-minded politician, Samuel acknowledged the need for economic independence in the female population.[26] In a speech to mark the opening of the new Sydney G.P.O. on 1 September 1874, he referred to his recent visit to Britain and the United States, where he found women successfully engaged as telegraphists and clerical workers. He went on to lament "the absence of a choice of suitable occupations for active, educated and intelligent women" in N.S.W. Intend on providing them with the chance to pursue "a life of honorable industry", Samuel used the occasion to announce his plan for the formal instruction of women in telegraphy.[27] In parliament Samuel had the political capital needed to shape departmental recruitment policy, having provided government with a detailed analysis of plans to construct a telegraph line from Sydney to Belvoir that would link N.S.W. to the Victorian network. His ability to advance government policy as vice-president of a sometimes obstructionist Executive Council and his electoral value as a prominent member of the Jewish community added to his standing in the Parkes administration.[28] During Samuel's tenure as Postmaster-General, nine women found operator positions in the Electric Telegraph Department.[29]

Working women also had an ally in John Fitzgerald Burns, Member for the Hunter and Postmaster-General from February 1875 to March 1877, and again from December 1877 to December of the following year.[30] Egalitarian by inclination, Burns pointed to reports from private telecommunications companies in Britain and the United States that supported the case for female telegraphists. As early as 1873, he

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[25] Samuel held the portfolio of Postmaster-General from December 1872 to February 1875, from March 1877 to August 1877, and from December 1878 to August 1880. See, David Sharpe, 'List of Postmasters and Postmasters General of NSW & Aust.', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, March 1979.

[26] George F. J. Bergman, 'Samuel, Sir Saul (1820–1900)', in Douglas Pike (gen. ed.) *A.D.B.*, vol. 6: 1851–1890, R–Z, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1976, p. 84.

[27] Samuel visited the Chief Telegraph Office in London, where he saw "upwards of 800 ladies busily engaged in the duties of operators". See, 'Opening of New Post Office', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 2 September 1874, p. 9 & p. 10.

[28] Bergman, 'Samuel, Sir Saul (1820–1900)', p. 84.

[29] The women in question were: Charlotte Dee, reappointed 24 April 1877 (approx.) on trial basis; Emily Eames, appointed 5 October 1879; Carrie Farley, appointed 1 January 1879; Nellie Meba Green, appointed 3 January 1879; Annie W. Jamieson, appointed 1 August 1879; Eliza F. Kibble, appointed 19 September 1879; Blanche Ida Moore, appointed 1 April 1879; Emma H. Pegus, appointed 1 January 1874; and Jane Peters, appointed 16 August 1879. See, report from Vickers Moyse, P.I., 18 April 1877, SP32, Parramatta, fol. B 1275/14.2.77; note signed by Saul Samuel, P.M.G., 24 April 1877, *ibid.*, fol. B 1275/14.2.77; & *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1883*, Sydney, 1884, pp. 156–161.

[30] Burns occupied the portfolio of Postmaster-General from 9 February 1875 to 21 March 1877, and again from 18 December 1877 to 20 December 1878. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 68; & G. N. Hawker, *The Parliament of New South Wales 1856–1965*, Ultimo, V. C. N. Blight, 1971, p. 317 & p. 318.

had quizzed Henry Parkes, then Colonial Secretary, in parliament about the prospect of employing women in the N.S.W telegraph service.[31] At the time Burns exercised some influence over his parliamentary colleagues, having supplied the Parkes faction with valuable political intelligence on local issues that contributed to the defeat of the Robertson-Martin coalition at the 1872 poll. Like Samuel, he recognised the plight of females in need of a livelihood, promoting education reforms designed to facilitate their entry into the workforce.[32] Under Burns, 14 female perforators were employed from 1875 in the new Wheatstone telegraph facilities linking Sydney with Melbourne and Brisbane. Six of the inductees worked in the Chief Telegraph Office (C.T.O.), while the remaining eight were divided evenly between the Albury and Tenterfield telecommunications centres.[33] In addition, Burns put women in charge of six of the 23 official post and telegraph establishments operational in 1876, and assigned another four female operators to various Morse outlets.[34] From the outset, female telegraphists on the official list were eligible to receive the same rate of pay as their male peers.

Underwriting Departmental Operations

Desley Deacon stresses that the N.S.W. Select Committee on the Civil Service of 1871 at no stage envisaged that women would be hired as cheap labour when considering the potential employment of female telegraphists. The subsequent history of female telegraphy suggests, however, that women were engaged expressly because they offered an inexpensive alternative to men, equal pay notwithstanding.[35] In the interest of economy, the telecommunications department placed junior female

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[31] Parkes responded to the effect that the administration was considering the matter. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 68.

[32] A supporter of the Education Act of 1866 and a vocal critic of the selective denominational system, Burns helped to pave the way for the free and compulsory schooling of girls in state institutions. See, Martha Rutledge, 'Burns, John Fitzgerald (1833–1911)', in Douglas Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 3, 1851–1890, A–C, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1969, p. 304 & p. 305.

[33] The women, according to station and salary, were: – C.T.O. on 75 pounds p.a.; Angelina Dargin, Mary J. Davies, Florence Eldershaw, Henrietta North and Frances E. Skarratt – all appointed 8 March 1875; and Elizabeth A. Douglas, appointed 10 June 1975: Albury on 104 pounds p.a.; Minnie L. Knott and Mary K. Poole, both appointed 16 March 1875; and Minnie E. Husing and Martha L. Payten, both appointed 1 April 1875 (See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1875*, p. 105): Tenterfield on 104 pounds p.a; Mary Bailiff, appointed 8 May 1875; Annie Halloran, appointed 10 May 1875; Mary McGregor, appointed 12 May 1875; and Lizzie Lardner, appointed 8 June 1875 (See, *ibid.*, p. 109). Minnie Husing's surname is sometimes spelt "Hussing" in official records. I have settled on "Husing".

[34] Three of the offices were occupied by former perforators with the closure of the Wheatstone facilities in Sydney, Albury and Tenterfield owing to a lack of co-operation on the part of the other colonies. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1876*, Sydney, 1877, p. 108. By the end of 1876, 27 women were employed in an official capacity by the N.S.W. postal and telegraphic services. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 69.

telegraphists in small, unprofitable outlets that did not warrant senior male operators on larger salaries. In April 1882 Rosa Gibbes was given the job of official post and telegraph mistress at Ashfield. The position paid 78 pounds p.a. in a facility that as late as 1887 cost almost 200 pounds a year more to run than it earned.[36] In July 1886 the authorities placed Mary Russell, Post and Telegraph Mistress at St Mary's, in charge of the new official outlet at St Peter's, a job attracting a salary of 140 pounds p.a. Head Office rejected several applications from males to run the facility on the grounds they were too highly paid based on their grading to justify their transfer to the minor inner-suburban amenity.[37] In Victoria, where official post and telegraph mistresses did not enjoy wage parity, women were also employed in lieu of men. From the outset they were posted to small telegraph establishments where the quantity of business did not warrant males on higher pay.[38] In N.S.W., equal pay did not equate to equality in employment.

Although women found paid work in the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department without specific reference to cheap labour, the 1871 Select Committee on the Civil Service was especially interested in the attitude of British postal bureaucrats to female staff. In evidence before an inquiry into the re-organisation of the telegraph system, Frank Scudamore, Second Secretary of the British Post Office, observed that women constituted a cheap labour resource, likely to wed and resign before they attained a senior position with a large salary, or became eligible for a pension. Men on the other hand were intrinsically more expensive to hire since they committed themselves to the service for life and invariably expected their salary to rise over time.[39] In effect, women subsidised male wages.

In N.S.W., female telegraphists in small, uneconomic establishments laboured to offset the cost of infrastructure development and discounted telegram rates. At the

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[35] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 69 & p. 70.
[36] John J. Olsen, 'Ashfield Post Office History', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, 1964, p. 2 & p. 3.
[37] Minute signed by Francis Suttor, P.M.G., regarding appt of Mary Russell, P. & T. Ms, St Mary's, to St Peter's as Fourth Class P. & T. Ms, 6 July 1886, SP32, St Peters, fol. 8 JUL 86/B 8257; & note by unidentified officer enclosing schedule of applicants, 12 June 1886, *ibid*.
[38] The Victorian and British telecommunications authorities identified women as a cheap source of labour from the beginning. See, Ann Moyal, *Clear Across the Country: A History of Telecommunications*, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson Australia, 1984, p. 79 & p. 80.
[39] M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840*, London, The Athlone Press, 1985, p. 217.

time the telegraph service in every Australian colony ran at a loss because of the heavy capital investment involved in serving a relatively small population dispersed across a vast land mass. As early as 1870, the colonial governments agreed to absorb the overheads in response to calls from business for lower telegraph charges in the interest of commerce. In that year delegates to the intercolonial conference resolved to reduce domestic rates, an initiative that made for a considerable increase in telegraph traffic at the expense of returns.[40] Late in 1872 a select committee of the N.S.W. legislature recommended a cut in overseas telegram charges of up to 50%, paid for, if necessary, by government.[41] Business leaders complained that while messages to Britain were restricted to a line or two owing to cost, deals would not be finalised as quickly as they might otherwise be. At the intercolonial conference of 1873, delegates opted to reduce charges for overseas and long-distance domestic communications by standardising fees across administrations. The resolution satisfied newspaper proprietors who claimed that cable copy was too expensive.[42] The British Post Office also looked to women to contain the cost of 'wire' services. Samuel Ross Cohn demonstrates that its use of cheap female labour was a direct response to the economic pressures, real and perceived, that came with the brief to extend telecommunications coverage after the government acquired the commercial telegraph companies.[43] Female telegraphists in N.S.W. were inexpensive conduits in an expensive communications network.

Women posted to marginal offices helped to accommodate the heavy demand on telegraph services throughout the general community. Edward Cracknell, Superintendent of Telegraphs, noted the enthusiasm with which his fellow colonists embraced 'the wire', pointing to its high per capita use. By 1872, 44 messages were transmitted annually for every 100 persons in N.S.W., compared with just 38 a year

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[40] K. T. Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent: The Communication Revolution and Federating Australia*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1976, p. 39. In the six months following the introduction of reduced charges on 1 July 1870, telegraphic traffic increased by 25%, while revenue decreased by 2,165 pounds compared with the corresponding half-year period in 1869. See, 'Appendix I', 'Report of the Superintendent of Telegraphs on the progress of Telegraphic construction in New South Wales, for the year 1870', *Post Office Sixteenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1870*, Sydney 1871, p. 34.

[41] At the same time, domestic rates were reduced to one shilling for 10 words. See, *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Postmaster General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1872*, Sydney, 1873, p. 14.

[42] Then a 20-word wire to Britain cost almost 10 pounds. See, Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent*, pp. 91–93.

[43] Samuel Ross Cohn cited in Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure', p. 52 & p. 53.

for every 100 residents of the United Kingdom.[44] Access to telecommunications, like access to a mail service, was regarded as the right of all Australians. As early as October 1859 – less than two years after the arrival of the telegraph in N.S.W. – a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist suggested that it had evolved from a novelty to a necessity, as important to daily life as the post office.[45] Women worked to enhance the utility of a popular phenomenon.

In common with married women in post-only offices, wives propped up departmental services as assistants to official-post-and-telegraph-master husbands. From the commencement of telegraphic business at Inverell in July 1868 until May 1870, when she was placed on the payroll, Emily Eames managed the office without payment while her husband, John Eames, delivered telegrams and attended to line repairs.[46] The wives of telegraphists also provided a cheap postal service. In July 1879 Alice Trader took on the postal work at Bourke in return for 50 pounds p.a. Prior to amalgamation of the town's postal and telegraphic functions under Mrs Trader's husband, the non-official postmaster, Henry Grant, had received 85 pounds a year to perform the same duties.[47] Like their peers in post-only facilities, the wives of post and telegraph masters buttressed operations on the strength of the marital relationship.

Female Employment – A Function of Merit and Bureaucratic Intent

Desley Deacon asserts that women gained telegraphic employment largely by default owing to the bureaucracy's fixation with Head Office affairs. She posits that, while females were refused access to the Chief Telegraph Office in the Sydney G.P.O. after the Wheatstone facility closed in 1876, they secured positions in branch, suburban and country outlets by way of political and family patronage.[48] Although influence figured

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[44] 'Appendix I', 'The Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs to The Postmaster General, Office of the Superintendent of Electric Telegraphs, Sydney, 13 April 1872', *Post Office Seventeenth Annual Report, being that for the Year 1871*, Sydney, 1872, p. 31.

[45] Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent*, p. 56.

[46] 'Inverell Post Office History', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, August 1965, p. 2; letter from John Eames, P.O., Inverell, to C. A. Fraser, 6 May 1870, SP32, Inverell; & letter from J. Eames, P.O., Inverell, to P.M.G., Sydney, 6 May 1870, *ibid.*, fol. 70/3710. The record indicates that Emma Pegus was the first female to be employed as a telegraphist, with her appointment to the position of Junior Operator at Yamba in 1874. It is possible that Emily Eames or another married woman performed operator duties in an unpaid capacity or as a paid assistant to her husband before that time.

[47] 'History of Bourke Post Office', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, p. 7 & p. 8.

[48] By 1886 women had charge of two of the 13 city branch offices and 13 of the 33 suburban outlets, while managing several country facilities. Stephen Lambton, Post Office Department Secretary, testified before the 1871 Select Committee on the Civil Service that no women were employed in his

in some appointments, the record indicates that female operators were frequently hired on the basis of their expertise and industry in light of concern to provide efficient 'wire' services to urban and rural areas. Mary Russell, St Mary's post and telegraph mistress, obtained the transfer to St Peter's branch office in July 1886 with the help of William Lyne M.P. Even so, Edward Cracknell only agreed to her relocation to St Peter's after satisfying himself that she was "a good Morse operator", considering the facility's importance in the telegraph network.[49] Head Office also placed Emma Pegus in control of Yamba's official post and telegraph outlet in January 1874 largely on the strength of her capabilities. While the influence her father wielded as the local clerk of petty sessions was a factor in her selection, Mrs Pegus had first to satisfy the inspectorate that she was technically competent and that she would be in constant attendance, given the significance of the coastal station as a source of shipping and weather information.[50] In assigning Mary Buckley to Deniliquin Telegraph Station in December 1875, Cracknell took account of the demands of the workplace.[51] Although her brother ran the centre, Miss Buckley was expected to pull her weight in the busy relay facility for Sydney-Adelaide traffic, which by 1888 had 11 operators on strength.[52] Cracknell's objections to plans by the postal department to put an officer without Morse skills in charge of the station once it amalgamated with the local post office underscored his interest in the quality of personnel. The Superintendent suggested that an untrained manager would cause "a great deal of inconvenience to the public business", stressing the need for someone to relieve staff at mealtimes or when otherwise absent.[53] Contrary to Deacon's case for female employment in an atmosphere of indifference, the engagement of women was conscious and purposeful.

A number of female telegraphists owed their tenure to the N.S.W. Post Office Department, notwithstanding Desley Deacon's contention that women were employed

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utility. Deacon cites this as evidence that senior postal and telecommunications bureaucrats were only interested in Sydney G.P.O. staff. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 71.

[49] Minute signed by Francis Suttor, P.M.G., regarding appt of Mary Russell, P. & T. Ms, St Mary's, to St Peter's as Fourth Class P. & T. Ms, 6 July 1886, SP32, St Peters, fol. 8 JUL 86/B 8257; & note under signed by Edward Cracknell, 16 June 1886, *ibid.*, fol. B 86/6883.

[50] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 72; & report by G. de Milhau, 4 June 1887, SP32, Yamba, fol. 6 JUN 87/B 6559.

[51] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1875*, p. 106. Although Miss Buckley's brother managed the facility, no evidence of his influence in the selection process could be found in the record.

[52] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, Sydney, 1889, p. 151.

[53] Memo from E. C. Cracknell, 18 June 1888, SP32, Part 1, Deniliquin.

in a bureaucratic vacuum.[54] Postal Inspector Wyndham Davies actively supported the application lodged in April 1877 by Charlotte Dee, Postal Assistant at Parramatta, for the job of operator at the newly amalgamated official office. He reported that her services were required due to the large workload, noting that the solitary male telegraphist was unable to cope with his own duties, let alone assist her husband, the Post and Telegraph Master, with postal matters. Indeed, the Dees were already relieving him of some tasks.[55] Inspector Vickers Moyse's suggestion that William Dee undertake the outside work, including line repairs, leaving his wife to perform indoor Morse duties, underlined the postal authorities' long-standing interest in familial and gendered divisions of labour.[56] Postmaster-General Saul Samuel embraced Moyse's report, proposing that Mrs Dee's responsibilities as Assistant be extended to include telegraphy on a trial basis. He discounted Edward Cracknell's assertion that the applicant would be unable to deal with the heavy traffic.[57] From the late 1870s, the postal department claimed greater say in the recruitment of telegraphists after offering to pay the wages of operators in marginal outlets, relieving the telegraph utility of the financial burden. Hence, in May 1888, Stephen Lambton, Post Office Secretary, saw fit to recommend the appointment of female telegraphists to the new facilities at Alexandria and Waterloo.[58] Instead of indifference, the N.S.W. postal bureaucracy exhibited a keen interest in women operators.

The Advantages of Telegraphic Employment

The community generally deemed telegraphy, like postal work, to be a fit occupation for respectable women, undertaken, as it was, within the "domestic" confines of a post

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[54] Deacon's argument that women found employment in the communications utilities as a result of bureaucratic indifference is partly based on the failure of Stephen Lambton, Secretary of the Post Office Department, to acknowledge the existence of female staff in testimony before the 1871 Select Committee inquiring into the Civil Service. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender* p. 70.

[55] Report from Wyndham Davies to G.P.O., 18 July 1877, SP32, Parramatta, fol. B 5775/21.7.77; & note signed by Stephen Lambton, Sec., *ibid.*, fol. 3892/16.5.77. Mrs Dee had previously worked as a junior operator at the Parramatta Street office in inner Sydney.

[56] Report by Vickers Moyse, P.I., 18 April 1877, *ibid.*, fol. B 1275/14.2.77. From the postal department's perspective, the mobilisation of wives was vital in the process of office amalgamation. An unidentified bureaucrat argued that Mrs Dee's presence was "indispensable" if the facility was to handle the workload. See, file note unsigned and undated, *ibid.*, fol. 3892/16.5.77.

[57] Note overleaf signed by Edward Cracknell**,** 24 April 1877, *ibid*., fol. B 1275/14.2.77. Stephen Lambton implicitly agreed with Moyse's proposal, noting that Mrs Dee should be paid for the Morse work she had already performed. See, note under signed by Stephen Lambton, undated, *ibid.*; & note signed by Saul Samuel, P.M.G., 24 April 1877, *ibid.*, fol. B 1275/14.2.77.

[58] Letter from Edward Cracknell, Supt of Tels, to Sec., G.P.O., 8 May 1888, SP32, Waterloo, fol. B 88/5821.

office. As such, telegraph operating represented an alternative to teaching. The writer of the Ladies Column in the *Australasian* newspaper of 28 July 1870 bracketed the two vocations in domestic terms, observing that telegraphy was an appropriate calling for women who were 'capable of earning an honest livelihood in more ways than housekeeping, sewing and teaching'.[59] Like female teachers, telegraphists in women-only offices worked within the notionally private sphere, minimising the possibility of moral contamination.[60] Unlike many female factory hands, they were not at risk of compromising their respectability through unregulated exposure to male workers.[61]

Equal pay aside, telegraphy offered women a substantial salary compared with other occupations. Comparable skills to those required of men ensured that female operators in official N.S.W. post and telegraph offices drew a considerably higher wage than women in "female" vocations, including domestic service and clothing manufacturing.[62] By 1880 official post and telegraph mistresses typically earnt between 52 and 75 pounds annually on top of a postal allowance of a similar amount. In contrast, a female servant received an average of just 28 pounds a year, albeit with free board and keep.[63] Even without equal pay, most female telegraphists in Victoria commanded a salary of 84 pounds p.a. by the 1890s.[64] In short, telegraphy afforded a measure of gender equality.

For single women living in Sydney, telegraphy promised economic independence in the absence of a suitable marriage partner. Although the issue of 'surplus women' was not as pressing as it was in Britain, the matrimonial outlook for spinsters, particularly in urban areas, remained limited throughout much of the 19th century owing to the tendency among underemployed bachelors to vacate the marriage market. Manufacturing workers in Sydney were frequently jobless due to fluctuations in

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[59] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 42.
[60] Women's role in nurturing and socialising children ensured that teaching was accorded domestic status. See, Theobald, *Knowing Women*, p. 17 & p. 18.
[61] Concern for the morality of female factory hands saw the segregation of women from male co-workers, the introduction of separate shifts to prevent fraternisation, and the construction of dedicated washroom and dining facilities. See, Raelene Frances and Bruce Scates, *Women at Work in Australia: from the Gold Rushes to World War II*, Melbourne, Cambridge U.P., 1993, p. 39 & p. 40.
[62] John Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1999, p. 98.
[63] Letter from I. Hyam, P.O., Lismore, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 18 May 1875, SP32, Lismore, fol. B 75/2882.
[64] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, Melbourne, 1911, p. ix; & McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 80.

labour requirements caused by cyclical economic downturns, unreliable supplies of raw materials, and the 'dumping' of British goods on Australian wharves. The seasonal nature of the pastoral industry exacerbated the problem of underemployment. Clerks, labourers and messengers involved in the sale and despatch of the spring wool clip had paid work for just a few months every year.[65] In the housing industry, tradesmen commonly found themselves out of a job because of periodic recessions and fluctuating migrant intakes. Men without reliable livings often travelled 'up country' in search of work, leaving women to manage on their own. While males outnumbered females in inner-urban areas by 1881, many women remained spinsters owing to the development of a sub-class of jobless bachelors without means, who were dependent on cheap eating houses and charity for survival.[66] Sydney's single women found a livelihood in telegraphy, leaving the city's single men to their tenuous existence.

A career in telecommunications also answered the financial needs of spinsters in larger regional centres. For single women in country towns, suitable marriage partners were often difficult to find by the 1860s, with females outnumbering males in the settled districts. The problem grew more severe from the 1870s with the failure of family selections and the subsequent movement of farming households to rural population nodes. The single women who vacated family farms were joined by the daughters of professionals, government officials, journalists, and other middle-class townsmen without the ability to support idle female offspring.[67] Like their city peers, spinsters in large regional centres suffered the consequences of male underemployment, given the poorly developed state of rural secondary industry and the seasonal character of primary production. Like the city, country towns often harboured a bachelor underclass without the economic wherewithal to provide for a

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[65] Shirley Fisher, 'The family and the Sydney economy in the late nineteenth century', in Patricia Grimshaw (ed.) *et al.*, *Families in Colonial Australia*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1985, pp. 154–156.
[66] By the 1870s males slightly outnumbered females in inner Sydney. By 1881 the sexes were evenly represented in the larger metropolis. Ten years later the proportion of males to females in Sydney had marginally increased. In 1891 35% of inner city males between 40 and 45 remained unmarried compared with 15% in the suburbs. *ibid.*, p. 157 & p. 158.
[67] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 69.

wife and family.[68] For single women in regional N.S.W., telegraphy promised a living at a time when many men had nothing to offer.

Telegraphic work served the purposes of older spinsters with family responsibilities. The ladies' columnist writing in the *Australasian* of 28 July 1870 commended a career in telegraphy to readers as a way of averting poverty among single women who were 'cast upon society after a life of hard work and bitter self-denial as aged paupers'.[69] The expectation in the community that single, mature-aged women would devote themselves to the care of elderly parents forced many to endure financial distress in the absence of employable skills.[70] Telegraphy enabled older spinster Louise Stephen to support herself, along with an aged parent. In February 1876, the then 32-year-old assumed the duties of official post and telegraph mistress at Manly, allowing her to meet the material needs of her widowed mother, who kept a small, unprofitable shop in the Sydney harbourside suburb.[71] Likewise, in May 1884, the Postmaster-General chose Eliza West, 27, to manage Darlington's official post and telegraph office, enabling her to keep a dependant mother.[72] In both Britain and Australia, one daughter in every middle- and middling-class family was usually assigned sole custody of aged parents, leaving siblings free to marry. However highly placed or affluent they were, male relatives outside the immediate family typically took limited or no direct responsibility for spinsters and their aged charges.[73] Louise Stephen had to provide for her mother, even though her uncle, Sir Alfred Stephen, held the office of Lieutenant-Governor and sat on the Council of Education, while his

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[68] In his study of Armidale, Ferry identifies a substantial group of males over 40 who never married, and were often without property at the time of their death. They included labourers, shepherds, miners, and anonymous bushmen without family. See Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, pp. 108 & 109.
[69] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 42.
[70] Anne O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison: The Poor in New South Wales 1880–1918*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1988, p. 11 & p. 17; & Katie Holmes, '"Spinsters Indispensable": Feminists, Single Women and the Critique of Marriage, 1890–1920', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 110, 1998, p. 78.
[71] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Louise Frederica Stephen as P. & T. Ms, 14 February 1876, SP32, Manly; & letter from Robert A. Fitzgerald, Mudgee, "on way to Bungulgumbie", to Mr Samuel, 5 June 1877, *ibid.*, fol. B 76/3027.
[72] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1885*, Sydney, 1886, p. 150; & letter from Eliza J. West, 121 Crown St, Woolomooloo, to F. B. Suttor, P.M.G., 23 October 1880, SP32, St Leonards, fol. B 9607/30 10 80.
[73] Patricia Jalland, 'Victorian Spinsters: Dutiful Daughters, Desperate Rebels and the Transition to the New Woman', in Patricia Crawford (ed.), *Exploring Women's Past: Essays in Social History*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1983, p. 135 & p. 161.

son, Matthew Henry Stephen, practised law and occupied the position of Examiner-in-Law at Sydney University.[74]

Widows of deceased employees in need of financial sovereignty also found a livelihood in the N.S.W. telegraph service. In July 1883 Head Office put Matilda Read in control of the amalgamated outlet at Merriwa, after her husband's death left her near destitute with a young family.[75] In June 1890 Keziah O'Brien became Gerringong's official post and telegraph mistress, enabling her to support her fatherless children.[76] The telegraph service offered sustenance to widows in the absence of a permanent superannuation scheme and other formal income provisions. As previously stated, many men placed greater faith in land, businesses and kin to maintain their family in the event of their death, than they did in long-term "investments".[77] Abolition of the belatedly established government superannuation fund in 1873 added to the financial perils faced by departmental widows, as did the inadequacies of the General Post Office Mutual Benefit Society. The Society was founded in 1876 to cater for permanent officers. It ran for just four years as a result of its inability to attract viable numbers and its unsustainable policy of returning subscriptions, in full or in part, at the end of each year depending on the mortality rate.[78]

Telecommunications employment, like postal work, allowed married women to augment household income. Ellen Cross, Official Post and Telegraph Mistress at St Mary's and later at Leichhardt, supplemented her spouse's earnings at a time when civil servants, including railway officials like her husband, lived in constant fear of

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[74] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1876*, p. 53 & p. 122. While Miss Stephen was required to earn a living, her uncle, Sir Alfred, and her cousin, Matthew, provided her sureties. See, *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Louise Frederica Stephen as P. & T. Ms, 14 February 1876, SP32, Manly; & Colin A. Hughes and B. D. Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890–1964*, Canberra, Australian National U.P., 1968, p. 56.

[75] Report by P. B. Walker, 12 July 1883, SP32, Merriwa; & letter from Matilda Read, P.O., Merriwa, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, Sydney, 6 July 1883, *ibid.*

[76] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Keziah O'Brien as Pms, 26 June 1890, SP32, Gerringong, fol. 4 JUL 90/B 10051; & letter from G. W. Heighway, Congregational Manse, Gerringong, to John Kidd, P.M.G., 9 May 1893, *ibid.*

[77] Many men took the view that family security could only be partially assured, and was only possible over the short term. See, Patricia Annette Curthoys, 'Securing Against Risk in Mid-Nineteenth Century New South Wales, Maitland, 1846 to 1871', Ph.D. Thesis, University of N.S.W., December 1995, pp. 228–231.

[78] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 65; & *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Postmaster General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1880*, p. 9.

retrenchment owing to fluctuations in government revenue caused by drought and erratic business cycles.[79] In the case of farmers' wives such as Celia Suttor, Millamurra's non-official post and telegraph mistress, the extra income helped to repay debts to local storekeepers and stock suppliers that stemmed from adverse weather and crop failures.[80] Contemporaneously, telegraphy provided married women with a financial buffer against desertion in the context of new gold strikes and court maintenance orders from the 1870s.[81] Telegraphy offered refuge from economic and social forces hostile to the family unit.

Women chosen to manage official post and telegraph facilities availed of free accommodation, fuel and lighting. Headquarters furnished Angelina Dargin – appointed to the Randwick office in February 1877 – with a residence attached to the workplace, a coal supply for heating and cooking, and a gaslight and kerosene allowance. The spinster thereby housed her mother, sisters and brother in relative comfort.[82] In Sydney a shortage of accommodation and high rents, sometimes accounting for 60% of weekly earnings, rendered the prospect of free quarters particularly attractive.[83] Moreover, many country towns lacked sufficient dwellings. Matilda Read's appointment to the Merriwa outlet in July 1883 secured shelter for "a large young family entirely unprovided for" in a settlement without an adequate supply of housing.[84] Telegraphy promised bonuses beyond wage parity.

Official post and telegraph accommodation provided live-in kin with the facility to earn a living. Minnie Knott, Glebe's post and telegraph mistress from 1877, shared her living quarters with her single sister, Jean. Prior to securing an assistant's position in the post office, Jean Knott supported herself by conducting music classes in the

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[79] Note under signed by Edward Cracknell, 11 December 1884, SP32, Leichhardt, fol. B 14423/11 DE 1884; & Theobald, *Knowing Women.*, p. 206.
[80] Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, p. 61 & p. 62; *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Susan Mary Howard as Pms, 7 May 1882, SP32, Millamurra; & letter from C. A. Suttor, Pms, Millamurra, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 3 September 1884, *ibid.*, fol. B 1139–1/10 OCT 1884.
[81] O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, p. 102 & p. 103.
[82] Letter from Lena Dargin, P.O., Randwick, to S. H. Lambton, Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 11 August 1884, SP32, Randwick, fol. B 9382/12 AU 1884; & letter from Alexander Tucker, Insp., Telegraph Lines & Stations, to Supt, Telegraph Dept, undated, *ibid.*, fol. B 10454.
[83] Shirley Fitzgerald, *Rising Damp: Sydney 1870–90*, South Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1987, p. 69.
[84] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1883*, p. 161 & p. 143; & letter from Matilda Read, P.O., Merriwa, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, Sydney, 6 July 1883, SP32, Merriwa.

departmental residence.[85] Ellen Cross, Leichhardt's post and telegraph mistress from 1883, co-habited with her single sister, Agnes, who earned her keep as an assistant operator.[86] While female telegraphists and their live-in relatives had access to an official residence, the household remained a site of 'domestic production'.

Unlike most working women, female telegraphists – regardless of their "domestic" work environment – occupied the same public, social and intellectual space as the men around them. Professor D. Kennedy of Durham College of Science observed that the ideal operator 'must be in touch with the politician, the sportman, and the man of commerce', and possess 'a *worldly* (my emphasis) education and knowledge' – things outside the realm of women confined to the female or private sphere. Further, the job called for 'brain work' and the same powers of concentration demanded of a shorthand copyist.[87] Integral conduits in the telecommunications network, female operators shared in the prestige enjoyed by telegraphists in general, performing, as they did, a vital service to the state, the business world, and the community at large. Thanks to the rapidity of the medium, telegraphy quickly became a critical tool of government, helping the authorities to administer the vast territories under their control. From the early 1860s, Morse played a pivotal role in the maintenance of law and order, allowing the police force to monitor the movement of bushrangers and quickly mobilise its resources. By that time telegraphists had become indispensable agents of commerce. With their help, businessmen could place orders in minutes and complete most transactions within days – things that had once taken weeks or months to finalise. Now too, they had ready access to market intelligence, enabling them to obtain a commercial advantage over competitors.[88] Meanwhile, telegraphists earned the respect of newspaper proprietors dependent on the speedy transmission of copy. The press's reliance on electronic communications increased with completion of the Overland Telegraph in October 1872. Connecting Adelaide with Darwin, the facility put the Australian colonies in contact with Britain and Europe via a submarine cable linking Darwin with relay stations in Singapore.[89] Henceforth, colonial newspapers

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[85] Letter from Minnie Knott, Glebe Point, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 22 December 1877, SP32, Randwick, fol. B10751/27.12.77.
[86] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1883*, p. 155 & p. 143; & report overleaf by G. P. Unwin, P.I., 31 December 1884, SP32, Leichhardt, fol. B 13304/17 NOV 1884.
[87] Quoted in Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 66.
[88] *ibid.*, p. 31.
[89] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 7.

reported events in Britain and Europe only a day or two old.[90] Telegraphists basked in the acclaim that accompanied the abstract and practical benefits brought by 'the wire'. The telegraph helped to rid colonial society of a feeling of isolation caused by a shortage of information from overseas. Because of its immediacy, it held out the possibility of objective or unmediated news, overcoming the pernicious effects of misinformation and rumour.[91] By facilitating free trade and the exchange of scientific and cultural ideas, the telegraph, like the postal service, was expected to bring peace and prosperity to the world.[92] Closer to home it brought a greater sense of security and confidence to family and social life in allowing relatives and friends to communicate with one another over long distances in emergencies and on special occasions. Thanks to the telegraph, female operators wore the mantle of honorary males.

Female telegraphists in N.S.W. shared in a sense of community, moving metaphorically, if not physically, within a larger body of telecommunications specialists. Their work brought them into contact with other operators, sometimes many hundreds of miles away, and gained them access to an electronic information network that kept individuals abreast of promotions, transfers, deaths and departmental gossip.[93] In "down times" telegraphists were free to "talk" to one another – every Morse operator identified by his or her call sign and many by their key technique.[94] Female telegraphists belonged to an occupational clique defined by specialised skills, a unique social environment, and an exclusive language.

Extraordinary Supervisory Powers

In N.S.W., the authorities frequently placed official post and telegraph mistresses in control of male employees. In many cases the practice was dictated by the growing demand for communications services in suburban Sydney – a by-product of the building boom, the growth in public transport, and the decentralisation of industry

[90] Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 62.
[91] Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent*, p. 57 & p. 86.
[92] Michael Roe, *Quest for Authority in Eastern Australia 1835–1851*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1965, p. 159.
[93] Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent*, pp. 110–112.
[94] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 10; J. W. Johnston, 'Early Telegraph Days', *St Martin's-le-Grand*, London, October 1894, p. 360; & 'The Telegraphic Ear', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 21.

from the early 1880s.[95] In 1881 widow Catherine Chape, manager of Balmain Post and Telegraph Office, had charge of a male operator and four male letter carriers.[96] By 1890 Minnie Knott, Glebe's post and telegraph mistress, supervised nine officers, consisting of a male telegraphist, a male assistant, a female assistant operator, and six male telegraph messengers. A similar situation prevailed in Victoria and South Australia.[97] By the standards of the day, the supervisory powers granted to post and telegraph mistresses were exceptional. In the British Post Office, female telegraphists and clerical workers occupied single-sex accommodation in large centalised offices, answered to senior officials of the same sex, and had no control over male staff. The concept of separate spheres in which males were required to be assertive and to assume leadership roles, and females were expected to be deferential and subservient, largely accounted for the reluctance to put women in charge of men. This gendered view of leadership was premised on the belief that men alone had the ability to see things holistically, while women remained preoccupied with the minutiae.[98]

Despite the novelty of the situation, the official record of the N.S.W. postal and telegraph departments fails to reveal any evidence of discord between female superiors and male subordinates on the basis of gender. The domestic attributes bestowed on women may partly explain the absence of conflict. According to the ideology of separate spheres, women had a duty to provide male breadwinners with a harmonious home environment – a task that often relied on good diplomatic skills.[99] In the case of female employees, the duty extended to the workplace. In July 1882 W. A. Hutchinson, Mayor of Balmain, wrote to Head Office complimenting Catherine Chape on the good working relationship she had with her staff, despite crowded quarters. At the time Mrs Chape, her operator, and five letter carriers or "sorters"

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[95] Gerald Healey, Frances Pollon (ed.), *The Book of Sydney Suburbs*, Sydney, Cornstalk Publishing, 1988, p. 15 & p. 110.
[96] Letter from C. Chape, Pms, Balmain, to P.M.G., Sydney, 16 February 1881, SP32, Balmain, fol. B 1712/19.2.81.
[97] 'Glebe Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, January 1986, p. 13.
[98] Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls', p. 161; & Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure', p. 69, p. 70 & p. 73. While women supervised other women in the British Post Office, they were ultimately subordinate to men. See, *ibid.*, p. 69.
[99] Catherine Hall, *White, male and middle-class: explorations in feminism and history*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992, p. 60, p. 61 & p. 65.

occupied a single room just 18 feet long by 14 feet wide – a situation that called for "extreme tact".[100]

The relative harmony found in mixed-gender offices in N.S.W. can be largely attributed to equal pay. While official post and telegraph mistresses in that colony were generally well regarded by their male colleagues, the same could not be said of their Victorian counterparts who were subject to a wage differential. On "Black Wednesday" 1879, the Victorian government retrenched a large number of male telegraphists, while retaining several female employees. The victims of the purge and their supporters argued that women were incapable of performing telegraphic duties as well as men, claiming that the authorities were prepared to accept a lower level of competency in females in return for cheap labour.[101] Reacting to the dismissals, male telegraphists in Victoria denounced the system that had seen well-connected widows without Morse training take precedence over skilled men with experience, alleging that it contributed to class divisions. That two thirds of men in the Victorian public service owed their employment to influence suggests, however, that cheap labour, rather than favour *per se*, was at the heart of the matter.[102] Arguably, wage parity ensured that N.S.W. women avoided the aspersions cast on the character of Victorian colleagues beholden to patronage. In the Victorian Parliament, David Gaunson, member for Ararat, reacted to the retrenchments by quoting Sam Slick of the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper who referred to some of the department's female officers as 'soiled doves' and accused the Minister of contempt for religion and morality.[103] The experience of female staff suggests that patriarchy was at its most obvious when workers were separated along gender and salary lines.

Opposition to Female Telegraphists

Despite political intervention in favour of working women, Edward Cracknell, N.S.W. Superintendent of Telegraphs, ensured that employment opportunities for

[100] By 1882 the number of letter carriers at Balmain had grown from four to five. See, letter from W. A. Hutchinson, Mayor of Balmain, Town Hall, to P.M.G., Sydney, 24 July 1882, SP32, Balmain, fol. B 7956.
[101] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 15.
[102] *ibid.*, p. 16 & p. 17.
[103] Gaunson objected to the apparent influence of women in government, noting that females remained on the payroll as cheap labour on 30 pounds to 50 pounds p.a. while men with dependants were

females in telecommunications were few in number. A member of the new middle-class technocracy, Cracknell exercised considerable bureaucratic power as successive Postmasters General came to depend on his technical expertise and knowledge of the latest scientific developments to manage their portfolio.[104] As a consequence, he enjoyed almost absolute sovereignty, running the Electric Telegraph Department as his personal fiefdom, irrespective of his responsibilities to the political head. Cracknell took advantage of his knowledge of telecommunications elsewhere in Australia to strengthen his control over his department, capitalising on concern among local politicians anxious to prevent South Australia and Victoria from stealing the technological march on N.S.W.[105] In the business world, the Superintendent and his intercolonial counterparts acquired substantial reputations, lobbying on behalf of newspaper proprietors, chambers of commerce and British cable companies for an expansion of the telegraph network.[106] Confident of his position in political, professional and commercial circles, Cracknell opposed the further recruitment of female telegraphists following the departure of Postmasters-General Samuel and Burns.[107] Stephen Lambton, Post Office Secretary, deferred to his authority in most things telegraphic. After learning that Cracknell disapproved of his suggestion that women be appointed to the outlets at Alexandria and Waterloo, he instructed his subordinates "not (to) press it".[108] Edward Cracknell's considerable authority dampened the prospects of females seeking a career in telegraphy.

The Superintendent's opposition to female operators rested on their sex's alleged physical and mental shortcomings. Edward Cracknell argued that women were unfit for telegraphic duties because they lacked the strength and agility to climb telegraph

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dismissed. The reference to soiled doves effectively likened the relationship between male patron and female beneficiary to that between client and prostitute. See, *ibid.*, p. 19.

[104] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 68. As early as 1856, Cracknell provided expert advice to a N.S.W. Select Committee chaired by Henry Parkes, which recommended that the telegraph be introduced to enhance the performance of government and advance the interests of commerce and the press. See, Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent*, p. 47 & p. 50.

[105] *loc. cit.*; & Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 55 & p. 68.

[106] Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent*, p. 50 & p. 51.

[107] William Lyne M.P. asked the Postmaster-General in parliament why women were no longer being recruited to the telegraph service. In preparing a reply to the question, Cracknell claimed that women could not be trusted with a secret. In 1888 he expanded on his objections to female staff in a memorandum to Stephen Lambton, Post Office Secretary. He cited the long hours, women's limited capacity for the work, their limited amenability to discipline, their tendency to treat employment as a stopgap until marriage, and the prospect of alternative occupations. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 71 & p. 73; & memo from E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, to S. H. Lambton, Sec. of the P.O., 18 May 1888, SP32, Waterloo, fol. B 88/5821.

poles and undertake line repairs, as well as the practical ability to test circuits. Hence, he rejected the application tendered by Charlotte Dee in April 1877 for the post of Junior Operator at Parramatta, noting that while she was a trained telegraphist, the job called for "a competent line tester".[109] Cracknell's rejection of Mrs Dee – ultimately over-ruled by Saul Samuel – reflected the view held in wider society that "genteel" women were innately delicate and lacked the capacity for hard work. It dovetailed with the conviction that females were unable to cope psychologically with demanding occupations and made mistakes under pressure.[110] For his part, Cracknell felt that Mrs Dee would be unable to manage heavy traffic without assistance.[111] Postal Inspector Davies generally shared his negative opinion of women in this regard. When, in February 1881, Catherine Chape, Balmain's post and telegraph mistress, complained of onerous duties, he remarked that "an active Postmaster could do the work easily".[112] Gendered employee attributes at once affirmed and undermined women.

Edward Cracknell and several of his contemporaries maintained that women were fundamentally unsuited to telegraphy because, unlike men, they were incapable of keeping a secret.[113] The Superintendent believed that the sensitive nature of the information committed to the telegraph system by government, business and the public required staff to observe the strictest confidentiality if the utility was to retain the community's confidence. On the subject of telegraphists, Professor Kennedy implied that the male operator had a monopoly on secrecy. He observed that matters of 'the most delicate and momentous secrecy' were 'entrusted to *his* discretion' (my emphasis), noting that '*his* work' (my emphasis) was 'of a highly confidential character'.[114] John Moroney, Camden's telegraph master, echoed public concern surrounding the perceived inability of females to preserve confidentiality. Responding in November 1878 to Stephen Lambton's suggestion that Amelia Pearson, the granddaughter of Camden postmistress Eliza Pearson, be tutored in Morse and work in the amalgamated facility, Moroney reported that the "inhabitants do not repose

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[108] Note in margin signed by Stephen Lambton, 8 May 1888, *ibid*., fol. B 88/5821.
[109] Report by Vickers Moyse, P.I., 18 April 1877, SP32, Parramatta, fol. B 1275/14.2.77; & note overleaf signed by Edward Cracknell, 24 April 1877, *ibid.*, fol. B 1275/14.2.77.
[110] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 85.
[111] Note overleaf signed by Edward Cracknell, 24 April 1877, SP32, Parramatta, fol. B 1275/14.2.77.
[112] Letter from C. Chape, Pms, Balmain, to P.M.G., Sydney, 16 February 1881, SP32, Balmain, fol. B 1712/19.2.81; & report overleaf by Wyndham Davies, P.I., 1 April 1881, *ibid.*, fol. B 81/1712.
[113] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 70.
[114] Quoted in Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 66.

sufficient confidence in the secrecy of female Telegraphists".[115] Just as concerned for the sanctity of communications, Captain Mann, the master of the S.S. *New England*, agitated in October 1882 for the replacement of Emma Pegus, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Yamba, arguing that the community preferred a male operator.[116]

The issue of secrecy aside, Edward Cracknell and many other senior public servants felt that single women were less committed to employment, irrespective of their need for economic independence, alleging that they treated paid work as a mere stop-gap until they found a suitable marriage partner. Anthony Trollope, author and British postal bureaucrat, expressed similar sentiments. In 1871 he testified before the N.S.W. Select Committee on the Civil Service that females were less efficient than males, opining: 'a woman never renders herself fully to her employment … because she knows she will leave … the moment she is married'.[117] The apparent levity and lack of purpose with which they approached training seemed to confirm the belief that females were less committed to a career than males. Describing an early method of teaching the Morse alphabet by tapping a pencil against a hard surface, British Post Office bureaucrat C. F. Thomas recollected a "typical" conversation between instructor and students: 'The boys would say, "Oh, sir, that is a good way to learn, I'm sure!". The maidens, with gush, would say, "La!, how nice; what fun!"'.[118] The feeling that females lacked the purposefulness of males partly explains Cracknell's failure to establish telegraph training facilities for women, despite Saul Samuel's public undertaking.[119] While used to justify female employment, gender difference was a double-edged sword.

The widespread conviction that spinsters were unnecessarily difficult or aggressive further compromised the vocational prospects of women in the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department. In October 1882 Manly's post and telegraph mistress, Louise

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[115] Note overleaf signed by Stephen Lambton, 23 September 1878, SP32, Camden, fol. B 78/6597; report from J. J. Moroney, Electric Tels, Camden, to Supt of Tels, Sydney, 15 November 1878, *ibid.*, fol. B 9220/2.11.78; & Vann L. Cremer, 'Camden Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, p. 16 & p. 17.
[116] Letter from Captain Mann, Master, S.S. "New England", 20 October 1882, SP32, Yamba, fol. B 11389/23 OC 1882.
[117] Quoted in McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 67.
[118] C. F. Thomas, 'Reminiscences of a Telegraph Instructor', *St Martin's-le-Grand*, London, July 1898, p. 414.
[119] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 68 & p. 69.

Stephen, requested that the office windows be fitted with Venetian blinds as protection against the hot afternoon sun, and asked for a "colonial oven" to be installed in the official residence in place of the stove. Postal Inspector Davies felt that Miss Stephen was "troubling the Dept unnecessarily", describing the oven as a "paltry request".[120] The overtures made by Eliza West, officer-in-charge at Darlington, for a rent allowance added weight to the view that single women were especially difficult. In July 1885 she wrote to Head Office complaining that the leased post and telegraph residence had a leaking roof and damp walls. Insisting that the premises posed a threat to her health, Miss West sought an additional payment to cover the cost of alternative accommodation. Annoyed by the request, Postmaster-General John See suggested that if she could not manage "without troubling the Department", she should be demoted to an assistant and relocated to another office.[121] Many in the community opined that spinsters were discontented, irritable and belligerent because of their inability to satisfy their "natural" inclinations as wives and mothers.[122] Single women were tainted by an apparent failure to conform to the passive and deferential female ideal.

The telegraph authorities found particular fault with older spinsters, despite popular support for the engagement of mature women. A number of senior bureaucrats considered that they lacked the ability and confidence of youths and younger females, having commenced telegraphic training at a more advanced age. In 1874 R. J. Ellery, Morse instructor, and Samuel McGowan, Victorian Superintendent of Telegraphs, prepared a report on the telegraphy classes for females held at the Industrial and Technological Museum in Melbourne. This document was instrumental in limiting the employment opportunities for mature women in the telegraph service. Noting that several older women had failed an examination due to nervousness, the writers recommended that henceforth students be restricted to females aged between 15 and 30 and that preference be given to individuals aged between 16 and 20.[123] Opposition

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[120] Letter from L. F. Stephen, Manly, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 13 October 1882, SP32, Manly, fol. B 10995/14 OC 1882; & note in margin and below signed by Wyndham Davies, 16 October 1882, *ibid.*
[121] Letter from E. J. West, Pms, P.O., Darlington, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, undated, SP32, Darlington, fol. 11 JUL 85/B 7745; & note overleaf signed by John See, P.M.G., 14 July 1885, *ibid.*
[122] Jalland, 'Victorian Spinsters', p. 132; & McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 85. Belligerency among spinsters was thought to be linked to sexual aggressiveness in women – a condition manifested in prostitution. Poovey argues that the British authorities tried to contain the latter through emigration. See, Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 15
[123] *ibid.*, p. 47, p. 48 & p. 85.

to mature women in the telecommunications sector had its corollary in the selection of young females to fill the vacant perforator positions in Sydney's Central Telegraph Office, most of the successful applicants being under the age of 21.[124] In short, the ageing process rendered women less employable.

Women Kept On

While in office, Postmasters-General Samuel and Burns protected the tenure of mature women and younger females through the use of circumspect language that minimised the potential for adverse public comment. In the Annual Report of 1876, Samuel announced the establishment of official post and telegraph offices at Manly, Waverley and Hunter's Hill under "persons unconnected with private business … for the more efficient transaction of postal, telegraphic, money order, and Government Savings Bank business". He failed to mention that, in all three cases, the employees were women.[125] In the 1877 Annual Report, John Burns noted that the four official outlets opened in Sydney in that year were also in the hands of dedicated employees, but overlooked the fact that three of the four were managed by females.[126]

Despite reservations regarding the competency of older women, they retained a place on staff while officialdom and sections of the community saw many young males as irresponsible and unreliable. Over time, the authorities encountered numerous difficulties with immature and negligent youths who put the reputation of the service at risk. A report prepared in August 1879 by Neil Sharp, Official Post and Telegraph Master at Lismore, in response to a complaint from the mayor regarding his two young telegraphists highlighted some of the problems. Sharp observed:

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[124] Whereas Henrietta North was 41 when appointed a perforator in 1875, most of her female colleagues were in their teens and early twenties. Minnie Knott was 16 and Minnie Husing just 15 when chosen for perforator positions in that year. See, *Public Service Enquiry Commission (Report of, Upon General Post Office, Money Order Office, and the Electric Telegraph Department, with Appendix Thereto), 1890*, Sydney, pp. 34–41; & *Commonwealth of Australia – Return of Officers, Department of Postmaster-General – New South Wales, 1901*, p. 81 & p. 82.

[125] The offices in question were established on 1 March, 1 July and 1 August 1876, respectively. See, *Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Postmaster General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1876*, Sydney, 1877, p. 4.

[126] The offices managed by women were at Edgecliff (Woollahra), Glebe and Randwick, established on 16 July, 21 September, and 1 March, respectively. The male-run facility was located at Haymarket. See, *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Postmaster General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1877*, Sydney, 1878, p. 5.

> Ross the Assistant, is a very good operator…, but being only a boy of some 13 or 14 years of age, I have some difficulty in keeping him in his proper place. During my absence on the Tweed Line …he was continually out in the street playing at tag with the other boys. The other lad Hart, who is a Probationer … is a fair operator but like most other boys is inclined to be cheeky on the line and to the public also.[127]

In a memorandum written nearly two years earlier, Louise Stephen, Manly's post and telegraph mistress, alluded to similar problems with her young male help, complaining that assistant Alfred Levey disobeyed her, neglected his duties, and was sometimes absent without leave.[128] Mature and reliable by comparison, women were called on to replace unsatisfactory youths. Soon after Levey's departure in September 1877, Head Office appointed Rosa Gibbes to the assistant position at Manly.[129] In January 1879 the department acted on misgivings surrounding young males by placing Clarinda Rowe in charge of Berrima's post and telegraph facility. The action followed vigorous objections from local residents to the appointment of Percy Rowe, her 18-year-old son, to the job of post and telegraph master.[130] In these instances the utility's standing in the community took priority.

Women continued to find work in the N.S.W Electric Telegraph Department in the absence of a consensus regarding the skills and demeanour required of an operator and employee. While Edward Cracknell argued that males were better equipped both physically and mentally for telegraphic work, the Electric and International Telegraph Company in London reported that female operators were quicker-eyed and more attentive than their male peers.[131] Whereas Cracknell claimed that women lacked the firmness of hand necessary to ensure a precise and unambiguous Morse transmission, the American telegraph companies maintained that delicacy of touch made females

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[127] Extract of letter from James Stocks, Mayor of Lismore, to P.M.G., 8 August 1879, 'History of Lismore Post Office', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, p. 2; & extract of report from Neil Sharp, P. & T. Mr, Lismore, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Electric Tels, Sydney, *ibid*., p. 2 & p. 3.

[128] Memo from L. F. Stephen, Manly, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 10 September 1877, SP32, Manly, fol. B 7401/11.9.77. British postal bureaucrats found similar fault in many young telegraph messengers. The belief that they lacked discipline prompted the formation of military-style units in which boys were taught to march and salute. See, Daunton, *Royal Mail*, pp. 203–205.

[129] Letter from Alfred Levey, E.T.O., Manly Beach, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, 7 September 1877, SP32, Manly, fol. B 7526/12.9.77; & memo from S. Lambton, Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, to Pms, Manly, 12 October 1877, *ibid*., fol. B 8684/19.10.77.

[130] 'Berrima Post Office History', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, p. 4.

[131] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 37 & p. 38; & Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work*, p. 165.

better operators than males.[132] Attitudes towards the management of women were just as confused. The conviction among many Australian employers that female workers were difficult and unco-operative contrasted with the belief in U.S. telegraph utilities that women were more tractable than men.[133] Without universal agreement regarding the value of female labour, women obtained employment in an *ad hoc* fashion.

While female official employees in the N.S.W. postal and telegraphic instrumentalities enjoyed equal pay with males, the authorities had little financial incentive to engage women in large numbers, ensuring that those employed by the service remained a small minority. Whereas the telecomunications utility boasted 19 female perforators and junior operators in 1875, it had just eight more women telegraphists, including post and telegraph mistresses, on its books ten years later.[134] Conversely, in Victoria, where a wage differential operated and women received no more than 100 pounds p.a., the number of post and telegraph mistresses increased dramatically from 1878, displacing men in the process.[135] In that year females managed 43 of the 113 official post and telegraph offices. Twelve months later they ran 67 of the 128 outlets, nine of which had been in male hands a year earlier. In the interim the department saved 550 pounds in salaries.[136] In N.S.W., women held only about 25% of the postmistress and assistant positions occupied by their Victorian counterparts, and less than 10% of operator and clerical jobs.[137] Equal pay came at a cost, favouring a privileged few.

Objections to Patronage

From the early 1870s, a number of politicians expressed heightened opposition to patronage and other arbitrary employment privileges. In 1871 Arthur Onslow M.P., Chairman of the Select Committee on the Civil Service, criticised the use of parliamentary favours to shore up electoral support and insisted that government

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[132] Early Office Museum – Early Clerical Workers, http://www.earlyofficemuseum.com, 29 November 2009.
[133] Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 80.
[134] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 71. In 1888 just 29 women performed operating duties in official establishments. At the time 40 females were undertaking postal-only work in amalgamated offices. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, pp. 107–119.
[135] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 76.
[136] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 19 & p. 20.
[137] *ibid.*, p. 64; & Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 76.

appointments be made on the basis of quantifiable merit.[138] Objections among politicians to influence grew in response to the sheer volume of correspondence generated by representations on behalf of candidates for employment or promotion. In the period 1876 to 1880, the quantity of written material handled by the postal and telegraphic utilities increased by about one third.[139] James Norton, Postmaster-General in the Stuart ministry, was especially critical of the burden placed on his portfolio by the peddlers of influence. In the 1884 Annual Report, he drew attention to the heavy demands "brought to bear on the Minister and his superior officers by means of visits and letters from persons urging the real or imaginary claims of … his officers … to promotion and increased pay". Consequently, he required a larger staff than otherwise necessary to administer the departments under his control.[140] Some years earlier Norton's predecessor, John Fitzgerald Burns, had tried to curb other employment privileges in the form of "unearnt income", with the decision in 1875 to phase out stamp commissions payable to country postmasters and postmistresses.[141]

Head Office took the lead from reformist politicians in seeking to contain patronage. In May 1889 the postal department rejected overtures from H. W. Stephen M.L.A. for an increase in the allowance paid to Mary Waddell, Postal Assistant at Adaminaby Post and Telegraph Office. Chief Clerk James Dalgarno reasoned that to acquiese to such requests would cause the public and staff to believe that the only way to obtain a pay rise was through political advocacy. Secretary Stephen Lambton suggested that the petitioner be advised that salaries were proportionate to the business transacted and that any application from Mrs Waddell in person for a wage review would be judged on its merits.[142] In a note to Postmaster-General Daniel O'Connor, Lambton

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[138] *ibid.*, p. 65.

[139] In 1876 the N.S.W. Post Office Department and the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department received and despatched 18,290 written communications on various subjects, increasing to 21,301 items a year later. See, *Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Postmaster General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1877*, p. 14. In 1879 the utilities dealt with 24,448 letters, increasing to 24,905 items 12 months later. See, *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Postmaster General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1880*, Sydney, 1881, p. 19.

[140] K. G. Allars, 'Norton, James (1824–1906)', in Douglas Pike (gen. ed.), *A.D.B.*, vol. 5: 1851–1890, K–Q, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1974, p. 347; & *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1884*, Sydney, 1885, p. 10.

[141] A 5% pay rise compensated for the halving of the stamp commission (10%) in line with the belief that earnings should reflect duties. See, *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Postmaster General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, being that for the Year 1875*, Sydney, 1876, p. 12.

[142] Mary Waddell sought an increase of 15 pounds a year. See, letter from H. W. Stephen, Legislative Assembly, to Sec., G.P.O., 16 March 1889, SP32, Adaminaby, fol. 18 MAR 89/B 3347; note overleaf

proposed that a "stereotype reply" along the same lines be sent to other politicians making similar submissions, adding: "We get a large number of this kind of letter now and a considerable time is occupied in replying in manuscript." O'Connor approved the suggestion.[143] Meanwhile, the department tried to curb the exercise of family influence. Declining an application in February 1882 from Armidale postmaster John Emblin for a rise in the allowance paid to his wife and daughters, Lambton pointedly remarked that an outsider might be hired "in preference to increasing the Salaries of the PM and his family".[144]

The gradual bureaucratisation of the N.S.W. Post Office Department from the 1860s saw a corresponding, if slow, decline in the personal relationship between employer and employee. The requirement from 1859 that all appointments and requests for office fittings be approved by the Under Secretary for Finance and Trade and the Department of Public Works, respectively, expedited the process.[145] The decision in July 1865 to reject a request from Jemina Wickham for a new mantle clock underscored the widening gulf between patron and beneficiary. For over 20 years, Parramatta's official postmistress had made use of a personal timepiece to conduct departmental business.[146] In recent months it had broken, causing her to seek a replacement. The Department of Public Works argued that country post offices had never been supplied with clocks and that to do so now would set a precedent that was likely to be abused.[147] The same bureaucratic mentality depersonalised the relationship between management and non-official postmistresses. In December 1876 Herbert H. Brown M.P. wrote to the Postmaster-General on behalf of Rebecca Fowler, Allynbrook's widowed postmistress, asking for financial assistance to repair the post office. Brown explained that Mrs Fowler had a life interest only in the

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signed by James Dalgarno, 30 May 1889, *ibid.*, fol. B 89/3347; & note under signed by Stephen Lambton, 30 May 1889, *ibid.*

[143] Note signed by Stephen Lambton, 7 June 1889, *ibid.*, fol. B 7660/15 JUN 89; & note under signed by Daniel O'Connor, P.M.G., 8 June 1889, *ibid.*

[144] Letter from John W. Emblin, Pmr, Armidale P.O., to G. de Milhau, P.I., Sydney, 11 February 1882, SP32, Armidale, fol. B 1631/17 FEB 1882; & memo signed by Stephen Lambton, 12 April 1882, *ibid.*, B 3528/5 AP 1882.

[145] Golder, *Politics, Patronage and Public Works*, p. 163.

[146] Edward N. Walter, revised by John J. Olsen, 'History of Parramatta Post Office', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, 1963, p. 6 & p. 7.

[147] Letter from John Rae, Dept of Public Works, to Under Sec. for Finance and Trade, Sydney, 21 July 1865, SP32, Parramatta, fol. 7685/25 JY 1865. A clock was eventually purchased for 30 shillings. See, Walter, revised by Olsen, 'History of Parramatta Post Office', p. 6.

premises and was reluctant to spend money on the building.[148] Declining to help, Secretary Stephen Lambton replied that it was "not usual for Government to repair private property".[149] Undeterred, Rebecca Fowler approached the postal department in person, calling on it to contribute to the cost of the work. Again Lambton refused, noting that if "a precedent were once created I feel sure that … applications of a similar character would be received".[150] Concern for uniformity of policy left little room for discretionary concessions.

The Survival of Partiality

Despite the objections to patronage, women were assured of a place in the N.S.W. postal and telegraph departments while politicians and bureaucrats looked to maintain community confidence. In the absence of an all-embracing party platform, parliamentarians remained receptive to the concerns of their immediate constituents, dispensing offices to individuals according to a political imperative. Generally reluctant to surrender control of government appointments to bureaucracy, politicians refused to adopt the compromise proposals advanced by the 1871 Select Committee on the Civil Service. These measures would have reduced the impact of patronage on staffing.[151] In October 1889 Robert Fitzgerald M.P. lobbied successfully for the re-appointment of deserted wife Eliza de Trevana (formerly Kibble) to the job of post and telegraph mistress at Denman after Annie Kibble, her daughter and successor, was transferred to Waterloo. Anxious to preserve community goodwill, Fitzgerald claimed that Mrs de Trevana's reinstatement would give "unqualified satisfaction to the public by whom she is held in the highest esteem".[152] Head Office proved equally sensitive to public opinion, given the growth of suburbia, the influx of "anonymous"

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[148] Letter from H. H. Brown M.P. to P.M.G., 19 December 1876, SP32, Allynbrook, fol. B 8529/21.12.1876.

[149] Note attached signed by Stephen Lambton, 27 December 1876, *ibid*., fol. B 8529/21.12.1876.

[150] Letter from Mrs Fowler to P.M.G., 3 April 1877, *ibid*, fol. 2651/4.4.77, 76/8529; & note signed by Stephen Lambton on letter from Mrs Fowler, 5 April 1877, *ibid.*

[151] Robert Fitzgerald M.P., a member of the 1871 Select Committee, opposed removal of a politician's right to nominate applicants for public service positions, resisting the efforts of Arthur Onslow M.P. to curb patronage in favour of merit. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 65.

[152] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Elizabeth de Trevana as Pms, 5 November 1889, SP32, Denman, fol. 25 NOV 89/B 15562; & letter from R. G. D. Fitzgerald, Muswellbrook, to P.M.G., 3 October 1889, *ibid.*, fol. Electric Telegraph 9922/10.10.89. At the time Mrs de Trevana held the position of Junior Operator/Postal Assistant at Denman. See, letter from A. Kibble, P.O., Denman, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 31 December 1888, *ibid.*, fol. 2 JAN 89/B 16.

inhabitants, and its reliance on local intelligence.[153] Catherine Chape's reinstatement as Balmain postmistress in April 1874 after her son and successor, George, contracted consumption, underscored its regard for community confidence. Although reluctant to put Mrs Chape in charge of a facility soon to be amalgamated, Stephen Lambton endorsed her re-appointment, citing the family's long-term tenure and the "very great dissatisfaction" among residents if the office were removed from her care.[154] To some extent the employment of women remained a function of local sentiment.

Poor widows secured paid work in the telegraph utility, as in the postal service, on the basis of perceived obligation, misgivings surrounding female employees notwithstanding. Philip Walker, as Acting Superintendent of Telegraphs, chose Matilda Read to manage the official postal and telecommunications outlet at Merriwa in July 1883 mainly on the strength of her husband's contribution to the service. Though unable to operate, the widow assumed control of the office on the understanding that her son, a trained telegraphist, would attend the Morse key.[155] H. H. Cooke M.P. had urged Head Office to appoint Mrs Read as "an act of charity", while James B. Bettington of Brindley Park had insisted that it provide for the family of "an old officer of the Govt".[156] Keziah O'Brien took charge of Gerringong's official post and telegraph facility in June 1890 largely on the basis of her relationship to the deceased former incumbent. At Mrs O'Brien's request, Edward Cracknell allowed Relieving Officer Grieves to remain a few weeks longer at Gerringong until the widow had gained sufficient confidence in telegraphy.[157] Patronage prevailed in circumstances where moral duty eclipsed worker competency.

Mindful of an obligation to the widows of deceased employees, the authorities often deferred the amalgamation of postal and telegraphic facilities until their retirement or

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[153] Large-scale immigration added to the social anonymity of suburbs. See, Penny Russell, *'A Wish of Distinction': Colonial Gentility and Femininity*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1994, p. 10.
[154] Letter from Catherine Chape, P.O., Balmain, to P.M.G., 25 March 1874, SP32, Balmain, fol. B 1528/1-4-74; & note overleaf signed by Stephen Lambton, 2 April 1874, *ibid.*, fol. B 1528/1-4-74.
[155] Letter from Matilda Read, P.O., Merriwa, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, Sydney, 6 July 1883, SP32, Merriwa; & report by P. B. Walker, Acting Supt of Tels, 12 July 1883, *ibid.*
[156] Letter from H. H. Cooke, M.P., Merriwa, to P. B. Walker, Acting Supt of Tels, Sydney, 9 July 1883, *ibid.*; & letter attached from James B. Bettington, Brindley Park, to G. N. Griffiths, Sydney, 6 July 1883, *ibid.*, fol. B 8172/9 JY 1883.
[157] Letter from Keziah O'Brien, 67 Bayswater Rd, Darlinghurst, to S. Lambton, Sec., G.P.O, Sydney, 2 June 1890, SP32, Gerringong, fol. 5 JUN 90/B 8470; note overleaf signed by Edward Cracknell, 9 June 1890, *ibid.*; telegram from Alexander Grieves to P. B. W., Sydney, undated, *ibid.*, fol. 13 JUN 90/B

demise. Communications functions at Parramatta were only combined in January 1870 after the departure of Jemina Wickham, the town's long-serving postmistress, in July of the previous year.[158] Postal and telegraphic services at Camden also remained separate amenities until the resignation and subsequent death of Eliza Pearson in May 1879, when action was taken to vest responsibility for mail operations in the telegraph master (later deferred).[159] Loyalties to the wives of deceased officers frequently subsumed issues of economy and efficiency.

The background and circumstances of senior post and telegraph bureaucrats helps to explain their readiness to confer favour in spite of efforts to contain it. Although representative of the meritorious middle class, Edward Cracknell, Superintendent of Telegraphs, owed his position to his relationship with Charles Todd, Postmaster-General of South Australia and leading telecommunications authority. In 1858 Todd had invited his colleague to accompany him to the Antipodes for the purpose of establishing a telegraph service in that colony.[160] While the new middle-class technocracy gradually displaced the landed, clerical, military, and patronage-based civil service elite following the granting of self-government in 1856, in the case of the post and telegraph services, the old order persisted to a greater or lesser degree.[161] Besides being an electronics expert, Philip Walker, Assistant Superintendent of Telegraphs, claimed notable parentage as the sixth son of Rev. James Walker, M.A., former Headmaster of Cheltenham College and Headmaster of the King's School at Parramatta. Wyndham Davies, who entered the G.P.O. as a clerk in May 1862 and attained the office of postal inspector in July 1877, was no less than the eldest son of John Davies, Adjutant of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.[162] Like his colleague, Count Gabriel de Milhau, exiled French aristocrat and postal inspector, he appears to

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8899; telegram from K. O'Brien, Gerringong, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 25 June 1890, *ibid.*, fol. 25 JUN 90/B 9587; & note attached signed by Edward Cracknell, 2 July 1890, *ibid.*

[158] Walter, Olsen, 'History of Parramatta Post Office', p. 5 & p. 6; & letter from Sydney Wickham, P.O., Parramatta, to P.M.G., 20 July 1869, SP32, Parramatta, fol. 6083/JY 22 1869.

[159] Letter from Amelia Pearson, P.O., Camden, 28 May 1879, advising of grandmother's death on 26 May 1879, SP32, Camden, fol. B 4311/29.5.79; & report by Wyndham Davies, P.I., G.P.O., Sydney, 24 October 1878, *ibid.*, fol. B8361/25.10.78. Amelia Pearson was placed in temporary charge of the postal facility at Camden pending office amalgamation. See, *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Amelia Pearson as Temporary Pms, 9 June 1879, *ibid.*, fol. B 4581/7.6.79.

[160] As the head postal and telecommunications bureaucrat in South Australia, Charles Todd was honoured with the office of Postmaster-General, which remained a political portfolio in most of Australia's other colonies. He held the post of Government Astronomer concurrently.

[161] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 52.

[162] *St Martin's-le-Grand*, London, July 1898, pp. 274 –276.

have owed his appointment to political favour.[163] Senior bureaucrats harboured an ambivalent attitude towards influence at a time when ministerial sovereignty allowed for the ready removal of dissenters and unco-operative individuals. While some preferred an employment policy based on merit, many willingly participated in the system of patronage sponsored by politicians, given their shared interest in centralising control over departmental operations.[164] Job opportunities for women in the postal and telegraphic utilities were conditioned by a politicised administration containing vestiges of the past.

A Tenuous Existence

The vagaries of political life prevented Postmasters-General Samuel and Burns, as well as their successors, from putting female employment on a sounder footing in the departments under their control. Periodic breaks in office, during which time the portfolio was occupied by short-term incumbents, frustrated Samuel and Burns' attempts to establish a permanent recruitment regime favourable to women. In August 1880 Samuel was appointed N.S.W. Agent General in London, preventing him from further manipulating the gender balance in the communications sector.[165] Meanwhile, waning political support constrained Burns in his efforts to shape public-service recruitment practices. In 1874 he alienated allies in the Parkes government by opposing the electoral bill and by voting not to release bushranger Frank Gardiner from gaol – an action that contributed to the fall of the administration. While the incoming Robertson government "rewarded" him with the job of Postmaster-General, Burns gained a reputation among his parliamentary colleagues as a disloyal opportunist. His subsequent mismanagement of the Treasury portfolio, which helped to precipitate the defeat of the later Parkes administration in January 1889, ruined any further chance he may have had to put his stamp on departmental recruitment policy. Passed over for a ministerial post in the next Parkes government, Burns suffered

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[163] Denis Rowe, 'Count Gabriel De Milhau', *Clarence River Historical Society*, 5 July 1965, p. 7; 'Story Of A French Nobleman, Exiled From Homeland, Lived at Ramornie On Clarence', *Daily Examiner*, 18 August 1965 (cutting, no page number), in C 364/1, Personality File, De Milhau, Gabriel (Postal Inspector); & E. N. Walter, 'Postal Inspection', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, October 1962, p. 17a. Depending on the source, the postal inspector's surname appears as either de Milhau or De Milhau. See, above and *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1875*, p. 102. I have opted for de Milhau throughout this work.
[164] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 63.
[165] Bergman, 'Samuel, Sir Saul (1820–1900)', p. 85.

defeat at the 1891 polls and slipped into political oblivion.[166] With Samuel and Burns' departure, Edward Cracknell withdrew formal employment opportunities for aspiring female telegraphists from 1886, while remaining receptive to representations on behalf of needy women.[167] The rapidity with which the communications portfolio changed hands under the influence of factional forces meant that Samuel and Burns' successors had little time to develop an ongoing employment policy sympathetic to women, if such was their intention. Between August 1880 and December 1885, no fewer than eight politicians held the office of Postmaster-General, most for less than a year, one for as little as two months.[168] At most, the quick succession of political heads served to guarantee the existing employment order. The fortunes of female operators turned on tenuous political authority, rather than on their intrinsic value as workers.

For much of the period, women were constrained by an accepted performance standard. Despite the comparatively tolerant attitude exhibited by male post and telegraph employees in N.S.W. towards female co-workers, the view persisted that female operators ought to be paid less than men since they were only half as productive. It caused some senior officials to bracket women with youths who, because of their limited training and output, were deemed less valuable than grown men.[169] Consequently, mature women were frequently forced to compete with young males on small salaries for jobs in marginal outlets. The circumstances surrounding Louise Stephen's appointment to Manly Post and Telegraph Office in February 1876 underscored the reality of the situation. In the previous November, Stephen Lambton had written to Postmaster-General John Burns regarding the outlet, noting that there was insufficient business to keep an individual occupied all day long. For the sake of economy, he proposed the engagement of a "lady <u>who can operate</u> … or a lad of 20 or 21 who is (an) operator". Lambton added that the salary would not exceed 100 pounds

[166] Burns was appointed Postmaster-General in J. S. Farnell's government. As Treasurer from 1887 to 1889, he lost the confidence of pastoralists, manufacturers and the general public by failing to keep his promise to balance the budget, by introducing land and property tax bills in 1888, and by imposing a tax on beer and tobacco. See, Rutledge, 'Burns, John Fitzgerald (1833–1911)', p. 304 & p. 305.
[167] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', pp. 71–73.
[168] The office-holders were: Francis Bathurst Suttor, appointed 11.8.1880; Stephen Campbell Brown, appointed 14.11.1881; Alexander Campbell, appointed 30.8.1882; Francis Augustus Wright, appointed 5.1.1883; William Joseph Trickett, appointed 28.5.1883, James Norton, appointed 2.5.1884; John See, appointed 7.10.1885; and Daniel O'Connor, appointed 22.12.1885. See, Sharpe, 'List of Postmasters and Postmasters-General of NSW & Aust.'
[169] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 8, p. 80 & p. 81.

a year to be met by the postal department and the telegraph service in equal shares.[170] The same standard of productivity used to assess the value of female and adolescent male labour handicapped some adult males. In April 1887 John Collett, Marrickville's official post and telegraph master, asked for a raise, citing a large workload and increased responsibility. Rejecting the request, Stephen Lambton drew attention to his physical limitations and the uneconomic nature of the facility: "I do not think this officer has much to complain of. Having unfortunately but one arm we cannot expect the same amount of work from him as otherwise and moreover the Marrickville Office … is not a paying one".[171] An arbitrary measure of performance effectively relegated women to a minority labour market.

The lack of provision for operator training seriously impeded women in their pursuit of a career in the N.S.W. telegraph service. Besides failing to set up educational facilities contrary to Samuel's undertaking, Edward Cracknell reneged on his promise before the 1873 Select Committee on Telegraphic Communication to arrange classes for females once the new Sydney G.P.O. had been completed. Accordingly, women wanting to learn telegraphy had to look to relatives and friends with access to Morse equipment.[172] Emma Pegus, Yamba's post and telegraph mistress, possibly learnt telegraphy from channel pilot Francis Freeburn or from his daughter, Caroline, who worked as an honorary operator for the maritime authorities.[173] In all probability, widow Mary Russell, officer-in-charge at St Mary's, was taught to operate by her husband, who had managed the Jerilderie and Corowa outlets.[174] Similarly, Lily Isaac very likely prevailed on her married sister, Lizzie Ferris, Waverley's post and telegraph mistress, to teach her Morse prior to taking charge of the Post and Telegraph Office at Scone in July 1884.[175]

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[170] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Louise Frederica Stephen as P. & T. Ms, 14 February 1876, SP32, Manly. The office handled only 40 letters and four inward and outward mails a day. See, memo from Stephen Lambton, P.O. Sec., 24 November 1875, *ibid.*, fol. B 6219/22.10.75; & note under signed by John Fitzgerald Burns, P.M.G., 24 November 1875, *ibid.*

[171] Letter from John Edwin Collett, Pmr, Marrickville, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 29 April 1887, SP32, Marrickville, fol. 3 MAY 87/B 5063; & note signed by Stephen Lambton, 3 May 1887, *ibid.*, fol. B 87/5063.

[172] *Select Committee on Telegraphic Communication, Minutes of Evidence, Votes and Proceedings, N.S.W., 1872–73, Vol. 2, Part 1*, p. 91.

[173] Report by G. de Milhau, 8 July 1871, SP32, Yamba, fol. B 2777/13.7.71.

[174] Letter from M. Russell, Corowa, to P.M.G., 16 October 1882, SP32, St Marys, fol. B 82/13632/340.

[175] Lily Ann Isaac assumed the position of Postmistress at Scone on 21 July 1884. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1885*, p. 161. Lizzie Ferris *nee* Isaac was made Postmistress at Waverley

Prospective female telegraphists in N.S.W. found themselves at a disadvantage in relation to their Victorian and British counterparts. In Victoria women attended classes in telegraphy at Melbourne's Industrial and Technological Museum from April 1872, or enrolled in operating courses at the Melbourne Working Men's College, or at the School of Mines in Bendigo and Ballarat from the 1880s.[176] The authorities supported these teaching institutions, offering instructors and equipment, and, in the case of the School of Mines, a small government subsidy. In Britain minor postmasters, postmistresses, and their families could call on travelling instructors and practise on "dummy" instruments supplied by the Post Office.[177] In N.S.W., women were left to their own devices, literally and metaphorically.

In that colony a career in telegraphy remained outside the occupational realm of most women. Informal tuition was, by its very nature, exclusive, contingent upon the goodwill of family members and acquaintances who were able to make available Morse equipment.[178] The need for financial support during an unpaid "apprenticeship" prevented poorer women from entering the ranks of female telegraphists. Unlike their male counterparts who received a training wage as telegraph messengers, prospective female operators had to prove their competency in an honorary position before seeking a place on the government payroll. Rosa Gibbes prevailed on her family for the eight months she worked as an unpaid assistant to Louise Stephen, Manly's post and telegraph mistress, before requesting appointment to her office in September 1877.[179] Eliza West also depended on kin for sustenance during the two years she toiled as an honorary assistant to her brother in Sydney's Park Street office before seeking a paid position at St Leonard's in October 1880.[180] Female telegraph apprentices constituted a proportion of those working women

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on 3 July 1876 and became an operator at the same facility on 5 September 1876. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1876*, p. 108 & p. 111.

[176] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 54 & p. 55.

[177] Johnston, 'The Early Days of the Telegraph', p. 267 & p. 268.

[178] For many Victorian women, the cost of learning telegraphy would have been prohibitive, dedicated training facilities notwithstanding. Students at Melbourne's Industrial and Technological Museum paid a pound a term for a two-term course of instruction, a fee beyond the reach of most working-class women. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 56. The Schools of Mines were also intrinsically selective, charging two guineas a quarter for tuition. Consequently, access to instruction was largely restricted to women from comparatively affluent backgrounds. See, *ibid.*, p. 45.

[179] Letter from Rosa E. W. Gibbes, P. & T. O., Manly, to Supt of Tels, Sydney, 13 September 1877, SP32, Manly, fol. B 7592/13.9.77.

overlooked by statisticians of the day.[181] A woman aspiring to a career in telegraphy needed good connections and an accommodating family to succeed.

The lack of access to sureties would have precluded many women from applying for post and telegraph employment. Under the Postal Act of 1867, departmental employees were allowed a 50% reduction in sureties, provided that they were acquired through a guarantee company – the legislative change reducing the amount advanced as security from 100 pounds to 50. Regardless, relatively few females would have had the economic wherewithal to obtain the necessary cover.[182] Wives had only limited credit worthiness prior to the passage of the Married Women's Property Acts of 1879 and 1893 that ensured that their earnings and their real and personal possessions remained their own. As legal adjuncts of their spouses up until that time, wives were not permitted to enter into contracts with money lenders in their own right and could not be sued for failure to honour a financial agreement, making them unacceptable risks. Unless her husband went guarantor on her behalf, a married woman had little hope of obtaining government employment.[183] Single women found themselves in a similar situation. Unless her father, another male relative, or a patron came to the party, a spinster was unlikely to secure guarantees from a finance company until such time as successive statutes made her liable for debts incurred in her name.[184] Because of the constraints placed upon them, many women stood outside the employer/employee relationship as legal and economic non-entities.

Growing concern for the male wage ensured that youths were provided for in a way women were not. Over the course of the 19th century, the ideology of the self-sufficient male breadwinner and the housebound female dependant gained ground as more middling- and working-class men subscribed to the middle-class ideal.[185] For its part, the telecommunications department generally looked to provide young males with adequately paid, long-term employment. Unlike their female peers, aspiring male telegraphists had access to an established career path from the 1870s, commencing as

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[180] Letter from Eliza J. West, 121 Crown St, Woolomooloo, to F. B. Suttor, P.M.G., 23 October 1880, SP32, St Leonards (North Sydney), fol. B 9607/30.10.80.
[181] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 141.
[182] Extracts from Postmaster-General's Minute Book – May, 1852 to Oct, 1868, p. 239.
[183] Ferry, *Colonial Armidale*, p. 106.
[184] *loc. cit.* Women in Britain faced similar financial impediments. See, Hall, *White, male and middle-class*, p. 97.
[185] *ibid.*, p. 145.

telegraph messengers.[186] Recruited from age 12 after completing their elementary education, boys received on-the-job Morse tuition under a post and telegraph master or mistress, sending practice messages in "down times". In due course messengers sat a theoretical and practical examination. If they passed, they were taken on as probationary telegraphists, becoming junior operators at the end of a six-month trial. All the while male trainees drew a wage that sometimes exceeded that received by newly-appointed female telegraphists, despite theoretical remunerative equality. In time, youths could apply for the job of operator proper, or post and telegraph master, from where they might aspire to more senior positions in the bureaucracy.[187] The priority accorded young males effectively compromised the earning power of women. In September 1883 Ellen Cross, then aged 28, complained that her operator's salary (52 pounds p.a.) as Leichhardt's post and telegraph mistress was the same as that received by her telegraph messenger, a lad of 14 who had yet to acquire the skills needed to relieve her at the instrument. Indignant, Mrs Cross argued that she ought to be paid more than "a common messenger boy".[188]

The same regard for separate-sphere ideology saw single female employees cast in an aberrant role. In evidence before the 1871 Select Committee on the Civil Service, Anthony Trollope dismissed the case for female economic independence, asserting that matrimony was woman's proper estate. Charles Badham, Professor of Classics at the University of Sydney, testified that, while some females might suffer financially because of a lack of eligible suitors, they should continue to contemplate marriage and home life rather than a position in the public service.[189] In Britain, William Rathbone Greg criticised the promotion of paid work for women in financial distress, claiming that females had an innate urge to nurture. Accordingly, anything that made the single life viable, attractive or lucrative prevented them from realising their instinctual needs and added to their 'redundancy'.[190] Greg looked to marriage as a way of overcoming

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[186] South Australian women had semi-formal access to a career in telegraphy, starting as paid messengers and studying Morse in their spare time. Unlike men, they did not enjoy classified status and a consequent degree of job security. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 81.
[187] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 8 & p. 15.
[188] Letter from Ellen Cross, P. & T. O., Leichhardt, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 25 September 1883, SP32, Leichhardt, fol. B 11441/26 SE 1883.
[189] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 67 & p. 68.
[190] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 1 & p. 2. Greg believed that females benefited psychologically when they surrendered spinsterhood and became wholly dependent on a male's earnings. See, A. James

social problems at home and abroad. He argued that female emigration would relieve the shortage of potential brides in the colonies and discourage vice among poor women who might otherwise turn to prostitution.[191] Contrary to expectations, most female immigrants in Australia looked to find a job before a husband. Their quest for employment and the heavy demand for household servants made for constant friction between immigrants and Australian authorities on the one hand, and British officialdom on the other.[192] Clearly, working women and the advocates for female domesticity were at cross purposes.

The propensity to see female post and telegraph employees as inhabitants of the domestic domain meant that they were denied the same employment rights as males. From Head Office's perspective, residential accommodation was adequate compensation for women on relatively low salaries. In April 1877 Angelina Dargin, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Randwick, wrote to the postal department asking for the same wage as that paid to the female postal assistant at Ashfield. Rejecting the request, Stephen Lambton observed that, unlike the latter, she had access to official quarters.[193] In October 1886 Louisa Perceval approached the department seeking a retrospective postal allowance that covered her 11 years of service prior to the restoration of her office to an official outlet. Head Office's response underscored the tendency to regard women as homebodies first and workers second. Declining the request, Inspector George Unwin argued that St Peter's former non-official post and telegraph mistress had benefited from free housing in the interim and had therefore been adequately rewarded for her efforts.[194] In the post and telegraph service, female wage earners remained captives of the private sphere.

Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration 1830–1914*, London, Croom Helm, 1979, p. 129 & p. 130.

[191] Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 5.

[192] Jane Gothard, *Blue China: Single Female Migration to Colonial Australia*, Carlton South, Melbourne U.P., 2001, pp. 10–13 & p. 33. Poovey questions the veracity of Greg's assertion that women had a natural instinct to marry. She maintains that the ideology of gender difference was 'fissured' by competing priorities, including the need for economic sovereignty. See, Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 2 & p. 3.

[193] Letter from A. Dargin, P. & T. Ms, Randwick, to Sec., G.P.O., 6 April 1877, SP32, Randwick, fol. B 7745/7.4.77; note under by unidentified officer, 12 April 1877, *ibid.*, fol. B 7745/7.4.77; & note signed by Stephen Lambton, 13 April 1877, *ibid.*, fol. B 7745/7.4.77.

[194] Letter from Louisa Perceval, Church St, St Peter's, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, undated, SP32, St Peters, fol. 23 OCT 86/12843; & note under signed by G. P. Unwin, P.I., 2 November 1886, *ibid.*

Arguably, the caring role assigned to women damaged their career prospects by necessitating breaks in service. Agnes Pegus, Postal Assistant and Junior Operator at Leichhardt, took leave without pay from 11 September to 1 November 1888 to nurse her brother, who had to resign from his position in the Accountant's Branch owing to ill health.[195] Similarly, Mary Davies, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Hunter's Hill, took time off to care for her ailing sister.[196] Over the years, colleagues Minnie Knott at Glebe and Annie Halloran at West Botany also availed of leave without pay.[197] Of the 52 post and telegraph mistresses, female telegraphists and female postal assistants still on the permanent list in 1900 following a purge of married female officers four years earlier, approximately 7% had not been engaged continuously.[198]

The Quarantining of Women

Meanwhile, the effective confinement of female official staff to single-gender facilities prevented many women from attaining their full employment potential. From the late 1870s, Head Office set aside a limited number of centres, mostly small or uneconomic, expressly for women, gradually superseding mixed-gender workplaces in the process. By effectively establishing a quota of outlets for females, Edward Cracknell appeased the political proponents of women's employment, while allowing females little more than a foothold in the service. When Elizabeth Douglas left Randwick Post and Telegraph Office for Waterloo in February 1877, she was replaced by Angelina Dargin, Junior Operator at the latter station.[199] Similarly, after Ellen Cross transferred from St Mary's to Leichhardt in December 1882, she was succeeded by Mary Russell, trained telegraphist from Corowa. Mrs Russell, in turn, surrendered the office to Caroline Palmer, Operator from Summer Hill, in July

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[195] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, p. 148.

[196] *ibid.*, p. 135; note in margin signed by unidentified official, 14 October 1891, SP32, Hunters Hill, fol. 13 JUL 91/B 8247; & memo from A. Arndell, Appt Clerk, to Sec., Telegraph Service, & Accountant, 9 April 1896, *ibid.*, fol. 10 Apr 96/B 3988.

[197] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, p. 134 & p. 136.

[198] The approximate percentage of women with broken service does not take into account probationary and supernumerary staff and is calculated on the basis of conflicting records. See, *New South Wales Public Service List 1900, Being a List of the Officers employed, at 30th June, 1900, by the Government of New South Wales, under the provisions of the "Public Service Act of 1895"*, Sydney, 1900, pp. 173–207; *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, p. 148; & Conduct, Training & Other Employment History Register, 1880 to 1900.

[199] Angelina Dargin, formerly of Waterloo, was appointed to Randwick on 1 February 1877, having exchanged positions with Elizabeth Douglas. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1877*, Sydney, 1878, p. 123.

1886.[200] Competition between women for positions in the few "female" outlets contributed to occupational isolation. When Lilla Twentyman resigned as post and telegraph mistress at Hunter's Hill in June 1886, Mary Davies at Balmain, Caroline Palmer at Summer Hill, and Mary Russell at St Mary's vied with one another for the job, instead of applying for places in larger, male-dominated establishments.[201] The marginal nature of "female" facilities limited the potential earnings of officers-in-charge. While major telegraph centres boasted the latest duplex equipment, smaller, unprofitable outlets were usually equipped with a single-line Morse key attached to a perforated tape machine that allowed for the receipt of messages outside office hours. Consequently, most women who worked from the tape were prevented from contesting positions in larger establishments that required "sound reading" experience. Prejudice, along with the forces of determinism, served to insulate females from wider vocational opportunities.

The segregation of female departmental staff also emanated from fears surrounding the alleged sexualisation of women in the public sphere. Even the most respectable female officers appeared to be at risk of moral decline if left to commune with members of the opposite sex in an ambiguous space. In April 1880 Senior Constable George Dove reported that Amelia Pearson, Camden's then postmistress, and her sister, Jeanette, were seen talking to young men in an unseemly manner on the office verandah. Horatio Carpenter, a resident of nearby Fernside, went further, alleging that the women were "on the street".[202] Opposition to Stephen Lambton's proposal of November 1878 to transfer Miss Pearson to Camden's telegraph office with the amalgamation of facilities highlighted fears of female sexualisation in the public domain. Apart from the issue of community confidence, Telegraph Master Moroney resisted the move for propriety's sake, observing: "it would not be advisable for a lady to engage in this office, there being two unmarried men (myself and the

[200] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of M. Russell as P. & T. Ms, 19 December 1882, SP32, St Marys, fol. B 170/5 JA 1883; & *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Caroline Palmer as P. & T. Ms, St Mary's, 13 July 1886, *ibid.*, fol. 16 JUL 86/B 8624.

[201] Letter from R. L. Twentyman, Pms, Hunter's Hill, to P.M.G., 14 June 1886, SP32, Hunters Hill, fol. 14 JUN 86/B 7150; letter from M. J. Davies, Balmain, to S. H. Lambton, Sec., G.P.O., 2 July 1886, *ibid.*, fol. 2 JUL 86/B 7992; letter from Caroline Palmer, "Glenabra", Moonbie St, Summer Hill, to P.M.G., 15 June 1886, *ibid.*, fol. B 86/7300; & memo from E. C. Cracknell to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 2 July 1886, *ibid.*, fol. 2 JUL 86/B 7988.

[202] Report from George Dove, Senior Constable, Camden Police Station, to Officer in Charge, Eastern Police District, Sydney, undated, SP32, Camden, fol. C 80/2486; & letter from Horatio Carpenter, Fernside near Camden, 31 March 1880, *ibid.*, fol. C 2192/2 APR 1880.

probationer named Waterworth) employed, and diver other reasons".[203] Moroney's objections were predicated on the common conviction that, while middle-class women lacked sexual urges, females outside the home and in male company might succumb to prostitution at any time, presenting a moral threat to all concerned. Whereas most men were thought to channel their sexual energy into employment, some women were believed to be incapable of finding relief in productive work and were hence vulnerable to sinful decay.[204] The relegation of females to single-sex offices was a way of averting potential problems.[205]

The quarantining of female employees arguably compromised their career prospects by reducing their job to the status of "women's work". Women who work exclusively with, and learn exclusively from, other women are frequently disadvantaged through the devaluation of their knowledge and expertise.[206] The situation of female assistants provides some evidence of this phenomenon. In June 1883 the department appointed Jean Knott to assist her sister, Minnie, officer-in-charge at Glebe, who, in all likelihood, taught her younger sibling how to operate.[207] Five years later Miss Knott occupied the same position on the same salary (26 pounds p.a.).[208] Meanwhile, in February 1885, Headquarters had hired Agnes Pegus to help her married sister, Ellen Cross, officer-in-charge at Leichhardt. In all probability, Mrs Cross had tutored her offsider in Morse while manager at St Mary's.[209] Three years later Miss Pegus was receiving the same wage (52 pounds p.a.) as an operator and assistant at Leichhardt.[210] Jean Knott and Agnes Pegus remained on low salaries until April 1892, when their wage rate was raised to 110 pounds a year.[211] Female telegraphists were, in effect, victims of minimal expectations on the part of the employer.

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[203] Cremer, 'Camden Post Office History', p. 16 & p. 17.
[204] Witz and Savage, 'The gender of organizations', p. 50.
[205] In Victoria female operators working in the Chief Telegraph Office were isolated from their male colleagues, confined to a separate floor of the Melbourne G.P.O. with access via a female-only entrance. McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 51, p. 63, p. 68 & p. 71.
[206] Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, p. 202.
[207] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1883*, p. 140.
[208] Jean Knott's salary was composed of an operating allowance of 26 pounds and a postal allowance of the same amount. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, p. 148.
[209] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1885*, p. 155. Miss Pegus had assisted her sister in an honorary capacity at St Mary's for some years. See, letter from Mr Pegus to P.M.G., Sydney, 29 July 1882, SP32, St Marys, fol. B 8595/15 AUG 1882.
[210] Agnes Pegus' salary consisted of an operating allowance and a postal allowance of equal amounts. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, p. 148.

Mixed Fortunes

A study of the six women who joined the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Department as perforators in 1875 and were still on staff in 1888 reveals a divide in the vocational circumstances of female telegraphists.[212] Those individuals who had been assigned to larger, more prosperous offices after the closure of the Wheatstone facilities had fared relatively well in the interim. By 1888 Angelina Dargin and Henrietta North, who had commenced on 75 pounds a year, were earning 160 pounds p.a. as post and telegraph mistresses at Randwick and Edgecliff, respectively. Similarly, Minnie Knott, who had started on 104 pounds annually, received 150 pounds that same year as officer-in-charge at Glebe.[213] Conversely, those women posted to small, uneconomic outlets suffered a lack of earning power. Mary Davies, who had drawn a perforator's salary of 75 pounds a year in 1875, earned just 124 pounds p.a. in 1888 as officer-in-charge at Hunter's Hill.[214] Likewise, Annie Halloran, who had commanded 104 pounds p.a. in 1875, received only 16 pounds more a year in 1888 as manager of Lower Botany Post and Telegraph Office.[215] Women who had failed to gain control of an outlet after the Wheatstone units closed down fared even worse. Minnie Husing, one of the original perforators on 104 pounds p.a., earned just 10 pounds more a year in 1888 as an operator at Sydney's George Street West branch.[216] The mixed fortunes of former perforators point to the operation of a career differential within the same gender.

Technology played a significant role in determining a woman's occupational outlook. Official post and telegraph mistresses relegated to small, unprofitable establishments were typically prevented from attaining their full potential because of the elementary nature of the equipment installed in these outlets. In the mid 1870s, Edward Cracknell ordered that the installation of alphabetical machines in non-official offices be extended to include marginal official facilities, thereby removing the need for trained Morse telegraphists. Competent Morse-key operator Lilla Twentyman suffered as a result of her appointment in August 1876 to Hunter's Hill, an office supplied with an

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[211] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1893*, Sydney, 1894, p. 221 & p.224, respectively.
[212] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*. The women in question were: Angelina Dargin, P. & T. Ms, Randwick, p. 138; Mary Davies, P. & T. Ms, Hunter's Hill, p. 135; Annie Halloran, P. & T. Ms, West Botany, p. 136; Minnie Husing, Operator, George Street West, p. 149; Minnie Knott, P. & T. Ms, Glebe, p. 134; and Henrietta North, P. & T. Ms, Edgecliff, *loc. cit.*
[213] *ibid.*, p. 138 & p. 134.
[214] Mary Davies' salary was increased to 130 pounds p.a. from 18 May 1888. See, *ibid.*, p. 135.
[215] *ibid.*, p. 136.

alphabetical instrument. Reduced to using the A.B.C. machine, Miss Twentyman was denied the chance to hone her Morse skills, preventing her from applying for more senior positions that called for sound-reading experience.[217] Annie Halloran, Morse operator at Paddington Post and Telegraph Office, also lost the facility to practice her craft with her transfer in March 1883 to the A.B.C.-equipped outlet at Lower Botany.[218] If detrimental to the career prospects of Morse-trained women, alphabetical machines enhanced the earning power of unskilled women in non-official offices. Jane Peters, Postmistress at Hamilton (formerly Borehole), benefited from Cracknell's decision in August 1879 to place an A.B.C. apparatus under her control. The device enabled her to acquire a degree of telegraphic expertise while offering a wire service to the local population. In return for her telecommunications work, Mrs Peters received 26 pounds p.a., taking her total salary to 51 pounds a year.[219] Louisa Perceval, manager of St Peter's Non-Official Post Office, also gained from the installation of an alphabetical machine, with the decision in June 1886 to raise her wage to 52 pounds a year in line with her extra competencies and responsibilities.[220] For women, technology proved to be something of a mixed blessing.

Notwithstanding disadvantageous postings to offices with basic equipment, an examination of the record suggests the existence of a salary and promotional divide with respect to telegraphy, regardless of gender. The women hired in 1875 to work as perforators in Sydney's Wheatstone facility started on 75 pounds a year, while their female colleagues in similar centres at Albury and Tenterfield commenced on 104 pounds p.a. In contrast, male and female operators attached to small official offices with conventional Morse machines were allowed just 52 pounds a year as

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[216] *ibid.*, p. 149.

[217] Lilla Twentyman worked as a probationer at Balmain before her promotion to Hunter's Hill. See, unsigned memo to Sec., G.P.O., 29 June 1876, SP32, Hunters Hill, fol. B 3799/30.6.76. Edward Cracknell placed a premium on the ability to "sound read" from a Morse sounder – a precondition for employment in the major telecommunications centres. See, note overleaf signed by Edward Cracknell, 22 June 1888, SP32, Waterloo, fol. 16 JUN 88/B 8129.

[218] Annie Halloran was appointed to the Lower Botany office on 5 March 1883. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1883*, p. 157.

[219] Note signed by Edward Cracknell, 2 August 1879, SP32, Borehole, fol. Electric Telegraph 3845/24.7.79.

[220] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Louisa Perceval as Pms, 26 June 1882, SP32, St Peters, fol. B 8241/5 AU 1882; report from Alexander Tucker, Inspr, Telegraph Lines & Stations, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt, Tel. Dept, undated, *ibid.*, fol. B 5612/31 MY 1882; & note signed by Stephen Lambton, 11 June 1886, *ibid.*

beginners.[221] Later on, this second group of workers were effectively denied the chance to acquire additional skills on duplex and quadruplex instruments. Installed in large telecommunications centres during the 1870s and 1880s, the machines permitted two or more messages to be transmitted or received simultaneously. In June 1888 Robert Farquaharson, Waterloo's post and telegraph master, had to decline an invitation to work in the Central Telegraph Office (C.T.O.), fearing that he would be unable to adjust to the new equipment after spending five years in a small outlet. During that time he had operated "the Tape" or perforated tape machine. Hence, he had little sound-reading experience at a time when it was a general prerequisite for employment in the C.T.O.[222] Hired in January 1875, Farquaharson earned 140 pounds p.a., whereas the 15 operators in the C.T.O who had joined the service that same year commanded an average salary of 195 pounds p.a.[223] Robert Galloway, Post and Telegraph Master at Alexandria, and Louise Stephen, officer-in-charge at Manly, were similarly affected by insufficient prowess in sound-reading, drawing 104 pounds and 170 pounds a year, respectively, in 1888.[224] Technology tended to make for a two-tiered employment structure based on expertise rather than gender.

Irrespective of their level of skill and their circumstances, many male and female officers remained beholden to a system of influence. Over time, the relationship between employer and employee grew gradually more distant with the assignment of staff to suburban and country outlets beyond the immediate gaze of supervisors. Consequently, many workers were overlooked by superiors ignorant of their capabilities and situation. The problem revealed itself as early as 1870. In May of that year, John Eames, Post and Telegraph Master in rural Inverell, was moved to write to Colin A. Fraser M.P. seeking a pay rise in light of his large workload. A competent telegraphist, Eames asked Fraser to speak to Postmaster-General Joseph Egan on his

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[221] See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 72.

[222] Farquaharson would have preferred a transfer to Alexandria or Manly where tape equipment was still in use. See, letter from R. Farquaharson, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 15 June 1888, SP32, Waterloo, fol. 16 JUN 88/B 8129.

[223] Farquaharson was appointed on 13 January 1875. On 1 July 1888, he became an acting relieving officer and was posted to small outlets. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1888*, p. 140. Salaries for the 15 operators at the Central Telegraph Office ranged from 124 to 295 pounds p.a. The two officers in receipt of lower salaries than Farquaharson may have been demoted because of misdemeanours. See, *ibid.*, pp. 143–146.

[224] Robert Galloway was appointed to the newly converted official office at Alexandia on 1 July 1888. See, *ibid.*, p. 139. Louisa Stephen retired on 30 April 1888. See, *ibid.*, p. 136; & memo from Edward Cracknell, Supt of Tels, to Sec., G.P.O., undated, SP32, Manly, fol. 27 APR 88/B 5778.

behalf, expressing faith in the politician's powers of persuasion: "I feel convinced that a word from you would have a better effect than a dozen letters".[225] Upset by her lack of progress in the service, Eliza West, Operator at St Leonard's, successfully appealed to Lieutenant-Governor Sir Alfred Stephen in July 1883 for promotion to the new facility at Surry Hills. Instrumental in Miss West's appointment to the department, Sir Alfred supported her application on the grounds of "fitness, combined with character & previous service".[226] Demonstrable and quantifiable skills alone were not enough to guarantee advancement.

The Male Wage and Domestic Tensions

In N.S.W., the appointment of female relatives to assistant positions in post and telegraph offices retarded the development of the male wage by encouraging a reliance on women's earnings. In proposing in April 1877 that Charlotte Dee be appointed to the job of junior operator at Parramatta on a trial basis, Postmaster-General Saul Samuel went some way towards addressing the financial needs of her husband, the post and telegraph master. Thomas Dee wanted his salary raised to 250 pounds a year, or 300 pounds without a stamp commission, owing to the growth in business. Alternatively, he proposed that his wife be made his assistant telegraphist on "a fair salary", in which case he would withdraw his request for a wage review.[227] Head Office acted on the second option. In February 1884 Headquarters engaged Caroline Myers to assist her husband, the Post and Telegraph Master at Nimitybelle, paying her 40 pounds p.a. Her appointment compensated George Myers, whose application for a raise was rejected in fairness to others of equal seniority.[228] The bureaucracy treated a wife's wage as indivisible from her husband's. In April 1882 Thomas Perceval, Non-Official Postmaster at St Peter's, approached the postal department about a raise. Declining the request, Inspector Alexander Tucker took

[225] Letter from John Eames, P.O., Inverell, to C. A. Fraser M.P., 6 May 1870, SP32, Inverell.
[226] Letter from Sir Alfred Stephen, 25 July 1883, SP32, Surry Hills.
[227] Note signed by Saul Samuel, P.M.G., 24 April 1877, SP32, Parramatta, fol. B 1275/14.2.77; file note unsigned and undated, *ibid.*, fol. 3892/16.5.77; & note under signed by Stephen Lambton, 15 July 1877, *ibid.*, fol. 3892/16.5.77.
[228] *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1885*, p. 159; & letter from G. W. Myers, Pmr, Nimitybelle, to Henry Dawson M.L.A., Barristers Court, Elizabeth St, Sydney, 4 May 1889, SP32, Nimitybelle, fol. 7 MAY 89/B 5698.

account of the money paid to his wife for operating the alphabetical instrument, noting that their income amounted to "129 pounds in all".[229]

The employment of female assistants to supplement male wages often placed an extra burden on household finances and contributed to tension between workplace and domestic responsibilities. The situation of Mrs Hyam, wife of Isaac Hyam, Lismore's official post and telegraph master, underscored the experience of women unable to reconcile the competing demands of work and home. In May 1875 her husband complained to Head Office that he needed to hire a servant to perform the housework now that his wife was assisting him – an additional expense he could not afford. Mrs Hyam received 18 pounds p.a., whereas local domestic help cost around 50 pounds a year, which included a wage of 12 shillings a week, along with board and meals. The post and telegraph master stressed that his wife was unable to perform her office duties as well as her household chores.[230] Prior to her appointment, she had managed the housework without recourse to outside assistance.[231] In colonial Australia, the keeping of servants tended to set the middle orders apart from the *nouveaux riche* and prosperous tradespeople.[232] For Mrs Hyam, hired help was a necessity rather than a statement of class. As such, she resembled the female factory hands in Britain who were forced to engage professional housekeepers.[233] Mary Waddell, wife of Adaminaby's post and telegraph master, was also a victim of competing demands on her time. In September 1882 W. C. Herbert of Rosedale called on Head Office to grant her husband a salary increase, pointing out that his spouse ran the facility as his assistant when he was away on line repair duty. Herbert observed that the extra office work put Mrs Waddell to "great inconvenience (having a family of children to attend to)".[234] Too often women augmented male earnings at their personal and families' expense.

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[229] Report by Stephen Lambton, Sec., P.O. Dept, 3 April 1882, SP32, St Peters, fol. B 3779/15 AP 1882; & report from Alexander Tucker, Inspr, Tel. Lines and Stations, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, undated, *ibid.*, fol. B 5612/31 MY 1882.
[230] Letter from I. Hyam, P. & T. Mr, Lismore, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 18 May 1875, SP32, Lismore, fol. B 75/2882.
[231] Minute paper signed by Stephen Lambton, 10 May 1875, *ibid*., fol. B 2552/8 5 75. Female domestic servants were usually paid 12 shillings a week. See, Probert, *Working Life*, p. 79.
[232] Russell, '*A Wish of Distinction'*, pp. 183–185.
[233] Probert, *Working Life*, p. 93.
[234] Letter from W. C. Herbert, Bolairo, Rosedale, 1 September 1882, SP32, Adaminaby, fol. B 9450/6 SEP 1882. In response to Herbert's overtures, the department paid Mary Waddell a temporary

Agency and its Limitations

Some official postmistresses without telegraphic training fought to preserve their marketability and expertise in the face of office amalgamation. In November 1869 Eliza Daly, Postmistress at West Maitland, learnt that her job would be abolished with the integration of postal and telegraphic functions. Seeking to protect the vocational knowledge she had gained over the previous 16 years, Mrs Daly refused admission to her temporary replacement, Mr M. Lee, upon his arrival, and declined to instruct him in local postal operations. Lee reported that the postmistress intended to remain in the building "until the first of the year, when she would walk out". In the meantime she proposed that "the Post Master General send a gentleman from Sydney to instruct me".[235] Faced with an unco-operative incumbent, the authorities allowed Mrs Daly to retain her position, appointing a telegraph master to manage a separate telecommunications facility under the same roof. Jane Hogan, Postmistress at Wallabadah, employed similar tactics, refusing to provide her designated successor, telegraph master Hugh Briggs, with any operational details after he took charge of the office in October 1876. In her case the protest proved ineffectual.[236] The initiatives taken by these women to preserve their intellectual capital conflicted with the concept of female respectability based on passivity and deference to male authority. Striking members of the Victorian Tailoresses' Association demonstrated a similar disregard for the dominant view of respectable womanhood, arguing that a submissive demeanour was of little help to workers with children to feed.[237] When presented with the prospect of unemployment, a number of working women cast aside the model of compliant femininity.

At a time when female employment lacked universal endorsement, some women asserted their right to paid work by way of grammatical devices. Throughout the period the bureaucracy generally failed to formally acknowledge the existence of female officers in internal records, using the title "Postmaster" and the abbreviation

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allowance of two pounds a month. See, report by V. Moyse, P.I., 13 September 1882, *ibid.*, fol. B 10044/21 SE 1882; & note signed by Stephen Lambton, 15 September 1882, *ibid.*

[235] Letter from M. Lee to P.M.G., 30 November 1869, SP32, Maitland, fol. 10033/1.12.1869.

[236] Telegram from H. F. Briggs, T. Mr, Wallabadah, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 24 October 1876, SP32, Wallabadah, fol. B 6999/24.10.76; *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Hugh Fife Stanley Briggs as P. & T. Mr, 17 October 1876, *ibid.*, fol. B 7009/25 10 76.

[237] The Association was formed in 1883. Frances points to a "different standard of virtue" among members. See, Frances, *The Politics of Work*, 1993, p. 35.

"P.M." in a generic sense to refer to both men and women in staff registers and printed stationery. While most female officers-in-charge used the word "Postmistress" to describe themselves in official correspondence, Catherine Chape, Balmain's post and telegraph mistress, opted in July 1885 for the notionally male designation in a memorandum to Head Office, signing herself "C. Chape (Postmaster)". In so doing, she assumed the status of a male breadwinner. Mrs Chape also challenged the bureaucracy by using the initial "C", rather than her given name.[238] Sexually ambiguous, the descriptor was at odds with official record-keeping practices whereby males were identified by the initial of their first name, while females were invariably referred to by their full name, often prefaced by "Miss" or "Mrs".[239] Meanwhile, some unpaid female workers pressed their claim for remunerated employment by adopting impressive "masculine" or gender-neutral titles. When, in July 1882, Mary Waddell, wife of Adaminaby's post and telegraph master, wrote requesting payment for the help she gave her husband, she referred to herself as the "Asst PM", rather than the (female) "Assistant".[240] In seeking recognition as workers, some women subverted and manipulated language.

Some official post and telegraph mistresses attempted to renegotiate the ill-defined boundary between public and private space in their favour. In March 1882 Louise Stephen, Manly's post and telegraph mistress, wrote to the department suggesting changes to the newly constructed office that would have denied customers access to the interior. Her proposal called for the front window to be fitted with sliding panels, allowing mail to be dispensed from inside the building to residents standing outside. Miss Stephen claimed that the alterations would not adversely affect the public, drawing attention to the shelter afforded by the front verandah. According to her, the changes would result in a quieter workplace, "an advantage when working the telegraph instruments". Postal Inspector Davies dismissed the proposal, observing that it represented a return to the "old fashioned system of a small delivery window", and pointed to the fine lobby expressly designed for the transaction of business.[241] Minnie Knott, Glebe's post and telegraph mistress, also attempted unsuccessfully to redraw

[238] Memo from C. Chape (Postmaster), 14 July 1885, SP32, Balmain, fol. 17 JUL 85/B 8046.
[239] See, for example, List of Staff, 1879.
[240] Letter from Mary Waddell, "Asst PM", P. & T. O., Adaminaby, to Sec., G.P.O., 6 July 1882, SP32, Adaminaby, fol. B 7124/10 JY 1882. Although official, the title "Assistant P.M." was rarely used.

the blurred border between public and private space, asking for the linoleum on the office floor to be extended into the adjacent hallways and for carpet to be laid on the stairs of the residence – a request rejected on the grounds of cost.[242]

Over time, the expansion of postal bureaucracy and infrastructure restricted the capacity of women to negotiate their terms of employment. From the late 1860s, staff came under greater scrutiny after the Post Office Board of Inquiry of 1862 found that several complaints against personnel stemmed from inadequate supervision. In January 1867 the department hired two inspectors to monitor post offices and mail services in urban and rural areas, bringing employees into closer contact with the administration.[243] In July 1867 Mary Elliott, Non-Official Postmistress at Turee Creek, refused to consign letters to the new contract mail service terminating at Denison Town unless her salary was raised from 12 to 35 pounds p.a. Sent to investigate the matter, Inspector de Milhau reported that her house was the only dwelling on the mail line and that the next-closest residence was at Fitzgerald's station four miles away.[244] In the circumstances the contractor was instructed to transport the mail from Cassilis to Denison Town direct, circumventing the Turee Creek outlet. After agreeing to a quote of 91 pounds a year covering the change of route, Head Office dismissed Miss Elliott.[245] The administrative autonomy allowed postmistresses was far from absolute.

Subsequent to the arrival of the telegraph, women found employment in the N.S.W. postal and telecommunications services amidst a mass of complementary and competing forces. Patronage notwithstanding, most female telegraphists were engaged

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[241] Memo from L. F. Stephen, P. & T. Ms, Manly, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 18 March 1882, SP32, Manly, fol. B 2879/20 MA 1882; & note under signed by Wyndham Davies, P.I., 1 April 1882, *ibid.*
[242] Memo from M. Knott, P.O., Glebe, to Sec, G.P.O., Sydney, 31 December 1885, SP32, Glebe, fol. B 33/4 JAN 86; note under signed by G. P. Unwin, P.I., 5 January 1886, *ibid.*; & note under signed by Stephen Lambton, 6 January 1886, *ibid.*
[243] Between October or November 1858 and March 1864, when his position was abolished, a single inspector performed the duty. See, Walter, 'Postal Inspection', p. 5, p. 12, p. 13 & p. 17.
[244] Letter attached from M. Elliott, Pms, Turee Creek, 4 July 1867, SP32, Turee Creek, fol. 4895/6 JY 1867; & telegram from G. de Milhau, P.I., to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 8 July 1867, *ibid.*, fol. 4972/10 JY 1867.

in a purposeful manner, and not in an organisational vacuum as suggested. Moreover, a number succeeded in securing operator positions largely by reason of expertise. Although beneficiaries of equal pay, female workers provided the authorities with an inexpensive source of labour, underwriting unprofitable facilities, infrastructure development, and discounted telegraph rates. Thanks to single-gender offices and a salary differential independent of sex, opposition to working women and wage parity remained relatively muted. Like postal work, telegraphy catered to a niche labour market shaped by culturally determined gender differences and the ideology surrounding female respectability. Reduced matrimonial prospects and inadequate male incomes fuelled the demand for female employment. The postal department's financial stake in telecommunications ensured that women retained a presence in the telegraph service, regardless of Edward Cracknell's opposition. Equal pay proved to be a mixed blessing, at once protecting women from the odium attached to cheap labour and limiting their employability. In the circumstances many female telegraphists forfeited the possibility of promotion in return for free housing in a segregated office and membership of an occupational elite.

The women engaged by the N.S.W. postal and telegraph departments laboured in an arbitrary and discriminatory environment. Favouritism in employment survived in the absence of policy continuity, and for as long as women enjoyed the patronage of Postmasters-General Samuel and Burns, declining once their champions' departed from office. The rapid turnover of political heads prevented women from consolidating their hold on departmental positions, but acted to preserve the status *quo*. Because they performed the same work as men for the same salary, female supervisors in N.S.W. enjoyed a harmonious relationship with their male subordinates. Elsewhere, a wage differential eroded the goodwill between workers of the opposite sex. Despite their access to equal pay, female telegraphists in N.S.W. suffered under an autocratic administration that effectively conferred a skill monopoly on men. Those women who succeeded in obtaining an operating position – a privileged few with training and the financial means – were increasingly marginalised because of Head Office's primary commitment to the male wage. Irrespective of their

[245] Letter from John McCubbin, P.O., Denison Town, to S. H. Lambton, Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 3 August 1867, *ibid.*, fol. 5836/5 AU 1867; letter from J. McCubbin, Denison Town, 17 August 1867, *ibid.*, fol. 6149/23 AUG 1867; & note from D. Dalgarno to Accountant, 5 September 1867, *ibid.*

detractors, women remained on strength while immature and irresponsible youths presented problems, and while the qualities required of a good operator remained the subject of debate. In this sense they can be said to have gained employment by default. Gender segregation prevented female workers from amassing vocational capital, while both men and women in marginal facilities were constrained by circumscribed skills. Over time, a divide developed between female telegraphists in terms of salary and position. This development was partly offset by the deployment of alphabetical equipment and a limited democratisation of the skill base. Despite moves towards a meritocracy, patronage persisted among politicians and bureaucrats with an ambivalent regard for influence. This ambivalence helped to preserve female tenure while underscoring the disparate and unstable nature of the state. Irrespective of their expertise, many telegraphists without exposure to superiors remained indebted to patronage. Though encouraged to pursue telegraphic work, women were arguably prevented from achieving their full career potential because of the caring role assigned to them. While wives assisted husbands they effectively undercut the male wage and were left to handle the competing demands of work and home.

Female agency brought uneven results. A few postmistresses managed to defend their livelihood when faced with office amalgamation, while others re-cast the language of gender to better reflect their status as women and workers. Still others tried unsuccessfully to extract salary concessions, or capitalise on the unclear divide between public and private domains. At the very least, these demonstrations of self-interest pointed to the non-hegemonic nature of the passive female ideal. Female post and telegraph employees in N.S.W. participated in a labour market shaped by calculating bureaucracy and conditioned by fortuity, internal division, and resistance.

Chapter Three: The Quest for Equality, 1890–1901

This chapter embraces the period from the onset of the 1890's depression to the arrival of nationhood in 1901, when the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department combined with the five other colonial post and telegraph instrumentalities to form the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Department under the federal constitution. Eight years previously, the N.S.W. Post Office Department had fully amalgamated with the Electric Telegraph Department following the death of Edward Cracknell, Superintendent of Telegraphs, in January 1893. Holding to the view that many postal employees were incapable of managing telegraphic communications, Cracknell had reputedly stated, somewhat prophetically, that the complete integration of services would happen over his dead body.[1] Over a decade earlier, the Electric Telegraph Department had assumed responsibility for telephonic services in N.S.W., when, in March 1882, a switchboard facility opened in the Sydney G.P.O., replacing the commercially operated Royal Exchange established in the previous year.[2] Following Cracknell's demise the combined utilities were placed under the control of Stephen Lambton, former Secretary of the Post Office Department, who, as Deputy Postmaster-General, answered to the political head of the day.[3] In 1891 the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Society invited official post and telegraph masters and mistresses, male and female telegraphists in urban, suburban and country establishments, and other officers performing telegraphic work outside the central telecommunications facilities, to become members. That same year the Society commenced publication of the *Transmitter*, the union's official journal.[4] In 1895 the staff association extended

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[1] Letter from E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, to Sec., G.P.O., 18 December 1888, SP32, Armidale, fol. 20 Dec 88/B 16938; & 'Corowa Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, p. 6. Edward Cracknell died on 14 January 1893. In 1890 the Public Service Commissioners inquiring into postal and telecommunications services recommended that the two utilities be fully integrated, but action was deferred out of respect for Cracknell who had managed the colony's telegraph system from 1861. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, Sydney, 1894, p. 1 & p. 2. The N.S.W. Postmaster General controlled the Postal and Electric Telegraph Department, established in February 1893, as well as the Money Order Office and the Government Savings Bank. See, *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1893*, Sydney, p. 201 & p. 202.

[2] The first telephone exchange in Australia was established in Melbourne in September 1880. See, Keith Munro, *"Have You Finished?" (The History of the Country Telephonists – especially those in the New England Tablelands)*, Armidale, self-published, 1989, p. 16.

[3] Chief Clerk James Dalgarno was appointed Secretary of the Postal Service, while Philip Walker, Deputy Superintendent of Telegraphs, was made Secretary of the Telegraph Service. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, p. 2.

[4] Previously, union membership had been confined to "the operating staff", or those officers employed in the central telegraph centres. In 1885 the telegraphists at these facilities founded the N.S.W.

membership rights to all official postmasters, postmistresses and postal assistants, restyling itself the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society.[5] By way of preparing for Federation in 1901, representatives of the post and telegraph unions from each of the six Australian colonies met in Sydney in October 1900 to form a federal body known as the Australian Commonwealth Post and Telegraph Officers' Association (A.C.P.T.O.A.).[6] Subsequent to the first intercolonial conference, members of the constituent unions chose Edward Kraegen, President of the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, for the position of General President. At the same time, the *Transmitter* was adopted as the A.C.P.T.O.A.'s official publication.[7]

In the following pages, I analyse the circumstances of female post and telegraph employees during the 1890s. The chapter examines the impact of the marriage bar instituted in 1895 and efforts to encourage 'synthetic turnover', the process discussed by Samuel Ross Cohn in his study of female employees of the British Post Office and the Great Western Railway.[8] To the extent that wives worked out of economic necessity, I note endeavours to enforce the ideology of Domestic Man, identified by Marilyn Lake and seconded by Desley Deacon, who provided for his family without recourse to female earnings.[9] My work also deals with staff reclassification and the declining economic and social standing of telegraphists – a phenomenon tied to efforts to redefine and delimit skill. From the early 1870s, Dr Andrew Garran, editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and advocate for the business model of employment,

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Operators' Society. The union changed its name to the N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Society four years later. See, 'Ourselves', *Transmitter*, vol. I, no. 1, 9 June 1891, p. 1.

[5] 'N.S.W. Postal & Electric Telegraph Society Rules', *Transmitter*, vol. IV, no. 9, 14 February 1895, p. 5.

[6] Gerald E. Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.: A Study of White Collar Public Service Unionism in the Commonwealth of Australia 1885–1922', Occasional Papers No. 2, Dept of Political Science, Research School of Social Science, Australian National University, Canberra, 1966, p. 20 & p. 21. Throughout the text Caiden refers to the 'A.C.P.T.A.', rather than the 'A.C.P.T.O.A'. See, *ibid.*, p. 3.

[7] John S. Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions: A History of the Telegraphist and Postal Clerk Unions of Australia*, Sydney, Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists, 1980, p. 92. Edward Kraegen held the office of President (Chairman), N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, and the position of General President, A.C.P.T.O.A., concurrently. See, *ibid.*, p. 351 & p. 352.

[8] Samuel Ross Cohn, 'Feminization of Clerical Labor in Great Britain, A Contrast of Two Large Clerical Employers: 1857–1937', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1985; & Keith Grint, 'Women and Equality: The Acquisition of Equal Pay in the Post Office 1870–1961', *Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 1, February 1988, p. 94.

[9] Domestic Man co-existed with the competing masculinism of the urban bushman fostered by city-based misogynists. See, Marilyn Lake, 'The Politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context', *Historical Studies*, vol. 22, no. 86, 1986, pp. 116–131; & Desley Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context: Conflicting masculinisms in the New South Wales Public Service Bill of 1895', in

had challenged the moral economy operating in craft-based unions, like the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, wherein all adult members were deemed to possess the same level of skill. Critical of union attempts to regulate the labour market, Garran argued that employers had the right to pay an individual according to his or her useable expertise.[10] He rejected the union tenet that labour was a form of capital with an intrinsic monetary value independent of market forces.[11] On another subject, I investigate mounting opposition to female supervisors within the department. Many contemporary feminists maintained that women should only be allowed to supervise other women, fearing the objectification of female managers by male subordinates.[12] Meanwhile, female officers in N.S.W. continued to make individual appeals to influential men, instead of taking collective action via the male-dominated union to overcome problems. Rosabeth Kanter observes that unions and other organisations established by men often repel women. She argues that the male 'homosociability' that leads to their creation frequently renders them intolerant of females.[13]

In this chapter I ask why official postmistresses and female telegraphists in N.S.W. – then the only female public servants on the permanent list in Australia to receive equal pay – did not take a more conspicuous role in the Victorian-led quest from 1900 for wage parity beyond Federation, given that they had most to lose if the initiative failed.[14] These officers – including their most senior representative – willingly passed responsibility for the equal pay campaign to their male peers. The "man-woman" revealed in Deborah Sheppard and Meta Zimmeck's work helps to explain such behaviour. According to this paradoxical concept, a woman is required to behave like a man, but not be a man, remaining a woman while not behaving like one. Zimmeck

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Susan Magarey (ed.) *et al.*, *Debutante nation: Feminism contests the 1890s*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1993, p. 50, p. 57 & p. 58.

[10] Ben Maddison, 'From "Moral Economy" to "Political Economy" in New South Wales, 1870–1900', *Labour History*, no. 75, November 1998, p. 90, p. 98, p. 100 & p. 102.

[11] Garran maintained that many tasks performed by so-called craftsmen could be undertaken by individuals without their alleged expertise. See, *ibid.*, p. 93.

[12] Ellen Jordan, 'The Lady Clerks at the Prudential: The Beginning of Vertical Segregation by Sex in Clerical Work in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Gender & History*, vol. 8, no. 1, April 1996, p. 76 & p. 77.

[13] Kanter uses the term, homosexuality, when referring to homosociability. See, Rosabeth Kanter cited in Anne Witz and Mike Savage, 'The gender of organizations', in Mike Savage and Anne Witz (eds), *Gender and Bureaucracy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1992, p. 15 & p. 16.

[14] Kate Deverall notes that the competing demands of home life prevented many female public school teachers in N.S.W. from actively pursuing their wage claims. See, Kate Deverall, 'A Bid for Affirmative Action: Annie Golding and the New South Wales Public School Teachers' Association, 1900–15', *Labour History*, no. 77, November 1999, p. 120.

suggests that the successful female employee often assumes the character of the man-woman, deferring to male co-workers, where necessary, in order to avoid sexualisation and to appease men who might be threatened by her.[15] By leaving their male colleagues to prosecute the case for wage parity, Post Office women in N.S.W. mobilised potentially hostile men to work on their behalf. The same employees arguably exploited the system of objectified influence central to Michel Foucault's power-from-below model.[16] In her study of women in the British Post Office, Zimmeck notes that female deference and sexualised favour went hand in hand.[17]

The path to wage equality under the Commonwealth was littered with obstacles. At the time many in the community opted for equity rather than equality, the former an acceptable, albeit lesser, alternative to the latter. Carole Pateman points to constant tension in Australian history between equity and equality.[18] Equity requires that unfairness be remedied, but, unlike equality, does not call for gender and social structures to be destroyed.[19] Louisa Dunkley, Vice-President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association, argued the case for wage parity on the premise that women were equal, but different, to men – a position taken by many Australian feminists at the time. However, because of the need to prove that females had comparable capabilities to males, and the use by critics of a hypothetical "average" worker of either sex as a yardstick, proponents of equal pay under the Commonwealth often insisted that women were the same as men, only different. This seemingly contradictory, dichotomous notion sparked disagreement between female

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[15] Deborah Sheppard and Meta Zimmeck cited in Witz and Savage, 'The gender of organizations', p. 53; & Meta Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure: women, bureaucracy and the post office 1870–1920', in Savage and Witz, *Gender and Bureaucracy*, p. 78. Sheppard notes that successful women need to be feminine in appearance and presentation, but businesslike in manner. See, Witz and Savage, 'The gender of organizations', p. 53. Zimmeck cites Maria Constance Smith, Superintendent of female staff in the Savings Bank Department of the British Post Office, as an example of the man-woman. Senior management described her as a wonderful 'man of business'. Miss Smith avoided public occasions so as not to draw attention to herself and to ensure that her male colleagues monopolised the 'limelight'. See, Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure', p. 78 & endnote 46, p. 91.

[16] Michel Foucault cited in Rosemary Pringle, 'Destabilising patriarchy', in Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian feminisms*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 207; & Witz and Savage, 'The gender of organizations', p. 27 & p. 28.

[17] Meta Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls: The Expansion of Clerical Work for Women, 1850–1914', in Angela V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800–1918*, Oxford, 1986, p. 165 & p. 166.

[18] Carole Pateman, 'The Concept of Equity', in Patrick N. Troy (ed.), *A Just Society?: Essays on Equity in Australia*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1981, p. 21.

[19] Stuart Macintyre, 'Equity in Australian History', in *ibid.*, p. 39.

activists and the authorities over the coming decade.[20] During that period many feminists tried to portray domestic life as a viable alternative to paid work, while attempting to reform gender relationships. Barbara Caine notes a divide between the feminist quest for political and economic equality, and the less-celebrated campaign for domestic, personal and sexual fulfillment, the former often disguising the latter.[21] Anna Yeatman observes that females must first recognise their oppression before they can act collectively to improve their lot. In the case of the N.S.W. Post Office women, their relative advantage *vis-a-vis* their Victorian counterparts may have accounted in part for their failure to become politicised.[22] In investigating their detachment from the equal pay campaign, I draw heavily on the thoughts of female Post Office staff in Victoria and South Australia, given the relative dearth of information on the motives of the N.S.W. women.[23]

For many female activists, equality in employment, the vote, and the female condition were inextricably linked. Suffragists Vida Goldstein and Rose Scott, foundation secretary of the Womanhood Suffrage League of N.S.W. (established in 1891), realised that the lack of paid work and economic dependency diminished women's claim to the franchise and contributed to a power differential in their social and sexual relationships with men. According to Goldstein and Scott, the situation gave rise to abusive husbands, unwanted pregnancies and a heightened risk of venereal disease.[24] A close adherent to the concept of maternal citizenship, Rose Scott believed that gender equality in the workplace, together with the female franchise, were essential if

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[20] For reference to the "average" worker, see, for example, 'Correspondence', 'Equal Pay', letter to the Editor from 'One Interested', Adelaide, 6 January 1902,' *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 9, 17 January 1902, p. 23; & 'Correspondence', 'Female Operators, An Answer to "Inconnue"', letter to the Editor from 'Still Waiting', Western Australia, 28 February 1902', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 11, 18 March 1902, p. 22. Much of the heat generated by bids for gender equality discipates when equal is substituted for same. See, Beverley Kingston, 'Women and Equity in Australia', in Troy (ed.), *A Just Society?*, p. 165. Carol Bacchi argues that the same/different divide is not necessarily irreconcilable in forcing either/or choices. See, Carol Lee Bacchi, *Same difference: Feminism and sexual difference*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1990, p. xiii, p. 4 & p. 7.

[21] Barbara Caine, 'Women's studies, feminist traditions and the problem of history', in Caine and Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian feminisms*, p. 5 & p. 6.

[22] Anna Yeatman, 'Interlocking oppressions', in *ibid.*, p. 45.

[23] The historical record contains little information regarding the attitude of N.S.W. women to the campaign for equal pay under the federal government. What material exists is restricted to brief items in the *Transmitter* and oblique references in departmental correspondence.

[24] Judith A. Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1994, p. 95, p. 96 & p. 113. Members of the Victorian Lady Teachers' Association, which was formed in 1884 to promote equal pay, also discerned a link between employment inequality and the vote. See, Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 43.

women's innate morality, good sense and compassion for others were to have a beneficial impact on Australian economic, political and social life.[25]

Opposition to Working Wives

From the early 1890s, married women working in the N.S.W. postal and telecommunications utilities were threatened with redundancy in the face of mounting opposition to patronage and a decline in revenue. Reporting on the government sector in 1890, the Civil Service Board criticised the arbitrary appointment of female postal assistants and other temporary employees outside of its control. Over time, senior bureaucrats had recruited workers to clear up outstanding work, and had kept them on after the backlog had been removed, adding to an already inflated salary bill. In its 1891 report, the Board complained that temporaries often lacked demonstrable merit and were engaged without regard to age and qualifications, whereas probationers had to be under 25 and possess appropriate credentials.[26] From 1892 Head Office began to remove married women from postal assistant positions to offset the losses in telegraphic earnings caused by the onset of depression.[27] In September 1893 Helen Mulligan, wife of the post and telegraph master at Tumut, was dismissed, forcing her husband to reduce his life insurance cover and assign the office cleaning to his male staff. Mrs Mulligan had been hired to compensate her spouse for the high cost of living in the remote mountain community.[28] In December 1893 the department retrenched Alice Hayes, Postal Assistant at Sofala, after 12 years' service, even though her unemployment would be "seriously felt" in her family of ten.[29]

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[25] *ibid.*, p. 79, p. 97, p. 112 & p. 114.
[26] *Report of the Civil Service Board of New South Wales, for the Year 1890*, Sydney, 1891, p. 2; & *Report of the Civil Service Board of New South Wales, for the Year 1891*, Sydney, 1892, p. 2.
[27] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1892*, Sydney, 1893, p. 2. Wives of post and telegraph masters were removed from office as early as 1889 after a drop in government receipts due to the abolition of crown land leases and sales.
[28] Letter from C. T. Mulligan, Pmr, P.O., Tumut, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 27 October 1893, SP32, Tumut, fol. 30 OCT 93/B 10948; report by A. Tucker, P.I., 15 September 1893, *ibid.*; & note signed by Stephen Lambton, Sec., 18 September 1893, *ibid.* The wives of previous post and telegraph masters at Tumut had been engaged for similar economic reasons. See, letter from J. Bennett, Pmr, P.O., Tumut, to Sec., Sydney G.P.O., 21 January 1891, *ibid.*, fol. 22 JAN 91/B 965.
[29] Letter from Alice Hayes, P.O., Sofala, to Dep. P.M.G., 18 April 1894, SP32, Sofala.

The Public Service Act passed in December 1895 had a disproportionate impact on married women. Its genesis can be traced to the electoral victory of the Free Trade party led by George Reid that won office largely on the back of his pledge to trim public sector overheads by 200,000 pounds through retrenchments, salary reductions and improved management.[30] The Royal Commission appointed in 1894 to examine the N.S.W. Public Service lent weight to the movement for financial reform. The investigative body was established mainly in response to pressure for change from the telegraphists' society and from other unions hostile to influence and the costly administration of capricious politicians. The Commissioners delivered their report in 1895. They recommended the abolition of patronage under the law and the creation of a politically independent board of commissioners in the interest of economy and efficiency.[31] Of the 204 departmental employees dismissed as of 31 July 1896 under the ensuing legislation, 49 were married women, consisting of four official post and telegraph mistresses and 45 temporary postal assistants.[32] The balance included 15 official post and telegraph masters, 27 male postal assistants, 46 male telegraphists and 37 male clerks.[33] Reporting on the retrenchments for the *Transmitter*, "Circuit" referred of the anxiety among officers left to pore over an updated staff list in the absence of a separate schedule of forced resignations. The spectre was "one of the most painful scenes I have witnessed … It was like hunting through a list of survivors of a great shipwreck on board on which was one's nearest and dearest".[34] Whereas official post and telegraph mistresses made redundant were generally entitled to superannuation benefits like their male peers, female postal assistants on the

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[30] Louise Thornthwaite, 'Regulating State Employment: the Origins and Development of Public Sector Appeal Systems in N.S.W., 1880–1980', *Labour History*, no. 68, May 1995, p. 135; & Colin A. Hughes and B. D. Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890–1964*, Canberra, Australian National U.P., 1968, p. 432 & p. 433.

[31] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 24; & Desley Deacon, *Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers 1830–1930*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1989, p. 120.

[32] A total of six official post and telegraph mistresses left the public service at that time.Two of the women had attained maximum retirement age. The married post and telegraph mistresses compelled to resign were: Ellen Cross, Leichhardt; Lizzie Ferris, Waverley; Louisa Hiley, Bondi; and Jane Peters, Hamilton. See, *Special Gazette under the Public Service Act of 1895*, Sydney, 30 July 1896, copy in Conduct, Training & Other Employment History Register, 1880 to 1900, p. 54.

[33] 'Public Service Board's Report', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 1. While 8% of permanent officers were dismissed, 98% of temporary workers lost their jobs. See, Barbara Page, 'Public service management and political control: the 1917–1918 Mason Allard inquiry and the Public Service Board of New South Wales', in J. J. Eddy and J. R. Nethercote (eds), *From Colony to Coloniser: Studies in Australian Administrative History*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1987, p. 151.

[34] 'Roundabout Mems By Circuit', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 17.

temporary list were ineligible for any form of state compensation.[35] A statutory process of discrimination had replaced arbitrary opposition to female employees.

The Public Service Board used the 1895 legislation to rid the public sector of women with husbands in government positions. As a Board member, Government Statistician Timothy Coghlan – who claimed to have drafted the statute – saw to it that married women resigned and were thereafter precluded from appointment to the Clerical and Professional Divisions. He expelled all working wives despite a compromise clause carried by Premier Reid and the Labor Party that allowed for the retention of married female teachers and other women with husbands in public sector jobs, provided the Board deemed their tenure to be in the colony's interest.[36] Also, under Coghlan, wives were dismissed regardless of an understanding among politicians that the law would not be applied retrospectively. In this respect the sackings were contrary to the objectives of the Reid administration, which aimed to provide females with greater employment opportunities.[37] Henceforth, married women were excluded from the government workforce by dint of parliamentary *and* bureaucratic will.

Timothy Coghlan maintained that working wives were largely supported by husbands and simply worked for 'pocket money'. Prepared to labour for a pittance, they drove down the earnings of men and single women, while eroding the living standard of the whole community.[38] Wedded to the craft-union ideology of the male provider, Coghlan contended that a high ratio of male to female employees was a clear indication of worker and economic prosperity, applauding any decline in the female working population.[39] His outlook was informed by increasing regard in the working class for the middle-class concept of separate spheres, whereby married women lived productive lives at home given over to the cultivation of an environment conducive to

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[35] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 88 & p. 89.
[36] Timothy Coghlan held the post of Public Service Commissioner from 1896 to 1900. See, Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context', pp. 55–58; & Claire McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', M.A. Thesis, Dept of History, School of Humanities, La Trobe University, April 1984, p. 57, p. 74 & p. 76.
[37] Coghlan's actions were at odds with the express wishes of Premier George Reid who was anxious to accommodate working women. See, Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context', p. 57.
[38] Anne O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison: The Poor in New South Wales 1880–1918*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1988, p. 96, p. 131 & p. 141; & Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 145.
[39] Katrina Alford, 'Colonial Women's Employment as seen by Nineteenth-Century Statisticians and Twentieth-Century Economic Historians', *Labour History*, no. 65, November 1993, p. 5.

the physical and moral wellbeing of their families.[40] Put simply, working wives had to return to the hearth for the sake of wider society.

A number of politicians were anxious to purge the public service of married women given the negative effect of the economic downturn on male livelihoods. Originating in the substantial losses incurred by British investors in Argentina in July and August of 1890, the depression precipitated the failure of Barings Bank in London and prompted British businessmen to withdraw their funds from Australian lending institutions. The consequent credit squeeze caused the speculation-ridden Melbourne and Sydney property markets to collapse over the next two years, contributing to large-scale unemployment and underemployment.[41] Parliamentary debate over the new Public Service Bill reflected concern among politicians that working wives were prospering while jobless men languished. John McElhone, Free Trade member for Fitzroy, claimed that married women in the public sector with husbands in government service were denying many family men a living. He cited Lizzie Ferris, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Waverley on 218 pounds a year, whose spouse was first clerk in the Post Office accounts branch, and Ellen Cross, officer-in-charge at Leichhardt on 180 pounds p.a., whose husband held a position in the government railways.[42] In April 1895 Edward Clark, Free Trade member for Willoughby, complained in writing to the Postmaster-General that former widow Ada Ford (previously Hambly) continued to draw a salary as Willoughby's post and telegraph mistress, despite her remarriage in August 1892. Clark observed that her husband had a job paying 250 pounds annually and demanded her dismissal, pointing to "the very great number of eligible unemployed male [*sic*] and female [*sic*] offering themselves

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[40] Patricia Grimshaw and Graham Willett, 'Women's history and family history: an exploration of colonial family structure', in Norma Grieve and Patricia Grimshaw (eds), *Australian Women: Feminist Perspectives*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1981, p. 132, p. 145, p. 149 & p. 150; & Jane Humphries, 'Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family', in Alice H. Amsden (ed.), *The Economics of Women and Work*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, pp. 140–165.

[41] In N.S.W., the economic situation deteriorated when the Federal Bank suspended payments in January 1893 and the Commercial Bank of Australia closed its doors in April 1893. The colonies' heavy dependence on British capital, an imbalance between demand and supply in the pastoral and building sectors, and an over-reliance on government for jobs exacerbated the depression. See, O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, p. 67. Limited relief work and poor harvests added to unemployment. See, Bruce Scates, 'A Struggle for survival: unemployment and the unemployed agitation in late nineteenth-century Melbourne', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 94, April 1990, p. 43 & p. 44.

[42] Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context', p. 53.

to the Dept".[43] As far as some parliamentarians were concerned, the employment of wives was unconscionable.

Those politicians and senior public servants seeking to persuade men to take financial and moral responsibility for their families endorsed the marriage bar. In recent years the authorities had become increasingly alarmed by the failure of many males to support their kin following reports of men deserting families for the goldfields in Western Australia, or living off the earnings of wives engaged in factory work. In the circumstances, critics looked to counter the concept of the independent, hedonistic, "urban bushman" popularised by the *Bulletin* magazine.[44] To encourage men to take their family commitments seriously, the postal department issued a regulation in 1892 prohibiting married women from applying for offices with residences attached.[45] Politicians worried by a perceived increase in desertions since the onset of the depression, and the attendant burden on charities and the state, saw the ban and the ensuing marriage bar as a way of compelling men to commit themselves to their kin's welfare.[46] During the debate on the Public Service Bill, Jacob Garrard, Free Trade member for Sherbrooke, argued that wives should be removed from government posts to prevent "so-called men" from living off their wages.[47] Samuel Whiddon, Free Trade member for Sydney (Cook Division), opined that no man should take a wife if he was unwilling to support her.[48] Edward Clark's argument for the dismissal of Ada Ford, Willoughby's post and telegraph mistress, focused on her husband's alleged failure to take financial responsibility for her. Clark protested that Ford enjoyed "luxury's [*sic*] provided by his wife", citing her salary, free accommodation worth between 65 and 70 pounds p.a., and her cleaning, fuel and lighting allowances. He referred to a horse, "supplied and fed by the Dept", that was purportedly used by Ford to commute to and from work each day. In the circumstances Clark insisted that the department's ban on the appointment of wives to offices with residential quarters be

[43] Letter from Edward M. Clark, Legislative Assembly, to P.M.G, 4 April 1895, SP32, Willoughby, fol. 4 APR 95/B 3479.
[44] Lake, 'The politics of respectability', pp. 8–15. Indolent men were seen to encourage role reversal and threaten male identity as females assumed responsibility for household income. See, Sue Rowley, 'Things a bushwoman cannot do', in Magarey (ed.) *et al.*, *Debutante nation*, p. 194 & p. 195.
[45] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 149.
[46] Rowley, 'Things a bushwoman cannot do', p. 189.
[47] Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context ', p. 52.
[48] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 76.

enforced.[49] Married women found themselves at the centre of an exercise in social engineering.

That aside, the administration saw fit to remove wives from the government payroll in an effort to address the alleged failure of married women to embrace motherhood. Alarmed by a relative decline in population growth from the early 1890s, the authorities accused married middle-class women of limiting their fertility with the aid of birth-control techniques and contraceptives. Some women had chosen not to have large families in light of evidence that multiple pregnancies compromised the health of mothers and prevented them from giving their children's development their full attention.[50] Others had elected to have fewer offspring for economic reasons.[51] By the 1880s books such as Annie Besant's, *The Law of Population*, which dealt with reproduction, sexuality and relatively cheap contraceptives, had enhanced the ability of women to regulate their fertility.[52] The fear of 'race suicide' that led to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, a statute designed to curb the southern advance of the 'Asian horde', fuelled criticism in government of married women who practised birth control.[53] Increasingly, the state claimed an interest in women's bodies.

The Public Service Bill's ban on married women did not meet with universal political support. Representing rural interests, William Lyne, Protectionist member for Hume, and Edward W. O'Sullivan, Protectionist member for Queanbeyan, argued in parliament that women should be allowed to provide for their families, irrespective of their marital state.[54] In country areas female earnings boosted the family economy. At the time rural businesses were failing due to the depressed agricultural market, and

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[49] Letter from Edward Clark, Legislative Assembly, Sydney, to P.M.G., 20 April 1895, SP32, Willoughby, fol. 30 APR 95/B 4239.

[50] In the 1880s families had an average of six children; by 1910 the number had halved. Disquiet surrounding reduced fecundity culminated in the 1903/04 Royal Commission into Decline of the Birthrate. The Commissioners reported that many middle-class women were resorting to contraception, putting personal interest before family. See, Alison Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom: Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life*, Melbourne, Cambridge U.P., 1997, p. 7, p. 12 & p. 39.

[51] By the early 1900s, some working-class women had begun to regulate their fertility. See, Ellen McEwen, 'Family history in Australia: some observations on a new field', in Patricia Grimshaw (ed.) *et al.*, *Families in Colonial Australia*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1985, p. 189.

[52] Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom*, pp. 67–69.

[53] O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, p. 104. Fear of 'race suicide' was sustained by the increased incidence of family breakdown and by moves to liberalise divorce laws. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 133. Racial oblivion aside, declining population growth appeared to threaten the country's ability to wage war, to compete diplomatically, and to trade effectively. See, Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom*, p. 7.

[54] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 149.

selectors were abandoning impoverished holdings.[55] Concerned for 'fair play', Edward O'Sullivan observed: "A woman should not be compelled to leave the service when she gets married any more than a man should be". Similarly, Albert Piddington, Free Trade member for Tamworth, asserted that the embargo on working wives was contrary to the spirit of meritocracy in discriminating against a significant proportion of the population, adding that it would render women financially dependent and vulnerable to bad marriages.[56] While ostensibly intended to benefit all, the ban was seen to disadvantage an important minority.

Assistance to Single Women and Widows

On a more positive note, the statutory marriage bar was designed to help needy women find public sector employment by facilitating the departure of females about to be wed. A representative of the new, educated middle class, Timothy Coghlan sought to accommodate the unmarried daughters and widows of urban professionals and civil servants. Their fathers and husbands were, or had been, members of his natural constituency, and many had fallen victim to unemployment or financial ruin in the wake of the depression. By way of the 1895 law, Coghlan also tried to assist the single daughters of failed selectors, rural businessmen and respectable tradesmen who could ill afford to keep unmarried offspring at home.[57] The contraction of the marriage market due to the economic downturn rendered many of these women 'superfluous', with more men deferring or rejecting matrimony.[58] From the early 1890s, feminists had lobbied Coghlan to cater for spinsters and widows in need of paid work. Petitioners included Rose Scott and Louisa Lawson, editor of the *Dawn* newspaper, both of whom had been politicised by the failure of men to properly

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[55] Frank Cotton M.P. praised those women able to manage paid work and domestic chores concurrently. See, Deacon, Reorganising the masculinist context', p. 52 & p. 53; & McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', pp. 74–76. The British Postmaster-General, James Ferguson, queried the logic of the marriage bar, observing that private employers were unlikely to dismiss efficient servants who wed. See, M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office since 1840*, London, The Athlone Press, 1985, p. 220.

[56] *Parliamentary Documents*, 1895, p. 1642, p. 1643, p. 1650, pp. 1821–1829, & pp. 1877–1888; & Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 145 & p. 146. The *Sydney Morning Herald* opposed the marriage bar, describing it as 'unjust and absurd'. See, Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context', p. 52 & p. 53.

[57] *ibid*., p. 56 & p. 57.

[58] Raelene Frances, *The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Sydney, Cambridge U.P., 1993, p. 19.

provide for their womenfolk.[59] By ridding government of working wives, Coghlan was seen to be doing other women a service.

In seeking to manipulate the female labour market, Timothy Coghlan had precedence on his side.[60] In Victoria the parliament had set out to provide for single women in financial distress through the Public Service Act of 1883, which prohibited wives from holding government posts.[61] Meanwhile, in Britain, the marriage bar introduced in 1874 to some sections of the civil service had penetrated the entire organisation by 1894. Under the regulations women who left to be wed were granted a "dowry" to assist them in married life, subject to the discretion of the department head.[62]

As an exercise in 'synthetic turnover', the ban on married women produced variable results. In his study of women employed by the British Post Office and the Great Western Railway, Samuel Ross Cohn notes that the prohibition on working wives was designed to reduce overheads by accelerating the movement of staff in areas where the work was labour-intensive, the training minimal, and where increment-based salaries and pensions added to labour costs over time. The process of synthetic turnover was also intended to limit the expense associated with confinements and family commitments, while minimising discontent among single women intent on promotion. If not entirely successful in Britain, the marriage bar in N.S.W. did provide some single women with a living.[63] When Louisa Hiley, Bondi's post and telegraph mistress, resigned in July 1896, her spinster daughter Julia stepped into the

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[59] A number of middle-class women followed paid work owing to a change in the definition of 'manliness' that saw brothers refuse to support single sisters. A "working-class" woman, Louisa Lawson, formerly "assistant" to her husband, Postmaster at Eurunderie, left her spouse in 1883 mainly because of his failure to properly provide for her. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 154 & p. 155.

[60] As an impartial "expert" from the new professional middle class, Coghlan exercised considerable influence over politicians and senior bureaucrats in the early 1890s – a period marked by political instability and public-sector militancy. See, Ben Maddison, '"The Day of the Just Reasoner": T. A. Coghlan and the Labour Public Sphere in Late Nineteenth Century Australia', *Labour History*, no. 77, November 1999, p. 13, p. 16 & p. 17.

[61] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 13. In 1894 married and single female teachers over 50, who had escaped the ban, were retrenched in response to the deepening economic crisis. Previously, wives were allowed to teach in those state schools where their husbands also taught. See, Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth–Century Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1996, pp. 168–170.

[62] Grint, 'Women and Equality', p. 96 & p. 97; & Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls', p. 162.

[63] Cohn, 'Feminization of Clerical Labor in Great Britain', pp. 91–115; Lee Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work: Middle-Class Working Women in England and Wales*, Newton Abbot, David and Charles, 1973, p. 178; & Jordan, 'The Lady Clerks at the Prudential', p. 69. Grint suggests that the

breach.[64] Similarly, when Jane Peters, Hamilton's post and telegraph mistress, left that same month, her single daughter of the same name took her place.[65] That said, concern for the male wage tended to subvert the purpose of the ban. Rather than select a spinster to replace Lizzie Ferris, Waverley's married post and telegraph mistress, the department filled the vacancy with a man. Her replacement commanded an annual salary of 240 pounds – 22 pounds more than his predecessor received to perform the same duties.[66] (Generally, staff who moved to lower-grade offices did not suffer a wage cut). At the same time, Head Office exchanged Ellen Cross, Leichhardt's married officer-in-charge on 180 pounds p.a., for a male on 220 pounds p.a.[67] In his study of female workers in the British Post Office, Keith Grint notes that the marriage bar had little impact on the more senior women (telegraphists and clerks), whereas those in junior positions (telephonists and typists) tended to yield to synthetic turnover, lower pay offering less incentive to stay on.[68] Similar differences may be discerned among females in the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department, irrespective of the small sample and the fact that, unlike their British counterparts, women who left the colonial public service to marry did not receive a gratuity.[69] In the six years, 1896 to 1901 inclusive, two of the 37 single post and telegraph mistresses and female telegraphists remaining in N.S.W. resigned voluntarily, possibly to be married. In neither case were women recruited to take their place. Meanwhile, 11 of the 115 single female telephonists in N.S.W. departed the service, some presumably to wed. In every instance they were replaced by women.[70]

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marriage bar in Britain was first intended to facilitate economies through rapid staff turnover, and only incidentally designed to benefit single women. See, Grint, 'Women and Equality', p. 96 & p. 97.

[64] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Julia Hiley as P. & T. Ms, 1 August 1896, SP32, Bondi, fol. 3 AUG 96/B 7279.

[65] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Jane Peters as P. & T. Ms, 1 August 1896, SP32, Hamilton.

[66] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1895*, Sydney, 1896, p. 55; & *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1896*, Sydney, 1897, p. 58.

[67] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1895*, p. 40; & *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1896*, p. 43.

[68] Female clerks opposed the marriage ban on the grounds that it disadvantaged them financially. Keith Grint cited in Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls', p. 168; & Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work*, p. 78. Cohn notes that the impact of the marriage bar differed between organisations. While stimulating synthetic turnover, the ban did not induce many women in the British Post Office to leave. In the Great Western Railway Company, several women left to be married and were replaced by single females. The difference in response to the ban can be partly attributed to the superior entitlements enjoyed by government employees. See, Cohn, 'Feminization of Clerical Labor in Great Britain', pp. 91–115.

[69] 'Women's Column (By "Inconnue")', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 11, 16 April 1901, p. 5.

[70] The two single post and telegraph mistresses to resign were: Miss A. E. V. E. Bulfin at Newport on 23 September 1898; and Miss E. M. Bush at Gresford on 17 February 1900. See, Conduct, Training & Other Employment History Register, 1880 to 1900, p. 67 & p. 75. Between 1896 and 1901, three official post and telegraph mistresses and one female official assistant retired on a pension. See,

In Australia a core of senior women remained on the government payroll, the prospect of marriage notwithstanding. They included Minnie Knott, Glebe's post and telegraph mistress, who accumulated 30 years of service before retiring on a pension in 1906, and Lily Isaac, officer-in-charge at Dulwich Hill, who had been a departmental employee for 22 years when she resigned in 1908 under similar circumstances.[71] In Victoria single female telegraphists typically refused to depart the service, contributing to the decision to suspend their yearly increments. In a speech to parliament in October 1893, Postmaster-General John Gavin Duffy lamented their reluctance to wed: 'What a pity some of them do not get married; a number of them are charming enough too, fine cultural young ladies, (who) would make model wives'.[72] Less-than-completely successful, the marriage bar failed to take account of the career woman.

Opposition to all Women

Despite its charter to assist spinsters in financial distress, the Public Service Board was strongly biased against single women. For three years from 1896 to 1899, it banned them from sitting the Clerical Division examination, thereby placing a ceiling on the number of official post and telegraph mistresses and female telegraphists. In defence of its actions, the Board alleged that existing facilities did not allow for males and females in the same room.[73] In any event, while he tried to cater for them, Board member Timothy Coghlan believed that single women, along with working wives, undermined the male wage and lowered the standard of living for all, hence the need

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Commonwealth of Australia – Return of Officers, Department of Postmaster General – New South Wales, 1901, pp. 31–58 & pp. 77–88. During the period the N.S.W. department also had one female junior clerk, one female mail sorter, a matron, one assistant matron, and a shorthand typist – too small a sample to be of statistical significance. See, *ibid.*, p. 37, p. 39 & p. 44.

[71] Memo from Sec. of Public Service Commissioner, 20 June 1906, SP32, Glebe, fol. B 06/4989; *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1887*, Sydney, 1888, p. 158; John Olsen, 'Dulwich Hill Post Office History', Historical Section, P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, June 1973, p. 9 & p. 11; & *New South Wales Blue Book for the Year 1887*, p. 162. In Minnie Knott's case, service was not continuous. See, *Public Service Inquiry Commission (Report of, upon General Post Office, Money Order Office, and the Electric Telegraph Department, with Appendix Thereto)*, N.S.W. Legislative Assembly, Sydney, November 1890, p. 37 & footnote p. 39.

[72] Duffy attributed the suspension of increments to the women's refusal to marry and leave the service. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 99.

[73] The exclusion of women from the Clerical Division was contrary to the spirit of the Public Service Act of 1895, which provided for the admission of single females to government positions after passing an appropriate examination. See, Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context', p. 51.

to regulate their access to government positions.[74] His negative attitude towards spinsters was shaped by concern for the demography of the Western World. In Australia, Britain and the United States, the authorities disapproved of women who appeared to favour study and a career over matrimony and family. Many medical experts believed that female graduates who spent hours reading compromised their reproductive potential and their physical and mental health.[75] Those women who promoted voluntary spinsterhood and economic independence in preference to the 'sex slavery' of marriage added to the apparent threat to population growth and the social status *quo*.[76] In truth, many working women had no choice in the matter, given the shortage of potential partners. During the depression thousands of spinsters found themselves outside the marriage market because of male underemployment, especially in the building industry, which was slow to recover from the downturn.[77] Largely indifferent to reality, the Public Service Board expected single women to put the national interest before personal sovereignty, and matrimony before a career.

Anxiety surrounding the growing number of women engaged in paid work outside the government sector prompted efforts to restrict openings for married and single women in the public service. In the years 1891 to 1901, the workforce participation rate for females *vis-a-vis* males increased from 36.5% to 40.7%.[78] The perceived threat to male earnings was compounded by the depression, which saw large numbers of females enter the labour market in response to male unemployment and underemployment.[79] The exodus of jobless men to the goldfields in Western Australia, leaving wives and single daughters to support families on their own, fuelled the phenomenon. In manufacturing industry, fear of cheap female labour grew with

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[74] Despite his objections to female labour, Coghlan found jobs for women in the Government Statistician's Office. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 173.
[75] On average, female graduates in N.S.W. married at the then advanced age of 29, 25% of them remaining childless. See, Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom*, p. 60 & pp. 63–65.
[76] Kate Cornell challenged the conjugal rights of married men, seeing them as a form of oppression. See, Katie Holmes, '"Spinsters Indispensable": Feminists, Single Women and the Critique of Marriage, 1890–1920', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 110, April 1998, p. 74 & p. 75.
[77] Many women also failed to marry owing to higher mortality rates among males, uneven patterns of immigration, and a lack of marketable 'charms'. See, Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom*, p. 76.
[78] Frances, *The Politics of Work*, p. 19. By 1901 almost 70% of single women, or 40% of all females aged between 15 and 40, were engaged in paid work. See, Patricia Grimshaw, '"Man's Own Country": women in colonial Australian history', in Grimshaw (ed.) *et al.*, *Families in Colonial Australia*, p. 199.
[79] Male underemployment was especially common in the building industry, with daily fluctuations in the demand for labour. See, Scates, 'A Struggle for survival', p. 47.

the perception that women were being hired before men.[80] In offices, the introduction of new equipment, starting with the typewriter from the late 1870s, and followed by calculating machines in the 1880s, ushered in a range of "female" occupations such as steno-typist and bookkeeper.[81] Between 1881 and 1911, the proportion of female to male clerical workers in Australia rose from 3% to almost a third.[82] Convinced that a high percentage of working women repelled foreign investment, Timothy Coghlan believed that statistics could be used to attract international finance by showing that the economy was of sufficient strength so as not to require female labour. Under his direction past censuses were revised by dividing the population into male breadwinners and jobless dependants. The resulting figures highlighted the "progress" of N.S.W. and reduced working women to statistical non-entities.[83] In short, the high rate of female employment had to be reversed both in fact and on paper.

The move to limit job vacancies for women in government departments, irrespective of their marital status, took place in the context of mounting opposition to nepotism. Increasingly committed to the cause of meritocracy, politicians and senior bureaucrats came to regard post-office families as self-interested, inequitable and inefficient. In March 1891 Postal Inspector George Unwin declined a request from Vickers Moyse, former Inspector, now Postmaster at Redfern, for his daughter, Elizabeth, to be made his assistant. He noted that her sister, Mary, was already paid to help their father.[84] For a few years prior to the Public Service Act of 1895, Headquarters had begun to view the postal duties undertaken by the wives of post and telegraph masters as an extension of their domestic responsibilities, and therefore tasks to be performed without payment. In September 1893 Postal Inspector Alexander Tucker reported on the removal of Helen Mulligan, wife of Tumut's post and telegraph master, from the payroll. He argued that she ought to be helping her husband free of charge like other women in her situation, especially given the "superior household accommodation"

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[80] While absolute numbers of female factory hands rose in the 1890s, the relative percentage of female manufacturing employees in the workforce remained stable. See, Frances, *The Politics of Work*, p. 65.
[81] Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work*, p. 144.
[82] Melanie Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce in the Twentieth Century', *Labour History*, no. 63, November 1992, pp. 73–76.
[83] Coghlan estimated that the female workforce participation rate from 1871 to 1901 was around 24% to 29%. See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, pp. 135–139; & T. A. Coghlan, 'The Employment of Women', in *General Report on the Eleventh Census of New South Wales*, Sydney, 1894, pp. 276–279.

provided.[85] Like other men in his position, Charles Mulligan protested unsuccessfully against his wife's dismissal, proposing that his male telegraphist be transferred to Kiandra rather than lose the additional income.[86]

Although not formally opposed to female officers, the male-dominated N.S.W. Electric Telegraph Society took a less-than-sympathetic view of working women. In the November 1894 issue of the *Transmitter*, editor Charles Fry referred to the alleged biological shortcomings of females, citing a report by the French postal authorities. It revealed that women cost more to hire than men due to frequent illnesses and an inability to manage hefty workloads.[87] Concerned for the livelihood of males in a depressed economy, the union leadership implied that a woman's proper role was that of a housebound spouse with a breadwinner husband. Reporting on the marriage in June 1894 of Rosa Gibbes, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Clarence Town, to Frank Whysall, Telegraph Master at Broken Hill, Fry observed that the bride "entered into a life long contract to perform, not telegraphic duties, but the duties … of a telegraph master's wife".[88] As a corollary of its interest in female dependency, the Society insisted that husbands properly provide for their partners. At the union's monthly meeting in July 1894, the membership resolved to inform the Postmaster-General that "a certain postmistress" (possibly Rosa Gibbes) had married since the 1892 regulation was issued prohibiting wives from holding offices with residential quarters.[89] From the Society's perspective, postal and telegraphic work was better left to males.

Youths Given Priority

Because of the premium placed on the male wage, married women were expected to yield to youths with a working life ahead of them. With an eye to their future,

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[84] Letter from V. Moyse, Pmr, Redfern, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 6 March 1891, SP32, Redfern, fol. 11 MAR 91/B 3124. Inspector Unwin opined: "I do not think three of one family a desirable arrangement in one office". See, report under by G. P. Unwin, P.I., 13 March 1891, *ibid.*

[85] Report by A. Tucker, P.I., 15 September 1893, SP32, Tumut; & note signed by Stephen Lambton, 18 September 1893, *ibid.* In January 1891 Chief Clerk James Dalgarno rejected a request from James Wakely, officer-in-charge at Morpeth, to employ his wife, suggesting that "a stranger" would be preferable. See, letter from James Wakely, Pmr, P.O., Morpeth, to Sec., G.P.O., 6 January 1891, SP32, Morpeth, fol. 7 JAN 91/B 237; & note overleaf signed by James Dalgarno, 9 January 1891, *ibid.*

[86] Letter from C. T. Mulligan, P.O., Tumut, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 27 October 1893, SP32, Tumut, fol. 30 OCT 93/B 10948.

[87] 'General News', *Transmitter*, vol. IV, no. 6, 13 November 1894, p. 4.

[88] 'General News', *Transmitter*, vol. IV, no. 2, 14 July 1894, p. 3.

[89] 'Society', *Transmitter*, vol. IV, no. 3, 14 August 1894, p. 9.

Timothy Coghlan set out to ensure that young males had access to a long-term career. He rejected the suggestion put before the Public Service Inquiry that lads be hired as temporary telegraph messengers on a small salary and dispensed with as required, insisting that they had a right to permanent tenure if found to be efficient.[90] The department took a similar position to Coghlan at the expense of female workers. In December 1893 Head Office dismissed Margaret Scott, Postal Assistant and wife of the Post and Telegraph Master at Casino, to allow junior telegraphist James Donovan to be kept on staff. Identified as redundant, Donovan persuaded senior officials to retain him, after pointing out that he had a widowed mother to support. Mrs Scott's husband urged Head Office to reconsider without success, explaining that he had invested considerable trust in his wife in the absence of reliable male staff: "I do not see how I can manage without my present assistant – there will be none but junrs in the office and there is in Stamps, Cash, Pro. Notes & Postal Notes 175 pounds. I cannot hand my keys over, as I do now, to my wife, to a junr".[91] In July 1895 Mrs Gosbell, Postal Assistant and wife of Kogarah's post and telegraph master, lost her job – in her case so that trainee operator H. Robinson might remain on strength.[92] From the perspective of married women, only males enjoyed an inalienable right to employment.

Like Timothy Coghlan, the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society believed that young males should receive a "living wage", claiming that low pay damaged their marriage prospects, reduced family earnings, and brought more females into the workforce. Ever since the parsimonious Civil Service Amendment Act was passed in 1886, junior employees had endured a general freeze on annual salary increments, along with limited promotional opportunities, causing many officers severe financial distress. The union leadership expressed concern for the future of "adult boys" such as George McCanley, a 19-year-old telegraph messenger at Albion Park.[93] Recommending his

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[90] 'Round About Mems By Circuit', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 9, 16 February 1896, p. 9.
[91] Report by unidentified officer, 1 December 1893, SP32, Casino, fol. 4.12.93/B 11701; note under signed by Stephen Lambton, 2 December 1893, *ibid.*; letter from W. M. Scott, P. & T. O., Casino, to P. B. Walker, Sec., Telegraphs, Sydney, 28 October 1893, *ibid.*, fol. 5 OCT 93/10983; letter from M. Scott, Casino, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 12 December 1893, *ibid.*, fol. B 93/11297; & memo from W. M. Scott, Pmr, Casino, 12 December 1893, *ibid.*
[92] Letter from H. Robinson, Messenger, Kogarah P. &.T. O., to Dep. P.M.G., 27 August 1895, SP32, Kogarah, fol. 28 Aug 95/8536.
[93] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 94 & p. 95; & 'The Fourth Annual Report of the Public Service Board', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 2, 16 July 1900, p. 9.

transfer in July 1897 to the Dapto office, where he would have a better chance to advance, Postal Inspector Tucker described McCanley as "a full grown man 6 foot high, and capable".[94] The union demanded a living wage for young males to help offset the negative impact of limited prospects. The *Transmitter* reminded readers that telegraph messengers had to pass an examination after four years' service, obtain appointment as a junior or cadet operator on 50 pounds p.a., wait four years to advance to 100 pounds, and serve 12 more years to attain 200 pounds p.a. on the basis of an eight-pound annual increment. Because of their slow progress through the ranks, many operators were unable to take a wife and acquire a home until middle age.[95] Young males attracted sympathy in a way women did not.

Concern to boost their future earning power ensured that youths received priority in terms of training and recruitment. With their interests in mind, the Electric Telegraph Department set up an operating course in the Sydney G.P.O. on 30 October 1890. For a fee of two pounds a term, probationers received instruction in telegraphy, elementary electricity and battery maintenance, and gained on-the-job experience before securing a permanent position.[96] Although permitted to attend the course, most prospective female telegraphists could not afford the expense and continued to look to kin or acquaintances for informal tuition and employment.[97] Mary Hambly was taught to operate by her aunt, Ada Ford, Willoughby's post and telegraph mistress, serving an unpaid apprenticeship for three years before obtaining a position in her office in

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[94] Report by A. Tucker, P.I., 7 July 1897, SP32, Albion Park, fol. 15 July 97/B 2865. William Taafe's situation resembled that of McCanley. Aged 23 in 1896, Telegraph Messenger Taafe had worked in the small outback office at Yetman for seven years without the chance to "improve" himself, despite good reports from supervisors. See, letter from W. Taaffe, Messenger, Yetman, 14 September 1896, SP32, Yetman, fol. 19 Sep/B 9076; note under signed by W. J. Lancaster, Pmr, 14 September 1896, *ibid.*; & letter from W. Taaffe, Messenger, Yetman, 7 June 1897, *ibid.*, fol. 11 Jun 97/B 8453.

[95] 'Annual Salary Increments', *Transmitter*, vol. IV, no. 4, 14 September 1894, p. 2.

[96] The Public Service Commissioners had earlier recommended the establishment of formal training facilities in the Sydney G.P.O. where boy messengers would receive telegraphic tuition. Alternatively, prospective operators had to acquire a certificate of competency from a technical college, or from a telegraph inspector in the case of country residents. See, *Public Service Inquiry Commission (Report of, upon General Post Office, Money Order Office, and the Electric Telegraph Department, with Appendix Thereto)*, November 1890, p. 12. Evening lectures were held for staff already posted to offices. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1891*, Sydney, 1892, p. 26 & p. 27.

[97] Miss F. M. Piggin, Cadet attached to the Corowa facility in rural N.S.W., received on-the-job Morse tuition before resigning on 31 October 1893. See, Conduct, Training & Other Employment History Register, 1880 to 1900, p. 40.

1895.[98] Alternatively, widows of former employees such as Keziah O'Brien, officer-in-charge at Gerringong, perfected their Morse skills by appealing to Head Office for personal instruction from a qualified officer.[99] Largely excluded from the formal induction process, women remained quasi employees of sorts.

Concessions, Economies and Trade-Offs

Contrary to Timothy Coghlan's attitude towards working wives, the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department kept a number of married women on the books in view of their contribution to household income. Head Office's decision to retain the services of Ada Ford, despite protests from Edward Clark M.P., took account of the distress her four young children would experience if she were dismissed. Previously, Robert Small, Mayor of Willoughby and father of Mrs Ford, had written to Joseph Abbott M.L.A., claiming that her husband's salary was insufficient to keep his daughter and her offspring in food and clothing.[100] A sceptical Edward Clark forced the department to conduct an internal investigation, which concluded that the post and telegraph mistress was, for all intents and purposes, an official employee. Accordingly, the Deputy Postmaster-General had either to dismiss her, or reduce her salary to a level commensurate with that of a non-official officer. Stephen Lambton chose the second course of action, reasoning that a wage cut of 25 pounds a year would cause "less hardship".[101] The department also allowed Elizabeth Parr, Postal Assistant and wife of James Parr, Post and Telegraph Master at Gosford, to keep her job, after discovering that her earnings paid for their children's education.[102] While

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[98] Letter from A. M. Ford, Pms, P.O., Willoughby, to P.M.G. Dept, 5 February 1895, SP32, Willoughby, fol. 6 FEB 95/B 1314.

[99] Telegram from Alexander Grieves to Phillip Walker, Sydney, 13 June 1890, SP32, Gerringong, fol. 13 JUN 90/B 8899; & telegram from K. O'Brien, Gerringong, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 25 June 1890, *ibid.*, fol. 25 JUN 90/B 9587.

[100] Small explained that his daughter was near destitute owing to her former husband's failed speculative ventures. See, letter from R. Small, Mayor, High St, Willoughby, to J. Abbott M.L.A., 9 April 1895, SP32, Willoughby, fol. 10 AR 95/B 3654.

[101] Letter from Edward M. Clark, Legislative Assembly, to P.M.G., 4 April 1895, *ibid.*, fol. 4 APR 95/B 3479; letter from A. M. Ford, P.O., Willoughby, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 15 April 1895, *ibid.*, fol. 16 Apr 95/B 3742; & report by Stephen Lambton, 18 April 1895, *ibid.*, fol. 30 Apr/B 4238.

[102] Letter from E. Parr, P.O., Gosford, 4 October 1893, SP32, Gosford, fol. 4 OCT 93/B 9960. Mrs Parr remained employed throughout the 1890s to compensate her husband whose salary was reduced from 227 to 150 pounds p.a. from July 1896 following reclassification. See, *Special Gazette under the Public Service Act of 1895*, 30 July 1896, p. 1. Later, Mrs Parr transferred to Ultimo in Sydney, where one of her children was studying music. See, letter from M. J. Kyle, Pmr, P.O., Ultimo, 26 July 1900, SP32, Ultimo; & letter from E. Parr, P.A., Elizabeth Street South P. & T. O., 30 January 1901, SP32, Gosford, fol. 30 JAN 1901/B 481. Mrs Parr's continued employment as late as April 1901 contravened official policy. See, telegram from J. F. Parr, 22 April 1901, SP32, Gosford, fol. B 23 APR 1901/2045.

senior bureaucrats maintained an independent employment policy, the concept of the male wage was less than hegemonic.

Moreover, the department continued to employ several married women for reasons of economy. Despite its ban from 1892 on the appointment of wives to establishments with residential quarters, Head Office kept Ada Ford (formerly Hambly) on strength because of her willingness to accept a low salary. In October 1891 the then widow was chosen to manage the Willoughby outlet in preference to Abraham Fordham, Postal Assistant at Bathurst – the only male among three candidates for the job. Already on 130 pounds a year, Fordham had clearly anticipated a raise if successful, after complaining that his wage was insufficient for a family man.[103] When challenged by Edward Clark M.P. to remove Mrs Ford, Stephen Lambton determined that, while she was an "official" employee in theory, she was not in remunerative terms, since her salary did not exceed the 100 pound threshold that separated permanent officers from non-official staff, amounting to 99 pounds 10 shillings p.a. Accordingly, she was not subject to the prohibition on wives occupying departmental accommodation.[104] Clark suggested that her practical exclusion from the permanent list was a cynical bureaucratic device, "the salary of Mrs Ford having been so nicely arranged as to be just under 100 pounds per annum".[105] Head Office also elected on economic grounds to retain the services of Rosina Long, Temporary Assistant and wife of William Long, Albion Park's official post and telegraph master. The decision to keep her followed a report prepared in October 1894 by Postal Inspector Unwin who calculated that a permanent male replacement would cost an extra 30 pounds p.a.[106] In August 1897 Head Office re-hired Mary Waddell, former Assistant at Adaminaby, having dismissed her in July of the previous year. Chief Inspector Wyndham Davies had pressed for her reinstatement, pointing out that the Adaminaby facility was uneconomic and would have to be closed if there was no one available to

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[103] Letter from A. Fordham, P.A., Bathurst, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 6 October 1891, SP32, Willoughby, fol. 12084/19 OCT 91.

[104] Report by S. H. Lambton, Sec., 18 April 1895, *ibid.*, fol. 30 Apr 95/B 4238. Inspector Unwin opined that Mrs Ford was not an official employee. See, report by G. P. Unwin, P.I., 17 May 1895, *ibid.*

[105] Clark argued that Mrs Ford's free accommodation and her cleaning, fuel and lighting allowances made her an official employee in practice, if not in fact. At the time Ada Ford had charge of five employees (three letter carriers, a mail boy and a telegraph messenger). See, letter from Edward Clark, Legislative Assembly, Sydney, to P.M.G., 20 April 1895, *ibid*., fol. 30 APR 95/B 4239; & *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1894*, Sydney, 1895, p. 58.

mind the office when her husband was out delivering telegrams.[107] As at 6 July 1897, wives had resumed the duties of assistant at 27 official outlets.[108] In these instances economic pragmatism prevailed over ideology.

Despite its commitment to the male wage, the post and telegraph bureaucracy retained a vested interest in the employment of single women, given their crucial role in the operation of small, unprofitable, official offices. Introduced in June 1892 to contain overheads, the so-called "Single Classification" system facilitated the relegation of females to these outlets. Establishing four grades of official postmaster, postmistress, postal assistant and operator, the system saw most women consigned to the fourth and lowest-paid echelon attracting a salary of between 100 and 160 pounds a year. While existing female officers continued to draw equal pay, new female recruits had a ceiling of 160 pounds p.a. placed on their earnings under an amendment to the Civil Service Act of 1884, in effect confining women to uneconomic offices.[109] Headquarters made sure there were enough women to run the outlets by offering them a small bonus to relocate to minor amenities.[110] Although opposed in principle to working women, officialdom set up mechanisms that guaranteed their employment.

As in previous years, Head Office looked to "cheap" female labour to help offset the cost of providing postal amenities. Over the course of the decade, women on relatively low wages subsidised the extension of penny town postage to large regional centres from 1890, a thrice-daily delivery service in Sydney's inner suburbs from 1891, and a fixed-rate domestic Parcel Post system from 1893.[111] The department also

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[106] Memo from G. P. Unwin, P.I., 12 October 1894, SP32, Albion Park, fol. 16 OCT 1894/4879. Staff in higher-paid positions did not suffer a salary reduction when transferred to lower-paid offices.
[107] Letter from J. W. Holliman, Sec., Public Service Board, to Acting P.M.G., 9 August 1897, SP32, Adaminaby, fol. 10 AUG 97/B 3188; *pro forma* Declaration of Appt of Mary Rebecca Waddell on 13 August 1897, noting resignation on 31 July 1896, *ibid.*, fol. 17 AUG 97/B 3245; & letter from Mary Waddell, Acting Assistant, Adaminaby, to Dep. P.M.G., 28 July 1897, *ibid.*, fol. 30 July 97/B 3061.
[108] Report by Wyndham Davies, Chief Inspr and Supt, 6 July 1897, *ibid.*
[109] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year* 1892, p. 7; note signed by unidentified official, 26 February 1892, SP32, Glebe, fol. 917039/B 2860; & note below signed by unidentified officer, 14 March 1892, *ibid.*
[110] Memo from A. Arndell, Appt Clerk, to Sec., Telegraph Service, & to Accountant, 9 April 1896, SP32, Hunters Hill, fol. 10 APR 96/B 3988.
[111] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1889*, Sydney, 1890, p. 19; *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1891*, p. 11; *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1894*, p. 11; & *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1895*, p. 17.

prevailed on women to assist in the operation of the postal-note system from 1894. The latter allowed for the sale of redeemable vouchers for small fixed amounts and was partly intended to encourage transient males to remit money to their absent families, rather than waste their earnings on drink.[112] More importantly, Head Office employed women on modest salaries to help compensate for the decline in revenue brought by a reduction in postal charges for British mail from 1891 – an initiative that resulted in a 28% increase in volume and a 46% drop in earnings.[113] Similarly, women toiled to counter the losses caused by the "smuggling" of letters and goods in newspapers posted without charge.[114] As in the past, comparatively inexpensive female labour underwrote the free services provided to other government bodies, which included the handling of taxation returns, the provision of private boxes and the maintenance of electoral records.[115] Female employees afforded economic advantages, regardless of the perceived interests of workers in general.

As before, the N.S.W. telegraph service called on women to assist in the running of telecommunications facilities. From the early 1890s, the utility suffered substantial shortfalls owing to the depression and the reduction in charges for press communications with the Western Australian goldfields. By 1892 expenditure exceeded revenue by 180,000 pounds p.a.[116] Cuts in overseas cable rates from May 1891, and the government's contractual obligation to make good the losses incurred by the cable company due to the economic downturn, compounded the drain on finances.[117] Female telegraphists on fairly low wages laboured to offset the shortfalls and meet a growing demand for telephone switchboard services.[118] The latter assumed

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[112] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, p. 1.
[113] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1891*, p. 14. By 1894 reduced postage charges for British mail had resulted in a loss to the Australian colonies of around 40,000 pounds p.a. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1894*, p. 3. The depression added to the decline in revenue by contributing to a reduction in the number of registered letters and discretionary items, such as Christmas cards, committed to the post. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, p. 16.
[114] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1889*, p. 22.
[115] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1896*, p. 2.
[116] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1892*, p. 2. In 1891 press rates were reduced from two shillings and six pence a word to one shilling and ten pence a word. See, Ann Moyal, *Clear Across Australia: A History of Telecommunications*, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson Australia, 1984, p. 65.
[117] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, p. 21 & p. 22.
[118] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1892*, p. 25. A cheaper rental system from 1893 contributed to increased telephone usage,

critical importance as the telephone, like the telegraph before it, came to be seen as a vital communications medium, proving an aid to business and investment and an invaluable device in emergencies.[119] By 1893 four of the 11 telephone exchanges installed in offices around Sydney were run by female telegraphists.[120] For economic and operational reasons, women had rendered themselves indispensable.

Conscious of the disquiet surrounding working women, some female official employees offered to forego a higher salary in return for security of tenure and access to official accommodation. In January 1893 Blanche Squire, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Burrawang, asked to be transferred to Lower Botany Post and Telegraph Office, explaining that she would happily accept her current salary, even though the manager's job at that facility might command a larger wage. Annie Halloran had occupied the outlet for the previous ten years during which time it had become a "female" posting.[121] In September 1891 Agnes Pegus, Postal Assistant at Leichhardt, applied for the job of Post and Telegraph Mistress at Taverners Hill, intimating that she was anxious to secure a home for her widowed mother. Like Blanche Squire, she was prepared to remain on her present wage if selected for the position.[122] Many officers viewed official residences as compensation for the withdrawal of salary increments, as well as a check on the high cost of accommodation on the open market. Since the early 1880s, rental housing had grown more expensive as cheap temporary structures yielded to relatively elaborate permanent dwellings, with an attendant decline in owner-occupiers.[123] Accordingly, female employees often ignored the better-paid jobs of postal assistant or operator at larger offices, where the private

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replacing the purchase system under which subscribers paid for line installation and bought the apparatus. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, p. 23 & p. 24.

[119] Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 68. The telephone, like the telegraph, was an important instrument in the cause of Federation, generating a sense of unity among colonists with a common culture and similar interests. See, K. T. Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent: The Communications Revolution and Federating Australia*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1976, p. 50.

[120] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, p. 24. By 1890 N.S.W. had a total of 1,872 telephones (445 in government offices, 1,393 in commercial businesses, and 34 in private dwellings). See, *Public Service Inquiry Commission (Report of, Upon General Post Office, Money Order Office, and Electric Telegraph Department, with Appendix Thereto)*, November 1890, p. 15.

[121] Letter from B. G. Squire, P. & T. Ms, Burrawang, to S. H. Lambton , Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 27 January 1893, SP32, Lower Botany, fol. B 30 JAN 93/1075; & *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Annie Halloran as P. & T. Ms, on 8 March 1883, 17 March 1883, *ibid.*, fol. B 3369/19 MA 1883.

[122] Letter from Agnes Pegus, P.A., Leichhardt, to P.M.G., 23 September 1891, SP32, Willoughby, fol. 25 Sep 91/B 11673.

[123] Beverley Kingston, *Oxford Dictionary of Australia: Glad Confident Morning 1860–1900*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1993, p. 30 & p. 31.

quarters were reserved for the officer-in-charge, in favour of the lower-paid managerial positions at minor outlets where they were assured of a residence.[124] In the prevailing environment, pragmatic considerations constrained career aspirations.

Reclassification

Official post and telegraph mistresses in N.S.W. suffered disproportionately as a result of the salary reductions that accompanied reclassification in 1896. For some time Edward O'Sullivan M.P. and other members of the "retrenchment" faction had been pressing for a rationalisation of the public sector and cuts to the wage rates of senior officials to cover the cost of an expanding unemployment relief programme.[125] The move to reduce salaries gained credibility after the 1894 Public Service Royal Commission found that government employees were overpaid compared to workers in private enterprise.[126] Charged with reclassifying staff, the Public Service Board appraised each job from a commercial perspective, assessing its "value" according to the amount of business transacted at each office. Timothy Coghlan and his fellow Board members placed post and telegraph masters and mistresses in one of five grades, each with overlapping salary ranges. The first, or most senior, grade covered a remuneration range of 300 to 400 pounds p.a.; the second 220 to 330 pounds a year; the third 190 to 280 pounds annually; the fourth 140 to 220 pounds a year; while the fifth and lowest grade embraced officers on 100 to 160 pounds p.a. [127] Consequent to reclassification, 306 post and telegraph masters and mistresses had their annual wages reduced by an average of 42 pounds three shillings each.[128] The review had a particularly severe impact on female officers in small facilities that were subject to dramatic variations in takings outside of their control. Emily Eames, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Bundarra, incurred a significant financial loss with the decline in local goldmining activity, her salary cut from 236 to 120 pounds p.a. Reclassification also had negative implications for women posted to outlets with limited potential for revenue growth. Minnie Husing, Post and Telegraph Mistress in

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[124] In South Australia female officers were prepared to forego a higher salary in return for residential quarters, accepting billets in small rural offices paying between 75 and 120 p.a. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 81 & p. 87.
[125] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 100.
[126] O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison*, p. 77.
[127] The Board only departed from the business model when considering the "extra work" that did not generate revenue performed by staff in mail distribution centres and in telegraph repeating stations. See, 'Statement of Old and Revised Salaries', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 3.

the inner-Sydney suburb of Darlington, had her yearly wage reduced by 10 pounds to 150 pounds in keeping with her modest receipts. Contemporaneously, Mary Russell in nearby St Peter's watched her salary drop from 180 to 130 pounds p.a. owing to sluggish business activity in her suburb.[129] Reclassification served to further institutionalise "cheap" female labour within the post and telegraph service.

For female telegraphists, the staff review proved detrimental, or at least ineffectual. Like their "postal" colleagues, the department's 540 odd operators were assessed in relation to office takings. While a few telegraphists were allowed as much as 280 pounds p.a., the majority received 160 pounds or less a year – those posted to small centres equipped with single-line instruments and with low traffic volumes faring worst. Eliza West, Telegraphist at George Street West Post and Telegraph Office, suffered as a consequence of reclassification. Forced to compete for business with the Sydney G.P.O. only a mile away, Miss West had her salary reduced from 160 to 140 pounds p.a. after facility earnings dropped from 1,848 pounds in 1895 to 1,814 pounds a year later.[130] Junior female telegraphists neither lost nor gained as a result of reclassification. Jean Knott at Glebe and Agnes Pegus at Leichhardt kept their salary of 120 pounds p.a., thanks partly to the 100-pound threshold that distinguished official employees from non-official personnel and prevented their wages from being cut dramatically. According to the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, the staff review was intrinsically unfair since individuals had no control over the value of their line.[131] Whatever the outcome, the exercise confirmed the lowly standing of female operators within the organisation.

For some women, the salary cuts came as a major financial blow. Barbara Ford Seymour, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Bowna, watched her salary drop from 140 to

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[128] A total of 12,953 pounds was saved as a result. See, 'Public Service Board's Report', *ibid.*, p. 1.
[129] *ibid.*, p. 2; & 'Statement of Old and Revised Salaries', *ibid.*, p. 7. Some men attached to minor establishments were adversely affected by reclassification. The officer-in-charge at Lambton saw his salary cut by 54%, while his counterpart at Raymond Terrace had his wage reduced by 45%. Reclassification gave rise to a number of anomalies. Emily Eames, who managed the Bundarra outlet, lost 49.15 % of her salary, although her office actually made a small profit, earnings climbing from 286 pounds in 1895 to 316 pounds a year later. See, 'Public Service Board's Report', *ibid.*, p. 2; *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1895*, p. 29; & *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1896*, p. 32.
[130] *The Annual Reports of the Postmaster-General, for the Years 1895 and 1896*, p. 35 & p. 38, respectively.

120 pounds p.a. Forced to request a refund of her superannuation contributions, the widow gave vent to feelings of desperation: "I am ruined & my children's prospects also, I cannot even pay the premium on my life assurance".[132] Though still relatively comfortable financially, Blanche Squire, officer-in-charge at Burrawang, had to dispense with the domestic help consequent to the staff review.[133] Other workers faced with wage cuts cancelled holiday plans, set limits on their children's education, and gave up hobbies.[134] Reclassification eroded the privileged economic position long enjoyed by official post and telegraph employees.

Opportunities to appeal the salary reductions before the Public Service Board were limited. Pressure of work prevented many officers from preparing a case for review, while others were discouraged from appealing owing to the commissioners' refusal to furnish exact details of the factors upon which they based their decisions.[135] The Board quickly dismissed appeals that failed to compare the work performed with that undertaken by employees in private enterprise, but offered no idea as to how this might be done. Without an informed course of action, officers were hard pressed to mount an argument for the reinstatement of their former wage. Many employees had no faith in the appeal process, believing that the Board had a vested interest in upholding its original decision.[136] Most women lacked the wherewithal and inclination to appear before the commissioners. Surprisingly, of the five who did, three had their appeal allowed.[137] However, for most aggrieved officers, there appeared to be little option but to accept the determination.

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[131] 'Statement of Old and Revised Salaries', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 10; & 'The Classification of Operators', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 11, 15 April 1897, p. 1.

[132] Note under signed by A. Arndell, 19 September 1896, SP32, Bowna, fol. SEP 96/B 9039. Mrs Seymour only received 100 pounds a year in hand, with 20 pounds deducted for rent. See, letter from Barbara Ford Seymour, Bowna, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 16 September 1896, *ibid.*

[133] Letter from B. Squire, P.O., Burrawang, to Sec., P.M.G. Dept, undated, SP32, Burrawang.

[134] 'Twelth Annual Report of the New South Wales Postal and Electric Telegraph Society', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 8, 16 January 1897, p. 4.

[135] The commissioners chose not to provide particulars regarding their determinations in order to preserve their discretionary powers. They made arbitrary decisions with respect to grading, admitting to the absence of any "hard and fast rule". See, 'Report of the Public Service Board', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 7, 16 December 1896, p. 9.

[136] Officers lacked the incentive to appeal, given the Board's assertion that they were already paid 25% more than workers in private enterprise. See, 'Report of the Public Service Board', *ibid.*, p. 8.

[137] The Board allowed Annie Kibble, officer-in-charge at Waterloo, another 20 pounds a year after her salary was reduced from 150 to 120 pounds p.a. See, 'Re-Grading of Postal–Telegraph Officers', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 12, 15 May 1897, p. 8. Emily Doust, officer-in-charge at Paterson, previously on 150 pounds annually, had her pay increased from 100 to 110 pounds a year, while Miss C. E. Eames, Postal Assistant at Bundarra, persuaded the Board to raise her salary of 26 pounds p.a. – which

Meritocracy

Frequently the beneficiaries of patronage, female departmental employees were adversely affected by the system of merit enshrined in the Public Service Act of 1895. Intent on ridding government of pernicious influence, Timothy Coghlan used the legislation to introduce competitive entrance examinations and to transfer responsibility for recruitment and promotions to an independent board. In this way employment in the government sector could be freed of political interference to the advantage of the new merit-based middle class.[138] Under the law the Public Service Board's authority extended to women previously appointed under the prerogative of the Governor and Executive Council, a provision that made for greater accountability.[139] Parliament passed the Public Service Bill in response to lobbying from the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, the Draughtmen's Union, and other staff associations weary of bias. The legislature was also swayed by representations from bureaucrats and individual politicians who demanded an influence-free public sector.[140] Under the Civil Service Act of 1884, ministers had retained control over employment, often engaging or promoting the well-connected at the expense of better-qualified candidates without patrons.[141] From the telegraphists' perspective, the new legislation promised to restore faith in a vocation damaged by a partial employment regime.[142] Those seeking reform looked to Victoria, where rigorous entrance examinations from 1884 had brought an end to political appointments. They also took inspiration from the British Civil Service, which had universally adopted the Northcote–Trevelyan initiatives by the early 1890s.[143] Under the new legislative order in N.S.W., future candidates for jobs in the Clerical Division had to sit a competitive examination, and all aspiring operators were required to prepare for a demanding test in telegraphy. Existing employees were expected to pursue extra training to equip

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reclassification had left unchanged – to 39 pounds p.a. See, 'Re-Grading of Postal–Telegraph Officers', *ibid.*, p. 7.

[138] Although a champion of meritocracy, Coghlan, like many public servants, owed his position to political influence. See, Arthur McMartin, 'Patronage, merit and morality', in Eddy and Nethercote (eds), *From Colony to Coloniser*, p. 58.

[139] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 75.

[140] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 89.

[141] *ibid.*, p. 88 & p. 93.

[142] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 32.

[143] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 57; Page, 'Public service management and political control', p. 149; & Daunton, *Royal Mail*, p. 241 & p. 295.

them for senior positions.[144] With an eye to merit, the Public Service Board dismissed a number of appeals against salary reductions on the grounds that the officers concerned lacked the qualifications to justify their previous wage. Henceforth, widows and spinsters holding posts solely by virtue of a deceased relative's service would be ineligible for pay rises, except for annual increments, until such time as they could demonstrate additional expertise.

In providing for the transfer of post and telegraph officers from the Single Classification to the Clerical Division, the Public Service Board added to the pressure on women to prove their worth. Well meant, the provision gave employees unprecedented access to different jobs both inside and outside of the department.[145] Indirectly, it forced female post and telegraph officers to compete with a larger number of workers on the basis of expertise, while, in effect, requiring them to justify their right to equal pay. Not surprisingly, no woman would appear to have sought a promotion or transfer outside the department in the period 1896 to 1900.[146] For females, meritocracy came at a price few could afford.

While a meritocratic employment policy promised a more efficient workforce, permanent officers of both sexes were affected by efforts to purge the department of perks, gratuities, and other forms of "unearnt income" foreign to the concept of individual employee worth. Inspired by a business model based on accountability and transparency, the Public Service Board issued a regulation in July 1896 requiring officers in charge of post and telegraph facilities to pay rent for their private quarters. Thereafter, a rental allowance based on grade was deducted from their salaries. Many officers complained that the impost was arbitrary and in some cases too high, arguing that the amount paid should reflect the true value of the premises on the rental

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[144] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 73. Telegraph messengers, telephonists and letter carriers were exempted from the policy. From July 1893 all candidates for more senior positions had been required to pass the Civil Service examination. Previously, applicants for government jobs, excepting "Officers" under the Civil Service Act, only needed to be able to read manuscript, take dictation, and do simple arithmetic. Thereafter, candidates for the operators' test were charged a pound per quarter for tuition from departmental staff, precluding many poorer women from a career in telegraphy. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, for the Year 1893*, p. 9.
[145] 'Eleventh Annual Report of the New South Wales Postal and Electric Telegraph Society', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 8, 16 January 1896, p. 5 & p. 6.
[146] *New South Wales Blue Books*, Sydney, 1896 to 1900.

market.[147] In 1891 country employees lost the prerogative to charge residents a fee for keeping a private mail bag on their behalf, a privilege dating from the 1850s.[148] Similarly, in 1896 they forewent the right to bill customers for switching a private telephone line.[149] The shift to a more meritocratic regime proved costly.

Telegraphy Loses Some of Its Lustre

Over the course of the 1890s, educational shortcomings contributed to a decline in the vocational standing of N.S.W. telegraphists. At a time when Sydney University and various business and technical colleges were offering accredited professional, managerial and commercial courses, telegraphic training remained *ad hoc*, narrowly based, and non-transferable. Operators typically discounted formal instruction from a recognised institution in favour of on-the-job training and self-education, acquiring a limited knowledge of telegraph theory from books borrowed from the union library, or from specialist articles in the *Transmitter*.[150] This mode of tuition was arbitrary in nature and tended to lack scientific rigour. In the 1896 Annual Report of the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, the librarian observed that members were interested in books on elementary or practical telegraphy, but seldom borrowed publications covering theoretical subjects in any depth.[151] Arguably, the departmental examiners' heavy emphasis on practical skills dissuaded many telegraphists from investigating scientific matters. Although candidates for employment were expected to have a theoretical understanding of electricity and magnetism, the entrance examination generally called for manual and "mechanical" competencies, including the ability to transmit and receive Morse at a rate of 20 words a minute, and the capacity to prepare and test electric cells.[152] The informal apprenticeship undertaken by aspiring female telegraphists shored up the tradition of self-education. In February 1891 Sarah Howell

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[147] The N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society insisted on free quarters to no avail. The leadership cited the need to attend the office outside working hours to collect the mail and a recent edict requiring staff to occupy the premises overnight for the sake of security. Henceforth, a rental allowance was factored into total salary. See, 'Public Service Board's Report', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 2; & 'Deputation to Public Service Board', *ibid.*, p. 15.

[148] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1891*, p. 11. Charles Mulligan, officer-in-charge at Tumut, suffered a 10% reduction in income after losing the right to charge for keeping a private mail bag. See, letter from C. T. Mulligan, Pmr, P.O., Tumut, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 27 October 1893, SP32, Tumut, fol. 30 OCT 93/B 10948.

[149] 'Departmental', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 3, 16 May 1896, p. 7 & p. 8.

[150] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 8, p. 13 & p. 14.

[151] 'Report by Jonathan King, librarian, Eleventh Annual Report of the New South Wales Postal and Electric Telegraph Society', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 8, 16 January 1896, p. 8.

[152] 'Departmental', *ibid.*, p. 10.

Jnr, daughter of Gladesville's post and telegraph mistress, sought appointment to an operator's position at her mother's office. She had worked at Gladesville in an unpaid capacity for the previous three years. In that time she had practised telegraphy to "prove oneself competent".[153]

Because of their informal training, operators were gradually relegated to the ranks of "manipulative" workers, putting them at a distinct disadvantage compared to government clerks, who received larger salaries in the belief that they possessed more exacting skills. The highest-paid clerical officer earned at least 100 pounds more a year than the best-paid telegraphist.[154] As manipulative workers, operators could be transferred, suspended, demoted or fined for inattention, incompetency or late attendance, whereas clerks were generally exempt from such penalties.[155] In August 1889 Head Office demoted Eliza West, Darlington's post and telegraph mistress, to an operator's position at the George Street West facility due to her "great carelessness". In December 1892 she was placed on a year's probation owing to her "unsatisfactory performance".[156] Like letter carriers and other officers in the manipulative grades, telegraphists were thought to lack the capacity for self-regulation, adding insult to injury.[157] Telegraphy had become a rather insular, circumscribed, and somewhat diminished pursuit.

Meanwhile, telegraphists suffered a gradual loss of public face with changes to their vocational circumstances. In 1894 the department waived telegraph messenger entry requirements to help adolescent males into employment, a gesture that generated multiple complaints in the Sydney press about inept telegram boys and trainee operators, and tainted the image of telegraphists in general.[158] By the late 1890s, telegraphists had become commonplace, with hundreds engaged in

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[153] Letter from Sarah F. Howell, Gladesville P.O., to Supt of Tels, 25 February 1891, SP32, Gladesville, fol. 4494/17 APR 91.
[154] 'Round About Mems By Circuit', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 2, 13 July 1895, p. 4.
[155] 'The Value to the State of Operators' Work and its Remunerations', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 5, 19 October 1896, p. 2.
[156] Conduct, Training & Other Employment History Register, 1880 to 1900, p. 34 & p. 67.
[157] The merit-based Northcote-Trevellyn system of public administration popularised the concept of "manipulative" or "mechanical" labour. See, 'Round About Mems by Circuit', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 1, 13 June 1895, p. 6.
[158] 'The Educational Standard', *Transmitter*, vol. IV, no. 3, 14 August 1894, p. 1 & p. 2. By relaxing entry requirements, the authorities undermined efforts from 1892 to raise the standard of telegraph

telecommunications work throughout N.S.W. Once occupational curiosities held in awe, operators now attracted little public notice. Over the years the introduction of machine telegraphy had served to debase employee skills and render the work more routine.[159] The full amalgamation of postal and telecommunications services from 1893 added to the loss of prestige, with the requirement that officers perform postal and miscellaneous duties along with their telegraphic tasks.[160] In Sydney, Julia Hiley, Bondi's post and telegraph mistress, and other trained operators, sold tram tickets on behalf of the public transport department, a duty that went some way towards stripping them of their occupational mystique.[161] Over time, telegraphy had lost much of its professionalism and glamour.

It had begun to languish as a calling from the 1880s with the growth of alternative occupations in the service sector. Banks, insurance companies, larger merchants, and retail outlets now offered men and women a range of well-paid positions, provided they were willing to forego the superior leave entitlements afforded public servants. For females, the shift to the private sector was facilitated by the advent of business colleges teaching stenotyping, book-keeping and general clerical skills.[162] Outside the office, many women found work in tea rooms, boarding houses and department stores.[163] Hotels, in particular, afforded ample opportunities for females, with the proliferation of lavishly furnished saloon and lounge bars catering for middle and lower middle-class patrons. Saloon and lounge barmaids commanded higher wages than domestic servants, their job calling for attractiveness, intelligence, manners, and an ability to exchange banter with customers.[164] An increase in resignations reflected

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messengers and trainee telegraphists. See, *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1892*, p. 7.

[159] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 13 & p. 311.

[160] Note under signed by unidentified official, 26 June 1893, SP32, Armidale, fol. 16 MAY 93/B 4609.

[161] Letter from Louisa Hiley, Bondi P.O., to Sec., G.P.O., 10 September 1890, SP32, Bondi, fol. 90/B 13150.

[162] Raelene Frances and Bruce Scates, *Women at Work in Australia: From the Gold Rushes to World War II*, Melbourne, Cambridge U.P., 1993, p. 97 & p. 98. In Britain ambitious women with special competencies, such as a foreign language, could aspire to lucrative positions in banks, metropolitan utilities and stockbroking firms. See, Zimmeck, 'Jobs for the Girls', p. 166 & p. 167.

[163] Frances and Scates, *Women at Work in Australia*, p. 89 & p. 90.

[164] Saloon and lounge barmaids partly displaced the publican's female relatives on hotel staffs. See, Diane Kirkby, '"Barmaids" and "Barmen": Sexing "Work" in Australia, 1870–1940s', in Jane Long (ed.) *et al.*, *Forging Identities: bodies, gender and feminist history*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia, 1997, p. 163 & p. 171; & Peter Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour: The Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype', *Gender & History*, vol. 2, no. 2, Summer 1990, p. 163. According to the N.S.W. census of 1891, hotel work and hotelkeeping accounted for 13% of all female workers and 7% of all male workers. See, Kirkby, '"Barmaids" and "Barmen"', p. 162, p. 165 & p. 166.

the decline in telegraphy *vis-a-vis* other occupations. In 1892 alone, 44 departmental officers resigned voluntarily, including five operators, two telegraph masters, and 30 telegraph messengers – this in spite of the deteriorating economic situation.[165] Telegraphy now had to compete for staff in a diversified labour market.

Post-office management and telegraphy began to lose their privileged status as two of the few acceptable pursuits for middle- and middling-class women with the evolution of a more expansive definition of female respectability from the early 1890s. The latter development can be traced to the enhanced political, legal and economic power enjoyed by women – a function, among other things, of the female franchise in South Australia, divorce law reform, and the female contribution to household income in a depressed economy.[166] The widening of parameters surrounding respectability enabled saloon and lounge barmaids to see themselves as socially superior to domestic servants, shop assistants, and women employed in working-class hotels. Even so, their link to alcohol prevented them from claiming undisputed middle-class status.[167] Be that as it may, a few middle-class women opted for bar work in place of office duties or governessing, responding to the better pay and the prospect of communing with a wider section of society.[168] Reputable females now had a broader range of suitable livelihoods from which to choose.

Industrial Impotency

Hostility among female post and telegraph employees minimised the potential for united action under the union banner to arrest the decline in financial and social status. An arbitrary administration that appeared to favour one woman over another gave rise to perceived differences between officers and contributed to discord between individuals.[169] In May 1891 an aggrieved Minnie Knott, Glebe's post and

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[165] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1892*, p. 24.

[166] Divorce law reform gave wives limited property rights. Women in N.S.W. gained in economic authority from 1895 after acquiring taxpayer status. See, John Mackinolty, 'The Married Women's Property Acts', in Judy Mackinolty and Heather Radi (eds), *In pursuit of justice: Australian women and the law 1788–1979*, Sydney, Hale & Iremonger, 1979, pp. 66–74.

[167] Kirkby, '"Barmaids" and "Barmen"', p. 166. In Britain saloon and lounge barmaids were generally seen as reputable individuals and were bracketed with postmistresses and female telegraphists in popular stage productions. See, Bailey, 'Parasexuality and Glamour', p. 169.

[168] Kirkby, '"Barmaids" and "Barmen"', p. 159.

[169] A similar situation existed in the British civil service. See, Holcombe, *Victorian Ladies at Work*, p. 180.

telegraph mistress, approached the department about office help. She noted that Eliza West, Telegraphist at George Street West, had a postal assistant to call on, arguing that she was entitled to the same staff since her duties were just as demanding.[170] Mounting opposition to working wives added to the tension between female employees. In November 1893 spinster Lily Isaac, the Post and Telegraph Mistress at Scone, prevailed on Robert Fitzgerald M.P. to write to the Postmaster General on her behalf after her widowed mother and assistant was dismissed – an action that left the latter dependent on her daughter. Relying on information provided by Miss Isaac, Fitzgerald pointed out that her married sister, Lizzie Ferris, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Waverley, and Ellen Cross, officer-in-charge at Leichhardt, both had office help, despite having spouses in well-paid public service positions.[171] Set one against another, female officers generally lacked the collective consciousness needed to pursue their interests in the industrial arena.

Female official employees were also handicapped in industrial terms by a masculine union culture. Exclusively male, the executive committee of the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society denied women members a voice in union policy-making. At the same time, a range of union-sponsored educational, sporting and social activities outside of women's experience, including evening lectures, cricket competitions, telegraphic chess games and smoke concerts, served to marginalise the female membership.[172] A regular event in craft-based unions, the all-male smoke concert celebrated the superior working conditions enjoyed by Australian men and afforded temporary respite from the strictures of family life.[173] Quarantined industrially from their male co-workers, women were more likely to seek redress through personal, rather than collective, dealings with the department.

The capacity of the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society to promote the interests of members, both male and female, was diminished by its passive approach to authority. Initially militant, the organised labour movement adopted a less aggressive posture following the collapse of the pastoral, mining and maritime strikes of 1890 to 1892,

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[170] Memo from M. L. Knott, P.O., Glebe, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 12 May 1891, SP32, Glebe, fol. 13 MAY 91/B 5874.
[171] Letter from R. G. Fitzgerald M.P., Muswellbrook, to P.M.G., 25 November 1893, SP32, Scone, fol. 3697/27 NOV 93.
[172] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 9, p. 10, p. 23 & p. 24.

which saw the mobilisation of non-unionised labour and the imposition of harsh state sanctions.[174] On the communications front, the coercive methods used by R. A. Sholl, Western Australia's Postmaster-General, to quash the telegraphists' strike on the Eastern Goldfields had a demoralising effect on the relevant staff associations in each colony.[175] The consequent decline in union authority, together with a shift in Labour policy from direct action to constitutional change via the ballot box, made for increasingly conservative employee organisations.[176] The tendency among members of the N.S.W. union to see themselves as gentlemen and ladies, and their commitment to the political status *quo*, ruled out radical action as a means of achieving their ends.[177] Telegraphists were bound by an implicit contract with their employer that prevented them from acting to protect their interests outside of government. Under the terms of this compact, the state offered them relative job security and an acceptable salary in return for specialised, but otherwise unmarketable, skills.[178] This, together with events in Western Australia, rendered the union leadership in N.S.W. especially anxious to assure government of its loyalty. To that end, it attached disclaimers to letters printed in the *Transmitter* from individuals critical of the administration and directed members to address all personal grievances to the department or the Public Service Board, rather than approach politicians and the press with their concerns.[179] In a gesture intended to reassure the authorities, the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society abandoned its objection to the 1895 reclassification based on office

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[173] Kingston, *Oxford Dictionary of Australia: Glad, Confident Morning*, p. 186.

[174] The government dealt severely with unemployed protestors, gaoling leaders and blacklisting malcontents. See, Scates, 'A Struggle for survival', p. 60.

[175] In common with Charles Todd in South Australia, R. A. Sholl, head post and telegraph bureaucrat in Western Australia, acquired the title of Postmaster-General. Elsewhere in Australia it resided with a politician. See, Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 25. Many unions suffered a loss of financial power because members were unable to pay their dues: the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society was relatively untouched by the depression. See, W. Nicol, 'Women and the trade union movement in New South Wales; 1890–1900', *Labour History*, no. 36, May 1979, p. 29.

[176] Belinda Probert, *Working Life: Arguments about work in Australian society*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1989, p. 41.

[177] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 305 & p. 306.

[178] The contract between telegraphists and the state assumed that workers would eventually succumb to wrist injury or experience a 'breakdown'. See, 'Roundabout Mems By Circuit', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 17. The compact was rooted in the concept of reciprocity promoted by Alfred Deakin and the "New Protectionists". They considered that staff had a right to a fair wage in return for loyalty to the capitalist order. See, Macintyre, 'Equity in Australian History', pp. 42–44.

[179] See, for example, 'Independent Criticisms', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 2, 16 July 1900, p. 3; 'Public Service Board's Report', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 3; 'Deputation to P.S. Board', *ibid.*, p. 15; & Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 63.

revenue.[180] From an industrial perspective, departmental employees, women included, were reduced to a state of partial paralysis.

The union's concern to demonstrate its commitment to the existing order manifested itself in an excessive emphasis on sporting, cultural and social events at the expense of major employment issues. Throughout the 1890s the *Transmitter* reported on the cricket, cycling and shooting matches attended by members, while covering staff flower shows and musical recitals. It also published members' poetry and kept readers informed of marriages, deaths, promotions and transfers within the department.[181] Some officers were clearly impatient with the Society's apolitical approach. In the *Transmitter's* July 1895 edition, "Far Far West" asked of what interest was it that "John Thomas, operator, at so and so, has married Mary Jane, the slavey at the Royal (Hotel), … when there are weighty and serious matters respecting the service".[182] The union was rendered largely ineffectual by a perceived need to conform.

While their male co-workers and the community in general viewed them as domestic beings first, and employees and individuals second, women workers were discouraged from venting their grievances. The circumstances surrounding the retirement of female officers underscored the conviction that their proper place was in the home. On the occasion of her departure in July 1896, married woman Lizzie Ferris held a dinner at her residence for staff members to thank them for their assistance. At the function Waverley's outgoing post and telegraph mistress was presented with a "choice silver egg cruet" as a token of her subordinates' esteem.[183] That same month Henrietta North, Edgecliff's post and telegraph mistress, received an identical piece of tableware at a similar gathering to mark her retirement.[184] While the settings and the gifts confirmed women's standing in a "domestic" or private space, men were celebrated in a very public manner as citizens of the world. Before W. B. Nesbitt, Post

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[180] Employees were expected to demonstrate their commitment to the status *quo* by refusing political office and by referring potentially seditious messages to the Chief Telegraph Office. See, Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 63.

[181] See, for example, 'Country Items By "Splasher"', *Transmitter*, vol. IX, no. 4, 16 September 1899, p. 8; 'Athletic Mems (By "Timer")', *ibid.*, p. 9; & 'Departmental', *ibid.*, p. 11.

[182] 'Correspondence', letter to the Editor from "Far Far West", *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 2, 3 July 1895, p. 7. "Anchored" expressed dissatisfaction with the Society's apolitical stance, having languished on 100 pounds p.a. for three years without promotion. See, 'Correspondence', letter to the Editor from "Anchored", *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 9, 16 February 1896, p. 5.

[183] 'Retirements, Transfers, & Resignations', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 3, 18 August 1896, p. 7.

and Telegraph Master at Uralla, left to take up his new job as Mrs Ferris' replacement, a large community meeting was held in the Council Chambers. There he was given an illuminated address decorated with images of the district, along with a purse of sovereigns to help him on his way.[185] Whereas women received "anonymous" gifts for the table, men were affirmed as members of a vocational fraternity in a uniquely personal way. In March 1896 A. C. Berghofer, Operator at Marrickville, exchanged jobs with W. C. Workman of Tumut. Before Berghofer departed for his new station, his colleagues honoured him with a silver-mounted meerschaum pipe, a cigar holder, and a silver match box, each engraved with his initials – items that placed him in the masculinised role of smoker.[186]

Partiality Persists

Despite opposition to post-office families and the legislative emphasis on examinable merit, the department's senior bureaucrats continued to practice patronage. Putting sentiment before talent, utility and due process, Stephen Lambton kept Matilda Read, Merriwa's widowed post and telegraph mistress, on the payroll until 31 July 1896, when she became eligible for a pension, discounting the adverse findings of an internal inquiry in October 1893. It revealed that her two sons performed most of the office work and concluded that her job was a sinecure.[187] As an added concession, Lambton chose Mrs Read's eldest son, operator W. A. Read, as her replacement and made his brother, telegraph messenger F. J. Read, his deputy. In both instances no reference was made to applications from outside the family.[188] Head Office also favoured Sarah Howell Snr, Gladesville's ageing post and telegraph mistress, allowing her to work alongside her telegraphist daughter until she attained pensionable age in July 1896. It did so despite a report of September 1893 that

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[184] 'General News', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 12.
[185] In August 1896 E. W. Powell was presented with an illuminated address and a purse of sovereigns at a special meeting of residents prior to his transfer from Kempsey to the George Street North office. See, 'Retirements, Transfers, & Resignations', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 3, 18 August 1896, p. 7 & p. 8.
[186] 'General News', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 10, 16 March 1896, p. 5.
[187] *Special Gazette under the Public Service Act of 1895*, 30 July 1896, copy in Conduct, Training & Other Employment History Register, 1880 to 1900, p. 54; letter from R. G. Fitzgerald M.P., Muswellbrook, to Mr Kidd, P.M.G., 25 October 1893, SP32, Merriwa, fol. 27 OCT 93/B 11089; & note over signed by Stephen Lambton, 30 October 1893, *ibid.*
[188] *Pro forma* Approval of Appt of W. A. Read, Operator, as P. & T. Mr, Merriwa, effective 1 August 1896, *ibid.*, fol. 14 July 96/B 6378; & note signed by A. Arndell, Appt Clerk, 15 July 1896, *ibid.*, fol. 16 July 96/B 6573.

confirmed that only one employee was needed to work the facility.[189] Force of habit may have figured in the hierarchy's partial approach to employment. By 1895 Stephen Lambton had served the communications utility for 30 years, while his immediate subordinate, Secretary James Dalgarno, had worked alongside him for the previous 23. During that time both men had repeatedly exercised their influence.[190] By the 1890s patronage of post-office families had acquired a life of its own.

Throughout the decade, senior management continued to smile on women seeking jobs in family-owned premises. In August 1896 Head Office appointed telegraphist Julia Hiley to the position of official Post and Telegraph Mistress at Bondi, replacing her married mother as officer-in-charge. Her appointment was only confirmed after the bureaucracy arrived at a satisfactory arrangement with her father to renew the lease on the building in the absence of alternative accommodation. In this instance Stephen Lambton overlooked regulations requiring officers to wait their turn for promotion.[191] As in the past, senior management favoured women who subsidised non-official operations by providing rent-free properties. In December 1897 Headquarters chose Mrs Herbert Clarke to run the post and telephone office at Broke for 52 pounds a year after her husband waived the annual rent of 25 pounds. Previously, the facility had functioned as an official outlet and the utility had leased the building from the couple.[192] Head Office made Mrs Clarke the postmistress instead of Miss Morany, the daughter of "an old political supporter" of Albert J. Gould M.P., who had pressed for her appointment. Mrs Clarke's engagement constituted a saving of 69 pounds p.a. on the cost of operating an official amenity.[193] Then, in N.S.W., as in Britain, the marriage bar did not extend to non-official postmistresses and departmental housekeepers due to the difficulty in finding

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[189] *Special Gazette under the Public Service Act of 1895*, 30 July 1896, copy in Conduct, Training & Other Employment History Register, 1880 to 1900, p. 54; & *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Miss S. Howell as P. &. T. Ms, 1 August 1896, SP32, Gladesville, fol. 8 AUG 96/B 7252.
[190] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 82.
[191] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Julia Hiley as P. & T. Ms, 1 August 1896, SP32, Bondi, fol. 3 AUG 96/B 7279.
[192] Report by E. J. Young, Inspr, 15 October 1897, SP32, Broke, fol. B 22 OCT 97/4182; note over signed by A. Arndell, Appt Clerk, 3 November 1897, *ibid.*, fol. 1 NOV 97/B 4316; & *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Mrs H. M. Clarke as Pms, 21 December 1897, *ibid.*, fol. 3 JAN 98/B 2.
[193] Letter from A. J. Gould M.P., 4 December 1897, *ibid.*, fol. 7 DEC 97/B 4864; note signed by Stephen Lambton, 8 December 1897, *ibid.*; & report by E. J. Young, Inspr, 15 October 1897, *ibid.*, fol. B 22 OCT 97/4182.

individuals willing to accept the modest wage.[194] Economic considerations often eclipsed philosophical objections to departmental influence.

The 1890s were marked by increasing intolerance towards female supervisors. Impatient with the failure of Mary Russell, St Peter's post and telegraph mistress, to bring a difficult letter carrier to heel, an unidentified bureaucrat recommended in April 1892 that the man be placed under "a strict Postmaster". Believing discipline to be a male preserve, the official engaged in word play to make his point, quipping: "the postmaster should be a postmaster".[195] In rejecting the request from Vickers Moyse, Postmaster at Redfern, for his daughter, Elizabeth, to join her sister Mary as his second assistant, Postal Inspector Unwin considered that the ten letter carriers on staff should be "controlled by men, not by young ladies".[196] Supervision had become a gendered concept.

Female supervisors appeared to threaten male identity at a time when men were torn between competing masculinities. As far as many males were concerned, 'New Women' – including single post and telegraph mistresses in supervisory roles – were subverting the gender order, both by abjuring matrimony and dependent motherhood, and by usurping men's 'natural' authority.[197] Women in the temperance movement added to the threat to manliness by attempting to foist their template of male domesticity on the opposite sex. Abstemious, thrifty and family-focused, the male persona they promoted challenged the pleasure-seeking, independent, bushman-inspired, urban male model presented in the *Bulletin*.[198] For male office workers, printers and grocers, the risk posed by domesticity was compounded by what some viewed as 'effeminate' occupations, raising, as they did, the spectre of role reversal.[199]

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[194] In 1901 the department in N.S.W. employed one female office keeper and 18 female cleaners. See, *Commonwealth of Australia – Return of Officers, Department of Postmaster-General – New South Wales, 1901*, p. 40 & p. 41. In Britain non-official postmistresses were known as sub postmistresses. See, Grint, 'Women and Equality', p. 89.

[195] Note under from unidentified bureaucrat to G. P. Unwin, Inspr, 9 April 1892, SP32, St Peters, fol. 31 MAR 92/B 4619.

[196] Letter from V. Moyse, Pmr, Redfern, to Sec., G.P.O., Sydney, 6 March 1891, SP32, Redfern, fol. 11 MAR 91/B 3124; & report under by G. P. Unwin, P.I., 13 March 1891, *ibid.*

[197] Critics of married female supervisors argued that they challenged their husbands' authority. See, Kathleen Archibald, *Sex and the Public Service*, Ottawa, Public Service Commission of Canada, 1973, pp. 62–64.

[198] Lake, 'The politics of respectability', pp. 1–3.

[199] Tainted by their 'effeminate' occupation, compositors tried to preserve their manliness by attempting to exclude females from the printing trade. See, Frances, *The Politics of Work*, p. 67.

Even so, the *Transmitter* actively cultivated the cause of family-oriented man, with regular gardening and household carpentry advice.[200] A keen horticulturalist, Ernest Winton, Post and Telegraph Assistant at Campbelltown, personified the male ideal endorsed by the journal, growing roses and chrysanthemums in his backyard and exchanging cuttings with colleagues.[201] In August 1887 William Melville, Post and Telegraph Master at Balmain, lodged a request for a clothes line, a fuel shed and a dust bin that highlighted the tension between the competing masculinities of domestic man and urban bushman. Dismissing the need for a clothes line, Stephen Lambton showed obvious contempt for Melville's preoccupations, remarking sarcastically: "he might just as reasonably ask the Dept to find his bed linen".[202] Female supervisors challenged men at a point when their identity was at its most fragile and contestable.

Resistance and Spatial Autonomy

Some female official employees resisted efforts from the 1890s to exert greater regulatory control over the workplace by manipulating the terms of employment in their favour. In the final decade of the 19th century, Head Office subjected workers to stricter surveillance, with the establishment of a dedicated postal inspection branch in 1891 and the engagement of district post and telegraph masters to oversee facilities in their area.[203] Contemporaneously, the department introduced a rigorous set of regulations covering hours and duties that were intended to bring greater efficiencies. Eliza West, Telegraphist at George Street West, turned these measures to her advantage and, in so doing, retained some degree of personal autonomy. In February 1895 Postal Inspector Tucker reported that she had divided the working day of 11 hours 45 minutes into two unequal halves, whereby she worked from 8.30 am to 3.00 pm one week and from 3.00 pm to 8.15 pm the next, exchanging hours with operator Frederick Hagley every alternate week. Besides allowing for free time, the

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[200] By the late 1880s, many men engaged in home carpentry and some housework, fully subscribing to the concept of male domesticity. See, Grimshaw, "Man's Own Country", p. 201 & p. 202.
[201] 'Country Items By "Splasher"', *Transmitter*, vol. IX, no. 4, 16 September 1899, p. 8.
[202] Letter from W. Melville, P.O. Balmain, to Sec., G.P.O., 8 August 1887, SP32, Balmain, fol. B 9.8.87/9330; & memo under signed by S. H. Lambton, 21 September 1887, *ibid.*, fol. B 87/9330. Lambton was just as annoyed to receive a letter from Henry Moyse, Redfern's family-focused postmaster, who complained that the arrival of the night mails disturbed the sleeping household. See, letter from H. Moyse, P.O., Redfern, to P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 14 February 1894, SP32, Redfern, fol. 14 FEB 94/B 1631; report by E. Bramble, 28 March 1894, *ibid.*; & note under signed by Stephen Lambton, 31 March 1894, *ibid.*
[203] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1891*, p. 10.

arrangement enabled the workers to avoid the inconvenient split shift caused by the rule that required officers to take a midday meal break.[204] James Dalgarno, then Acting Deputy Postmaster-General, was appalled by the practice: "It is ridiculous to think that officials who are not fully employed ... should only attend for 5 ¼ hours (a day)". He noted that employees who laboured beyond 8.00 pm were permitted "an hour or two off in the middle of the day".[205] Mary Russell, St Peter's post and telegraph mistress, tried to circumvent the regulations in order to preserve some control over staffing. In March 1900 she applied to have her departing telegraphist, William McSkimming, replaced by his brother, John, a junior operator attached to her previous station at St Mary's with whom she had a good working relationship. Overlooking the rule that staff complete two years' service before transferring, Mrs Russell argued unsuccessfully for his relocation on the grounds of compatibility and local knowledge.[206] Protective of their relative freedoms, some female officers refused to surrender their personal and administrative sovereignty willingly.

Females attached to small post and telegraph offices still enjoyed a degree of spatial autonomy not available to most of their male colleagues in larger facilities. In many of the bigger offices worked by males, the department had imposed a "rational" structure on the interior space, with dedicated telegraph, counting, and mail bag rooms, as well as self-contained living quarters. The layout sometimes contributed to an erosion of administrative sovereignty, the space effectively imposing its will on staff. In the case of Tamworth Post and Telegraph Office, the residential section was that large a departmental official doubted if the officer-in-charge would be able to afford to properly furnish the void.[207] Because the premises occupied by women were often too small to lend themselves to partitioning, female employees were free to manage the interior space as they saw fit. Mary Davies, Post and Telegraph Mistress

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[204] Report by A. Tucker, P.I., 14 February 1895, SP32, George Street West, fol. 26 FEB 95/B 1950.
[205] Note signed by James Dalgarno, 22 February 1895, *ibid.*, fol. 26 FEB 95/B 1950. Inspector Tucker observed that the arrangement was "more the outcome of prevailing custom than necessity". See, note adjacent signed by A. Tucker, P.I., 22 February 1895, *ibid.*, fol. 26 FEB 95/B 1950.
[206] Report by A. Burnett, Inspr, 22 March 1900, SP32, St Peters; report by Wyndham Davies, Chief Inspr & Supt, 26 March 1900, *ibid.*, fol. B 26 MAR 1900; & memo from A. J. Arndell to James Dalgarno, 28 March 1900, *ibid.* The claim by John McSkimming to local knowledge suggests that he had lived in the St Peter's area with his older sibling prior to his appointment to the St Mary's office.
[207] Opened in 1886, Tamworth's new post and telegraph office featured an integral bathroom – a relatively rare amenity at that time. See, *Tamworth Post Office Centenary*, Sydney, P.R.O., A.P., 1986, no page number; & Lyall Green and Warren Newman, *Chronological History of Tamworth, Vol. 1, Prehistory to 1894*, Tamworth, community-based subscription publication, 2004, p. 321.

at Hunter's Hill, worked in a single room measuring just 13 feet by 12. When the mail arrived, she would banish the public to the outside verandah and lock the door, only re-admitting customers once the sorting had been completed.[208] In April 1891 Miss Davies moved to a marginally larger building in Hunter's Hill. There she had the telegraph equipment shifted from a purpose-built bench to a desk near the counter so as to allow the operator to attend to customers while she sorted letters at the rear.[209] Gabriella Carroll, Hornsby's post and telegraph mistress, also enjoyed substantial spatial freedom. Working out of a rented building that was too small to permit public access, Miss Carroll served customers through an open window, the sill doubling as a counter.[210] In a sense female employees were advantaged by their very insignificance.

A Loosening of Domestic Ties

Over time, and in spite of objections to working women, the Postal and Electric Telegraph Department exhibited an increasing willingness to treat females as employees in their own right, independent of their domestic responsibilities. Gradually, it came to recognise the 'New Woman' as an autonomous political, economic and social entity consistent with the enfranchisement of South Australian women and the enhanced regard in some quarters for the professionalism, dedication and versatility of female workers.[211] In October 1898 Head Office recommended the transfer of single woman Mary Buckley from Deniliquin to Kiama owing to a shortage of trained operators, leaving her brother, the officer-in-charge of Deniliquin Telegraph Station, to manage without her.[212] The department also looked upon assistant Lilian Tobin at Mulgoa as a sovereign employee apart from family. When in July 1899 she applied to join her single sister, Louisa, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Bundanoon, Miss Tobin was appraised as an individual worker, rather than a simple extension of her sibling. Recommending her transfer, Chief Inspector Wyndham Davies described Lilian Tobin as "an expert Operator and Sound Reader", remarking

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[208] Report from Alexander Tucker, Inspr, Telegraph Lines and Stations, to E. C. Cracknell, Supt of Tels, 27 December 1888, SP32, Hunters Hill, fol. 18 OCT 87/B 12525; & *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 22 December 1888 (cutting, no page number), *ibid.*

[209] Report by A. Burnett, Inspr, 11 July 1891, *ibid.*, fol. 13 JUL 91/B 8247.

[210] Report by E. J. Young, Inspr, 13 February 1895, SP32, Hornsby, fol. 15 Feb 95/B 1601.

[211] In the *Kilmore Advertiser* of 30 January 1897, Mabel White was praised for her ability, flexibility and common sense. She worked as a clerk, as an operator, and as Relieving Postmistress at Kilmore before taking charge of the Suburban Room in Melbourne's Chief Telegraph Office in 1900. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 62.

[212] Memo from A. Arndell, Appt Clerk, 18 October 1898, SP32, Deniliquin, fol. 18 OCT 1898/B 4332.

that there were "few better hands … at any Telegraph Office in the Colony".[213] Moreover, the department treated married woman Emma Pegus, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Yamba, as an autonomous being independent of her husband. In December 1893 Inspector A. Burnett proposed that she take on a larger office commensurate with her salary – this despite her spouse's involvement in the construction of Yamba's artificial harbour and the fact that her relocation would have fragmented the family unit.[214] Though still powerful, the nexus between paid work and home life placed slightly fewer constraints on women than it had previously.

The Quest for Wage Parity under the Commonwealth

From 1900 female official employees of the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Department were parties to a national campaign for equal pay headed by Louisa Dunkley, Vice-President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association. The Victorian women aimed to secure wage parity with men pending the transfer of postal and telecommunications services from the six colonies to the Commonwealth Government following Federation in 1901. They were emboldened in their quest by the achievements of the *ad hoc* committee formed in 1895 to represent official postmistresses and female telegraphists before the classification tribunal charged with cutting Victorian government overheads. With Louisa Dunkley as its elected head, the committee obtained increases for females in most salary ranges – a tribute to its leader's formidable oratory and research skills.[215] On a deeper philosophical level, the Victorian women sought the same wages as men on the strength of their shared humanity – a notion intrinsic to the case for female suffrage.[216] Over the course of the 1890s, Dunkley and her female colleagues in the Suburban Room of Melbourne's Chief Telegraph Office had become increasingly politicised, with the decision in 1890

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[213] Report by Wyndham Davies, Chief Inspr and Supt, 4 July 1899, SP 32 Bundanoon, fol. 6 JUL 1899/B 3147; & letter from Public Service Board, 30 Young St, Sydney, to Deputy P.M.G., 26 July 1899, *ibid.*, fol. 27 JUL 1899/B 3502.

[214] Report under by A. Burnett, Inspr, 21 December 1893, SP32, Yamba, fol. 20 DEC 93/B 12730; letter from E. Pegus, P. & T. O., Yamba, to Dep. P.M.G., 5 June 1894, *ibid.*, fol. 8 JUN 94/B 5838; & note under signed by James Dalgarno, 9 June 1894, *ibid.*

[215] The all-male Victorian Post and Telegraph Association chose not to lodge a submission with the classification tribunal, fearing that it would make matters worse. Members suffered salary reductions as a consequence. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 72 & p. 73.

[216] Bacchi, *Same difference*, p. 7; & Kingston, 'Women and equity in Australia', p. 163.

to suspend annual increments and cut the number of places in each grade.[217] In July 1900 the Victorian women formed their own union after male co-workers refused them admission to their association.[218] From then on, Louisa Dunkley and her fellow unionists lobbied politicians to support their bid for equal pay and set out to win the endorsement of male union officials, senior bureaucrats, and their wives at social functions organised by their association. Dunkley initiated a letter-writing campaign pitched at male staff, the press and the public, basing her well-articulated argument for equal remuneration on the N.S.W. precedent.[219] She pointed to the injustice in paying the exceptional woman a lower salary than the inferior or 'average' male, and focused on the 'value' of the work, regardless of gender.[220] Disadvantage, along with inspired leadership, lent impetus to an effort to extend the reach of wage equality.

The Victorian women found common cause with other parties anxious to rid females of the stigma attached to cheap labour. Timothy Coghlan supported equal pay to prevent women from undercutting the male wage, while, in 1894, the Australian Workers' Union had pressed for wage equality on the dual premise that all workers, regardless of sex, shared similar interests, and that ability was not gender-specific.[221] A proponent of equal pay in the public sector, Rose Scott claimed that women needed an independent income sufficient to free them from alcoholic and 'animalistic'

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[217] By 1900 several female telegraphists in Victoria had gone without a raise for nine years. The limit placed on the number of positions in each grade restricted opportunities for promotion. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 96 & p. 98.

[218] The Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association held its inaugural meeting on 26 July 1900. See, *ibid*., p. 95 & p. 98.

[219] *ibid.*, p. 78. The *conversazione* held on 8 October 1900 in honour of the delegates to the first intercolonial conference of post and telegraph associations was attended by 200 women, including the wives of politicians and senior bureaucrats. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 88. On 25 November 1901, members of the Victorian women's union entertained delegates to the A.C.P.T.O.A.'s first annual conference at an afternoon tea held in the Melbourne Botanical Gardens. Guests included Senator Glassey and the wives of union officials. See, 'The Conference', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 8, 21 December 1901, p. 12.

[220] Dunkley championed the exceptional individual, noting that the same could be found in both sexes. She observed: "It has been stated that the average man is superior to the average woman in ability, but even if this were so, why should the woman who is superior to the average of either sex be kept back ...?". See, 'Correspondence', 'Equal Pay, letter to the Editor from L. M. Dunkley, Victorian W. P. and T. Association, Melbourne, 28 May 1902', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 2, 17 June 1902, p. 23; & Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 133.

[221] Deacon, 'Reorganising the Masculinist Context', p. 57. The editor of the Australian Workers' Union journal, the *Hummer*, advocated equality of the sexes. See, Maddison, 'From "Moral Economy" to "Political Economy"', p. 95.

husbands, sexual abuse, and the temptations of prostitution.[222] An expert in artful persuasion, Scott had held regular Friday night 'salons' at her home from the late 1880s. At these functions she set about attracting politicians, judges and bureaucrats to her cause.[223] In 1901 fellow suffragist Vida Goldstein set up a network of working women dedicated to wage parity after calling a meeting of female Post Office staff, teachers and factory hands to solicit support. In all probability Louisa Dunkley attended the gathering.[224] On a less admirable note, the Labor Party had adopted a platform of equal pay with the intention of pricing women out of the labour market.[225]

N.S.W. Remains Detached

However compelling Louisa Dunkley's case, female official employees in N.S.W. failed to embrace the campaign for equal pay under the Commonwealth with the same enthusiasm as their Victorian counterparts, preferring to remain on the periphery of affairs. Dunkley made regular contributions to the *Transmitter* by way of promoting wage parity, and anonymous correspondent *Inconnue* produced a monthly column from December 1900 in which she discussed a range of issues including equal pay. Generally, the N.S.W. women avoided union discourse surrounding this and other subjects.[226] Nevertheless, on 9 November 1900, Minnie Knott, Glebe's post and telegraph mistress, saw fit to address a special meeting of the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society. The gathering was called to discuss the proceedings of the first intercolonial conference of post and telegraph associations held in Sydney the previous month. At the conference, the delegates had agreed to press for an extension of equal pay to cover all official postmistresses and female telegraphists under the federal government. In her brief speech to union members (paraphrased in the *Transmitter*), Miss Knott – then the most senior woman in N.S.W. – effectively

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[222] Allen, *Rose Scott*, 1994, p. 4, p. 143, p. 151 & p. 189. Advocate for working women, Louisa Lawson, had an influence on Rose Scott, denouncing loveless marriages in which wives were mere instruments of men's pleasure. See, *ibid.*, p. 88.
[223] *ibid.*, p. 74 & p. 79.
[224] The working group formed as a result of the meeting was made up of 14 officials headed by factory inspector Margaret Cuthbertson. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 107 & p. 108. In 1902 female public school teachers in N.S.W. called for 'equal pay for equal work of equal merit'. See, Deverall, 'A Bid for Affirmative Action', p. 118.
[225] The Party platform followed a two-thirds majority vote in favour of wage parity. See, *ibid.*, p. 126.
[226] Initially, the pen-name of the anonymous female columnist was spelt "Inconnue", later changing to "L'Inconnue". To avoid confusion I have opted for *Inconnue* throughout the work. In 1908 female correspondent *Flora* revealed that *Inconnue* was the pseudonym of Mabel White, Victorian Postmistress. See, 'Women's Column (By Flora)', *Transmitter*, vol. XVII, no. 9, 18 January 1908, p. 5.

abrogated responsibility for the pursuit of wage parity on behalf of her female co-workers throughout the colony, and looked to her male peers to protect and advance their interests.[227] According to her, "those unable to attend the meetings had … every confidence in those who managed the affairs of the Society doing nothing that would be injurious to the welfare of any section of officers".[228] By referring the matter of equal pay to the union leadership, Minnie Knott minimised the risk of alienating her male colleagues, granted the misogyny found in many craft-based unions at the time.[229] Her approach was also well advised, considering the lack of industrial consciousness among N.S.W. women compared with their southern counterparts. In N.S.W., female employees tended to be physically dispersed, occupying offices throughout the colony – a situation that discouraged the development of a unified approach to employment issues. Conversely, the Victorian women were mostly concentrated in a few facilities, including Melbourne's Chief Telegraph Office – circumstances conducive to the growth of unionism and workplace solidarity.[230] The decision by the N.S.W. women to hand responsibility for the wage parity case to men was in keeping with the support role taken by female unionists. In most unions women were restricted to raising funds, organising social events, and dispensing charitable assistance to distressed members and their families, leaving men to frame policy and prosecute industrial action.[231]

In entrusting male members with their occupational future, the N.S.W. women were adhering to the concept of virtual representation. It pivoted on the assumption that male and female interests were indivisible and that men defended women's rights through their participation in the political nation, thus eliminating the need for a female vote.[232] Significantly, Miss Knott asserted that the concerns of both sexes were

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[227] As at 11 September 1901, Minnie Knott received 235 pounds a year (190 pounds as a basic salary, plus 40 pounds for rent and five pounds cleaning allowance). See, *Commonwealth of Australia – Return of Officers, Department of Postmaster General – New South Wales, 1901*, p. 81.
[228] Paraphrased speech. See, 'Federation of Post and Telegraph Associations', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 6, 16 November 1900, p. 2.
[229] See, for example, Frances, *The Politics of Work*, p. 67.
[230] By 1900 the Suburban Room in Melbourne's Chief Telegraph Office housed 34 female operators. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 137.
[231] Raelene Frances *et al.*, 'Women and wage labour in Australia and Canada, 1880–1980', *Labour/Le Travail*, 22 September 1996, reproduced in The Free Library by Farlex, http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Women and wage labour in Australia and Canada, 1880–1980.a030338655, 9 October 2009.
[232] Kingston, 'Women and Equity in Australia', pp. 163–165.

"identical" in her speech to the male membership.[233] The N.S.W. women put expediency and custom before independent action.

The deferential nature of Minnie Knott's address was consistent with the demeanour adopted by senior women in organisations hostile to ambitious and successful females. Deborah Sheppard and Meta Zimmeck note that females in male-dominated workplaces commonly don the mantle of the "man-woman" to avoid objectification and a consequent reduction in status and credibility. Where necessary, they yield to men so as not to draw unwelcome attention to their gender. Typically, they avoid social gatherings of males who might not want it known that they have female peers or superiors.[234] Prior to Miss Knott's speech, female officers usually stayed away from meetings of the Postal and Electric Telegraph Society.[235] While several women attended subsequent union gatherings, they did so as observers rather than participants.[236] Minnie Knott, a member of the A.C.P.T.O.A. Executive Council from March 1902, was the only female to speak at later meetings, her contribution to union discourse limited to seconding motions put by men.[237] Arguably, by managing their "visibility", female employees ensured male support for the concept of wage equality.

Notwithstanding Louisa Dunkley's intellectual contribution to the wage parity case, her female colleagues can be seen to have mobilised patronage and "female charm" to achieve their ends. The *Transmitter's* account of the *conversazione* held on 8 October 1900 in honour of the delegates to the first intercolonial conference of post and telegraph unions in Sydney provides an insight into the attitude towards female members. It also sheds light on the power exercised by women in a social setting away from the workplace where their objectification was arguably used to their

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[233] 'Federation of Post and Telegraph Associations', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 6, 16 November 1900, p. 2.

[234] Deborah Sheppard cited in Witz and Savage, 'The gender of organizations', p. 53; Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure', p. 78 & footnote 46, p. 91; & Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom*, p. 12.

[235] No reference can be found in the *Transmitter* to female speakers at Society meetings prior to November 1900.

[236] Women attended the special meeting of the Society on 4 October 1901 and the annual general meeting on 3 February 1902. See, 'State Associations', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 6, 18 October 1901, p. 21; & 'Federated Associations, N.S.W. P and E.T. Society', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 10, 17 February 1902, p. 14.

[237] 'A.C.P. & T.O. Association', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 1, 17 May 1902, p. 10. At the special meeting of the Society on 4 October 1901, Minnie Knott seconded a motion moved by Arthur Gentle, A.C.P.T.O.A. Treasurer, reaffirming the union's commitment to the principle of equal pay. She agreed

advantage. Proposing a toast to the female guests, D. J. Hines remarked that they were 'great favourites of (the) telegraphists, judging by the bright and varied costumes, and the lovely faces looking down from the gallery'. He went on to observe that there were 'three powers in the world – "The Press", "The Pulpit", and "The Petticoat". The press spreads news all over the world; the pulpit spreads wisdom and knowledge; and the petticoat spreads – well considerably'.[238] As early as 1896, the Victorian women had shown an ability to win favour by dint of femininity. Responding to their efforts to have grade entry and increment restrictions lifted, Postmaster-General Duffy remarked in parliament: 'I do not know if it is quite fair of these ladies to go around to all the susceptible young men of the House, and taking advantage of their bright eyes, to move honourable Members' susceptible hearts. I do not know that in future, it would not be necessary to pass an Order-in-Council to provide that only plain ladies should be permitted in the Public Service'. Whether fair or otherwise, the tactic earned the women a six-pound a year increase.[239] Although theoretically antithetical, influence rooted in female objectification co-existed with reasoned argument.

The N.S.W. women can have felt no compulsion to actively promote the national campaign for equal pay while the union leadership claimed the initiative as its own. Even though cheap female labour threatened male earnings elsewhere in the economy, Edward Kraegen, as President of the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, recognised the folly in barring females from unions, noting that the Victorian and South Australian women had formed their own organisations after they were denied entry to the mens' associations.[240] Recent history suggested that non-unionised women would continue to undercut male wages while employers continued to engage them. Female membership of the Society at least gave the leadership some control over women's terms of employment, while the fees females paid helped to ensure the

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with him that a separate classification and pay rate for women would ultimately result in lower wages for both sexes. See, 'State Associations', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 6, 18 October 1901, p. 21.

[238] 'The Conversazione, Toasts, "The Ladies"', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 5, 25 October 1900, p. 10.

[239] Quoted in McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', pp. 100–102. Elsewhere, the efficacy of female objectification was evident in the anxiety of mistresses forced to compete with attractive female servants for their husbands' attention. See, Paula Hamilton, 'Domestic dilemmas: Representations of servants and employers in the popular press', in Magarey (ed.) *et al.*, *Debutante nation*, p. 86.

[240] Tailoresses and female boot workers refused access to male unions formed their own organisations in 1889, followed by barmaids and caterers in the early 1890s. See, Nicol, 'Women and the trade union movement in New South Wales; 1890–1900', p. 21 & p. 30.

body's financial viability.[241] With that in mind, Kraegen pressed for universal wage equality, arguing that a salary differential based on gender would eventually force down the wages of all staff. According to him, the female officers outside of N.S.W. held their positions solely on the basis of their capacity to furnish inexpensive labour.[242] Responding to the decision of the South Australian women to accept the 140-pound maximum salary for females contained in the first draft of the Commonwealth Public Service Bill, Kraegen suggested that their tenure would remain at risk while boys could be hired for half the amount. He admonished male members who supported the status *quo*, stressing that they had no guarantee of paid work while women could be engaged more cheaply.[243] Expediency demanded that the Society embrace equal pay to ensure its members' economic survival.

The somewhat unsympathetic perception of female employees in union circles betrayed the male members' wholly pragmatic attitude to wage parity. Despite his commitment to equal pay and Louisa Dunkley's argument that the sexes were essentially the same for the purposes of employment, Edward Kraegen tolerated negative representations of women in the union journal. In the December 1900 edition of the *Transmitter*, a joke reminded readers of females' alleged inability to keep a secret, nominating the three fastest modes of communication as: "Telephone, telegraph, and tell-a-woman".[244] The journal's coverage of the *conversazione* held during the first intercolonial conference suggested a reluctance to take women seriously. For his part, the reporter saw the female guests as so much ineffectual decoration, observing that "the galleries were filled with ladies, whose presence enhanced the gaiety of the function" and gave it "an air of completeness". His reference to the "innovation of … a lady singer or two at a first-class smoke concert"

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[241] Females boosted union numbers in the face of a temporary decline in membership due to retrenchments and salary cuts. See, 'Twelfth Annual Report of the New South Wales Postal and Electric Telegraph Society, 13 January 1897', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 8, 16 January 1897, p. 6.

[242] 'The Commonwealth Public Service Bill', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 2, 17 June 1901, p. 3 & p. 4. As at 30 August 1901, the Victorian office had 386 female official employees; the Queensland branch 41 (no postmistresses or telegraphists); the South Australian 127; the Western Australian 216; and the Tasmanian 101. N.S.W. had 201 female officers, making for a national total of 1,072 women. See, *Commonwealth of Australia – Return of Officers, Department of Postmaster-General – New South Wales, 1901*, p. 31, p. 32, p. 38, p. 40, p. 41, pp. 44–51, p. 54, p. 57, p. 58, p. 77, & pp. 81–89.

[243] 'The Commonwealth Public Service Bill', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 3, 18 July 1901, p. 3.

[244] 'Head Office Bubbles [By "Depolariser"]', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 7, 17 December 1900, p. 10. As late as May 1902, the *Transmitter* revisited Edward Cracknell's assertion that females lacked the physical attributes required of a good operator, with a cartoon showing a "new woman" in fashionable

left readers in no doubt that men were at the centre of proceedings.[245] For a number of males, the equal pay campaign had little bearing on their attitude to women.

Edward Kraegen sought to minimise male opposition to the quest for wage equality under the Commonwealth by drafting an agenda for the first intercolonial conference of post and telegraph unions that was intended to depoliticise and de-feminise the initiative among delegates and ordinary members. For his part, R. J. Meagher, Secretary of the Tasmanian Post and Telegraph Association, questioned the wisdom of pursuing equal pay, fearing that it would precipitate the removal of women from the service, however meritorious they may be.[246] In the circumstances Kraegen arranged for the motion put by Louisa Dunkley calling for wage equality to follow one calling for a fair minimum salary of 120 pounds p.a. for all official postmasters, postmistresses and telegraphists attached to more important stations. By bracketing the items, he "neutered" the issue, locating it within the larger debate surrounding equity in the workplace.[247] Significantly, Kraegen did not schedule wage equality for discussion until the fifth day of proceedings and then only after less critical matters, such as salaries for relieving staff and days off in lieu of public holidays, had been addressed. In that way the procedural process obscured the subject.[248] By carefully manipulating union discourse, Edward Kraegen rendered women largely invisible.

Though we cannot know for sure, female post and telegraph employees in N.S.W. may have chosen to forego the union campaign for wage equality in favour of the ballot box. At the time many feminists placed greater store in the vote than collective action to effect reform in the economic sphere. Catherine Spence, President of the

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pantaloons attempting unsuccessfully to climb a telegraph pole to undertake repairs. See, 'Equal Pay Regardless of Sex', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 1, 17 May 1902, p. 12.

[245] 'The Conversazione', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 5, 25 October 1900, p. 8; & 'The Conversazione, The Musical Programme', *ibid.*, p. 11.

[246] At the first intercolonial conference, Meagher requested that his personal opposition to equal pay be placed on record. He stopped short of trying to have the wage parity motion rescinded. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 87, p. 131 & p. 132.

[247] The delegates agreed that the 120-pound minimum should apply to postmasters and postmistresses at offices with postal, telegraphic, money order and banking facilities. The N.S.W. Society proposed that all post and telegraph operatives be afforded equal rights with departmental clerks, adding weight to the issue of equity. See, 'The Conference', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 5, 25 October 1900, p. 5 & p. 6.

[248] Kraegen tried to depoliticise equal pay by limiting exposure to female concerns in the union journal. In its coverage of the inaugural intercolonial conference, the *Transmitter* made only cursory reference to female officers in Victoria and to correspondence from their union "dealing with ... their (members') welfare". In contrast, readers were treated to a detailed account of deliberations as to whether increments should cease at 150 or 200 pounds p.a. See, 'The Conference', *ibid.*, pp. 4–6.

South Australian Women's Post and Telegraph Association, and advocate of effective voting, may have been instrumental in her members' decision to abandon the union-led bid for equal pay and instead use the franchise to press for improved terms of employment.[249] The latter approach had something to recommend it. Approval of universal wage equality by the electorate would minimise the possibility of reprisals made against female Post Office employees – something the women might not have been able to avoid if wage parity was granted to them alone.[250] In taking the democratic route, women might hope to elevate equal pay to the status of a national political issue.

N.S.W. Women Protect their Interests

The N.S.W. women were unlikely to subscribe to the quest for wage equality under the federal government for fear of casting an unwelcome light on their privileged position. While Louisa Dunkley looked to a N.S.W. precedent, arguing that the Public Service Act of 1895 enshrined the principle of equal pay, an examination of the statute fails to reveal any reference to wage parity as such.[251] Only 16 pages long, the legislation gave the Public Service Board broad powers to determine the salaries and conditions of government officers, but only referred to women in relation to job vacancies, remuneration and examinations.[252] Dunkley asserted that the Act put an

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[249] According to John Baker, a female solicitor linked to the South Australian women's union was opposed to equal pay, claiming that it would destroy the job prospects for females in the service. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 69 & p. 70; & 'South Australia', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 2, 17 June 1901, p. 15.

[250] The democratic route would avoid potential hostility to equal pay. Whereas male-dominated unions were often ill disposed to women in the industrial arena, moderate socialist groups seeking parliamentary representation were generally more tolerant of females. See, Deverall, 'A Bid for Affirmative Action', p. 117. Although a union supporter, Vida Goldstein argued that the vote could be used to improve working conditions for women and bring about social reform. See, Judith Smart and Marian Quartly, 'The National Council of Women of Victoria: Suffrage and Political Citizenship', *Victorian Historical Journal*, vol. 79, no. 2, November 2008, p. 229.

[251] Louisa Dunkley made the unequivocal statement: "The N.S.W. P.S. Act, containing the principle of equal pay, was introduced in December, 1895". It followed criticism of wage parity from R. J. Meagher, Secretary of the Tasmanian Post and Telegraph Association. See, 'Correspondence, Equal Pay', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 4, 18 August 1902, p. 19. The statute contained no specific reference to equal pay. All N.S.W. politicians, bar Tom Bavister, independent Labor member for Ashfield, failed to notice the omission. See, Deacon, 'Reorganising the masculinist context', p. 51.

[252] Clause 35 of the N.S.W. Public Service Act of 1895 reads: –

The Board may make regulations for facilitating the employment of women in those departments or branches of the Public Service in which it may seem desirable to employ them; and regulation may determine the salary or wages to be paid to women employed in any particular work or class of work, and may provide generally for all matters relating to the examination of female candidates for employment, which may require special provision.

end to a two-tier employment structure: "Prior to that date (the date the bill was passed) there were two separate classifications – the lower one, of course, for the women".[253] In reality, male and female employees on the permanent list had shared the same bureaucratic status in terms of salary since the establishment of official post offices in September 1862.[254] From 1895 the Public Service Board continued to treat the sexes equally, at least in theory, by allowing for the transfer of all official employees, both male and female, from the Single Classification to the Clerical Division.[255] From 1862 until 1892, when new female appointees were prevented by regulation from earning more than 160 pounds p.a., women had enjoyed wage equality on the basis of bureaucratic custom alone.[256] Up until then what differences existed between the sexes were a consequence of attitudinal, geographical and personal factors. Dunkley's case for equal pay turned on a false legal premise.

The N.S.W. women had good reason to fear that females would be passed over in favour of males if Louisa Dunkley's quest was successful. In a cynical move, the Victorian Trades Hall Council had called for wage parity in 1896 with a view to purging the workforce of women. Many female public school teachers doubted the efficacy of equal pay campaigns, claiming that they would ultimately see men hired before women.[257] The role equal pay had played in stymieing female employment in the post and telegraph service was clear for all to see. In N.S.W., where wage equality prevailed, only 46 females, or 31 post and telegraph mistresses and 15 operators, were employed in an official capacity as at 11 September 1901.[258] In Victoria, where a wage differential operated, 110 women held the job of official postmistress, while 107

See, "An Act to Provide for the better regulation of the Public Service, and for other purposes 23rd December 1895", *Public Statutes of New South Wales (Public and Private)*, Sydney, 1891–1895, p. 82.

[253] 'Correspondence, Equal Pay', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 4, 18 August 1902, p. 19; & Melanie Nolan, 'Sex or Class?: The Politics of the Earliest Equal Pay Campaign in Victoria', *Labour History*, no. 61, November 1991, p. 109.

[254] *Post Office (Eighth Annual Report, being for 1862)*, Sydney, 1863, p. 7; *Post Office (Ninth Annual Report, being for 1863)*, Sydney, 1864, p. 3; & 'Appendix H', 'Return shewing the increased Salaries allowed to Official Postmasters', *ibid.*, p. 27.

[255] 'Eleventh Annual Report of the New South Wales Postal and Electric Telegraph Society', *Transmitter*, vol. V, no. 8, 16 January 1896, p. 5 & p. 6.

[256] *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General, on the Departments under his Ministerial Control, for the Year 1892*, p. 7; note overleaf signed by unidentified official, 26 February 1892, SP32, Glebe, fol. 917039/B 2860; & second note below signed by unidentified officer, 14 March 1892, *ibid.*

[257] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 103; & Deverall, 'A Bid for Affirmative Action', p. 126.

[258] The post and telegraph mistresses occupied 17 inner-city and suburban offices, and 14 rural establishments. See, *Commonwealth of Australia – Return of Officers – Department of Postmaster-General – New South Wales, 1901*, pp. 51–88.

females worked as telegraphists at the close of 1899.[259] The South Australian women rejected the national industrial campaign for equal pay, afraid that it would lead to an embargo on female staff.[260] In June 1901 they abolished their association formed in May 1900, after accepting an invitation to join the men's union on condition that their male colleagues pressed for a separate, lower-paid, female classification under federal law.[261] For many women, a livelihood mattered more than higher wages.

Tenure became an overarching issue for men and women alike. Initially, the Commonwealth Public Service Bill offered no guarantee of permanency, allowing for the dismissal of a public servant if a job could not be found for him or her in the newly established federal instrumentalities.[262] Further, Prime Minister Edmund Barton was alleged to have said that all transferees to the Commonwealth public sector would be engaged in a temporary capacity only, generating considerable anxiety among employees.[263] Many public servants feared for their jobs, anticipating efforts to rid the service of duplicate staff with amalgamation of the six colonial post and telegraph utilities. Others believed that they would be made redundant to pay for a national Penny Post facility, further cuts in telegram charges, and the "undergrounding" of telephone lines.[264] Both male and female officers worried over the implied threat to tenure inherent in the conviction held by Commonwealth Postmaster-General James Drake that the department should, if possible, be a paying

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[259] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 164; & Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 72.

[260] 'S.A. Electric Telegraph Association, Report of Half-Yearly General Meeting', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 3, 18 July 1901, p. 14. By January 1901, South Australia had 54 post and telegraph mistresses, two station mistresses operating post offices, 15 female clerks and telegraphists, and 26 female telegraph messengers. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 94.

[261] The South Australian Women's Post and Telegraph Association was founded on 12 May 1900 after male employees initially refused to allow females admission to their union. See, *ibid.*, pp. 92–94. According to McCuskey, the women had disbanded their association by January 1901. See, *ibid.*, p. 94. Vida Goldstein allegedly helped to inspire the women workers to organise industrially. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 69, p. 70, & footnote 10, p. 82. The South Australian women were prepared to accept a minimum adult wage of 100 pounds a year, and a maximum of 150 pounds p.a. under federal law. See, 'South Australia', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 2, 17 June 1901, p. 15. Unclassified personnel, the women sought classification in the hope of gaining job security. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 90.

[262] 'The Commonwealth Public Service Bill', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 2, 17 June 1901, p. 3.

[263] Barton's office later confirmed that only those individuals employed in wholly new departments, excluding the Post Office, would be hired as temporaries. See, 'The Commonwealth Association', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 10, 15 March 1901, p. 10.

[264] 'Federal Postal Conference', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 8, 17 January 1901, p. 9.

concern, rather than run at a loss.[265] When jobs were in jeopardy, equal pay appeared something of a luxury.

Because of the threat to "level down" wages, female official employees in N.S.W. had less cause to embrace the national campaign for equal pay than did their counterparts in the other administrations, even if it were to prove successful. In parliament George Reid, Premier of N.S.W., suggested that Federation would see either a 'levelling-up' or a 'levelling-down' of salaries in the federal sector for the sake of uniformity, noting that the colony's Post Office employees were better paid than their peers in the other jurisdictions.[266] N.S.W. officers had most to lose by a levelling down of wages. By the close of 1900, official post and telegraph mistresses received between 100 and 225 pounds a year, while female operators commanded a wage ranging from 100 to 135 pounds p.a.[267] In Victoria official post and telegraph mistresses collected between 70 and 150 pounds a year; female operators between 54 and 84 pounds p.a.[268] In the circumstances parochial concerns transcended universal wage justice.

While the N.S.W. women lacked the same credentials as their Victorian counterparts, they were unable to wholly identify with Dunkley's demands for equal pay on the basis of equal merit. Whereas the Victorian officers had acquired telegraphic qualifications from an accredited institution, the N.S.W. women could only claim *ad hoc* tuition from relatives or associates.[269] Similarly, while the former had needed to sit an exacting clerical examination from 1883 and secure a certificate of competency, the latter had only to pass a simple test from 1884 to gain admission to the department.[270] Since the abolition of patronage and the imposition of strict selection

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[265] 'Post and Telegraphs Bill, Second Reading', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 2, 17 June 1901, p. 7.
[266] 'The Levelling-Up or Levelling-Down of Salaries', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 4, 17 September 1900, p. 1; & 'An Important Speech by the Hon. J. G. Drake', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 9, 16 February 1901, p. 10.
[267] 'Appendix A', *The Annual Report of the Postmaster-General for the Year 1900*, Sydney, 1901, pp. 33–71.
[268] 'The Levelling-Up or Levelling-Down of Salaries', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 4, 17 September 1900, p. 1; & McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', Appendix 3, p. 164 & p. 165. In South Australia women in charge of official offices were allowed between 75 and 120 pounds p.a., while female operators received between 90 and 120 pounds a year. See, *ibid*., p. 82 & p. 87. According to the *Transmitter*, the former commanded between 50 and 130 pounds p.a. See, 'The Levelling-Up or Levelling-Down of Salaries', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 4, 17 September 1900, p. 1.
[269] Louisa Dunkley attended classes at Melbourne's Industrial and Technology Museum, obtaining a certificate in telegraphy. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 95.
[270] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 72. Louisa Dunkley passed the Victorian Public Service Clerical Examination in 1887. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 95.

criteria in Victoria, the colony's female Post Office employees had come to consider themselves the equal of men.[271] The N.S.W. women could make no such claim.

Their inability to wholeheartedly endorse the quest for equal pay under the Commonwealth was a function of concern among the Victorian women to prove themselves the equal of men through competitive examinations. From Louisa Dunkley's perspective, formal assessments were critical if they were to justify the case for wage parity.[272] In late-19th-century Victoria, female applicants for telegraphic positions competed with males in increasingly more rigorous examinations intended to curb the unremitting demand for employment. In 1888 women sitting the operating test were required to transmit 10 words a minute: by 1890 the rate had increased to 20, a pass no guarantee of appointment.[273] For studious women of limited means such as Louisa Dunkley – whose father had died young – an exam-based meritocracy promised access to an independent living grounded in individual worth.[274] Unlike their southern counterparts, the N.S.W. women did not tie wage parity to the pursuit of excellence.

Moreover, while many males exhibited greater knowledge and expertise, female officers in N.S.W. may have lacked the confidence needed to argue the case for equal pay with any conviction. Because of their reliance on influence, women were frequently less capable than men and often had to call on them for assistance. Rosina Long provides a case in point. In January 1895 she was put in charge of Albion Park Post Office at the behest of Archibald Campbell M.P., owner of the *Illawarra Mercury*, wholly on the strength of her late husband's service and her responsibility

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[271] *ibid.*, p. vii & viii.

[272] In general, women needed to produce more evidence of equal competency with men than the converse. See, Archibald, *Sex and the Public Service*, p. 5.

[273] In 1890, 35 women were appointed following the tests, decreasing to 18 a year later, and to three the year after that. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 59.

[274] *ibid.*, p. 96. After her father, an insolvent boot importer, died, Louisa Dunkley and her older sister provided for her family, which included two brothers studying at university. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 74; 'New Insolvents', *Argus*, Melbourne, 11 May 1871, p. 5; & 'Law Report, Insolvent Court, 11 August, 1871', *Argus*, Melbourne, 12 August 1871, p. 6. In the *Transmitter's* account of her marriage in December 1903, Miss Dunkley was given away by her "father". In all probability, the bride's brother, a physician, escorted his sister down the aisle. See, 'The Kraegen-Dunkley Wedding', *Transmitter*, vol. XIII, no. 9, 18 January 1904, p. 12; & 'Mrs E. C. Kraegen', *Transmitter*, vol. XIII, no. 10, 18 February 1904, p. 5.

for a child.[275] Mrs Long was appointed despite advice from the acting telegraph master to the effect that she had limited Morse ability and needed the help of a trained hand to work the office.[276] Since the 1880s the skills gap between males and females had grown wider with the exchange of the telegraph for the telephone in small outlets. In October 1896 the department replaced the Morse key installed at the Hornsby Junction office only a year earlier with a telephone. Thereafter, Gabriella Carroll, postmistress and trained operator, conveyed telegrams telephonically to Wahroonga for onward transmission by telegraph, the removal of the Morse instrument denying her the facility to hone her craft and maximise her expertise.[277] In such instances Louisa Dunkley's merit-based case for wage equality lacked validity.

Confused Arguments and Alternative Pursuits

All the while the N.S.W. women were witness to unhelpful, ambiguous and unproductive arguments in favour of equal pay. In July 1901 Sir William Lyne, then federal Minister for Home Affairs and advocate of female employment, discounted Louisa Dunkley's case for wage parity on the basis of comparable utility in urging his parliamentary colleagues to provide for 'women who cannot go to hard work, as can most young men'.[278] Meanwhile, Vida Goldstein and Rose Scott inadvertantly weakened Dunkley's argument by underlining female "difference". They contended that women, who had a unique ability to civilise home life, would have a moderating effect on politics if allowed the vote.[279] The stress on qualities peculiar to females contributed to a seemingly irreconcilable, same/different gender dichotomy. Dunkley then had to face the common feminist conundrum in which the sexes were both equal

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[275] Letter from Archibald Campbell, *Illawarra Mercury* Office, Wollongong, to Joseph Cook, P.M.G., 18 January 1895, SP32, Albion Park, fol. 21 Jan 95/B 740.

[276] Letter from T. Armstrong, J.P., Albion Park, 29 January 1895, *ibid.*, fol. 30 Jan 95/B 1135; & telegram from (–) Arnold, Acting Station Master, Albion Park, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 25 January 1895, *ibid.* Widow Elizabeth Lee, officer-in-charge at Trunkey Creek, was hired without Morse training on the basis that her daughter, Lucy, would work the telegraph following appropriate tuition. See, memo from Supt of Tels to Sec., G.P.O., 5 December 1892, SP32, Trunkey Creek, fol. 5 DEC 92/B 16043; & note signed by unidentified official, 3 December 1892, *ibid.*

[277] The installation of telephones was intended to save the department the cost of a qualified operator. See, *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Miss G. A. Carroll, Operator, Burwood, as Pms, Hornsby Junction, 4 March 1895, SP32, Hornsby, fol. B 95/1981 & fol. 4 Apr 95/B 3478; & John J. Olsen, revised by Vann L. Cremer, 'Hornsby Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, August 1981, p. 15.

[278] 'In Parliament, The Public Service Bill', paraphrased from *Hansard*, *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 3, 18 July 1901, p. 5.

[279] Beverley Kingston, 'The Lady and the Australian Girl: Some Thoughts on Nationalism and Class', in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (eds), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1986, pp. 45–47.

by reason of their sameness, and fundamentally divergent.[280] While she claimed that her female co-workers were as committed to employment as their male colleagues, *Transmitter* columnist *Inconnue* implied that women were apt to see marriage as more important than a career. Accordingly, she applauded the British Postmaster-General, Lord Londonderry, for offering "a small dowry" to female clerks who left the Post Office to be wed. She predicted that more young women would want to enter the service as a result.[281] *Inconnue* defended the claim to equal pay on the strength of equal ability, but perpetuated the bind in alluding to the sexes' divergent financial needs. Responding to the assertion made by Senator Henry Dobson, a critic of wage equality, that men's clothing cost more than women's, she admitted that, unlike females, most males were incapable of making their own garments and had to purchase them, incidentally recalling the long-held belief that women only worked for 'pin money'.[282] Ridden with apparent contradictions, the case for equal pay looked to have reached an impasse.

Meanwhile, the surge in low-paid, segregated, "female" occupations largely eclipsed the argument for wage parity. Although the Public Service Board had a brief to provide for single women following passage of the 1895 Public Service Act, the bulk of the jobs it created were in the increasingly feminised occupations of telephonist, typist and shorthand writer, junior clerk, and library assistant.[283] In September 1896 the Board recruited 14 unemployed female pupil teachers to be trained as switchboard attendants at the Central (Telephone) Exchange in the Sydney G.P.O. Experience elsewhere suggested that women made better telephonists than men, their resonant voices making them easier to hear on line. They were also found to be more tolerant of the imperfect technology of the day and more adept at pacifying annoyed callers.[284] Unlike female telegraphists, the trainee switchboard attendants were chosen by ballot and did not have to sit an entrance examination.[285] During the course of their tuition, the women received 10 shillings a week. After completing their training, they were

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[280] Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia*, North Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1984, p. 10.
[281] 'Women's Column (By "Inconnue")', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 11, 16 April 1901, p. 5.
[282] 'Women's Column (By Inconnue)', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 9, 17 January 1902, p. 5.
[283] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 161.
[284] Extract from London's *Daily Mail*, undated, 'Women's Column (By Inconnue)', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 11, 18 March 1902, p. 5.
[285] Trainee telephonists were only expected to produce health and character references. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 77.

paid a salary not exceeding 80 pounds p.a., and were consigned to a separate floor of the G.P.O. with a dedicated entrance and exit, their movements monitored by a matron intent on limiting their contact with male staff.[286] A ban on night work "protected" the women from physical and moral danger, leaving young men to perform their duties after dark.[287] Several youths went on to become telephone mechanics or instrument fitters, with the prospect of earning 156 pounds p.a. via a series of annual increments. Whereas telephone fitting was seen as a rewarding career, telephony rapidly became an occupational 'dead end', contributing to the vocational isolation of female staff.[288] In salary terms, the press regarded switchboard duties as different from men's work. Noting that most female telephonists received no more than 30 shillings a week, the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that the money would be "a great attraction" to young women, implying that their financial needs were of a lower order than men's.[289] It was hard to demonstrate equality of the sexes in the workplace when women performed gender-specific tasks.

Although universal wage equality was the objective, some female post and telegraph employees in N.S.W. were possibly prepared to accept a lesser alternative. In February 1892 Minnie Knott, officer-in-charge at Glebe, wrote to the Postmaster-General complaining about her heavy workload. Miss Knott asked for a raise commensurate with her responsibilities, emphasising the "fairness" of her request. Arguably, in her case, equity, as opposed to equality, was a gender-neutral concept that transcended the masculinised union mantra of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.[290] The liberalisation from 1900 of provisions covering annual increments, plus an increase from January 1901 in the minimum wage paid to officers-in-charge from 100 pounds to 130 pounds p.a., went some way towards placating those women seeking equity before equality.[291] For the South Australian women, fairness had priority over parity. Their decision to join the men's union was contingent upon male

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[286] 'General News', *Transmitter*, vol. VI, no. 2, 27 July 1896, p. 13.
[287] Extract from *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 4 October 1896, in Edward N. Walter, 'A History of the Telephone Service in New South Wales', P.R.O., P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, August 1962, Section 9, 'Staffing and Staff Conditions', p. 7.
[288] Junior instrument fitters started on 26 pounds a year, advancing to 110 pounds p.a. after their first year of service. See, *ibid.*, Section 9, 'Staffing and Staff Conditions', p. 21.
[289] *Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney, 4 July 1896 (cutting, no page number, detached).
[290] Memo from Minnie Knott, P.O., Glebe, to P.M.G., Sydney, 23 February 1892, SP32, Glebe, fol. 917039/B 2860.

members pressing for an increase of 30 pounds a year in the maximum salary paid to females in lieu of wage equality. The proposed rise would mean women received 150 pounds p.a., or 58 pounds less than the average annual wage for postmasters.[292] In the June 1901 edition of the *Transmitter*, an unidentified female telegraphist writing on behalf of her South Australian colleagues pointed out that every operator, whether male or female, experienced a gradual decline in intellectual and mental faculties due to the demanding nature of the work. She argued therefore that officers should be "adequately recompensed" for their services over time. Importantly, once the claim to fairness had been honoured, the "question of sex" and, by implication, the issue of wage equality, could be "left alone".[293] Elsewhere, the Women's Organising Committee of the Political Labor Council was lobbying for a fair or living wage for females. In so doing, the Committee was confident in the knowledge that equity, a long-standing legal and procedural notion, did not threaten the status *quo*. In this respect it differed from equality, which entailed a change in the political, economic and social order.[294] Many women were happy to settle for an "optimum" rate of pay.

The promotion of domesticity as an alternative expression of female merit may have dissuaded some women from pursuing a wholly mercenary agenda. From the mid 1880s, several social reformers claimed that companionate marriage offered the woman with a comprehensive education a level of satisfaction that rivalled or exceeded that found in paid work. They argued that her schooling enabled her to better understand her husband's business interests, added to her versatility, and boosted her capacity for empathy.[295] Augusta Olson, wife of Ashfield's official post and telegraph master, exhibited the flexibility and rapport expected of an educated woman in a companionate marriage. Although not a paid employee, Mrs Olson took

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[291] 'The Increments', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 1, 16 June 1900, p. 1; & 'The Fourth Annual Report of the Public Service Board', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 2, 16 July 1900, p. 9.

[292] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 93. Too weak to maintain a separate union identity, the South Australian women were numerous enough to persuade males to support a fair wage for females following their admission to the men's association and the election of representatives to the executive committee. See, *ibid.*, p. 94.

[293] 'South Australia', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 2, 17 June 1901, p. 15. John Baker suggests that the unidentified correspondent was Miss Gilmour, South Australian telegraphist. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 70.

[294] Kingston, 'Women and equity in Australia', p. 162; & Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 107 & p. 108.

[295] Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom*, p. 13 & p. 14. Marriage-oriented, *Inconnue* opined that paid work and an education prepared a woman "to become the wife and companion to any man in any station of life", her "worldly knowledge" helping her to better understand the value of time and money. See, 'Women's Column (By Inconnue)', *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 2, 17 June 1901, p. 5.

charge of the office in November 1897 after her husband fell ill, managing the staff until the facility's telegraphists were in a position to relieve her.[296] From the late 1890s, interest groups concerned for reproduction and childrearing maintained that motherhood was of vital importance to the country and a creditable alternative to employment. Experts in early childhood development stressed the critical role of mothers in ensuring that the next generation was well nourished. Meanwhile, eugenicists emphasised women's responsibility for controlling national fertility in the interest of offspring and the state, sluggish population growth notwithstanding.[297] Although an advocate for working women, Vida Goldstein conferred extra status on female domesticity in suggesting that, if enfranchised, "the nation's housekeepers" would bring greater economy and efficiency to government by applying household budgetry principles.[298] Church-based women's groups added to the standing of housebound womanhood. Although a supporter of equal pay from 1893, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) saw wives and mothers as the chief custodians of family life. It looked to them to set a moral example to male kin in its campaign to curb alcoholism, gambling and venereal disease, which threatened the sanctity of the home.[299] The W.C.T.U. and other Christian women's organisations claimed many more members than the unions and secular feminist groups.[300] Their successful campaign to restrict hotel opening hours – an initiative that mobilised large numbers of housewives – proved that women could make gains inside, as well as outside, the home.[301] In this context the monetary preoccupations of female workers appeared selfish and unrewarding.

Ambivalence and contradiction distinguished the eleven years, 1890 to 1901. Although the authorities came to view working women with unprecedented suspicion,

[296] File note, unsigned and undated, SP32, Ashfield, fol. G97/3875; & letter from A. Olson, P.O., Ashfield, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 30 November 1897, *ibid.*, fol. G 1 DEC 97/3875.
[297] Bacchi, *Same difference*, p. 61.
[298] *ibid.*, p. 26 & p. 47.
[299] Anthea Hyslop, 'Temperate Feminists: Marie Kirk and the WCTU', in Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly, *Double Time: Women in Victoria – 150 Years*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1985, p. 122; & Farley Kelly, 'Vida Goldstein: Political Woman', in *ibid.*, p. 166 & p. 169.
[300] Sabine Willis, 'Homes are Divine Workshops', in Elizabeth Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Class and History: feminist perspectives on Australia, 1788–1978*, Sydney, Fontana Collins, 1980, p. 177.
[301] *ibid.*, p. 166.

fearing an adverse impact on population growth, national income and overseas investment, the post and telegraph department still prevailed on females as a “cheap” source of labour. Moreover, the utility continued to call on the services of married women, disregarding a general embargo on their employment. By keeping women on the books, the department, in effect, challenged the ideology of the male wage with which it identified. Further, in reinstating the wives of post and telegraph masters after dismissing them, it heeded the concerns of parliamentarians alive to the vital contribution of women to homehold income. Staff reclassification relegated women to the lowest grades without adequate provision to appeal, enabling the service to contain losses and shore up operations. At the same time, it helped to institutionalise female departmental employment. Contradiction also surrounded the marriage bar. Though designed to provide for single women, the ban was largely subverted by the focus on male earnings and the advent of the career woman. In spite of efforts to assist spinsters and widows, concentration on the male breadwinner and economic development saw employment and training priority given to youths and young men.
Faced with conflicting attitudes towards working women, female officers tended to self-segregate. A number of them effectively exchanged larger salaries in mixed-gender offices for security of tenure and housing in single-sex outlets. Despite the chance to contest public service positions outside of the department, the women maintained their insularity rather than have to compete with men for jobs. Irrespective of efforts to purge government of partiality, females remained beholden to personal connections in the absence of industrial power and gender solidarity. Their preparedness to appeal to influence can be traced to a masculinist and politically impotent union, and to an ageing, arbitrary administration seeking economies. On the subject of worker rights, many senior officials recognised the economic interdependence of husband and wife, but still held to the concept of housebound womanhood. Hence, married women were often expected to work for nothing in return for shelter. Those wives the department did employ were left to juggle office duties with domestic chores. The period was characterised by expediency and divergent priorities.

Contrast and contradiction also marked the national quest for wage parity under the Commonwealth. If the Victorian women looked to a meritocracy to prove themselves the equal of men, their N.S.W. colleagues prevailed on the time-honoured system of

patronage, deferring to males, while at once obscuring and arguably exploiting their femininity. Instead of actively defending their superior salaries, they maintained a low profile so as not to draw unwanted attention to their status as extra-legal beneficiaries of equal pay. However compelling Louisa Dunkley's argument for gender equality, the N.S.W. women kept their own counsel, rather than invite comparison with male co-workers and their better-qualified Victorian counterparts. Moreover, for many, equal pay was likely to have been a less-than-pressing issue when tenure and current salary levels were at stake. While women argued that they were the same as men, only different, the case for wage equality remained problematic. In any event, so long as some women opted for equity in lieu of equality, and many others chose the lower-paid feminised occupation of telephonist, or else invested in the domestic life, the wage parity claim lodged by a small minority appeared largely irrelevant. Put simply, the campaign for equal pay under the federal government lacked universal commitment, internal logic, and unity of purpose.

The 1890s witnessed changes in the status of employees. Once held in public admiration, telegraphists, both male and female, lost much of their professional aura, given their ubiquity, their inadequate training, and the existence of attractive, relatively respectable, alternative occupations. On another level, the struggle between competing masculinisms and the importance placed on male earnings led the department to retract its earlier support for female supervisors. On a brighter note, the bureaucracy began to treat a few women as autonomous workers independent of family in keeping with their demonstrable talents and their sexes' political, economic and social gains. Meanwhile, employees were exposed to greater regulation, prompting some women to resist inroads into their personal and administrative freedom. Ironically, the organisational insignificance of females in small offices enabled them to retain some control over the work environment – something denied to most males. The period was shaped by a decline in occupational standing tempered by marginal gains and efforts to preserve the workplace status *quo*.

Figure 1: Hartley Post Office (right side of building), c. 1855; HN5144, H.N. Series, A.P. Historical Archives. During the 1850s the postmistress, Mary Finn, shared the premises with the mounted police and court officials.

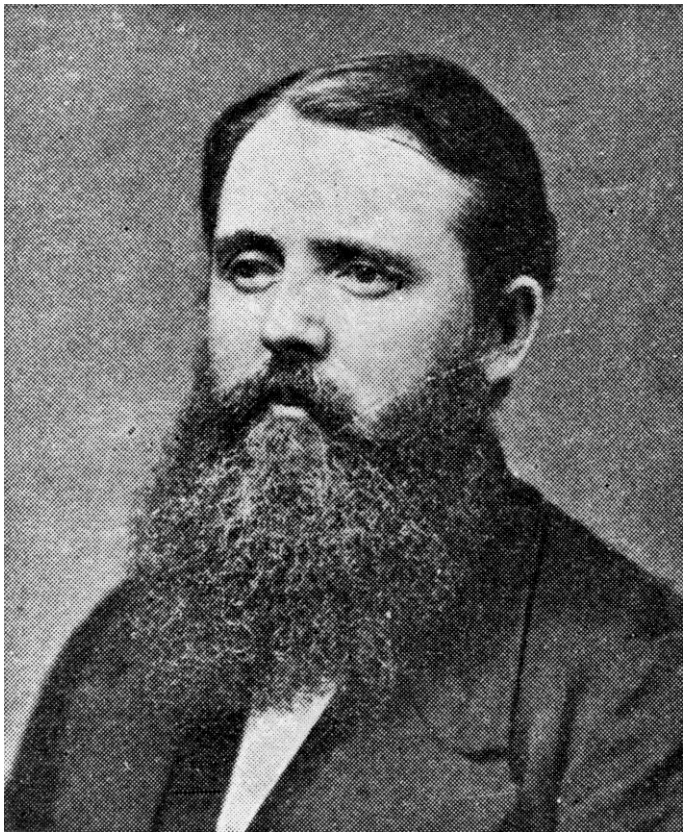

Figure 2: John Fitzgerald Burns, N.S.W. Postmaster-General and advocate for female telegraphists; N782, N. Series, A.P. Historical Archives.

Figure 3: Fanny Hosking and George Hosking, Post and Telegraph Master at Carcoar, HN1169 (courtesy: Mrs W. Larkin, Sydney); H.N. Series, A.P. Historical Archives. From 1872 to 1890, Mrs Hosking helped her husband with the office duties.

Figure 4: Ada Ford, Post and Telegraph Mistress at Chatswood (formerly of Willoughby), her niece, telegraphist Mary Hambly, and her male staff, c. 1897; N2514, N. Series, A.P. Historical Archives.

Figure 5: Leichhardt Post and Telegraph Office, early 1900s; unnumbered, H.N. Series, A.P. Historical Archives. Ellen Cross managed the facility from 1883 to 1896, when she and other married women were expelled from the N.S.W. Public Service.

Figure 6: Louisa Dunkley, Vice-President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association (centre), and her fellow unionists, c. 1902; John S. Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions: A History of the Telegraphist and Postal Clerk Unions of Australia*, Sydney, Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists, 1980.

Figure 7: Duncan McLachlan, Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner (seated, second row from bottom, second from left), and his staff, c. 1912; Gerald E. Caiden, *Career Service: An Introduction to the History of Personnel Administration in the Commonwealth Public Service of Australia 1901–1961*, Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 1965. McLachlan's extra-parliamentary administration limited access to genuine employment equality.

Figure 8: Maud Breeze, "Hello Girl" with a "smile in her voice", 1934; *Postal Notes*, vol. 1, no. 7, 17 December 1934. The employment of female telephonists for their commercial and public relations value undermined women's claim to equal pay for equal work.

Chapter Four: Some More Equal than Others, 1901–1914

In the following pages, I examine the generous employment provisions enjoyed by some N.S.W. women in the newly established Postmaster-General's (P.M.G.) Department and the gradual decline in vocational equality under Duncan McLachlan, Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner. The study begins with the transfer of staff from the six colonial postal and telecommunications administrations to the Commonwealth in March 1901, and the granting of equal pay under federal law the following year. It concludes with an assessment of the circumstances of female employees just prior to the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914. Over the period postmistresses and female telegraphists on the official list watched their claim to workplace equality erode in the context of concern for male earnings and disquiet surrounding waning population growth – their situation made worse by discriminatory employment policy.[1] The last-mentioned included a ban on working wives and impediments to the progress of single women beyond base-grade positions.

With the above in mind, I attempt to explain why female official employees failed to win back the vocational benefits denied them by the Public Service Commissioner. My enquiry covers budgetary restrictions, staff classification, the priority accorded union recognition, and Duncan McLachlan's facility to play one worker off against another. It also deals with the unsuccessful campaign mounted by Vida Goldstein, President of the Women's Federal Political Association (later renamed the Women's Political Association), to extend equal pay to all female employees undertaking equal work by way of federal parliament. Her initiative followed the passage of legislation in 1902 giving Australian women the vote in federal elections.[2]

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[1] Melanie Nolan and Marilyn Lake note that most females had lost the chance to perform the same duties as male federal public servants, along with their right to the minimum adult wage of 110 pounds p.a, by the end of the decade because of the priority accorded the family wage. See, Melanie Nolan, 'Sex or Class?: The Politics of the First Equal Pay Campaign in Victoria', *Labour History*, no. 61, November 1991, p. 113 & p. 117; & Marilyn Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man: Debates in the Labor Movement Over Equal Pay and Motherhood Endowment in the 1920s', *Labour History*, no. 63, November 1992, p. 4.

In considering the failure of female officers to recover their lost entitlements, I examine the abortive efforts of Constance Berridge, President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association, to achieve genuine or practical equality in employment before the Royal Commission on Postal Services of 1908–1910, notwithstanding theoretical wage parity. My investigation traverses Berridge's claim to equality based on moral considerations, as well as the assorted objections to working women.[3] It also addresses the changing attitudes towards supervision, the notion of gender sameness and difference, and the impact of maternal citizenship on employment. I understand that the concept of maternal citizenship contained an implied right to protection in the home, the workplace, and in society, as well as an obligation on women's part to exercise their allegedly unique sense of morality for the good of all.[4] My analysis of Berridge's case takes into account the loss of significant union leaders, the declining number of official employees, and the use of "cheap" female labour. It also deals with the disunity among female workers and the reasons why some women may have opted for less-than-total equality.[5]

After considering Berridge's case for genuine workplace equality, I discuss the findings of the Royal Commission on Postal Services and examine the forces that continued to frustrate the attainment of real parity. The latter included the regionalisation of telecommunications operations, the introduction of new technology, and the growth in employment opportunities outside the service.

Constance Berridge's failure to achieve her goal throws into sharp relief the tension between formal or theoretical equality, and practical or real equality in the post-suffrage period. From 1904 the Women's Central Organising Committee of the Labor

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[2] Janice N. Brownfoot, 'Goldstein, Vida Jane Mary (1869–1949)', *A.D.B.*, online edn, Australian National University, 2006, p. 2, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090042b.htm, 8 October 2008.

[3] I acknowledge Melanie Nolan and Laura Bennett's work on the collusion between private-sector employers and male unionists seeking to frustrate campaigns for equal pay. See, Melanie Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 102 & p. 103; & Laura Bennett, 'Job Classification and Women Workers: Institutional Practices, Technological Change and the Conciliation and Arbitration System, 1907–72', *Labour History*, no. 51, November 1986, pp. 11–23.

[4] Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1993, p. 28.

[5] Given the reluctance of many women to combine in the overall interest of their sex, historians Denise Riley and Judith Butler question the validity of a single definition of "woman", preferring multiple understandings of the word. See, Barbara Caine, 'Women's studies, feminist traditions and the problem

Party pressed for universal wage parity, conscious of its symbolic value in the process of female emancipation. Similarly, in 1913, the Women's Political Association campaigned for formal wage equality on behalf of female teachers in Victoria in an effort to extend parity beyond the ballot box and into the economic sphere.[6] In contrast, Sara Lewis of the Female Hotel and Caterers' Union, and Herbert Carter of the Federated Clothing Trade Union, set out to secure real wage equality for members, rejecting the theoretical form endorsed by the Victorian Trades Hall Council for the purpose of purging the workforce of women.[7]

As in previous chapters, I look at the play between patronage and quantifiable merit and analyse the post office as domestic space. My work covers Duncan McLachlan's attempt to rid the government sector of influence, the demand for skilled personnel, the quest for greater efficiency, and the survival of favour under the Public Service Commissioner.[8] In examining the post office as a "female" domain, I note the changing nature of family life and the gradual casting-off of domestic ties to the outlet in a business-oriented environment.

Despite objections to female labour and regard for demonstrable merit, a number of politicians, senior bureaucrats and male employees exhibited an ambivalent attitude towards working women, while retaining an interest in their economic wellbeing. On this point, Ben Maddison draws attention to a transitional phase between the decline of the moral economy and the rise of political economy, during which time favouritism and other arbitrary employment practices could still be found.[9]

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of history', in Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle, *Transitions: New Australian feminisms*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, pp. 1–3.

[6] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 108; & Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 134 & p. 135.

[7] In August 1913 Sara Lewis and Herbert Carter succeeded in forcing the Victorian Trades Hall Council to debate the issue of genuine parity. See, Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 109.

[8] In her study of women in the British Post Office, Meta Zimmeck suggests that senior officials engaged in 'sex patronage' irrespective of merit-based reforms, playing men off against women using a divide-and-rule strategy. See, Meta Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure: women, bureaucracy and the post office 1870–1914', in Mike Savage and Anne Witz (eds), *Gender and Bureaucracy*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers/The Sociological Review, 1992, p. 85.

[9] Ben Maddison, 'From "Moral Economy" to "Political Economy" in New South Wales, 1870–1900', *Labour History*, no. 75, November 1988, pp. 87–90, p. 100 & p. 101.

From about 1911 non-official post offices were alternatively known as allowance post offices.[10] The men and women who kept these outlets retained the titles of Non-Official Postmaster and Non-Official Postmistress.[11]

Wage Equality at a Price

In deference to the principle of equal pay for equal work, the Commonwealth Public Service Act of May 1902 provided for wage parity in respect of all permanent adult female employees of the federal government who performed the same duties as male officers.[12] Female employees of the P.M.G. Department benefited most by the provision, constituting 93.8% of all women transferred from the state to the federal payroll.[13] In the House of Representatives, the Labor Party had argued successfully for equal pay during the third reading of the Public Service Bill. In the Senate, Henry Dobson, Free Trader from Tasmania, had moved that females receive a third less than males, asserting that they were less productive and likely to leave the service to marry. Challenging the motion, Senator M. S. C. Smith, Free Trader from Western Australia, maintained that a wage differential ignored the principle of payment according to work value. Despite the misgivings of many politicians, Labor senators carried the day, insisting that women performing the same duties as men be paid the same salary.[14] The extensive campaign conducted by Louisa Dunkley and fellow members of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association to convince politicians of the merits of wage parity had been worth the effort. Given the cynical

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[10] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, Melbourne, 1911, p. 5; & N. C. Hopson, *New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Post Offices*, rev. edn, Sydney, self-published, 1984, p. i. Bureaucrats used the descriptors, Non-Official Post Office and Allowance Post Office, interchangeably. See, for example, 'Appendix C', 'Extracts from Reports of the Deputy Postmasters-General, Report of the Deputy Postmaster-General, Adelaide', *Postmaster-General's Department, Second Annual Report, 1911–12*, Melbourne, 1912, p. 35.

[11] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. 13; *Postmaster-General's Department, Third Annual Report, 1912–13*, Melbourne, 1913, p. 15; & *Postmaster-General's Department Fourth Annual Report, 1913–14*, Melbourne, 1914–15, p. 23.

[12] Effective from 1 January 1903, the law received assent on 5 May 1902. See, G. E. Caiden, *Career Service: An Introduction to the History of Personnel Administration in the Commonwealth Public Service of Australia 1901–1961*, Melbourne, Melbourne U.P., 1965, p. 63 & p. 70.

[13] Almost 16,000 officers, or 90% of all public servants who transferred to the Commonwealth on 1 March 1901, were Postmaster-General's Department employees. See, K. T. Livingston, *The Wired Nation Continent: The Communication Revolution and Federating Australia*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1976, p. 97.

attitude to equal pay elsewhere in the labour movement, some politicians conceivably supported the proposition in the hope it would see men appointed to government positions before women.

The Commonwealth Public Service Act placed all permanent officers under the statutory control of a powerful Public Service Commissioner located in Melbourne, the then national capital. Under the legislation, incumbent Duncan McLachlan had responsibility for the day-to-day administration of the P.M.G. Department, including appointments, examinations, officer classifications, annual increments, promotions and appeals, leave entitlements, and rules and regulations.[15] McLachlan exercised near absolute authority over staff – this despite the Post and Telegraph Act of 1901 that provided for a permanent Secretary, a Chief Office in Melbourne, and a Head Office in every state capital with a Deputy Postmaster-General in charge.

Although the Public Service Act was intended to provide for all working women, wives fared badly under the new regime. The legislation did not exclude married women from the service: nevertheless the Commissioner saw fit to restrict their claim to employment. Early in his tenure, Duncan McLachlan introduced a regulation (Section 80 (d) 139) in which the engagement of married women in an official capacity was declared "undesirable", and only permissible in special cases with the consent of the head of the department and a certificate from the Commissioner.[16] In December 1902 Public Service Regulation 140 came into effect. Intended to stimulate staff turnover and assist needy single women into paid work, it authorised the department to pay women who left their job to be married a bonus of up to three months' pay after five years' service.[17] Attractive financially, the provision discouraged efforts to secure permanent stations for working wives in the federal public sector. To help spinsters gain economic independence, Chief Office extended

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[14] Claire, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', M.A. Thesis, Dept of History, School of Humanities, La Trobe University, April 1984, p. 119 & p. 120.
[15] McLachlan was appointed to the position of Public Service Commissioner from the date the Public Service Act received assent, ie 5 May 1902. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 63 & p. 65.
[16] *ibid.*, p. 69. Few married women held official positions at the time of the prohibition. In N.S.W., Ada Ford, officer-in-charge at Chatswood, who had previously escaped the marriage ban, was replaced in February 1904 by D. J. Elliot, officer-in-charge at Burrowa. Mrs Ford drew 140 pounds a year, less 20 pounds' rent, her successor 210 pounds p.a., less 21 pounds' rent. See, notice signed by G. P. Unwin, Acting Dep. P.M.G., 2 February 1904, SP32, Chatswood, fol. DO 1521/FEB 18 1904.
[17] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 131.

the marriage bar in 1908 to include semi-official postmistresses living in government-owned buildings in the belief that they should be provided for by their husbands.[18]

Taking its cue from Duncan McLachlan, the department refused, in theory, to consider applications from married women to run non-official post offices.[19] In practice, it appointed wives as postmistresses in the absence of single women prepared to accept a small wage. Because of difficulties in finding replacements, spinsters who married after taking over an allowance facility were not expected to surrender their position – tacit acknowledgment of the part women played in supplementing household income.[20]

Fearing that equal pay would ultimately undermine the male wage and add to operational overheads, Duncan McLachlan moved to curb the number of women entering the P.M.G. Department and other government instrumentalities, while restricting the vocational opportunities of females already on staff. In 1905 he banned existing female telegraphists from undertaking the Clerical Division entrance examination. Next, he prohibited women outside the service from sitting the test.[21] From August 1908 the vast bulk of females in the General Division were prevented from taking the examination.[22] The Commissioner claimed that those individuals – for the most part women – who had received Morse training at a technical college were incapable of managing a line properly without at least 12 months' experience. Hence, from 1906 candidates for operating jobs had to pass a test in sending and receiving at a rate of 25 words a minute for ten minutes. McLachlan envisaged that successful applicants would in future be drawn from General Division officers who had picked up Morse in the course of their work. Since most of the women in the General Division were telephonists, females thereafter had little hope of working in

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[18] Testimony of Henry Templeton, Chief Clerk, *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, 1910, vol. 1, Q. 5740 & Q. 5741, p. 202.

[19] In Britain married women were refused employment as sub postmistresses, the equivalent of non-official postmistresses, from 1913. See, M. J. Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post Office Since 1840*, London, The Athlone Press, 1985, p. 221.

[20] Testimony of Henry Templeton, Chief Clerk, *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 1, Q. 5739 & Q. 5740, p. 202.

[21] The ban on female telegraphists entering the Clerical Division recalled the action taken against women in N.S.W. in the late 1890s. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 136, p. 137 & p. 140.

[22] *ibid*., p. 140. From August 1908 advertisements for the Clerical Division examination were worded in such a way as to exclude women. See, *ibid.*, p. 146.

telegraphy. The above constraints and extra requirements denied women further access to the more senior postmistress and telegraphist positions.[23] Thus, by 1907, only 47 women in N.S.W. held postmistress, operator and clerical assistant jobs in the Clerical Division, with 14 females in assistant and senior assistant roles in the General Division.[24] Constance Berridge, President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association, recognised the nexus between equal pay and the barriers to entry in the higher grades, observing before the Royal Commission on Postal Services of 1908–1910 that women were refused admission to the Clerical Division because they no longer offered "cheap labour".[25] With the ban on access to that stratum went the withdrawal of telegraphic training facilities for females, leaving only informal in-house tuition. The fear among South Australian women that wage parity under the Commonwealth would see eligible females marginalised or shut out of the service proved to be well founded.

To provide for working women, Senator Glassey, Protectionist member from Queensland, had moved a motion during the parliamentary debate on the Public Service Bill that provision be made for the appointment of roughly even numbers of males and females to the service in order to ensure that the spirit of the law was observed by the Commissioner. A number of his political colleagues combined to defeat the proposal, giving McLachlan effective control over gender composition. Senator H. Nield, a Free Trader from N.S.W, asserted that the provision would interfere with women's principal responsibility to boost the flagging birth rate, while the Postmaster-General, Senator James Drake, believed that it would compromise the discretionary powers of the head bureaucrat. Other senators felt that a quota would ultimately lead to the employment of fewer women.[26]

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[23] *ibid.*, p. 138 & p. 141.

[24] *Third Report on the Commonwealth Public Service issued by the Commissioner, Pursuant to Section 11 of the Commonwealth Public Service Act 1902, 1907–8*, Melbourne, 1908, p. 14. From 1906, almost all new female telegraphists were to be found in the General Division. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 140.

[25] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 41857, p. 1846.

[26] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', pp. 123–126. McCuskey suggests that the politicians who opposed equal pay were not sincere in their concern for female public sector employment, otherwise they would have endorsed Glassey's quota and introduced a similar amendment in the House of Representatives. If carried, his motion would have seen women in up to half of all Clerical Division positions. Given that only 5% of jobs were presently occupied by females, the proposal was too radical to accept. See, *ibid.*, p. 127.

Several women were adversely affected by the ban on access to the Clerical Division examination and by the absence of training facilities. May Smith, Temporary Postal Assistant at Burrawang, failed to gain entry to the clerical stratum after seeking permission in July 1904 to sit the operators' test in Sydney. Then aged 24, Miss Smith had attended the Morse equipment at Burrawang for two and a half years and had been obliged to study telegraphy "under a university coach".[27] Ellen Price, a telephonist in the General Division, also suffered from the lack of formal training amenities after her application of October 1909 for the job of semi-official postmistress at Trunkey Creek was rejected on the grounds that her telegraphic skills were not of a standard that would allow her to operate the outlet on her own. Previously, Miss Price had tried unsuccessfully to teach herself Morse on a privately owned key and had sought leave to learn telegraphy from a trained operator at Lawson Post and Telegraph Office.[28]

In seeking to restrict the employment opportunities for females in the federal public service, Duncan McLachlan shared the same attitude to working women as his lifelong friend, Timothy Coghlan, N.S.W. Government Statistician.[29] Like Coghlan, McLachlan embraced craft-union ideology, which held that working wives and single women, who were only semi-independent financially, eroded the wages of male employees and ultimately all workers over time. Accordingly, the Commissioner set out to limit the job prospects for females so as to guarantee the security of the principal male breadwinner.[30] In this respect his priorities aligned with those of Justice Higgins of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court who placed men at the centre of the household economy in his Harvester Judgment of 1907.[31]

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[27] Letter from Miss M. Smith, St David's Rectory, Burrawang, to Dep. P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 1 July 1904, SP32, Burrawang, fol. 16 Jul 1904/B 4845.

[28] Note signed by W. Windeyer, Pmr, Lawson, 18 October 1909, SP32, Trunkey Creek. Like Ellen Price, widow Theresa Fitzgerald, 45, was disadvantaged by the lack of formal training provisions, failing to secure the position of Semi-Official Postmistress at Ulladulla in 1908 because of inadequate telegraphic skills. See, 'History of Ulladulla Post Office', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, p. 65.

[29] After growing up together in the Sydney suburb of Redfern, McLachlan and Coghlan worked alongside one another in the N.S.W. Public Works Department from 1873, before the former took office as the N.S.W. Under Secretary of Mines and Agriculture. See, Desley Deacon, *Managing Gender: The State, the New Middle Class and Women Workers 1830–1930*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1989, p. 105 & p. 110.

[30] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 65; & Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 111 & p. 116.

[31] Belinda Probert, *Working Life: Arguments about work in Australian society*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1989, p. 99.

Persistent anxiety over declining population growth informed the Commissioner's attitude towards working women. In his 1903 study dealing with the waning birth rate in N.S.W., Timothy Coghlan concluded that the population's capacity to reproduce would further deteriorate unless females changed their mental and moral attitude to procreation. The findings of the N.S.W. Royal Commission on the Birth Rate released in 1904 pointed, in particular, to the "selfishness" of upper- and middle-class women who were allegedly putting career and pleasure before home life and the national interest through their use of contraception.[32] In minimising women's chances of a public-sector career, McLachlan buttressed the concept of the financially dependent wife responsible for the physical and moral wellbeing of the family.[33]

The Public Service Commissioner's arbitrary and autocratic regime compounded the marginalisation of women workers. Frequent ministerial changes and the desire in government not to politicise the service allowed Duncan McLachlan free rein to interpret the legislation as he wished.[34] Because the Public Service Act lacked specific reference to gender, he refused to concede the principle of equal pay for equal work, arguing that parliament had a differential rate of payment in mind when the bill was passed. McLachlan acknowledged that the wage rates of official postmistresses, female telegraphists, and other Clerical Division officers were prescribed in law and could not be varied through regulation. He noted, however, that Section 80 (a) of the Act allowed for the fixing of Professional and General Division salaries by administrative ruling. McLachlan took it that the salaries covered both males and females. The Commissioner, moreover, argued that sub-section (d) implied that women in the Professional and General Divisions were to be paid at a different rate to men in the same administrative category. He therefore concluded that "the popular notion (of equal pay as a legal right) … (was) … not justified by the Statute itself".

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[32] Carol Lee Bacchi, 'Evolution Eugenics and Woman: the Impact of Scientific Theories on Attitudes towards Women, 1870–1920', in Elizabeth Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australia, 1788–1978*, Sydney, Fontana Collins, 1980, p. 147.

[33] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 111.

[34] Twelve politicians held the Postmaster-General's portfolio in the first 13 years of nationhood. They were (in order of appointment): J. Forrest, 1 January 1901; J. G. Drake, 5 February 1901; P. O. Fysh, 7 August 1903; H. Mahon, 26 April 1904; S. Smith, 17 August 1904; A. Chapman, 4 July 1905; S. Maugher, 29 July 1907; J. Thomas, 12 November 1908 (first appt); J. Quick, 2 June 1909; J. Thomas, 29 April 1910 (second appt); C. E. Frazer, 14 October 1911; A. Wynne, 24 June 1913; and W. G. Spence, 17 September 1914. See, David Sharpe, 'List of Postmasters and Postmasters-General of N.S.W. & Aust.', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, March 1979. The Public Service Act was deliberately imprecise to make for a flexible administration. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 72.

Given that the Act did not expressly forbid wage parity, and irrespective of the foregoing, McLachlan believed he had the authority to make salary determinations. In regard to pay, the Commissioner allegedly set out "to make no sex distinction whatever, and to assign … equal remuneration for similar work". He also ostensibly aimed to ensure that women were afforded equal job opportunities, subject to the same selection criteria that applied to men.[35] McLachlan made selective use of the past to justify his contorted position on equal pay, arguing that women in the federal public service were "particularly fortunate" compared with females in the former colonial utilities, wherein "rates of remuneration were considerably less than for male officers of similar rank". He cited the lowly paid female officers in Victoria, but conveniently overlooked their female peers in N.S.W. who had long enjoyed wage parity.[36] Henceforth, equal pay depended on the personal inclination of the head bureaucrat rather than the will of the legislature.

Duncan McLachlan adopted a cavalier attitude towards promotions. Early in his tenure, he assumed the right under Section 50 of the Act to promote one officer over another after receiving advice from the Attorney-General that an aggrieved party had no recourse to appeal.[37] In evidence before the Royal Commission on Postal Services, Constance Berridge complained that junior males were often advanced at the expense of more senior women.[38] McLachlan's practices were consistent with Coghlan's concept of an independent public service free of political intervention in which bureaucrats were at liberty to make policy according to the "objective" science of personnel management.[39] His partial and personal administration reduced equality in employment from a legal provision to a discretionary aside.

Budgetary constraints provided a convenient rationale for the administration's failure to employ women on equal terms to men. In 1901 the federal government adopted an austerity programme so as to meet its obligation under the "Braddon" clause to pay

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[35] *Second Report on the Commonwealth Public Service issued by the Commissioner*, Melbourne, 1906, p. 27.
[36] McLachlan cited the Victorian Public Service Act of 1900 under which women in the Fifth Class of the Clerical Division received a maximum of just 110 pounds p.a. compared with 160 pounds for males. He noted that females were generally restricted to 84 pounds p.a. prior to 1900. See, *loc. cit.*
[37] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 84.
[38] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 41857, p. 1845 & p. 1846.
[39] Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 106 & p. 123.

the states a return on custom duties for 10 years.[40] For its part, the P.M.G. Department looked to economies to offset the cost of a subsidised Penny Post service to Britain, as well as cheaper telegram and telephone rates introduced at the behest of Sir William Lyne and the New Protectionists late in 1902.[41] Postmaster-General James Drake compounded the need for financial restraint by proposing that the department pay its own way, wherever possible, and aim for a balanced budget.[42]

Classification

The classification of federal public servants from June 1904 perpetuated the divide between the sexes. Duncan McLachlan instituted the exercise with the intention of standardising the vast range of positions and duties inherited from the colonial governments, observing that the P.M.G. Department alone accounted for 302 of the 470 different designations transferred to the Commonwealth. To ensure "the economical and sound business administration of the Departments", post and telegraph officers were assessed in relation to the "value" of their services, and establishments were appraised according to their worth *vis-a-vis* other facilities. Variables included the volume of letters posted and received, the number of telegrams handled, the quantity of money orders issued and paid, the amount of savings bank business transacted, and the level of telephone business generated. The public service inspectors who assessed facilities also rated them in terms of staff numbers and the amount of night work performed.[43] As in previous reviews, individuals and outlets were evaluated according to criteria mostly outside of their control.

Official post and telegraph masters and mistresses, henceforth known as postmasters and postmistresses, found themselves in one of five classes and in several different

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[40] Anne Moyal, *Clear Across Australia; A History of Telecommunications*, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson Australia, 1984, p. 92. The Commonwealth had a statutory obligation to pay the interest on properties transferred from the states to the federal government. See, *ibid.*, p. 96.

[41] 'Cheap Postal & Telegraphic Rates', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 7, 17 December 1900, p. 1; & 'The Post and Telegraph Rates Act', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 6, 17 October 1902, p. 3.

[42] In parliamentary debate, Drake prevailed over Senator Best from Victoria, who called for a wholly subsidised service to help open up a 'vast undeveloped continent'. Drake had the support of politicians who favoured a break-even policy. See, Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 90 & p. 91. As before, the utility had to absorb the cost of maintaining the under-utilised Pacific cable and provide "free" services to other instrumentalities, which, from 1901, included the supply of meteorological readings to the weather bureau. See, *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. 20.

[43] *Classification of the Public Service prepared by the Public Service Commissioner, 23 June 1904*, Melbourne, p. iv.

grades under a proportional grading system.[44] In N.S.W., positions ranged from Second Class Grade I attracting a salary of 460 pounds a year, to Fifth Class Grade XV paying 120 pounds p.a. Men in larger offices monopolised the Second and Third Class, leaving a few women attached to lower-grade facilities in the Fourth Class, and the bulk of females in the Fifth Class. Minnie Knott, Postmistress at Glebe, was the only female to occupy a Grade VIII post in the Fourth Class, in contrast to 27 males. In Grade IX of the Fourth Class, Jane Higgs at Surry Hills proved to be the sole woman among 25 men, while of the 34 officers in Grade X, Kate Black at Annandale was the only female. In the Fifth Class, women occupied 14 of the 71 Grade XIV jobs, and 12 of the 53 Grade XV posts, despite their relatively small numbers overall.[45] No employee suffered an immediate salary reduction following the review, however those paid more than their job warranted were refused further increases, while their successors received the revised wage for the position.[46] The classification process placed most women at an organisational disadvantage *vis-a-vis* men.

Classification did a particular disservice to several postmistresses by tying staffing levels to salaries and by perpetuating anomalies. As a result of the review, Mrs P. E. Fitzgerald in rural Bendemeer, who was graded at just 125 pounds a year, was expected to provide a post and telegraph service without any paid assistance.[47] Meanwhile, other country women on higher salaries, which might have justified help, laboured single-handedly in busy outlets.[48] Despite a wage of 160 pounds p.a., Blanche Squire, Postmistress at Burrawang, was left to manage the office without permanent help as she had done prior to Federation.[49] Conversely, Elizabeth Church –

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[44] Postmasters and postmistresses in all but the largest offices were expected to undertake telegraph work as required. See, Gerald E. Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.: A Study of White Collar Public Service Unionism in the Commonwealth of Australia 1885–1922', Occasional Papers No. 2, Dept of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra, 1966, p. 14.

[45] In lowly Grade XII of the Fourth Class, seven of the 24 places were filled by females. See, *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, pp. xviii–xx. Only a third of female operators in the Clerical Division could be found in the Fourth Class, the balance assigned to the Fifth Class. Juniors filled posts paying less than 110 pounds p.a. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 77. Duncan McLachlan stated: "every officer who ... gives efficient and willing service shall have a fair chance of advancement". See, *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, p. iv.

[46] Reductions in nominal salaries generally only applied to new, recently promoted, and transferred staff. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 77.

[47] *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, Schedule VII, p. 71; & 'Bendemeer Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, July 1985, p. 13 & p. 14.

[48] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 79.

[49] *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, Schedule VII, p. 74. The department allowed Miss Squire to hire a temporary assistant. See, letter from Miss M. Smith, St David's Rectory, Burrawang, to Dep. P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 1 July 1904, SP32, Burrawang, fol. 16 Jul 1904/b 4845.

who commanded just 130 pounds p.a. as postmistress in suburban Coogee – was allowed to keep her 17-year-old male assistant subsequent to the review.[50] Despite the Commissioner's best efforts to impose uniformity on public service employment, classification failed to treat all women equally and consistently.

Complexities surrounding the appeal process served to contain opposition to Duncan McLachlan's discriminatory employment policy. His insistence that classification had seen all appropriately qualified officers promoted to higher stations dissuaded women in the Fifth Class, upset by the failure to classify them in the Fourth Class, from appealing the matter.[51] The Commissioner put obstacles in their way by refusing to explain the exact methodology used to assess staff, and by failing to provide details of determinations before having them approved by the Governor General, or until parliament passed the Estimates. Of the 2,217 officers of both sexes who appealed, just 447 gained a revision. Politicians chose not to publicly criticise the classification since it promised to save money and was purportedly conducted in a scientific manner, leaving appellants without their support.[52]

The effective relegation of some women to the General Division and the introduction of new designations contributed to the general decline in career prospects for females. Following the classification process, those telegraphists, postal clerks (relatively senior employees who relieved postmasters when necessary), clerical assistants with Morse training, and other officers in the Clerical Division with duties deemed to be below clerical standard, had their positions transferred to the General Division – an employment stratum that only required basic qualifications for admission. The workers affected included several women. Despite the downgrading of their jobs, they were still expected to perform "clerical" work as required.[53] Consequent to the staff review, junior male and female operators in the General Division, who drew between

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[50] Assistant R. W. Wilson had joined Elizabeth Church in January 1902. See, *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, Schedule VII, p. 78. Despite her busy office, Miss Hiley, officer-in-charge at Bondi, had her staff reduced from six to five. See, *ibid.*, p. 72; & report by Alex Burnett, Inspr, 3 May 1902, SP32, Bondi, fol. 24 APR 1902/1953.

[51] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 41864, p. 1846.

[52] McLachlan maintained that the alleged rights of employees to particular rates of pay or privileges were purely arbitrary and that officers needed to prove that they were legally enforceable before he would recognise them. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 78, p. 81 & p. 82.

[53] The employees retained their "clerical" status. When they finally vacated their position, it was filled by a General Division officer. See, *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, p. xii. Postal clerks and many clerical assistants were trained in telegraphy. See, Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 14.

60 and 110 pounds p.a., received the generic title of Assistant and were assigned elementary postal tasks along with their telegraphic duties. The change in designation and responsibilities represented a linguistic and practical demotion.[54] In addition, McLachlan created the job of Senior Assistant in the General Division with duties "considered suitable for women", including stamp selling and postal note sorting. He saw it as offering ambitious females a vocational alternative to telephony.[55] Thereafter, a number of women were separated from male co-workers in terms of status and employer expectations.

Anxious to uphold the primacy of the male wage, Duncan McLachlan made special provision for young males seeking a career in the service. Unlike women in the General Division with limited occupational prospects, junior males in the same stratum could hope to progress to senior, non-clerical posts that involved "the supervision of large bodies of officers or the performance of work of a very responsible character". To maximise their potential, McLachlan permitted officers to transfer to positions of equivalent grade elsewhere in the department, provided they had the necessary competencies. Henceforth, telegraph messengers might progress via the assistant designation to the job of letter carrier or mail driver and onto mail officer, or, alternatively, pass through the Electrical Branch to become instrument fitters or line repairers. Youths in the clerical echelon who transferred across designations might aspire to "the highest ranks" of the service.[56] Under the classification system, the department calculated seniority according to earnings, allowing young men with just a few years' experience to overhaul long-serving women on smaller salaries. In this male-focused administration, women were consigned to the periphery.

Most male post and telegraph employees shared the community's reservations regarding working women and elected not to challenge the discriminatory treatment of female colleagues. Although not yet openly critical of female union members, the leadership of the A.C.P.T.O.A. was alarmed by the growing number of women finding jobs in offices and factories. In the September 1904 issue of the *Transmitter*,

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[54] 'Designations', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 3, 18 July 1904, p. 16.
[55] *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, p. vii.
[56] *ibid.*, p. vi & p. vii.

the editor complained that males were being "crowded out" of paid work, with dire implications for the birth rate.[57] In the March 1905 edition, he defended the constraints on female staff in the federal sphere on the basis that men were generally responsible for supporting a family, while admitting that several women also had dependants. According to the editor, Duncan McLachlan had acted "in the public interest".[58] From the perspective of male unionists, any relaxation of the restrictions on female employment could only compromise national wellbeing.

The A.C.P.T.O.A.'s quest for recognition under the Commonwealth subsumed the issue of employment equality. Under the New Protectionist model, government would accept staff associations, provided they adopted a mediating role between employers and labour and did not attempt to undermine the political, economic or social order.[59] Postmaster-General James Drake recognised the A.C.P.T.O.A. on the understanding it would bring matters before him in a constitutional way, in which case he would take into account its "influence and interests".[60] On 6 May 1902, Edward Kraegen, General President of the union, called on the Public Service Commissioner to assure him of the association's loyalty and its desire to promote efficiency and contentment in the service.[61] The union leadership raised only those issues with Duncan McLachlan that affected all members, avoiding sectional or individual grievances for fear of alienating the Commissioner. In return for its co-operation, McLachlan acknowledged the association on condition that it was properly conducted.[62] Committed to the status *quo*, the A.C.P.T.O.A. could not be seen to oppose the will of government in relation to working women.

The priority accorded union solidarity ensured that opposition to the marginalisation of women was generally muted. Only nominally a national body, the A.C.P.T.O.A.

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[57] 'Women's Page, By the Editor', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 5, 17 September 1904, p. 6.
[58] 'Women and the Service', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 11, 18 March 1905, p. 4.
[59] Stuart Macintyre, 'Equity in Australian History', in Patrick N. Troy (ed.), *A Just Society?: Essays on Equity in Australia*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1981, pp. 42–44.
[60] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 57.
[61] The Commissioner was not bound to recognise the union beyond the formal receipt of correspondence and deputations, and was not obliged to consult it on any matters affecting members. See, Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 60. On 22 August 1902, Kraegen, Louisa Dunkley and other union officials presented Duncan McLachlan with a forty-page document detailing their principal concerns. The submission covered the need for officers to remain in the clerical stratum, the minimum wage, and the job prospects of telegraph messengers. See, *ibid.*, p. 61 & p. 62.
[62] *ibid.*, p. 60.

was an amalgam of disparate affiliates, each with a different history and membership, and each previously subject to different designations, salary scales, regulations and operating practices.[63] Although critical of the ban on female entry to the Clerical Division, *Inconnue*, the *Transmitter's* anonymous female columnist, was careful not to sow discontent among readers following classification. She asserted that female telegraphists had "practically been placed on the same footing as men", their work deemed to be in the "highest class". Even so, she conceded that most Fourth Class positions had gone to males, and acknowledged that postmistresses had not fared as well as female operators under the review. Anxious to contain dissent, *Inconnue* admonished South Australian and Tasmanian members who expressed dissatisfaction with their grading and claimed "state rights" in respect of increments allegedly owed to them by former colonial governments. She implied that most women were happy with their lot and dismissed the malcontents, arguing that they had received what they had wanted.[64] Worker unity came before employee grievances.

Divide and Conquer

Duncan McLachlan utilised a strategy of divide and rule to frustrate opposition to his partisan policy. Early in his administration, male telegraphists were known as operators, while their female counterparts in the same office were called postal assistants in keeping with the designations adopted in Victoria in 1890. Concerned for equity and uniformity, Louisa Dunkley, delegate for the Victorian women at the second A.C.P.T.O.A. conference in March 1903, moved that the union insist on the same title for males and females who undertook identical duties. Personally, she favoured "Telegraphist". Opposing the motion, J. J. Coles representing Western Australia contended that it was tantamount to saying that women were as capable as men. Similarly, W. J. Field, delegate for the Victorian men, claimed that identical designations would lower the occupational status of males, since females were clearly no match for them. On the subject of equal pay – something intrinsic to Dunkley's motion – G. E. Goodman from N.S.W. approved of wage parity on the grounds of identical work. In a bid to defuse the issue, W. C. Crawley, delegate from South Australia, tried to separate designation from salary, suggesting that the motion did not mean that women granted the same title as men were necessarily entitled to the same

[63] *ibid.*, p. 16.

rate of pay.[65] The Commissioner exploited the divide between legislative endorsement of employment equality and workplace attitudes to the concept.

Meanwhile, a rift between postmistresses and female telegraphists minimised the potential for a combined assault on the Commissioner's biased employment regime. Given that postmasters and postmistresses were classified according to the grade of their office – which in the case of women was almost always lowly ranked – salaries generally ranged from 140 to 265 pounds a year, the majority of women receiving 160 pounds p.a., less a 10% rent deduction. In contrast, most female operators – usually with fewer responsibilities than postmistresses – were guaranteed a wage of at least 160 pounds p.a., regardless of office grading. The situation made for animosity between designations. Some postmistresses alleged that the women in Melbourne's Chief Telegraph Office had exerted their collective influence on the Commissioner to secure favourable pay rates – something that they were unable to do given the distance that separated them from the seat of power.[66]

Differences in titles and duties between Clerical Division and General Division officers following classification placed an additional obstacle in the way of concerted action against gender discrimination. In 1904 Duncan McLachlan agreed to reinstate the Telegraphist designation, replacing "Operator" for males and "Postal Assistant" for females in response to pressure from Clerical Division staff. Meanwhile, junior male and female operators in the General Division had acquired the title of Assistant Telegraphist (later changed to Assistant).[67] An officer in the Clerical Division, *Inconnue* felt that "Telegraphist" recognised the expertise of workers in her employment stratum and the trying conditions under which they laboured. Along with her male peers, she tended to devalue the work undertaken by General Division

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[64] 'Women's Page By "L'Inconnue"', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 3, 18 July 1904, p. 6.
[65] Delegate A. Sneyd from Queensland sought to separate work from gender, arguing that if males and females were assigned the same duties they should share the same title. See, 'The Conference, Fifth Day, Similar Designation', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 12, 17 April 1903, p. 8.
[66] Although 15 grades were assigned to post offices, not one outlet run by a woman was classified higher than the eighth grade. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 134 & p. 135. Classification from 1904 made for conflict between postmasters and male telegraphists, limiting their capacity to defend the rights of female officers. Thereafter, the latter could gain promotion before the former by sitting examinations, giving them first claim to postmaster vacancies. Sorely vexed, several postmasters left the A.C.P.T.O.A. and formed their own union. See, *ibid.*, p. 136.
[67] *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, p. iv; & 'Queensland, Southern Notes', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 4, 18 August 1904, p. 13.

officers, who often lacked the ability to "read" by ear. In her opinion the strain felt by Clerical Division operators trained to receive by sound exceeded that found in any other job.[68] In this instance designation and competencies mattered more than gender.

A salary differential between N.S.W. and Victorian women eroded the prospect of national action against the Commissioner's partial administration. Duncan McLachlan justified the wage disparity in terms of "local features", arguing that officers in N.S.W. typically served larger hinterland populations than their counterparts in Victoria where settlement was more concentrated.[69] *Inconnue* noted the envy felt by Victorian women towards their N.S.W. colleagues, observing:

> In one state the postmistresses are so well treated that the majority of Victorian postmistresses cast longing eyes, and wish they had been fortunate enough to have had their lot cast in that special State. To see a salary of 265 pounds opposite a woman's name makes the majority of other women positively gasp.

Inconnue claimed that some Victorian women had longer service than their N.S.W. peers and toiled in equally busy offices graded at only 140 or 160 pounds p.a.[70] In this case equality was as much about parity with other women as it was with men.

Disunity, Moderation and Non-Party Politics

Opposition from assorted women's organisations to Vida Goldstein's unsuccessful campaign for the Senate in 1903, 1910 and 1917, and for the House of Representatives in 1913 and 1914, handicapped efforts to achieve genuine employment equality in the public sector and elsewhere by democratic means.[71] Intent on legislative and social reform that included universal wage parity with men, Goldstein opined that males would remain largely indifferent to female concerns while women were absent from federal parliament.[72] The Women's Christian Temperance Union under Marie Kirk refused to endorse her initial bid for the Senate. Although committed to the principle of equal pay for equal work, the W.C.T.U. feared that it would damage the campaign for the female franchise at state elections and draw unwelcome attention to the radical potential of the vote, harming the prospects for

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[68] 'Women's Page By "L'Inconnue"', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 3, 18 July 1904, p. 6.
[69] *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, p. v.
[70] 'Women's Page By "L'Inconnue"', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 3, 18 July 1904, p. 6.
[71] Brownfoot, 'Goldstein, Vida Jane Mary (1869–1949)', p. 45.
[72] Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 32.

long-term change.[73] *Inconnue* reported that many women, including her fellow unionists, felt that Goldstein's quest for a Senate seat was premature, given the pressing need to educate females in the political process.[74]

The Australian Women's National League presented the greatest obstacle to employment equality by way of parliament. Formed in April 1904 allegedly to counter Vida Goldstein's political aspirations, the A.W.N.L. grew to 54,000 members during the Great War.[75] Led by socialites Lady Janet Clarke and her younger sister, Eva Hughes, the League owed much of its success to its impeccable political and business connections, its ready access to the media, and the policy of representing all women regardless of class – something that set it apart from its socialist opponents.[76] Opportunistic in nature, the A.W.N.L. attracted support from across the social spectrum with its denunciation of the 'free love' platform purportedly adopted by the more extreme socialists – an agenda that threatened the sanctity of marriage and the family.[77] In contrast to the League's large following, membership of Goldstein's Women's Political Association (W.P.A.) was unlikely to have exceeded 1,000 individuals at any one time and was generally confined to middle-class spinsters with leftist sympathies.[78] The A.W.N.L. leadership made good use of the press to present Goldstein's parliamentary candidature as something alien to women's condition, citing long hours and all-night sittings as reasons for not supporting female representation in government. Rather than a parliamentary presence, the League

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[73] Anthea Hyslop, 'Temperate Feminists: Marie Kirk and the WCTU', in Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (eds), *Double Time: Women in Victoria – 150 Years*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1985, p. 120; & Farley Kelly, 'Vida Goldstein: Political Woman', *ibid.*, p. 169. The Victorian Women's Franchise League maintained that the time was not yet ripe for a female politician. See, Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 157.

[74] 'Women's Page By "L'Inconnue"', *Transmitter*, vol. XIII, no. 4, 18 August 1903, p. 6. See also, 'Women's Page (By Lystra)', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 7, 17 November 1902, p. 5.

[75] Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 73; Marian Quartly, 'Defending "The Purity of Home Life" Against Socialism: the Founding Years of the Australian Women's National League', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2004, p. 178. The A.W.N.L. commenced with 120 branches: by 1914 it had 420 centres. See, Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 107; & Marian Quartly, 'The Australian Women's National League and Democracy, 1904–1924', *Women's History Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, March 2006, p. 46.

[76] Sylvia Morrissey, 'Clarke, Janet Marion (1851–1909)', *A.D.B.*, online edn, 2006, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A030391b.htm, p. 1, 9 October 2009 ; Judy Smart, 'Hughes, Agnes Eva (1856?–1940)', *A.D.B.*, online edn, 2006, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090389b.htm, p. 1, 9 October 2009; & Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 125 & p. 180.

[77] *ibid*., p. 178 & p. 191.

favoured a council of women advisors with unimpeded access to politicians.[79] An opponent of female economic independence espoused by the W.P.A., the A.W.N.L. argued that it relieved men of their responsibility to maintain wives and families and weakened women's influence in the home. Although conceding that working-class women were often forced to sell their labour, the League was principally concerned to protect them from the dangers to reproductive health and personal morality posed by some occupations.[80] Without the A.W.N.L.'s support for a female voice in parliament, the prospect of reversing Duncan McLachlan's discriminatory employment policies was seriously diminished.

Most women's groups remained committed to the existing political order, their moderate outlook limiting the range of action available to members. However aggrieved by the injustices facing females, Vida Goldstein and the W.P.A. rejected radical socialism and a revolutionary agenda in favour of a constitutional approach to employment equality and other reform.[81] Not surprisingly, the A.W.N.L. dismissed divisive socialist solutions to economic and social ills, calling instead for 'harmony between the classes'. The League's misrepresentation of all socialists as home wreckers contributed to an ideological divide between women. While some joined the Labor Party or founded radical independent groups, the majority gravitated to the conservative or anti-Labor camp.[82] Although wedded to the concept of organised labour, the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association identified with the moderate cause, by and large deferring to authority. Rather than vigorously protest the reduction in vocational opportunities, members accepted the Commissioner's assurance that they faced no structural barriers to advancement and took seriously his promise to re-grade underpaid postmistresses at some point in the future.[83] Because of

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[78] *ibid.*, p. 73. From 1903 the Women's Federal Political Association became the Women's Political Association, with efforts to secure the female vote in all state government elections. See, Brownfoot, 'Goldstein, Vida Jane Mary (1869–1949)', p. 2.
[79] Quartly, 'The Australian Women's National League and Democracy', p. 46; Quartly, 'Defending "The Purity of Home Life" Against Socialism', p. 179 & p. 180; Judith Smart, 'Eva Hughes: Militant Conservative', in Lake and Kelly (eds), *Double Time*, p. 183; & Judith Smart, '"Principles Do Not Alter, but the Means by Which We Attain Them Change": the Australian Women's National League and Political Citizenship, 1921–1945', *Women's History Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, March 2006, p. 60.
[80] Quartly, 'The Australian Women's National League and Democracy', p. 39 & p. 41.
[81] Brownfoot, 'Goldstein, Vida Jane Mary (1869–1949)', p. 45; & Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 53.
[82] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 107.
[83] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42040, p. 1854.

the conservative inclinations of most women's groups, extreme measures to achieve workplace equality were never entertained.

The rejection of party politics by many women made the objective of employment equality that much harder to attain. Like numerous feminists of her time, including the leaders of the A.W.N.L., Vida Goldstein opted for a non-aligned approach to reform, concerned that the party system ignored the oneness of humanity. She feared that if women embraced partisan politics they would adopt the manners and objectives of men and lose their independence of thought.[84] *Inconnue* identified with her position, noting that many females preferred to remain politically detached for the sake of autonomy.[85] Most Labor Party supporters construed Goldstein's independent stance as an attack on their politics and were unsympathetic to her cause.[86] Without a party manifesto and apparatus to assist her, Goldstein was hard pressed to repudiate or qualify the label of radical socialist attached to her, refute the A.W.N.L.'s assertion that a vote for her was a vote for Labor, and defend her support for the British suffragettes, if not their extremist tactics. The lack of a party structure, including an effective deputy and formal fundraising provisions, told on her political ambitions, support for the W.P.A. declining during her absence in England in 1911.[87] Without reliable financial backing, the Association had to absorb the losses incurred by its newspaper, the *Australian Woman's Sphere*, and the publication's successor, the *Woman Voter*.[88] Goldstein's failure to win a House of Representatives seat in 1913 stemmed from poor media coverage, electoral anger over suffragette outrages, and her opposition to compulsory military training as war approached. Moreover, voters had insufficient confidence in the ability of one woman without party endorsement to effect change.[89] Without a woman-oriented political force with party backing, the circumstances of female departmental employees were doomed to go unnoticed.

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[84] Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: the History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 145 & p. 147. Feminist Rose Scott claimed that the male orientation of political parties and the intrinsic difference between the sexes prevented men from properly representing women. See, Judith A. Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1994, p. 198.
[85] 'Women's Page By "L'Inconnue"', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 5, 17 September 1904, p. 6. The A.W.N.L. hierarchy worried that the female voice would be subject to male and machine manipulation if the League embraced a particular party. See, Smart, 'Eva Hughes: Militant Conservative', p. 183.
[86] Allen, *Rose Scott*, p. 270.
[87] Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 96, p. 98 & p. 115.
[88] The last edition of the *Australian Woman's Sphere* was published in March 1905. The *Woman Voter* was launched in 1909. See, *ibid.*, p. 75 & p. 79.
[89] *ibid.*, p. 121, p. 139 & p. 140.

The Quest for Genuine Equality

Constance Berridge, Postmistress at Albert Park and President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association, used the Royal Commission on Postal Services, which commenced hearings on 15 July 1908, to argue the case for genuine parity in employment on behalf of female permanent staff, the statutory right to equal pay notwithstanding.[90] William Webster M.P. had called for the inquiry in response to persistent complaints in the press regarding departmental inefficiencies and inept personnel.[91] In testimony before the Royal Commission, Constance Berridge claimed that the policies and actions of the Public Service Commissioner and the department had seen women gradually worked out of the more substantial positions. Those who remained were confined to small offices outside the gaze of senior officials and lacked access to the latest technology. Hence women had no way of proving that they were the equal of men.[92] Berridge noted that most females were to be found in the Fifth Class of the Clerical Division, whereas most of their male peers held posts in the Fourth Class, even though many had not served at isolated stations in harsh climates, as had numerous women.[93] The union leader challenged the view that women lacked the physical and mental stamina required of a good telegraphist in the higher echelons. She pointed out that many men were incapable of working a "heavy" office, breaking down or showing "signs of depreciation" over the longer term.[94] Questioning the competency of several males in 210-pound-a-year positions, she implied that females were just as well equipped to occupy senior posts. Holding to the principle of equal pay for equal work, Berridge insisted that those women in the General Division who undertook "clerical" duties for no extra money either be placed in the Clerical Division and receive the same salary as clerical workers, or be allocated General Division work only.[95] To enable females throughout Australia to become General Division operators, her union proposed that girls be hired as telegraph messengers and

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[90] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 122.
[91] *ibid.*, pp. 114–120.
[92] *Royal Commission on Postal Services*, *Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42024, p. 1854; & Q. 42094, p. 1857.
[93] *ibid.*, Q. 41857, p. 1845. Nationwide, only 24 postmistresses and female telegraphists occupied the Fourth Class of the Clerical Division compared with 707 men. See, *ibid.*, Q. 42014, p. 1854. According to Berridge, only 21 women were graded in the Fourth Class. See, *ibid.*, Q. 42001, p. 1854. The highest-paid woman, Jane Higgs, officer-in-charge at Surry Hills in N.S.W., who was found in the fourth subdivision of the Fourth Class, received 265 pounds annually. See, *ibid.*, Q. 41898, p. 1848.
[94] *ibid.*, Q. 42043, p. 1855. Berridge suggested that female telegraphists were less likely to break down than male operators because they led "a steadier life". See, *ibid.*, Q. 41875, p. 1847.
[95] *ibid.*, Q. 42098, Q. 42099 & Q. 42100, p. 1857.

undergo the same training as boys.[96] Berridge teased out the difference between theoretical equality and practical parity in the workplace.

Arguably, the benefits enjoyed by female official post and telegraph employees under the Commonwealth damaged Constance Berridge's case for genuine employment equality. During the course of the Royal Commission, the President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association confirmed that her members' salaries had grown by as much as 100% since Federation.[97] In N.S.W., female officers had retained their remunerative advantage over their interstate colleagues, with allowance made for "local features", and the decision not to reduce salaries to a uniform national average as previously proposed. Thanks to the liberal employment conditions provided for under the Public Service Act of 1902, female permanent officers throughout Australia were entitled to three weeks' recreation leave, public holidays, furlough after 20 years' service, and three months' sick leave after 10 years.[98] Their situation contrasted with that of trained nurses. Whereas they could hope for a salary of at least 160 pounds a year in good time, nurses in public hospitals drew just 75 to 85 pounds p.a., while those in private practice earned no more than 100 pounds p.a. Neither group of nurses had a statutory right to leave and public holidays.[99] On the face of it, the department's female official employees had little cause for complaint.

Constance Berridge believed that her fellow union members had a moral claim on the P.M.G. Department, arguably discounting Louisa Dunkley's wholly merit-based case for equal pay and compromising the quest for genuine equality. In evidence before the Royal Commission, Berridge implied that women were especially deserving of favour because of their deep-felt commitment to the job. She observed that female assistants often stayed back late to complete tasks with no thought of claiming overtime.[100] In contrast, young men typically left work early, trusting to their luck that there would be

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[96] *ibid*., Q. 41857, p. 1845, & Q. 41870, p. 1847. Caroline Allen of the Victorian women's union first proposed that girls be made messengers in 1906. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 139.
[97] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42025 & Q. 42028, p. 1854, & Q. 42084, p. 1857.
[98] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 65.
[99] Glenda Law, '"I have never liked Trade Unionism": the Development of the Royal Australian Nursing Federation, Queensland Branch, 1904–45', in Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Class and History*, p. 197.
[100] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42061, p. 1857.

sufficient spare time next morning to complete any outstanding work.[101] Berridge asked that special consideration be shown to women who had served the department faithfully in remote locations and harsh climates only to be displaced by men with no experience of difficult postings once easier billets became available.[102] Most nurses had the same stoic attitude and commitment to work, believing that employers had a moral obligation to staff. Shunning workplace regulation, the Australian Trained Nurses' Association expected members to work long shifts (frequently a 12-hour day) and forego overtime payments, confident in the knowledge that they would be granted sick leave and free hospital treatment, if and when required.[103] Like nurses, female post and telegraph officers referred workplace problems to the employer instead of pursuing industrial action, taking the view that the government represented the will of the people and should be sensitive to the needs of its public servants.[104] From Constance Berridge's perspective, female employees had a special relationship with the department that transcended issues surrounding quantifiable merit.

Her view that women had a right to particular consideration independent of demonstrable worth ran counter to the spirit of the Public Service Act. Opposed to partiality in employment, the vast bulk of parliamentarians had voted the statute into being with the intention of ensuring that the federal government sector rewarded talent and application. Accordingly, the Public Service Commissioner expected all applicants for permanent positions to sit an entrance examination and all officers to gain extra qualifications before seeking promotion, regardless of seniority or situation.[105] Constance Berridge's call for a morally based approach to employment conflicted with the prevailing mood of the legislature and the bureaucracy.

Physical isolation and vocational differences retarded endeavours to achieve real equality in employment. In defence of her union's failure to pursue the issue prior to that time, Constance Berridge explained to the Commissioners inquiring into Postal Services that members were scattered around the state and had "not been able to take concerted action about anything". In N.S.W., women were even more dispersed, with

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[101] *ibid*., Q. 42058, p. 1856.
[102] *ibid.*, Q. 42048, p. 1856.
[103] Law, "I have never liked Trade Unionism", pp. 197–200.
[104] Many male colleagues also preferred to make individual representations to bureaucrats, rather than engage in collective action. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 18.

18 of the 25 official postmistresses attached to rural offices extending as far north as Bendemeer and as far south as Bundanoon.[106] Failing to present a united front, Berridge complained to the Commissioners that her fellow postmistresses were worse off than female telegraphists, having been classified according to office earnings and not, as in the case of operators, on the basis of duties. Further, the latter were senior to the former in terms of salary, but did not have as many onerous tasks to perform. She felt that postmistresses should occupy a higher grade than operators.[107] In ascribing different work "values" to the two designations without reference to men, Constance Berridge subverted Louisa Dunkley's case for wage equality on the strength of comparable duties and similar responsibilities *vis-a-vis* males.[108] Literal and occupational distance divided women from one another.

By 1908 widespread concern for the male wage and disquiet surrounding sluggish population growth had conspired to harden the attitude of union leaders to working women.[109] In the previous year, Justice Higgins of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court had formalised the principle of the basic or family wage in his Harvester Judgment. It further institutionalised the idea of an economically autonomous male breadwinner with economically dependent female kin.[110] In testimony before the Royal Commission, Maurice O'Connor, General President of the A.C.P.T.O.A., confessed that the union leadership supported equal pay in the knowledge it would see males hired before females.[111] He claimed that women undercut the male wage and contributed to sweating by accepting a lower rate of pay, regardless of nominal salary equality. Accordingly, he supported the bar on female appointments to the Clerical Division.[112] The hierarchy of the Victorian Clerks' Union took a similar view, endorsing a wage parity campaign from 1911 on the assumption that males would be engaged before females if employers had to pay them the same salary.[113] The passage of time had rendered the motives of many union leaders more transparent.

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[105] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 60.
[106] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42066, p. 1857.
[107] *ibid.*, Q. 42031, p. 1854.
[108] *ibid.*, Q. 42132, p. 1858.
[109] Constance Berridge felt that women suffered more discrimination at the hands of the department and its male employees than previously. See, *ibid.*, Q. 42092, p. 1857.
[110] Probert, *Working Life*, p. 99.
[111] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 29883, p. 1239.
[112] O'Connor proposed that the money paid to women be used to help finance the national immigration scheme. See, *ibid.*, Q. 29882, p. 1239.
[113] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 110 & p. 111.

Growing opposition to working women in terms of the male wage manifested itself in objections to female officers on physical and psychological grounds. Chief Electrical Engineer Charles Hesketh claimed that female telegraphists were able to perform just 4/5ths of the work undertaken by male staff up to the 2nd division of the Fourth Class, their performance deteriorating beyond that point due to constitutional shortcomings.[114] Similarly, J. G. Willson, President of the N.S.W. Post and Telegraph Association (the former N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society), asserted that the "nervous strain" experienced by female operators in busy offices prevented them from achieving the same level of efficiency as males.[115] Constance Berridge discerned a link between the male wage and criticism of women in terms of alleged physiological and psychological inadequacies. She implied that her male colleagues purposely found fault in females because they feared that women would depress pay rates overall, regardless of nominal parity.[116] Antipathy towards "cheap" female labour transcended the reality of theoretical wage equality.

William Webster M.P. and head bureaucrat Duncan McLachlan put barriers in the way of Constance Berridge's efforts to obtain practical parity in employment. Webster – who sat on the Royal Commission and was interested in the economic and demographic wellbeing of the nation – disputed the case for equal pay on the basis of equal work, suggesting that female officers were incapable of heavy labour and customarily left their duties to male assistants.[117] He revealed his partisanship in the leading, close-ended questions he put to witnesses, asking Adam Fordyce from the Letter Carriers and Sorters' Association: "Do you think that they (women) will not prove themselves as efficient as the men?"[118] In the Third Report of the Commonwealth Public Service of 1907–1908, Duncan McLachlan in effect questioned a woman's right to government employment in referring to the expense involved in hiring female telephonists. By that time the latter constituted the vast bulk

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[114] Charles Hesketh cited by Jane Forbes in evidence before the Royal Commission on Postal Services. See, *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42212, p. 1861.
[115] *ibid.*, Q.s 34097–34100, p. 1454. In 1903 the N.S.W. Postal and Electric Telegraph Society changed its name to the N.S.W. Post and Telegraph Association. Willson held the office of President in 1903 and again between 1909 and 1913. See, Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 325 & p. 376.
[116] Berridge doubted that her male peers really believed women were "failures". See, *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 41857, p. 1845.
[117] *ibid.*, Q. 42108, p. 1857.
[118] *ibid.*, Q. 35765, p. 1524.

of female public servants.[119] Using sick-leave returns as a guide, McLachlan calculated that the females attached to capital city telephone exchanges cost 650 pounds a year more to engage than the same number of males. He implied that women lacked the work ethic of men and hinted that their illnesses were not always genuine.[120] In one stroke, Webster and McLachlan negated long-standing arguments in favour of female officers on the basis of gender-specific competencies.

Meanwhile, a militaristic outlook undermined the bid for genuine equality by redefining the nature of supervision. A phenomenon apparent from the mid 1890s, militarism developed in response to mounting nationalism – itself a product of international tension, anxiety over Australia's geographical isolation, and fear of economic and racial decline.[121] The Commonwealth Public Service Act reflected the growth in militarism, allowing employees in the army and naval reserve special leave to attend camps and training courses.[122] Because of it, leadership came to be regarded as a male preserve, with the establishment of cadet units in private boys' schools and the introduction of compulsory military service for males from 1911.[123] Militarism helped to frame the criteria for promotion in the public service. Focusing on leadership qualities, Duncan McLachlan insisted that telegraphists aspiring to jobs in Grades 4 and 5 of the Fourth Class possess "qualifications for supervision" – credentials females were now seen to lack.[124] Royal Commission witness, Thomas Quirk, President of the N.S.W. Postmasters' Association, opined that women were generally incapable of supervising men, citing a postmistress who had to be removed from office because of her inability to control her male staff.[125] He believed that men alone should oversee letter carriers.[126] According to the military model, women were deficient in the communication and diplomatic skills and in the spirit of camaraderie

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[119] In 1910 the department nationwide employed 768 female telephone attendants and 59 female telephone monitors and supervisors. See, *Sixth Report of the Commonwealth Public Service*, Melbourne, 1910, p. 73; & *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, 1910, item 687, p. 121.
[120] *Third Report on the Commonwealth Public Service ... 1907–8*, p. 20 & p. 21. Critics of female telephonists reported that women who wore the heavy headset often suffered headaches, became hysterical, or needed a 'good cry' after attending the switch. See, W. Boys, 'Telephone Girls in Australia', *St Martin's-le-Grand*, London, October 1898, p. 434 & p. 435.
[121] Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity 1870–1920*, Carlton South, Melbourne U.P., 2001, pp. 75–82.
[122] During the Boer War, the *Transmitter* reported on telegraphists who had joined the army to fight in South Africa and devoted considerable space to the activities of volunteer detachments.
[123] Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*, p. 27.
[124] *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, p. ix.
[125] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 39122 & Q. 39123, p. 1685.

required of effective leaders. Testifying before the Royal Commission, Senior Postal Inspector Joseph Johnston complained: "one cannot talk to them (women) as one could to a man". He described them as "very troublesome", referring to their constant call on sick leave and quick pursuit of petty matters.[127] Women were disadvantaged by a departure from "objective" merit in favour of "subjective" authority.

Maternal Citizenship and Sameness versus Difference

Feminist concerns for maternal citizenship negatively impinged on Constance Berridge's quest for real workplace equality. Activists Rose Scott and Vida Goldstein were troubled by declining population growth and were convinced that women had a duty to ensure the wellbeing of offspring in the national interest. Accordingly, they joined with female factory inspectors in lobbying for legislative and practical measures that would prevent women workers from damaging their reproductive and mental health.[128] Sensitive to their demands, the department limited the working day of female telephonists to six hours, 15 minutes.[129] At the same time, it modified the duties of postmistresses for the sake of their constitutions. In January 1904 J. Flynn, acting for the Inland Mail Clerk, altered the route taken by the Albury–Tooma mail coach, ensuring that it no longer stopped at Bowna. The change relieved the town's young single postmistress and potential mother, Ruby Foord, of the need to turn out in the middle of the night to meet the vehicle. In future the postmaster at Albury would make up the private mail bags and sort the roadside mail for Bowna in Miss Foord's stead.[130] Male union leaders also heeded the demands of maternal citizenship to the detriment of employment equality. In evidence before the Royal Commission, Maurice O'Connor, A.C.P.T.O.A. General President, suggested that women should be restricted to "domestic telegraphic work" paying no more than 160 pounds a year due to the strain on their constitutions.[131] Women had little claim to practical parity while the subject of paternalistic consideration.

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[126] *ibid*., vol. 2, Q. 39122 & Q. 39126, p. 1685, & Q. 39232, p. 1690.
[127] *ibid.*, vol. 1, Q. 27821, Q. 27819 & Q. 27820, p. 1126.
[128] Allen, *Rose Scott*, p. 66 & p. 67.
[129] Extract from *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 1896, in Edward N. Walter, 'A History of the Telephone Service in New South Wales', P.R.O., P.M.G. Dept, Sydney, August 1962, Section 9, 'Staffing and Staff Conditions', p. 7.
[130] The mail coach arrived at Bowna between 1am and 2am. See, note below signed by J. Flynn for Inland Mail Clerk, 6 January 1904, SP32, Bowna, fol. 5 JAN 1904/B 82.

The efforts of some female officers to establish a gender-based measure of merit cannot have helped Constance Berridge's case for real equality. Against a background of claims by feminists that women possessed a particular purity rooted in family life, some female employees invested heavily in domestic expertise, jettisoning the gender-neutral concept of work value in the process.[132] The *Transmitter's* anonymous female correspondent, "Nemo", chastised women who failed to keep their offices in good order and suggested that, in cases where advancement was slow, inspectors report on the cleanliness and neatness of facilities.[133] In the private sector, stress on the domestic attributes of women translated into lower rates of pay. Office secretaries hired on the basis of their administrative "neatness" and their capacity to beautify the workplace invariably received smaller salaries than male clerical workers.[134] For as long as domesticity remained a gender-specific criterion of employee worth, females would be treated differently from males.

The premium placed on female domesticity sabotaged Constance Berridge's bid for practical equality by contributing to a tendency to see post offices run by women as nurturing environments. Even though women's influence on boys declined with the rise of militarism and nationalism, postmistresses were still expected to educate young telegraph messengers and mould their behaviour.[135] In evidence before the Royal Commission, Berridge observed that the facility managed by a woman had become "a kind a nursery", where a boy would be trained in telegraphy and then be moved on, only to be replaced by another.[136] Advena Le Messurier, Postmistress in the Sydney suburb of Carlton, had three telegraph messengers in as many years – the frequent changes in personnel causing disruption to the service.[137] In state schools, female teachers attached to infants departments also performed the role of surrogate mothers, their "domestic" responsibilities justifying a lower salary than might otherwise have

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[131] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 29871, p. 1238.
[132] Quartly, 'Defending "The Purity of Home Life" Against Socialism', p. 188; Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 2 & pp. 28–31; *Argus*, Melbourne, 24 November 1910, p. 8; & Brownfoot, 'Goldstein, Vida Jane Mary (1869–1949)', p. 3.
[133] 'Women's Column', "I've been Thinking", letter from "Nemo", South Australia, *Transmitter*, vol. XI, no. 10, 17 February 1902, p. 5.
[134] In department stores, women often worked in the lower-paying drapery sections, leaving men to attend the more lucrative hardware and footwear areas. See, Beverley Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley: A history of shopping in Australia*, South Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1994, p. 94, p. 96 & p. 97.
[135] Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*, p. 117 & p. 198.
[136] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42065, p. 1857.

been the case.[138] Female P.M.G. Department employees had little hope of achieving true parity while their offices were treated as maternal domains.

The lack of a consensus surrounding gender sameness and difference undermined Constance Berridge's argument for equal access to employment opportunities. From the late 1880s, a woman's identity was increasingly linked to her reproductive duty to add to and improve the national stock. Buttressing the concept of gender difference, this construction of womanhood shaped school curricula for girls, with an emphasis on cooking, sewing and household budgetary skills. In testimony before the Royal Commission, telegraphist Jane Forbes implied that women were essentially different from men, admitting that "constitutional characteristics" accounted for her absences from work. Her admission aligned with witness statements from medical experts who claimed that females were intrinsically unsuited to telegraphy by reason of their physiology. As such, it called into question the validity of Louisa Dunkley's proposition that the sexes were basically the same for the purposes of employment.[139] Despite Vida Goldstein's insistence on equal pay for equal work, some W.P.A. members persisted in distinguishing between "male" and "female" occupations. Writing in the *Australian Woman's Sphere*, columnist Elsie Champion rebuked male clerks who complained about women taking their jobs. Describing their positions as 'lady like', Miss Champion suggested that they 'ought to be doing the rough open-air work needed in a young country'. Elsewhere in the newspaper, readers contemplating employment were asked to consider bookbinding, nursing and other feminised vocations.[140] While insisting that females be treated like males, Constance Berridge maintained that the sexes were innately different, arguing that girls, unlike boys, could not be expected to deliver telegrams at any time of the day, rain, hail or shine.[141] Nevertheless, many of her fellow unionists disagreed, and called for the recruitment of female telegraph messengers from every state.[142] For as long as the

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[137] Memo from A. Le Messurier, Pms, Carlton, to Dep. P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 21 November 1910, SP32, Carlton, fol. B 09/2354.
[138] Kate Deverall, 'A Bid for Affirmative Action: Annie Golding and the New South Wales Public School Teachers' Association, 1900–15', *Labour History*, no. 77, November 1999, p. 120.
[139] Jane Forbes denied that telegraphy contributed to her condition. See, *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42160, Q. 42161 & Q. 42163, p. 1859.
[140] Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 28.
[141] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42089, p. 1857, & Q. 41869, p. 1847.
[142] *ibid.*, Q. 41867, p. 1846, Q. 42003, p. 1854, & Q. 42068, p. 1857. The supporters of female telegraph messengers proposed that girls, like boys, be required to resign at age 18 if they failed the test

community and working women were unable to agree on the extent to which females resembled males, parity in employment remained a difficult notion to promote.

Moreover, in stressing gender difference, Constance Berridge discounted Louisa Dunkley's case for wage justice on the basis of the exceptional worker of either sex.[143] Since Federation, individual evaluations of worker capacity, independent of sex and ethnological background, had gained wider currency – a result of increased adherence to the principles of political economy. In keeping with Dunkley's argument, the appraisals replaced generalised assessments of the 'average' male and female employee based on the biological determinants of expertise (viz., gender and race).[144] For his part, Royal Commission witness Thomas Quirk, President of the N.S.W. Postmasters' Association and critic of female labour, had to admit that ability varied within the same sex, pointing to a postmistress in Sydney's northern suburbs who did "admirable work" as an electoral registrar.[145] It was now much harder to argue for gender equality in collective or overall terms.

A Loss of Leadership and Critical Mass

The loss of significant union leaders weakened the support base for Constance Berridge's initiative and allowed differences between female officers to go largely unchecked. Louisa Dunkley, Vice-President of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association and advocate for wage equality, had resigned from the service in December 1903 to marry Edward Kraegen, former General President of the A.C.P.T.O.A. and defender of working women.[146] Dunkley's husband had already been lost to the national body with his appointment in December 1902 to the position

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for promotion. See, *ibid.*, Q. 41857, p. 1845. A number of women were happy to undertake delivery work, provided they were paid accordingly. They included May Smith, Assistant at Burrawang, who performed an informal messenger service "at all hours of the day and night in severe weather". See, letter from Miss Smith, St David's Rectory, Burrawang, to Dep. P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 1 July 1904, SP32, Burrawang, fol. 16 Jul 1904/B 4845.

[143] 'Correspondence', 'Equal Pay', letter to the Editor from L. M. Dunkley, Victorian W. P. and T. Association, Melbourne, 28 May 1902', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 2, 17 June 1902, p. 23.

[144] Maddison, 'From "Moral Economy" to "Political Economy" in New South Wales', pp. 87–91.

[145] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 39125, p. 1685. In suggesting that inspectors knew the personal capabilities of each employee, Constance Berridge betrayed an appreciation of the concept of individual merit. See, *ibid.*, Q. 42087, p. 1857.

[146] 'The Kraegen–Dunkley Wedding', *Transmitter*, vol. XIII, no. 9, 18 January 1904, p. 12; & John S. Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions: A History of the Telegraphist and Postal Clerk Unions of Australia*, Sydney, Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists, 1980, p. 133.

of Chief Clerk to the Public Service Inspector for N.S.W.[147] Further, Minnie Knott, Glebe's long-serving postmistress and the sole female representative on the A.C.P.T.O.A. executive council, had surrendered her union membership following her retirement in August 1906.[148] With the departure of these individuals went the inspiration and much of the impetus behind the bid for equality in the workplace.

On a broader level, the decline in the number of postmistresses and female telegraphists on the permanent list limited the amount of grassroots support for Constance Berridge's quest and exposed the remaining women to disproportionate scrutiny. By January 1910 the P.M.G. Department nationwide employed just 240 official postmistresses and female official operators, given the marriage bar, the lack of access to the Clerical Division, and the withdrawal of formal training facilities.[149] Official language underscored the effectiveness of the war of attrition waged against women, obscuring their presence and their condition. In the Annual Report of 1910–11, the Postmaster-General boasted that "no *Postmaster* (my emphasis)" received less than 160 pounds p.a., "and that amount only in a few instances".[150] Conspicuous because of their limited numbers, female officers were the subject of excessive surveillance by male superiors intent on finding fault. In 1946 retired employee P. J. Arnold recalled that around 1910, when relief operator Mary Buckley worked at Tamworth, the postmaster had "spy holes" drilled in the dividing walls of the office and adjoining residence.[151] Constraints on female employment since Federation had rendered the quest for real workplace equality increasingly academic.

Retirements and a lack of proper representation caused by departures eroded the capacity of N.S.W. women both to defend the case for genuine parity, and to protect their interests with respect to their Victorian colleagues. From 1904 the department began to transfer female officers deemed to be "overpaid" to busier offices with

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[147] 'Mr. E. C. Kraegen', *Transmitter*, vol. XII, no. 8, 17 December 1902, p. 3.
[148] 'Notes of the Month – New South Wales', *Transmitter*, vol. XVI, no. 4, 18 August 1906, p. 10.
[149] In N.S.W., the utility had only 22 postmistresses and five female telegraphists on strength by 1910, while, in Victoria, it had 74 and 52 respectively. In South Australia it claimed 37 postmistresses and two female telegraphists; in Tasmania 25 postmistresses and one female operator; and in Western Australia 22 postmistresses only. Queensland had neither official postmistresses nor female operators. See, *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 641, p. 115, & item 687, p. 121.
[150] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. viii.
[151] "Dim Past", 'reminiscences of P. J. Arnold', *Postal Notes*, Australian Postal Institute (N.S.W. Branch), New Series, no. 15, 15 May 1946, p. 13.

responsibilities more in keeping with their salary – a practice that prompted some women to leave the service. In Minnie Knott's case, her departure was possibly hastened by her forced relocation from Glebe to Kogarah in June 1906. At the time she was drawing the substantial wage of 233 pounds p.a. Confronted with a larger workload, Miss Knott retired on the grounds of ill health two months later at age 47.[152] Given their declining numbers, female unionists in N.S.W., South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia chose not to lodge separate submissions with the Royal Commission, leaving their Victorian co-workers to speak on their behalf.[153] The *de facto* head of women in the A.C.P.T.O.A. after Louisa Dunkley and Minnie Knott's departure, Constance Berridge agreed with Commissioner Webster that Duncan McLachlan had favoured official postmistresses in recently granting them the same minimum salary as men (160 pounds p.a.). Previously, some Victorian women had been on just 140 pounds a year.[154] Using their case as a yardstick, and seemingly accepting of the concession, Berridge failed to take into proper account the situation of her N.S.W. colleagues who had achieved theoretical parity, but remained disadvantaged in relation to their male co-workers.[155] As their numbers waned so did the voice of N.S.W. women in matters of equality.

Elitism among permanent postmistresses and female telegraphists limited the potential level of support for Constance Berridge's quest. Prior to achieving wage parity nationwide, the women had bolstered their claim to equal pay for equal work by remaining detached from the department's telephonists. The latter occupied an increasingly "feminised" employment category and appeared to countenance a wage differential based on gender. During the parliamentary debate on the Public Service

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[152] Memo from Sec., P.M.G. Dept, advising transfer of M. L. Knott, Pms, Glebe, to Kogarah, *vice* Gosbell, 10 June 1906, SP32, Kogarah, fol. B 06/4988. The classification process may explain the reduction in Miss Knott's salary from 265 pounds to 233 pounds p.a. See, memo from Sec., P.M.G. Dept, 6 October 1906, *ibid.*, fol. 13 OCT 1906/B 7976. The transfer from Glebe to Kogarah meant Miss Knott left behind her sister and assistant, Jean, a possible factor in her decision to resign. See, 'Notes of the Month, New South Wales', *Transmitter*, vol. XVI, no. 4, 18 August 1906, p. 10.

[153] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 642, p. 115.

[154] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42041 & Q. 42042, p. 1855, & Q. 42053, p. 1856.

[155] To her credit, Berridge stressed that the N.S.W. women had long enjoyed the same salary as men. See, *ibid.*, Q. 41897, p. 1848. In January 1910, before the minimum wage increase took effect, official postmistresses in N.S.W. received between 140 and 265 pounds a year. In Victoria women earned between 140 and 210 pounds p.a, while in South Australia they received between 110 and 160 pounds p.a. In Western Australia all postmistresses claimed salaries applicable to the 5th Class of the Clerical Division. In Tasmania wages ranged from 140 to 210 pounds p.a. See, *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 642, p. 115.

Bill, female switchboard attendants in Melbourne's Central Telephone Exchange had refused to work overtime on Sundays and on weeknights until 9.00 pm, leaving their male counterparts to manage outside normal office hours in return for higher wages. In so doing, they effectively rejected the principle of equal pay for identical work.[156] Since then, official postmistresses and female official telegraphists had seen their industrial power decline partly through their reluctance to combine with telephonists. From inception, the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association had excluded switchboard attendants in deference to Louisa Dunkley's attitude in the matter.[157] Reacting to the suggestion that she was making a "class distinction" by denying them union membership, Dunkley insisted that the department had already created divisions between women on the basis of designation.[158] Dunkley's negative attitude to working spinsters who anticipated marriage and a life at home had done nothing to endear her association to them. A zealous craft unionist anxious to regulate wage rates, she condemned the woman who treated employment as a mere stopgap until she wed, or worked for a low salary "just to keep herself in clothes" before taking a husband. A "blackleg", this woman deprived needy females of a living and depressed male wages.[159] Without a whole-of-industry approach to unionism, Constance Berridge lacked the numerical and philosophical underpinning that would have helped her prosecute her case.

Semi-Official Postmistresses and other Female Employees

Meanwhile, Berridge's quest for practical equality on behalf of female official employees was yielding under the weight of semi-official staff. Faced with budgetary constraints, Headquarters set up a network of semi-official post offices from around 1908, many of which were under the control of women. Staff operated the facilities on

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[156] McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', pp. 115–117.

[157] The N.S.W. Post and Telegraph Association delimited membership. In August 1900 the department in N.S.W. had 115 female switchboard attendants who might have been invited to join the union. See, *Return of Staff, 1900*, Sydney, 1900, pp. 37–45. The women formed their own association in 1898. In Victoria Berridge's union might have gained 150 extra members if it had admitted telephonists. In South Australia the all-woman union excluded 31 female attendants, reducing its ability to survive. See, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 69. p. 105, p. 108 & p. 109.

[158] Dunkley argued that union membership should be restricted to women in the Clerical Division, thus avoiding a confusion of interests. See, 'Victorian Notes', *Transmitter*, vol. X, no. 3, 16 August 1900, p. 11; &, McCuskey, 'The History of Women in the Victorian Post Office', p. 97 & p. 98. Over time, rifts between female officers had hardened along socio-economic lines, with telegraphists tending to come from the middle and middling classes, and telephonists from the respectable working class. Similar divisions existed in the British Post Office. See, Zimmeck, 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure', p. 69.

[159] Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 133.

a contract basis and paid rent on the premises – typically official establishments downgraded because of inadequate returns. By the close of 1910, the department nationwide boasted 324 semi-official postmasters and postmistresses, each employed outside the ambit of government wage-fixing mechanisms. Most remained independent of the union movement.[160] The A.C.P.T.O.A. claimed that the conversion of official offices earning 400 pounds a year or less to semi-official outlets worked by qualified telegraphists on low pay eroded the principle of a minimum wage and limited job opportunities for young permanent officers.[161] The downgrading of Ulladulla's official establishment in June 1908 illustrated the union's case. As a result of the conversion, Lucy Gambell, Postmistress Grade XIII on 160 pounds p.a., found herself on the unattached list, responsibility for the amenity passing to semi-official postmistress Amanda Newell on 120 pounds p.a.[162] Thomas Quirk of the N.S.W. Postmasters' Association alleged that many semi-official employees were "sweated" in an attempt to minimise overheads, drawing attention to the need to receive mails outside office hours and the poor wages.[163] The case for genuine parity in employment had been partially eclipsed by the evolution of an alternative employer/employee paradigm.

Many women found semi-official employment attractive in spite of the poor pay and conditions. The job of semi-official postmistress appealed to former officers with non-transferable skills who had left the service to marry and required a livelihood following their husbands' death. In 1905 Amelia Wells, Postmistress at Auburn, resigned to be married, having spent some years behind the counter. In October 1909 the then 29-year-old widow applied for the vacant position at Trunkey Creek's semi-official office in the hope of providing for her child and herself. Thirty-year-old widow Mary Anne Grace contested the same job, having served at the Balbarrup and Bannister facilities in Western Australia, and at the Dandenong office in Victoria

[160] A smaller system of contract post offices existed prior to 1908. By the end of 1910, official outlets numbered 1,033. From about 1911 the Department covered the rent on semi-official establishments. See, *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department,* 1910–1911, p. 5 & p. 20.
[161] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 648, p. 116.
[162] Advice from F. Healy, Acting Sec., Post and Telegraph Commission, 13 June 1908, SP32, Ulladulla, fol. Dc 8/14828, JUN 15 1908/4583; *pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Amanda Newell as Pms, 24 November 1908, *ibid.*, fol. 8 JAN 1909/Db 158; & List of Applicants, *ibid.*, fol. DB/115453.
[163] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 39369, p. 1695.

before her marriage.[164] Semi-official positions furnished widows and single daughters with an income at a point when the cost of living was rising and when over half the male population left no estate at the time of death – a consequence, in part, of losses incurred in the 1890's depression.[165] Of the 12 applicants vying for the vacancy at Ulladulla's semi-official office in 1908, four were widows and four older spinsters.[166] For many women, the P.M.G. Department became the employer of first resort.

The utility's recruitment of single and married temporary and exempt female assistants sabotaged efforts to achieve real workplace equality by contributing to the minority status of permanent postmistresses and female telegraphists. Entitled to the same minimum salary as permanent officers, temporary employees claimed fewer rights and privileges under the Public Service Act, while exempt hands were denied the expensive leave and superannuation entitlements of official staff.[167] As such, they were cheaper to hire than permanent personnel. From the early 20th century, temporary and exempt female assistants were employed in official facilities to deal with the upsurge in business that accompanied the cut in telegram rates in 1902 and the breaking of the drought in 1903.[168] The Commissioner's lack of statutory control over their selection left the state head offices free to hire whoever they wished.[169] Some temporaries started on a higher wage than official personnel as compensation for fewer entitlements, effectively limiting opposition to McLachlan's gendered employment policy. From 1905, females over 21 with Morse training, but without

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[164] *Pro forma* application completed by Amelia Wells, 12 October 1909, SP32, Trunkey Creek; & *pro forma* application completed by Mary Anne Grace, 22 October 1909, *ibid.*

[165] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 74; & Beverley Kingston, *Oxford Dictionary of Australia: Glad, Confident Morning, 1860–1909*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1993, p. 42.

[166] The women in question were: Mrs Naomi Andrews, 46, without experience; Mrs Margaret Devlin, 33, with a daughter able to operate; Mrs Maria Wright, 59, late of Nullica Post Office; Mrs A. W. Evans, 38, former schoolmistress, no experience; Miss Jemina Fraser, 47, late of Clunes Post Office; Miss Johanna Hayes, 27, late of Michelago Post Office; Miss N. O'Donovan, 48, former Receiving Office Keeper; & Miss S. Fitzgerald, 53, former teacher, without experience. See, List of Applicants, SP32, Ulladulla, fol. DB/115453; & report by Acting Snr I., undated, *ibid.*, fol. Db 08/18083.

[167] In general, temporary staff received the same wages and holidays as permanent officers. Exempt staff included the wives of official postmasters, and non-official personnel. See, *First Annual Report on the Public Service, by the Public Service Commissioner*, Melbourne, 1904, pp. 28–30 & p. 33.

[168] Between 1901 and 1910, telegraph business increased by 57.64%. See, *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. 23. Temporary and exempt female employees worked to offset the inflated cost of mail contract services and rail freight, and the expense involved in updating the telephone network. See, 'Appendix C', 'Extracts from Reports of the Deputy Postmasters-General', *Postmaster-General's Department, Second Annual Report, 1911–12*, p. 26 & p. 27; & *Commonwealth Government Gazette*, 30 June 1904, p. 495.

permanent status, commenced on 110 pounds p.a. as temporary operators. Had they been allowed to sit the Clerical Division examination and gain official standing like males, they would have received just 40 pounds for the first six months as probationers, with small annual increments thereafter.[170] By 1907 the department had 11,290 exempt hands and 3,220 temporaries on the national payroll, N.S.W. accounting for 3,852 and 991, respectively. At the time the utility employed just 10,898 permanent officers.[171] The relationship between employer and female employee had, in many instances, descended to a lower level in the staffing structure.

The large number of women engaged in telephony and other lower-paid, feminised occupations also damaged Constance Berridge's quest for genuine parity in underscoring the numerical insignificance of official postmistresses and female telegraphists in the departmental labour market. Whereas, in 1910, the utility nationwide employed just 180 official postmistresses and 60 female telegraphists, it had 126 postal assistants without Clerical Division qualifications, 768 female telephonists, 59 female telephone monitors and supervisors, 42 female clerks and clerical assistants, and three women typists on its books.[172] From 1902, female switchboard attendants received 110 pounds p.a. after three years' service, but had little hope of advancing to more senior positions. Their situation lent weight to the perception of telephony as a dead-end occupation.[173] The editor of the *Transmitter* had come to see telephony and basic office work as appropriate pursuits for women, observing that they did not imperil those "domestic institutions" that depended on "men having regular work with reasonable remuneration".[174] Slow to adopt the non-gendered principles of political economy in their entirety, the department pointed to the manual dexterity of females – which had been thought to serve them well as telegraphists – to justify their appointment as typists and adding machine operators. In

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[169] While candidates for temporary employment had to apply to the Commonwealth Public Service, the Department chose the successful applicant, giving it effective control over the selection process. See, *First Annual Report on the Public Service, by the Public Service Commissioner*, p. 33 & p. 34.
[170] Letter from "M.L.B.", *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 10, 18 February 1905, p. 23.
[171] Duncan McLachlan complained that the hiring of exempt and temporary staff by state offices limited his ability to discourage patronage and regulate expenditure. He wanted the Public Service Act amended, giving him total control over recruitment. See, *Fourth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service*, p. 6 & p. 7.
[172] *Sixth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service*, p. 73; & *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 687, p. 121. A number of clerical assistants were trained in telegraphy.
[173] Walter, 'A History of the Telephone Service in New South Wales', Section 9, 'Staffing and Staff Conditions', p. 27; & *Classification of the Public Service ..., 23 June 1904*, p. vii.
[174] 'Women and the Service', *Transmitter*, vol. XIV, no. 11, 18 March 1905, p. 4.

the 1911–1912 Annual Report, the Chief Accountant described as excellent the performance of women who had recently sat examinations in the "manipulation of mechanical appliances", implying that they were particularly suited to basic keyboard work.[175] Equal pay for equal work was an ever more difficult concept to validate.

Critically for Constance Berridge's case, some postmistresses and female operators on the official list may have made an informed decision to remain in lowly ranked offices in view of the benefits attached to junior positions. Morse-trained women in small outlets enjoyed a measure of job security because of the need to repeat long-distance messages on secondary circuits. Despite the advent of "automatic" telecommunications equipment from the early 1900s, relay work remained a vital function partly due to delays in the re-introduction of the Wheatstone system (since improved) on major routes.[176] Difficulties in conveying telegrams by condenser-type telephone, notorious for its poor reception, only added to the need for trained operators in minor facilities.[177] Because the offices were not credited for relayed traffic they were unlikely to be upgraded, minimising the possibility of female employees being made unattached or moved to larger centres with automatic working and male staff.[178] The pay rises granted to lower graded officers from 1911 rendered work in small outlets more tolerable.[179] The women who settled for junior positions effectively relinquished their claim to parity with men on the basis of identical duties.

All the while divisions within the A.C.P.T.O.A. and union preoccupations distracted attention from the bid for genuine workplace equality. Because of different union membership criteria, types of telegraph equipment, and conditions of employment in each of the former colonies, now states, the A.C.P.T.O.A. had difficulty imposing a uniform policy on its constituent associations.[180] The consequent lack of union solidarity was reflected in the growth of disaffected sectional interests. In South

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[175] 'Appendix B', 'Report submitted by the Chief Accountant', *Postmaster-General's Department, Second Annual Report, 1911–12*, p. 25 & p. 26.
[176] The delay in reintroducing the Wheatstone system was exacerbated by a shortage of trained operators and the alleged unwillingness of staff to acquire the necessary expertise. See, *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, p. 13.
[177] Walter, 'A History of the Telephone Service in New South Wales', Section 8, 'Trunk Line Services', pp. 20–22.
[178] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 652, p. 117.
[179] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, pp. vii– x.
[180] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 16.

Australia unionists protested that proportional grading disregarded their rights under the former colonial administration, while staff on the Western Australian goldfields disputed the adequacy of district allowances in hot, isolated settlements where the cost of living was high.[181] Following Edward Kraegen's departure, the A.C.P.T.O.A. leadership largely ceased to refer workplace issues to politicians in accordance with Public Service Regulation 41, which prohibited officers from having contact with parliamentarians.[182] The ensuing discontent and ongoing factional issues led some A.C.P.T.O.A. members to establish separate, non-affiliated unions, including the Commonwealth Postmasters' Association and the Telegraphists' Union from 1911.[183] Infighting and weak leadership at state level sapped the ability of the A.C.P.T.O.A. to defend the interests of male and female members alike. In N.S.W., the Post and Telegraph Association floundered in the face of a protracted dispute between J. G. Willson, Kraegen's successor, and G. T. Richards, past President, over the appointment of a Clerical Division representative to the Inquiry and Appeals Boards.[184] Moreover, the union hierarchy was obsessed with the decline in working conditions caused by inadequate funding. The issue – reflected in allegations of sweating, compulsory unpaid overtime, low morale, flagging discipline, stoppages and high staff turnover – ensured that little attention was paid to female employees *per se*.[185] In the scheme of things, women's concerns barely mattered.

The Royal Commission Reports and Subsequent Developments

For the most part, the Commissioners assigned the task of investigating Postal Services took little account of Constance Berridge's case for genuine parity in employment. In their majority report presented on 30 September 1910, they compounded the inequalities experienced by women in recommending that they no longer be appointed to official postmistress and telegraphist positions, and that henceforth they be restricted to the feminised occupations of telephonist, telephone

[181] *ibid.*, pp. 77–81 & p. 86.
[182] Federal politicians insisted that aggrieved officers could appeal to parliament in the last resort. See, *ibid.*, p. 89. In 1908 the A.C.P.T.O.A. resumed contact with politicians to a limited extent, but did not actively cultivate relationships with them as it had done in Kraegen's day. See, *ibid.*, p. 112.
[183] *ibid.*, p. 186 & p. 187. The new unions sought formal registration in 1913.
[184] Ultimately, Richards was elected to represent officers on the boards. See, *ibid.*, p. 67 & p. 68.
[185] *ibid.*, p. 105, p. 106 & p. 108.

monitor and typist for the sake of the male wage.[186] Although troubled by the alleged impact of working women on male breadwinners, the Commissioners proposed that existing postmistresses and female telegraphists be allowed to retain their jobs. They considered that the women were entitled to the same treatment as men and were eligible for promotion, provided they demonstrated the necessary capacity.[187] Effectively rejecting the principle of equal pay for equal work, and disturbed by declining population growth, the Commissioners found women to be unsuitable for busy outlets: this followed testimony from doctors who maintained that telegraphy was injurious to female reproductive and mental health.[188] In short, the employment prospects and aspirations of women had to be contained for the good of all.

The minority report tendered by dissenting Commissioners Hugh de Largie and David Storrer tempered attitudes towards female departmental employees. The two politicians – one a Laborite, the other an Independent – asserted that women were entitled to hold the positions of official postmistress and telegraphist in the interest of equity. Neither had heard anything from witnesses to suggest that they were incapable of "high class work". Both de Largie and Storrer thought it unfair that females were refused the same chance to enter the department as males and denounced the policy of attrition that had seen women worked out of the more lucrative jobs.[189] If the female interviewees were to be believed, the Commonwealth Public Service Act had been violated by the Commissioner and the bureaucracy, their actions at odds with the spirit and letter of the law. Both men argued that women should be permitted entry to the Clerical Division by way of examination and reaffirmed the principle of equal pay

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[186] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 644, p. 115, & items 688 & 690, p. 122. The Commissioners also recommended that women no longer hold the positions of Clerk, Clerical Assistant and Postal Assistant. See, *ibid.*, item, 690, p. 122. The federal politicians who sat on the Royal Commission were as follows: Senators, H. de Largie (Labor, Western Australia) and E. Mulcahy (Deakin Protectionist, Tasmania); and House of Representatives Members, J. H. Cook (Deakin Protectionist, Bourke), C. C. Salmon (Deakin Protectionist, Laanecoorie), D. Storrer (Deakin Protectionist, later Independent, Bass), W. Webster (Labor, Gwydir), and H. H. Wilks (Anti-Socialist, Dalley). The Commissioners were initially assisted by H. B. Templeton, Chief Clerk, Postmaster-General's Department. Following the formation of the Fusion Party in December 1908, Cook, Mulcahy and Salmon resigned from the Royal Commission. Storrer became an Independent in 1909 and sided with Labor. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 89 & p. 90.

[187] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 644, p. 115, item 690, p. 122, & item 643, p. 115.

[188] *ibid.*, item 689, p. 122; & *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42163, p. 1859. During the course of the inquiry, Commissioner J. Hume Cook criticised the department for offering discounted postage to newspapers that carried advertisements for prohibited contraceptives. See, *ibid.*, vol. 1, Q. 5756, p. 202, & Q. 5759, p. 202 & p. 203.

[189] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minority Report*, 1910, item 1073, p. 187.

for equal work.[190] Their attitude to working women was framed at a time when political economy was overtaking the moral economy but had yet to entirely supplant it. Both politicians took the "non-biological" position characteristic of political economy in claiming that, as individuals, women were able to perform all official duties, and in effectively recognising the right of employers to hire whoever they wanted. In contrast, they took a moral stand in contending that the state had a duty to provide for needy women, describing the failure to do so as a "great injustice".[191] Women laboured in a vacuum created by the interplay of opposing perspectives.

The divergence of opinion among the Commissioners regarding female official employees was indicative of the ambivalence that surrounded working women. Like Timothy Coghlan, Duncan McLachlan nursed an intrinsically conflicting attitude to female workers, critical of their alleged impact on male wages while conceding the need to accommodate "surplus" women.[192] Although anxious to protect the interests of working men, many union leaders tolerated female officers, provided they did not compete directly with male members. In evidence before the Royal Commission, Thomas Quirk of the N.S.W. Postmasters' Association had opined that women should not be attached to substantial offices attracting 210 pounds a year, but might be posted to minor suburban facilities with minimal supervision requirements.[193] Quirk's testimony echoed that of William McDonald, former Secretary of the Victorian Post and Telegraph Association (Men's).[194] Greater regard for political economy's liberal definition of skill, which took no account of gender and race, added to the ambivalence surrounding female staff.[195] Commissioner William Wilks noted that several women managed busy circuits without undue stress, casting doubt on the veracity of the claim that females became mentally unstable when put under

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[190] *ibid.*, item 1074 & item 1075, p. 187. Vida Goldstein congratulated the two dissenting commissioners on their report. See, *Argus*, Melbourne, 24 November 1910, p. 8.
[191] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minority Report*, item 1074, p. 187. The Commonwealth Arbitration Court exhibited the same duality of thought. In 1907 Justice Higgins handed down his Harvester Judgment that upheld the notion of skill margins recognised by employers, but buttressed workers' expectations of a "living wage". See, Maddison, 'From "Moral Economy" to "Political Economy" in New South Wales', p. 85.
[192] See, Deacon, *Managing Gender*, p. 152.
[193] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 39122 & Q. 39126, p. 1685.
[194] *ibid.*, Q. 38108 & Q. 38110, p. 1636.
[195] Maddison, 'From "Moral Economy" to "Political Economy" in New South Wales', p. 87.

pressure.[196] Women retained a presence in departmental ranks while perceptions of female labour were confused or subject to compromise.

The regionalisation of telegraph facilities and the arrival of new technology served to confine existing female staff to lower-paid positions without the prospect of advancement, contrary to the recommendations of the Royal Commission. In 1913 the department established large telegraph traffic centres at Newcastle, West Maitland, Kempsey, Grafton, Lismore, Tamworth, Armidale and Narrabri. The facilities were worked by "expert" operators using modern equipment connected to Sydney's Chief Telegraph Office. Designed to expedite transmissions along shorter lines, the centres circumvented small, single-wire offices equipped with Morse keys, generally limiting the business done at these outlets to communications with regional hubs.[197] In the Sydney G.P.O., the revised Wheatstone system incorporated keyboard perforators from 1907, putting an end to the hand punching of tapes. The Creed Bille system used for interstate communications from 1913 ushered in further advances, channelling transmissions through perforators and printers that transcribed messages automatically at the receiving station. Both technologies rendered Morse-key dexterity largely superfluous.[198] More ominously, the reinstated Wheatstone system reintroduced distinct divisions of labour, with the employment of low-paid female "touch typists" whose sole task was to transcribe the electronic messages from the tapes.[199]

Developments outside the federal public service did not augur well for the future of workplace equality. In the Victorian clothing trade, the female cutters awarded equal pay in 1909 were thwarted by manufacturers and male unionists who colluded to ensure that men monopolised the "heavier" duties ostensibly to protect women's health. As a result, females were confined to lower-paid tasks.[200] In the Victorian Clerks' Union, the equal pay campaign from 1911 stalled as members debated the best way of assisting households, most opting for a living wage payable to the male

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[196] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42156, p. 1859.
[197] *Postmaster-General's Department, Fourth Annual Report, 1913–14*, p. 31 & p. 32.
[198] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 8.
[199] 'Appendix A', 'Report submitted by Chief Electrical Engineer in connexion with Telegraph and Telephone Matters for the year ended 30th June, 1913', *Postmaster-General's Department, Third Annual Report,1912–13*, p. 33.
[200] Men alone were authorised to use the heavy 32-pound irons for pressing. See, Raelene Frances, '"No more Amazons": gender and work processes in the Victorian clothing trades 1890–1939', *Labour History*, no. 50, May 1986, pp. 101–105.

breadwinner.[201] Many female clerks feared that parity would jeopardise their jobs and pressed for a separate, gender-based award.[202] Meanwhile, the press denounced the advocates of equal pay for threatening the tenure of female workers.[203]

The availability of agreeable alternative employment, but without the benefit of equal pay, did nothing to assist the cause of genuine workplace equality following the Royal Commission. By the second decade of the 20th century, thousands of women were performing office duties in large business houses – a function, in part, of fierce competition between commercial colleges for students, and the introduction of abridged typing and shorthand courses.[204] Many other women found jobs in retail, with the proliferation of emporia in Sydney and large regional centres.[205] The ongoing exchange of Morse keys for telephones in small outlets added to the allure of outside employment. Responding in June 1913 to plans to convert Burrawang's allowance office to telephone working, postmistress May Smith intimated that her temporary assistant, Mrs A. Connor, saw no future in the job with the loss of the telegraph. Miss Smith stressed the importance of the facility as a training centre for women seeking General Division work: "Hitherto the great attraction at this office has been the opportunity afforded for the study of Telegraphy, and five of the Assistants who have qualified here have held, or still hold responsible positions as Operators in the Service".[206] The heavy workload caused by the dramatic upturn in business activity between 1901 and 1911 enhanced the appeal of outside employment.[207] For women in

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[201] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 103, p. 105 & p. 111.

[202] *ibid.*, pp. 103–105. In August 1912 the Victorian Clerks' Union persuaded the Wages Board to grant a minimum wage to both men and women. The Council of Industrial Appeals withdrew the concession in 1913. See, *ibid.*, p. 112 & p. 115; & Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man', p. 9. In 1912 Justice Higgins granted equal pay to female fruit pickers, but retained the concept of gendered occupations with 'male' fruit picking and 'female' fruit packing. See, Muriel Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?: A Survey of Women's Work in Victoria with Special Regard to Equal Status, Equal Pay and Equality of Opportunity*, Melbourne, Hilton and Veitch, 1935, p. 35.

[203] Critics pointed to women in the Italian postal service who were granted equal pay by their 'socialist' government, only to be barred from the utility within a year. See, Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 113.

[204] Melanie Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce in the Twentieth Century', *Labour History*, no. 63, November 1992, pp. 69–72.

[205] Gail Reekie, '"Humanising Industry": Paternalism, Welfarism and Labour Control in Sydney's Big Stores, 1890–1930', *Labour History*, no. 43, November 1992, p. 62.

[206] Letter from M. Smith, Pms, Burrawang, to P.I., Goulburn, 14 June 1913, SP32, Burrawang; & letter from M. Smith, Pms, Burrawang, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 15 July 1913, *ibid.*, fol. 17 JUL 1913/IA 165.

[207] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 114 & p. 115. In the period 1909 to 1913, voluntary departures in relation to total permanent staff turnover in the federal public service grew from 45% to 58%. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 107.

small outlets, a job in the private sector promised regular hours and more free time.[208] In her letter of resignation of January 1910, Elizabeth Tobin, Postal Assistant at Bundanoon, explained that she had obtained a position in an insurance company in Sydney after completing a steno-typing course by correspondence. In her new job she could leave work at 5.00 pm sharp, "rather than have to linger late … until the last resident had called for his letters". Furthermore, she could look forward to an uninterrupted night's sleep, without having to rise at 4.00 am to collect the mail from the contractor.[209] Because of the opportunities on offer in private enterprise, the situation of female staff mattered to fewer and fewer women.

Office Conversions

Semi-official postmistresses had a tenuous hold on employment in the years following the Royal Commission on Postal Services. In 1911 the department decided not to set up any more semi-official offices, and upgraded to official status those existing facilities that earned at least 200 pounds p.a., of which 30 pounds was derived from telegrams. Permanent staff took charge of these centres. Previously, a 400-pound threshold had separated official outlets from semi-official. The Public Service Act did not allow for the transfer of redundant semi-official employees – often female relatives of deceased officers, and sometimes poorly qualified – to the permanent list, leaving several women without a livelihood.[210] Fear of redundancy discouraged individuals who kept semi-official facilities generating less than 200 pounds a year from soliciting extra business.[211] As at 31 December 1910, N.S.W. Head Office had 130 semi-official amenities remaining on the books.[212]

Meanwhile, women found work in allowance outlets converted from uneconomic official establishments.[213] Female staff in these offices helped the department deal

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[208] See, *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42028 & Q. 42029, p. 1854.

[209] Letter from Elizabeth Tobin, Bundanoon P.O., to Dep. P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 1 January 1910, SP32, Bundanoon, fol. 2 JAN/D 1231.

[210] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. 20; *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, items 650 & 651, p. 116; & *Postmaster-General's Department, Second Annual Report, 1911–12*, p. iv.

[211] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 652, p. 117.

[212] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. 5.

[213] In October 1904 May Smith, Postal Assistant at Burrawang, took over the outlet after it was downgraded to a non-official amenity and Blanche Squire, Postmistress, was transferred to Gladesville as an "overpaid" officer on 160 pounds a year. Miss Smith received 110 pounds p.a. – the conversion

with the increased demand for mail services that stemmed from the introduction of Penny Post in May 1911. Designed to stimulate economic and social life, Penny Post provided for a uniform postage rate on all standard letters within Australia and on all half-ounce letters addressed to other countries in the British Empire.[214] Women in non-official offices also assisted with the distribution of old-age pensions from 1909, invalid pensions from 1910, and the five-pound maternity bonus from 1912. In addition, they provided a banking service on behalf of the newly established Commonwealth Savings Bank.[215] Having subsidised operations for many decades, female non-official employees were even less expensive to hire with the introduction of the scale-rate system of allowances in 1908. Calibrated according to facility returns, the system turned on the assumption that workers had a second source of income.[216] As at 31 December 1910, N.S.W. accounted for 1,428 non-official outlets, many of them run by women, compared with just 353 official centres.[217] Job prospects for women had at once narrowed and diversified.

As in the past, women were content to operate postal and telecommunications facilities for wages that many men found unacceptable. Following the advent of federal and state wage-fixing courts in the early 1900s, most males looked forward to increasing rates of pay over time, effectively ruling out non-official employment. Because women willingly took on posts that attracted allowances most men would shun, many areas had amenities that would otherwise have been denied them. In July 1909 Lily Walker agreed to conduct a non-official office in the semi-rural Sydney suburb of Blacktown for 73 pounds p.a., rival storekeeper S. T. Booth having refused to perform the postal duties for less than 91 pounds a year.[218] In October 1912 dressmaker Ida Veitch took charge of Ulladulla Post Office following its recent

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saving around 94 pounds annually. See, *pro forma* Notice of Appt of M. Smith as Pms on 25 October 1904, SP32, Burrawang, fol. 8 NOV 1904/B 7698; & letter from G. P. Unwin, Acting Dep. P.M.G., to Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Melbourne, 12 August 1904, *ibid.*, fol. B 04/5530.

[214] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. xxii & p. 18.

[215] *ibid.*, p. 20 & p. 21. The maternity bonus was paid upon the birth of a 'viable' child. See, T. H. Kewley, *Australia's Welfare State: The Development of Social Security Benefits*, South Melbourne, Macmillan of Australia, 1969, p. 6.

[216] Circ. Memo No. 240 from Robert T. Scott, Sec., 25 April 1907, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, AB07/23503 G2037/107, N.A.A., Sydney; & Circ. Memo No. 697 from Robert T. Scott, Sec., to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, undated, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G6143/07, N.A.A., Sydney.

[217] As in previous years, the official statistics do not contain details of offices run by females. See, *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. 5.

downgrading from a semi-official facility to an allowance outlet. She succeeded poultry farmer Robert Wright who resigned from his position, complaining that 69 pounds p.a. was insufficient to cover the cost of local commodities.[219]

Meritocracy and the Bureaucratisation of Favour

Duncan McLachlan took seriously his responsibility under the Public Service Act to prevent patronage and other forms of influence from taking hold in the government sector, and to encourage staff to invest in formal education and training with a view to instituting a meritocracy.[220] Hostile to forces outside of his control and critical of the mediocrity that often accompanied partiality, the Commissioner disapproved of individuals who solicited the support of politicians and leading citizens to gain employment or promotion. Accordingly, he urged the latter not to make representations on behalf of officers and prospective employees.[221]

In spite of his objections to favouritism in employment, McLachlan and the P.M.G. Department came to monopolise the long-standing system of patronage that had seen female relatives of former employees receive paid work and ongoing consideration without regard to qualifications. Now that outsiders were dissuaded from making overtures on behalf of individuals, the gift of office, in effect, resided with the Commissioner and departmental officials.[222] In November 1908 McLachlan's office approved the appointment of Amanda Newell, widow of a Telegraph Branch employee, to the position of semi-official postmistress at Ulladulla. The action

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[218] Report by James McCutcheon, Acting Inspr, undated, SP32, Blacktown, fol. D 09/1285; & letter from Dep. P.M.G., 2 July 1909, *ibid*., fol. D 09/3115/JUL 6 1909/4445.

[219] Report by E. Turner, Inspr, 21 October 1911, SP32, Ulladulla, fol. Dc 11/4134; *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Ida Veitch as Pms, 8 October 1912, *ibid.*, fol. Dc 4586; letter from Robert Wright, Pmr, Ulladulla, to F. P. Brewer, P.I., Goulburn, 29 June 1912, *ibid.*; & report by F. P. Brewer, Inspr, 17 September 1912, *ibid.* With parents willing to support her, and a brother prepared to pay her for housekeeping services, Ida Veitch could accept the revised scale rate of 56 pounds 15 shillings p.a. less a 10% rent deduction. See, letter from Ida Veitch, P.O., Mogo, 26 September 1912, SP32, Ulladulla; & report by E. P. Ramsay, Inspr (Relieving), Goulburn District, 28 December 1911, *ibid.*

[220] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 60. Hostile to nepotism, McLachlan barred members of the one family from running an official facility. See, *First Annual Report on the Public Service, by the Public Service Commissioner*, p. 44.

[221] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 73.

[222] The Commissioners enquiring into Postal Services proposed the establishment of an independent Board of Management with responsibility for departmental employment. See, *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 42, p. 16, & items 55 & 56, p. 19.

emanated from a recommendation by the P.M.G. inspectorate.[223] Following Mrs Newell's selection, Assistant Edmondson was ordered to visit Ulladulla and instruct the appointee in accounting procedures after the postmaster at Milton reported that she was experiencing difficulty balancing the cash and completing returns.[224] In November 1903 McLachlan's office and departmental managers had decided on a largely moral basis to put Lucy Lee in charge of Trunkey Creek's official outlet following her widowed mothers' retirement. By taking this action, they ensured that the older woman, who was only entitled to a gratuity of 41 pounds and the return of superannuation contributions totalling 16 pounds two shillings upon her resignation, would be provided for in her dotage, given the delay in introducing a federal aged pension.[225] The department selected Lucy Lee in preference to fellow applicant Alfred Wales, Assistant at Brewarrina, who had spent five years at a remote outback station.[226] The favour shown by officialdom to certain women ran counter to the notion of unconditional right that underpinned applications for government welfare benefits. Although informed by value judgments, the Commonwealth old-age pension from 1909 and invalid pension from 1910 were predicated on the principle of universal access with little reference to the worthiness or otherwise of applicants.[227] Rather than eliminate partiality entirely, the new order concentrated the power of patronage in fewer individuals.

With the partial decentralisation of bureaucratic authority from the second decade of the 20th century, N.S.W. Head Office and the local inspectorate gained additional influence in relation to non-official staff. Since Federation, state and regional headquarters had surrendered many of their managerial prerogatives to the central administration in Melbourne. Critical of the unnecessary delay and circumlocution uncovered in evidence, the Commissioners inquiring into Postal Services recommended that the state head offices assume greater responsibility for local

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[223] Report by George Hay, Inspr, 22 September 1908, SP32, Ulladulla, fol. D 08/16072; report by S. B. Edwards, Inspr, 19 December 1908, *ibid.*, fol. Db 08/181083; & *pro forma* Acknowledgement of Appt of Amanda Newell as Pms, 24 November 1908, *ibid.*, fol. 8 JAN 1909/Db 158.
[224] Memo by E. Turner, Inspr, 14 January 1909, *ibid.*, fol. DB 245; & telegram from J. Grace, Pmr, Milton, to P.M.G. Dept, 13 January 1909, *ibid.*
[225] Appt advice from J. Dalgarno, Dep. P.M.G., to P.M.G., 2 November 1903, SP32, Trunkey Creek; & minute from George Allen, Sec. to the Treasury, to Executive Council, 26 November 1903, *ibid.*
[226] Letter from Alfred Wales, Assistant, Brewarrina, 22 October 1903, *ibid.*, fol. 24 OCT 1903/B 11761.
[227] Brian Dickey, *No Charity There: A short history of social welfare in Australia*, 2nd edn, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp. 106–108.

operations, leaving the Postmaster-General and Chief Office to concentrate on major policy.[228] In 1912 state Deputy Postmasters-General gained permission to establish outlets generating no more than 100 pounds p.a., and were given the authority to engage non-official employees and determine their rate of pay. Contemporaneously, district inspectors were authorised to recommend salary increases and provide advice to state heads.[229] In November 1912 Inspector John Molloy exercised his enhanced power in suggesting that Mrs H. M. Clarke, Non-Official Postmistress at Broke, receive one pound extra a year as compensation for heavier switchboard duties since the connection of two new private lines. He discounted the fact that her allowance was already in excess of the new scale rate for the facility. Molloy noted that Mrs Clarke had taken on the office many years before on the strength of a larger salary (52 pounds p.a.). He considered that she was performing a "special service" in attending the switch and ought to be recompensed.[230] In May 1914 the local inspector had storekeeper Mary Ann McMenamin appointed to Kelso's former semi-official office after it was made an allowance amenity. Contrary to custom Miss McMenamin refused to fit out the premises at her own expense. Exercising his increased authority, the inspector recommended that the counter, stamping table, scales and pigeon holes be left on site for her use, alluding to the area's status as "a major exporter of produce" as justification for the concession.[231] If, from a community perspective, patronage was more circumscribed, from a bureaucratic viewpoint it was now more diffuse.

Although the ban on entry to the Clerical Division prevented women from realising their full employment potential, the importance attached to rural operations meant that females with meritorious credentials continued to find paid work in small country outlets. An adherent to the principles of colonial socialism or governmentalism before entering federal parliament, Postmaster-General James Drake sought to ensure that country people retained an interest in departmental facilities, including a say in staff recruitment. He argued successfully in the Senate that the Post and Telegraph Bill should provide for a government monopoly that guaranteed all Australians access to

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[228] *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, items 47 & 48, p. 17, & item 49, p. 18.
[229] *Postmaster-General's Department, Fourth Annual Report, 1913–14*, p. 25.
[230] Report by John Molloy, D.I., 4 November 1912, SP32, Broke, fol. D 12/4971; note below signed by "E.W.B.", 5 November 1912, *ibid.*; & report by John Molloy, D.I., 14 November 1912, *ibid.*, fol. D 12/4971.
[231] Report by unidentified inspector, 1 May 1914, SP32, Kelso, fol. 1a 14/393/1.

technological innovation, irrespective of where they lived. Furthermore, he expected his officials to remain receptive to the needs of rural inhabitants.[232] Agar Wynne, Postmaster-General from June 1913 to September 1914, took a similar position, insisting that the utility cater for the isolated districts 'doing the pioneering work of the Commonwealth' – a policy objective helped along by the Royal Commission report that effectively reaffirmed the practice of cross-subsidisation whereby earnings from urban business shored up uneconomic rural services.[233]

As a result of agitation in the rural community to preserve the local telecommunications amenity, Maggie Hay, a telephonist trained in telegraphy, secured the semi-official postmistress position at Kelso in January 1910. Because of declining earnings, the department had initially looked to reduce Kelso's official facility to a non-official office. Under the planned change, the Morse equipment was to be removed and a telephone office keeper hired to convey telegrams telephonically, with an estimated saving of 86 pounds a year.[234] In October 1909 the Clerk of Turon Shire Council wrote to E. S. Carr M.P. complaining that townspeople and farmers would no longer be able to send telegrams in private if the telephone was used. Furthermore, the change meant the double-handling of messages with Bathurst and consequent delays. The Shire Clerk pointed out that the head bureaucrats were "servants of the Public" and were duty-bound to provide local business with "every reasonable convenience".[235] Heeding local sentiments, Inspector T. Williams cast around for an able telegraphist to run a semi-official office, settling on Miss Hay after rejecting an application from Ada Marsden, 46, sister of the outgoing postmaster. Although Miss Marsden had been her brother's assistant for 20 years, she lacked operator training. The department also ignored any moral obligation it might have had to applicant Mrs C. E. Jones, Non-Official Postmistress at Forster, who kept an

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[232] The Post and Telegraph Bill was introduced to the Senate on 5 July 1901. James Drake rejected Senator Gould's proposal that private enterprise operate the postal utility in urban areas, claiming that it would jeopardise services in remote regions. See, Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 89 & p. 90.

[233] Agar Wynne quoted in *ibid.*, p. 101; & *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, item 64, p. 21, item 80, p. 27, & item 85, p. 29. While endorsing the system of cross-subsidisation, the Commissioners recommended that the utility be self-supporting, wherever possible. See, *ibid.*, items 86 & 87, p. 30.

[234] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Maggie E. Hay on 31 January 1910, SP32, Kelso, fol. 17 MAR 1910/DA 1645; & report by T. Williams, Inspr, 16 October 1908, *ibid.*, fol. DA 08/1423.

[235] Letter from Shire Clerk, Turon Shire Council, Council Chambers, Kelso, to E. S. Carr, Houses of Parliament, Melbourne, 12 October 1909, *ibid.*, fol. OCT 20 1909/NSW 7021.

invalid husband, but had no knowledge of Morse.[236] Increasingly, women were separated according to their utility.

The emphasis on economy and efficiency generated by the report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services favoured women with obvious abilities. With an eye to improving its financial situation and enabling it to better meet the high cost of rural services, the Commissioners had recommended that the department be placed on a business footing.[237] Under the proposed model, the telecommunications utility would be self-supporting as far as possible, and no longer dependent on postal business to prop up operations.[238] In response to the Royal Commission report, the department adopted several practices based on scientific management theory to improve efficiency and maximise economy.[239] Formulated in the United States, the principles of scientific management called for further divisions of labour, greater regulation, and the monitoring and mechanisation of work processes. These measures and procedures promised to raise worker productivity and limit overheads.[240] In keeping with scientific management theory, the bureaucracy recruited more inspectors from 1910 and introduced a "system of scientific records" in 1913 that was designed to identify fluctuations in telecommunications traffic and ensure the correct allocation of personnel.[241] Scientific management principles also informed the purchase of more labour-saving office machines to reduce the claim on overtime and the demand for

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[236] Report by T. Williams, Inspr, 30 December 1909, *ibid.*, fol. Da/09/6532; *pro forma* application by Ada Eliza Marsden, St Ives, Liverpool, 22 October 1909, *ibid.*; report by T. Williams, Inspr, 3 November 1909, *ibid.*, fol. 16 NOV 1909/DA 5746; & report by D.I. Jefferson, 8 January 1910, *ibid.* Concern for rural amenities saw "competent telegraphist" Lucy Lee transferred to Lithgow as a Clerical Assistant 5th Class after the Trunkey Creek facility was converted to a semi-official outlet in October 1909. See, memo from Dep. P.M.G., 3 September 1909, SP32, Trunkey Creek, fol. Db '09/3651; & letter from W. J. Skewes, Public Service Committee, Melbourne, to Sec., P.M.G. Dept, N.S.W., 15 October 1909, *ibid.*, fol. OCT 19 1909/7580.

[237] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 97. The Commissioners criticised senior management's failure to appoint a Chief Accountant, as well as the inadequate financial systems. They called for a proper balance sheet to monitor expenditure and reveal revenue shortfalls. See, *Report of the Royal Commission on Postal Services*, p. 12.

[238] *ibid.*, items 86–88, p. 30. The Commissioners found that the flat-rate system of telephone charges contributed to losses, and recommended a toll system in its place. See, Moyal, *Clear Across Australia*, p. 98 & p. 101.

[239] The Commissioners identified several factors that led to inefficiency. They included poor staff training, insufficient inspection, inadequate funds, excessive use of temporary workers, and long delays in filling positions. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 97.

[240] Probert, *Working Life*, p. 25.

[241] The expansion of the inspectorate resulted in more frequent visits to country offices. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Third Annual Report, 1912–13*, p. 27.

temporary staff.[242] A skilled telegraphist with 15 years' service, Amelia Wells secured the job of semi-official postmistress at Trunkey Creek in December 1909, given the concern for greater efficiency. Inspector T. Williams regarded her as the best applicant to work the "long and at times bad" line that connected Trunkey Creek with Bathurst. He overlooked a claim to special breadwinner status made by R. O'Grady, an "honest industrious man" with a slight physical disability, whose experience was limited to managing a small outlet at Junction Reefs.[243] Cognizant of the same priorities, Inspector W. Legg challenged the decision in September 1914 to reduce the scale rate paid to non-official postmistress Lily Walker in light of declining business. Legg noted that Miss Walker had run the Blacktown facility for five years and had proved "very efficient". Moreover, no one else could be found to conduct the office for the money.[244]

Domesticity versus Commercial Pragmatism

Many female post and telegraph employees retained a strong domestic attachment to the workplace, reinforced by the creation of a more intimate home environment and the perpetuation of miscellaneous duties. From the late 19th century, the semi-public house inhabited by owners and servants alike yielded to the compact bungalow with little or no provision for live-in help. This development allowed for the evolution of the private family unit insulated from the outside world.[245] From around that time, the department began to construct official facilities in keeping with changes in public expectations surrounding domestic architecture. Many of the buildings erected were in the Federation Free Style with integral kitchens, bathrooms and laundries, and no servant quarters.[246] The increased level of privacy led some postmistresses to treat government residences as their own property. In October 1908 Postal Inspector James McCutcheon refused a request from Rachel Fitzgerald at North Parramatta for the kitchen to be extended after she complained that the room was intolerably hot in

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[242] *First Annual Report of the Postmaster-General's Department*, 1910–1911, p. v.
[243] Report by T. M. Williams, Inspr, 3 December 1909, SP32, Trunkey Creek.
[244] Report by William Legg, Inspr, 17 September 1914, SP32, Blacktown, fol. 1a 14/1180. Ultimately, due to the onset of war, Miss Walker had to accept a reduced rate. See, letter from L. Walker, Pms, Blacktown, to Inspr Legg, G.P.O., Sydney, 22 September 1914, *ibid.*
[245] The absence of servants and the heightened responsibility given to mothers for the raising of children added to the emphasis on domestic privacy. Compact bungalows facilitated the creation of an insular site controlled by wives and mothers. See, Katie Holmes, *Spaces in Her Day: Australian women's diaries of the 1920s and 1930s*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 44 & p. 45.

summer due to inadequate space and ventilation. Mrs Fitzpatrick believed she had licence to modify the official residence as she wished. Previously, she had converted the original kitchen into a breakfast room without permission at her own expense, leaving only a small area for meal preparation.[247] Constance Berridge took an equally proprietorial view of departmental premises. She argued that officers on leave should not have to surrender their home to relieving staff, proposing that separate living quarters be provided for stand-ins.[248] For many women, the post office and the domestic space were inextricably linked – a function of the growing number of extraneous tasks performed by personnel. In Drake, postal assistant Mrs Schwinghammer furnished the wedding breakfast in the front room of the official residence for couples married by her husband, postmaster George Schwinghammer. At the time he was the only person, apart from a local missionary, authorised to conduct marriage ceremonies for a small fee in the goldmining settlement.[249]

While the post office remained a domestic precinct for many female employees, some came to view it as a wholly business investment with the downgrading of official establishments to semi-official and non-official facilities. From the late 19th century, women had taken a greater role in private enterprise, purchasing small businesses in response to mounting opposition to females in the public sector and the granting of limited legal and property concessions.[250] In May 1908, anxious to maximise the return on her investment, postmistress May Smith sought permission to sub let part of the cottage adjoining Burrawang Post Office, which had been converted to a non-official outlet in late 1904. Since that time she had resided in the family home nearby. Miss Smith complained that she was paying rent for rooms that now went unused, and had the added "trouble and expense of cleaning (them)".[251] Equally mercenary in

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[246] Chris Pratten, 'The Summer Hill Post Office', *Ashfield & District Historical Society Journal*, no. 13, October 1998, pp. 10–12.
[247] Letter from R. L. Fitzpatrick, Pms, P. & T. O., North Parramatta, 14 August 1908, SP32, North Parramatta, fol. DA 08/617; & report by James McCutcheon, P.I., 21 October 1908, *ibid*.
[248] *Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence*, vol. 2, Q. 42121, Q. 42123 & Q. 42126, p. 1858.
[249] 'Recollections of F. F. Hunter', "The Mail Bag", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 19, 16 September 1946, p. 21.
[250] The number of female business proprietors in Sydney increased threefold between 1891 and 1911. See, Barbara Little, *Retail Trade and Distribution in Sydney 1880–1914*, Hons Thesis, Economic History, University of Sydney, 1979, p. 120, p. 121, p. 262 & p. 264.
[251] Letter from M. Smith, Pms, Burrawang, to P.M.G. Dept, 16 May 1908, SP32, Burrawang, fol. 18 MAY 1908/D 2561; & *pro forma* Notice of Appt of May Smith as Pms, 25 October 1904, *ibid.*, fol. 8 NOV 1904/B 7698.

outlook, Ethel Trisilian, manager of Humula's non-official facility, sought a raise in May 1910 as compensation for the fact that, unlike staff with detached residences, she was unable to sub let the departmental building that contained both public and private areas.[252] For some women, the post office had become a purely commercial asset.

Despite an auspicious start, the early years of the 20th century were less than rewarding for many female official employees. Under Duncan McLachlan, obstacles to female employment resembled those encountered in the N.S.W. post and telegraph utility – namely concern for the male wage, a tight budget, and fears emanating from a decline in population growth. Wage parity with men, however laudable, proved no guarantee of equality. Although enshrined in law, equality in the workplace proved vulnerable to manipulation by a Public Service Commissioner who exercised extra-parliamentary powers to marginalise working women. Early in his tenure, McLachlan institutionalised inequality between the sexes by way of bans on married women and prohibitions on access to staff examinations. These impediments were reinforced by an inflexible classification system, gendered designations and feminised occupations. Union concern for recognition and internal solidarity, and the capacity to play one interest off against another, enabled the Commissioner to avoid overt opposition to his partial regime. What chance female officers had of recovering their wage and career entitlements under the law faded in the absence of support for Vida Goldstein's campaign to secure universal wage equality via the federal legislature – a task made harder by her political non-alignment, moderation in female ranks, and a powerful conservative women's lobby.

The attempt by Constance Berridge to win genuine equality for official postmistresses and female telegraphists at the Royal Commission on Postal Services came to nothing. Arguably weakened by the overall increase in salaries since Federation, Berridge's case for real parity in the workplace was harmed by her claim that the department had a moral obligation to its female workers – a position at variance with the argument for vocational equality based on measurable worth. Her contention

[252] 'History of Humula Post Office', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, p. 19.

clashed with McLachlan's efforts to shape employment policy according to meritocratic principles. The all-consuming interest of unionists, politicians and bureaucrats in the male wage and stagnating population growth frustrated the quest for genuine equality in drawing attention to the alleged biological and psychological deficiencies of female workers. The hostility expressed by male unionists towards female colleagues revealed how hollow and tenuous was their support for equal pay following the departure of a committed leadership. Meanwhile, militarism undercut Berridge's bid for true equality by prompting a revision of the ideas surrounding effective supervision. Maternal citizenship and stress on female domesticity also had a negative effect on the quest in ensuring that women were treated differently from men. The same-but-different conundrum fuelled debate over suitable occupations for women and handicapped the pursuit of real parity by making equal pay for equal work a difficult proposition to justify. Since Federation, increased regard for the individual worker irrespective of sex meant that Berridge's gendered argument for wage equality was now much harder to sustain. Moreover, her endeavours lacked the support base needed to carry the day, with the departure of significant union leaders and the decline in employee numbers caused by nominal wage equality and regressive employment policy. Occupational exclusivity among female officers also hobbled Berridge's efforts, preventing the union leadership from bringing to bear industry-wide pressure for real parity. On another level, the recruitment of thousands of non-permanent workers – plus hundreds of female telephonists and semi-official employees – damaged the quest for true equality by making for an alternative labour market. The latter saw official postmistresses and female telegraphists reduced to near irrelevancies from a numerical and occupational perspective.

As in the past, some women may have intentionally exchanged gender equality for security of tenure, in effect disengaging from Berridge's quest. Given the dearth of support for her initiative in a national union plagued by leadership and factional problems, and the negative consequences of equal pay campaigns in the private sector, a woman's choice of a small, but vital, outlet without the facility to claim equal pay for equal work may have appeared the most expedient option.

The reports of the Royal Commission and later developments confirmed the situation of female departmental staff. The majority report put an end to the ambitions of

women wanting a career as an official postmistress or telegraphist. However, mixed feelings – which had long surrounded working women – provided for a dissenting view that allowed for the recruitment of females to lesser positions. Existing postmistresses and female telegraphists were kept on while the competing imperatives generated by political economy and the last vestiges of the moral economy remained in play. Already largely confined to smaller outlets, women preserved their niche in the departmental labour market with the restructuring of wire services and the need for minor relay facilities. All the while, the lure of the private sector weakened the impetus for workplace reform. Regardless of the poor treatment meted out to official and semi-official staff, women could still be found in non-official offices – economic and service considerations and their enthusiasm for the work countering efforts to minimise the female presence. Despite the declining fortunes of permanent officers, the female workforce remained generally resilient.

During the period favouritism and quantifiable merit went hand in hand, while the attitude of some women to the domestic-oriented post office changed forever. Paradoxically, though hostile to partiality, Duncan McLachlan provided for needy women by concentrating the power of patronage in his office. Meanwhile, P.M.G. officials gained in influence at a local level with the devolution of authority. As before, women with obvious skills remained in demand, thanks to the exigencies of rural services and a growing regard for efficiency. Most female employees still subscribed to the domestic values of the post office, given changes in family life and the breadth of non-postal duties. Some, however, came to see the home-cum-postal facility as a wholly commercial space in the context of attempts to shift costs from official establishments to semi-official and non-official outlets. At a time when favouritism and meritocracy co-existed, individual female employees held markedly divergent views regarding the workplace.

Chapter Five: Warfare and Welfare, 1914–1929

In this section I investigate the circumstances of female employees of the P.M.G. Department in N.S.W. from the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 to the onset of the Great Depression in October 1929. My work begins with the growing demand for paid work in response to rising prices, an inadequate military allotment system, and an ineffective charitable relief programme. I go on to cover the impact of government budgetary measures on departmental employment and the job prospects for women in wartime secondary and tertiary industry. Due attention is paid to the Marxist theory of a 'reserve army of labour'. According to this construct, women entered the workforce in significant numbers to replace men who had enlisted in the armed forces, and were dismissed when the latter returned home following the cessation of hostilities.[1] While evidence suggests that the theory applied to female workers in Britain, Melanie Nolan disputes its relevance in the case of Australia, arguing that improvements in education, rather than simple necessity, accounted for the presence of women in the workforce.[2] Ann Curthoys and Margaret Power also question the appropriateness of reserve labour pool theory in this instance, opting instead for the dual labour market model. They contend that women were permitted to sell their labour during the conflict and remained in the workforce beyond the Armistice because they occupied a gender-specific, non-competitive niche in the job market.[3]

On another level, I explore the nature and role of sacrifice in wartime and uncover evidence in the official record that suggests that selflessness was not a limitless commodity among female staff. My research deals with the pressure placed on women to put country before self in the face of government economies and bureaucratic devices that were calculated to encourage conformity. I consider the conditional nature of the sacrifice expected of women, the concessions allowed

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[1] Melanie Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce in the Twentieth Century', *Labour History*, no. 63, November 1992, p. 66 & p. 67.
[2] *ibid.*, pp. 70–73.
[3] Ruth Milkman first proposed the existence of a gender-segregated, dichotomous labour market. Jill Rubery argues that reserve labour market theory and dual labour market theory are compatible with one another, rather than competitive. According to her, the former is concerned with 'flows' of labour, while the latter deals with the allocation of women to particular tasks, irrespective of movements into and out of employment. See, *ibid.*, p. 66 & p. 67.

individuals for the sake of the war effort, and the effective limits of selflessness apparent in late-war protests over wage cuts. Marilyn Lake and Joy Damousi note that many contemporary observers were disturbed by the liberating effect of war on women. They complained that growing numbers of females were casting off the sacrificial mantle and their domestic responsibilities in favour of economic and personal freedom in response to enhanced job opportunities, especially in the United Kingdom.[4] The authorities, eugenists and many feminists lamented the appearance of 'flappers'. These seemingly self-interested, hedonistic, economically independent, young women flaunted convention, communing freely with soldiers and male workers. The authorities accused them of contributing to the growing incidence of venereal disease that threatened the gender order and national fertility.[5]

Joy Damousi, Marilyn Lake and Judith Smart have drawn attention to a significant level of dissent in the Australian female population during the later stages of the conflict, suggesting less-than-absolute adherence to the sacrificial or passive model of womanhood.[6] Members of the Women's Peace Army formed by Vida Goldstein in July 1915, along with socialist and non-aligned women, attended rallies and meetings to protest against the war and denounce plans to introduce conscription from 1916.[7] In 1917 assorted women's groups participated in food-riots prompted by the government's failure to address the high cost of living and alleged profiteering.[8] Other women's organisations boycotted unethical suppliers and set up food co-operatives,

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[4] Marilyn Lake and Joy Damousi, 'Introduction: Warfare, history and gender', in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds), *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century*, Melbourne, Cambridge U.P., 1995, p. 7.

[5] Although flappers were seen to be of working-class origin, middle-class women could be found in their ranks. See, Judith Smart, 'Feminists, flappers and Miss Australia: Contesting the meanings of citizenship, femininity and nation in the 1920s', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 71, 2001, p. 1.

[6] Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism, Communism and Gender in Australia 1890–1955*, Melbourne, Melbourne U.P., 1994, p. 40, p. 41, p. 52, p. 55 & p. 56; Lake and Damousi, 'Introduction: Warfare, history and gender', p. 7; Judith Smart, 'Feminists, food and the fair price: The Cost of living demonstration in Melbourne, August September 1917', in Damousi and Lake (eds), *Gender and War*, p. 274, pp. 280–283 & pp. 287–294; & Darryn Kruse and Charles Sowerwine, 'Feminism and Pacifism: Women's Sphere in Peace and War', in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (eds), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1986, p. 55.

[7] Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1993, p. 147.

[8] Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, p. 52.

challenging an economic system that countenanced excessive profits.[9] Damousi, Lake and Smart claim that the war mobilised women in a way not previously seen.[10]

On the subject of sacrifice, I take account of research that suggests a partial breakdown in the male and female spheres during and after the war. According to Damousi and Smart, the conflict saw many women assume a 'political' posture, contrary to the dominant ideology of female passivity found in the parliamentary parties, in unions, and in wider society.[11] They contend that, in questioning the assumptions surrounding war and male power, the anti-conscription campaigners took a genuine political stand.[12] While acknowledging their 'domestic' interests, Smart argues that many of the food rioters of 1917 were committed politically, and were not just defenders of a moral economy opposed to exploitation.[13] After the war the Housewives' Association looked to expand the parameters of political life beyond the male-dominated parliamentary model. To this end, the organisation presented housework as a viable alternative manifestation of citizenship to direct parliamentary participation and set out to convert consumption into a force for legislative reform.[14]

Some historians argue that Australia was a divided country from 1917, embroiled in an internal conflict between government and capital on the one hand, and strikers and opponents of profiteering and conscription on the other.[15] I have located evidence of a few female departmental employees who bridged the divide between the waring elements, thanks to their gender and the parties' shared interests.

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[9] Judith Smart, 'A Mission to the Home: the Housewives' Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Protestant Christianity, 1920–1940', *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 13, no. 28, 1998, p. 218 & p. 219.

[10] Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, p. 65; & Smart, 'A Mission to the Home', p. 219. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union and like-minded organisations took advantage of the conflict to secure the six-o'clock closing of hotels. See, Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1999, p. 65.

[11] Joy Damousi, 'Socialist women and gendered space: Anti-conscription and anti-war campaigns 1914–18', in Damousi and Lake (eds), *Gender and War*, p. 255; & Smart, 'Feminists, food and the fair price', pp. 291–294.

[12] Previously, the socialist women who were opposed to conscription had engaged in male-dominated discourse without challenging it, identifying capitalism as the enemy. Now, for some, the foe included men. See, Damousi, 'Socialist women and gendered space', p. 255, p. 268 & p. 269.

[13] Smart, 'Feminists, food and the fair price', p. 293 & p. 294.

[14] Judith Smart, 'The Politics of Consumption: The Housewives' Association in Southeastern Australia Before 1950', *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 18, no. 3, Fall 2006, p. 23.

[15] Ken Inglis, 'Men, women, and war memorials: Anzac Australia', in Richard White and Penny Russell (eds), *Memories and dreams: Reflections on twentieth-century Australia: Pastiche II*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1997, p. 44 & p. 45.

The above calls into question the validity of Carmel Shute's reading of wartime womanhood that places females in the "domestic" domain for the duration of the conflict. Shute contends that the war served to re-impose and reinforce the separate spheres by casting men as warriors, or history's real protagonists, and women as noncombatants in the support role of wife, mother, homemaker, and dispenser of material and moral comfort.[16] Required to forego their personal or immediate interests for the greater good, women saw many of the democratic and social gains made over the previous 20-odd years cancelled out.[17]

This chapter also addresses the P.M.G. Department's treatment of enemy aliens and female workers accused of disloyalty in time of war. John McQuilton observes that the authorities' conduct towards Germans and people of German descent was conditioned by local community opinion. Despite considerable anti-German feeling, the police often chose not to prosecute alleged spies or traitors after neighbours vouched for their soundness as citizens.[18]

During and after the conflict, a system of veteran preference operated in the federal public service. The employment policy favouring ex-servicemen placed departmental officials in the invidious situation of having to choose between men who had suffered for their country, and needy women with children to support. Marilyn Lake argues that veterans were afforded special priority due to their contribution to the nation's and the empire's defence, and in view of their role in raising the country's international profile and in shaping its self-image. According to her thesis, the Anzacs came to be seen as the 'metaphorical mothers of the nation', diminishing the claim by Australia's literal mothers to full citizenship and paid work.[19]

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[16] Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914–18', in Damousi and Lake (eds), *Gender and War*, p. 23, p. 24 & p. 28.

[17] As newly enfranchised members of the political nation, women had to prove that they were worthy of the vote by sacrificing male kin in battle, if required. See, Shute, 'Heroines and heroes', pp. 23–25 & p. 39; & Lake and Damousi, 'Introduction: Warfare, history and gender', p. 6 & p. 7.

[18] John McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War: from Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 2001, p. 164 & p. 165.

[19] Marilyn Lake, 'Mission Impossible: How Men Gave Birth to the Australian Nation – Nationalism, Gender and Other Seminal Acts', *Gender & History*, vol. 4, no. 3, Autumn 1992, pp. 305–322. Ken Inglis notes that, on war memorials, the fighting man replaced woman as the symbol of nationhood. See, Ken Inglis cited in Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity*, Carlton South, Melbourne U.P., 2001, p. 28 & p. 29.

With this in mind, I investigate the system of veteran preference in the P.M.G. Department, taking into account competition between returned men, war widows, married women, ex-army nurses, and male "civilians" for employment, as well as attempts to extend government paternalism beyond its legislative limits.[20] In light of veteran preference, I consider the renewed stress on a job applicant's moral qualities and the vocational opportunities for women that stemmed from the multiple shortcomings of former soldiers.

Returning to a recurrent theme, I discuss the shifting impediments to gender equality in the P.M.G. Department. My research traverses the reclassification of staff, the demise of the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association, membership of the Postal Institute, and Vida Goldstein's ongoing quest for universal wage parity. The work also deals with the range of feminist agendas and the inability of women's groups to come to terms with the changing condition of young females. Liz Conor suggests that older activists failed to provide for the 'City Girl' due to the dualism of gender subject and object – a consequence, in part, of the latter's public 'visibility' and the negative associations surrounding women in the street.[21] In addition, I address the implications for gender equality that emanated from stress on employee femininity, from the strategy to abolish the basic or family wage, and from the greater expectations surrounding motherhood.

In recent times historians have focused on the level of unity within the feminist movement during the war and over the following decades. Judith Smart is at pains to stress the co-operation between women's organisations in spite of different emphases. She attributes their collective support for wage equality and other causes to the leaders' membership of multiple groups and the cross-fertilisation of ideas.[22] By 1914 both the Australian Women's National League and the Women's Political Association

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[20] Katie Holmes notes that ex-army nurses had difficulty asserting their veteran status due to official unease surrounding their contribution to the war effort. She traces much of the discomfort to the women's ambiguous role as mother, sister and lover to the men in their care. Because of the unease, military 'sisters' were largely written out of the official record. See, Katie Holmes, 'Day mothers and night sisters: World War 1 nurses and sexuality', in Damousi and Lake (eds), *Gender and War*, pp. 47–53; & Lake and Damousi, 'Introduction: Warfare, history and gender', p. 8.

[21] Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*, Bloomington, Indiana U.P., 2004, p. 3, p. 10 & p. 11.

[22] Smart, 'Feminists, food and the fair price', p. 274 & pp. 280–282; & Smart, 'The Politics of Consumption', p. 15 & p. 16.

were calling on mothers to prepare their daughters for the vocational opportunities generated by war.[23] The two bodies were as one in demanding equal employment prospects.[24] Marian Quartly observes that in most women's organisations workplace and domestic concerns co-existed, minimising the possibility of conflict between groups.[25] After the war the Housewives' Association embraced both the workplace and the home, calling for equal pay for equal work while agitating for housework to be seen as a productive pursuit.[26]

I contend that disunity within the women's movement and an overarching regard for maternal citizenship seriously damaged any prospect female departmental officers might have had of recovering lost employment rights, while impeding the quest for wage justice in general. My investigation addresses the dearth of support among female activists for Vida Goldstein's bid to secure a Senate seat in 1917, despite their common commitment to gender equality in the workplace. It also takes account of the dispute surrounding the efficacy of feminism and the campaigns for legal and social reform. The rift between women's groups eliminated all possibility of a joint effort to secure employment equality. From the beginning of her campaign in 1903, Goldstein had recognised that multiple bodies with disparate areas of interest could handicap the quest for equal pay and other reforms by dissipating the energies of members. Hence, in an early edition of the *Australian Woman's Sphere*, she urged females to unite under the banner of a single organisation, proposing that the W.P.A. become their representative body.[27]

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[23] The A.W.N.L. believed that women should seek work that enabled them to become 'wealth producers', rather than take non-productive jobs in the service sector. See, Marian Quartly, 'The Australian Women's National League and Democracy, 1904–1921', *Women's History Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, p. 45.

[24] The Women's Co-operative Guild of the Victorian Socialist Party and the more moderate Housewives'Co-operative Association were both opposed to high food prices, establishing outlets that brought producers and consumers into direct contact, eliminating the middleman. See, Smart, 'Feminists, food and the fair price', p. 218; & Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, pp. 48–50.

[25] Quartly, 'The Australian Women's National League and Democracy, 1904–1921', p. 45. During the war the Feminist Club of N.S.W. championed a woman's right to choose an occupation, supporting the principle of wage parity, while arguing the case for an ongoing maternity allowance, birth control, and co-operative housing to lighten the load on mothers. The club was headed by Jennie Scott Griffiths, editor of the *Australian Women's Weekly*. See, Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, p. 86 & p. 103.

[26] Smart, 'The Politics of Consumption', p. 28 & p. 30.

[27] Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 52. Goldstein recognised the threat posed by multiple interests to reform, observing that the female vote had only been secured through the singlemindedness of advocates, related issues notwithstanding. See, *ibid*., p. 110; & Judith A. Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1994, p. 96.

Revisiting an earlier subject, I analyse the more recent attempts by female post and telegraph staff to preserve administrative and personal freedom, and examine further evidence for the treatment of women as workers in their own right. Some allowance/non-official postmistresses protested against oppressive supervision, managing to gain a few concessions in return.[28] Meanwhile, other women achieved greater autonomy as independent moral and economic beings.

On the subject of employee sovereignty, I examine the changing attitude towards older spinsters, the business interests of allowance/non-official postmistresses, and the enhanced status of working wives in the domestic economy. My research is undertaken in the context of a bureaucracy that continued to have application forms and *pro forma* inspectors' reports printed in respect of 'Postmaster' positions, regardless of the fact that they were frequently occupied by women – a practice that took no account of developments in gender relations.

Lastly, on a related issue, I explore the reluctance of some applicants for employment to see themselves as 'working women', and subscribe to the dictates of fashion. My study bears on contemporary representations of femininity and female wage earners in the community, film, and the print media. On this point, Susan Sheridan argues that women were active rather than passive consumers of the media, interpreting and utilising content according to personal perception and experience.[29]

Legislative changes from the early 1920s had significant implications for post and telegraph employees. The Arbitration (Public Service) Act of 1920 saw a Public Service Arbitrator appointed to assess the wage claims lodged by federal unions from 31 March 1921. The legislation relieved the Commonwealth Arbitration Court of the responsibility.[30] In 1922 parliament passed a new Public Service Act that allowed for

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[28] Andrew Friedman notes that employers sometimes resorted to 'responsible autonomy' or worker self-direction in an attempt to placate staff annoyed by over-zealous surveillance and other intrusive methods of scientific management. Friedman cited in Raelene Frances, *The Politics of Work: Gender and Labour in Victoria 1880–1939*, Sydney, Cambridge U.P., 1995, p. 5 & p. 9.

[29] Susan Sheridan, 'Reading the Women's Weekly: Feminism, femininity and popular culture', in Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian feminisms*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 92 & p. 93.

[30] The Arbitration (Public Service) Act of 1920 gained assent on 17 October 1920. The Commonwealth Arbitration Court continued to receive submissions from private sector workers. See, Gerald E. Caiden, *Career Service: An Introduction to the History of Personal Administration in the Commonwealth Public Service of Australia 1901–1961*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1965, p. 157.

the appointment of three Public Service Commissioners, bringing to an end the personalised administration of a single head bureaucrat.[31]

From January 1927 allowance outlets were universally known as non-official post offices. Resumption of the earlier descriptor followed the decision to upgrade all receiving offices, the lowest grade of postal facility, to allowance status.[32] In the intervening period, the department had gradually phased out Non-Official Post Office in favour of Allowance Post Office, although not completely.[33] From about 1915 the titles, Non-Official Postmaster and Non-Official Postmistress, slowly yielded to Allowance Postmaster and Allowance Postmistress.[34] In January 1927 the utility reverted to the previous designations.[35]

Constraints on Employment

During the Great War and in the years immediately following, a substantial rise in the cost of living contributed to an increased demand for employment in the federal public service and elsewhere. Determined according to the material needs of male workers and their dependants, the basic or family wage had been declining in real terms since 1911, a process accelerated by wartime inflation. Between 30 June 1914 and 30 June 1919, the cost of living (food and rent only) in the six state capitals rose by 43%, compared with an increase of just 16% in the average salary of permanent officers over the same period.[36] Overall, the price of basic commodities almost doubled during the course of the conflict.[37] The sale of government war bonds fuelled

[31] The Public Service Act of 1922 gained assent on 18 October 1922. See, *ibid.*, p. 167.
[32] Henceforth, all allowance facilities and receiving outlets were collectively known as non-official post offices. See, N. C. Hopson, *New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory Post Offices*, rev. edn, Sydney, self-published, 1984, p. ii; & *Postmaster-General's Department, Eighteenth Annual Report, 1927–1928*, Melbourne, 1929, p. 5.
[33] Many officials continued to use the terms, Non-Official Post Office and Allowance Post Office, concurrently. See, for example, *Postmaster-General's Department, Sixteenth Annual Report, 1925–1926*, Melbourne, 1926–27, p. 10.
[34] See, for example, *Postmaster-General's Department, Sixth Annual Report, 1915–16*, Melbourne, 1914–15–16, p. 8; & *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Allow. Pms, Eliza King, 7 May 1926, C2593, GA 46, Ashbury.
[35] For some time after the reversion to Non-Official Postmaster and Postmistress, departmental officials used obsolete printed stationery bearing the titles, Allowance Postmaster and Allowance Postmistress.
[36] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 130.
[37] Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1996, p. 12.

inflation by accelerating the circulation of money and stimulating interest rates.[38] Living expenses also grew as landlords raised rents in response to the heavier taxes introduced to finance the war effort. The latter included death duty payable from late 1914 on estates larger than 1,000 pounds, land tax imposed from that year on previously exempt crown leaseholds, and income tax levied from 1915 on sums exceeding 156 pounds p.a.[39]

The wives of servicemen often found themselves in need of paid work. Under the military allotment system, a married soldier had to surrender two-fifths of his weekly pay to his spouse, or three-fifths to her if he had children. In 1917 the amount ranged from just one pound 10 shillings and 11 pence for a wife alone, to two pounds 17 shillings and nine pence for a woman with seven or more offspring. By then the deductions were patently deficient in many places, including the inner-suburbs of Sydney, where rent was typically two pounds a week.[40] The demand for employment among servicemen's wives grew with the increased incidence of family desertion. As the war progressed, some husbands misrepresented themselves as single men, or adopted an assumed identity to avoid having to maintain their kin. The inability of wartime charities to meet the needs of many dependants compounded the call on paid work. The organisations often fell short of their goals due to inadequate responses to public appeals and the inefficiencies that resulted from a lack of co-ordination and the duplication of services.[41]

From 1915 females enjoyed greater employment opportunities in the federal government. Because of the war, the administration relaxed the prohibition on married women in certain departments and waived the competitive entrance examination in some areas in an attempt to compensate for the loss of men to the military. By 1916 one in every four Commonwealth public servants eligible for military service had enlisted.[42] The recruitment concessions saw married women

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[38] Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901–1929*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1956, p. 136 & p. 138.
[39] *ibid.*, p. 146.
[40] Bruce Scates and Raelene Frances, *Women and the Great War*, Oakleigh, Cambridge U.P., 1997, p. 42.
[41] D. I. McDonald, 'The Australian Soldiers' Repatriation Fund, An Experiment in Social Legislation', in Jill Roe (ed.), *Social Policy in Australia: Some Perspectives 1901–1975*, Stanmore, Cassell Australia, 1976, p. 114 & p. 115.
[42] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 115 & p. 122.

appointed to official offices as temporary or exempt employees without the right to sit examinations for promotion, their salary restricted to 110 pounds p.a.[43]

Even so, employment prospects for both sexes remained limited in the post and telegraph service. With the intention of maximising the nation's fighting funds, Chief Office placed a general embargo on recruitment from 28 September 1914. In future, workers, including temporary and exempt hands, would only be hired where absolutely necessary, given the anticipated decline in domestic and international business due to hostilities. Importantly, no men eligible for military service would be engaged while the country was at war.[44] The department added to the constraints on recruitment by imposing a moratorium on the construction of new buildings and the expansion of telecommunications infrastructure until victory had been achieved. The closure or downgrading of facilities returning less than the grade threshold and the removal of post and telegraph outlets from railway stations had a similar effect. On 4 April 1916, the utility called on councils, progress associations, and the wider community to refrain from agitating for improved amenities while Australia was involved in a costly conflict, further dampening the demand for labour.[45]

Like many employers, the P.M.G. Department was not in a position to offer substantial job vacancies to women at the time. In Australia the emphasis on a volunteer army and rejection of the conscription referenda placed limits on the potential size of the armed forces, effectively restricting the employment prospects for women.[46] In Britain the impetus of "total war" and compulsory military service witnessed the mobilisation of large sections of the male working population. Consequently, women entered a wide range of civilian occupations previously monopolised by men, including mail sorting and mail delivery, the female workforce

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[43] Initially, the department employed temporaries for nine months. The period was later reduced to six months with a view to sharing the work around. It could be extended beyond six months if no one other than the incumbent was available to perform the duties. See *ibid.*, p. 116.

[44] Circ. Memo No. 678 from Justinian Oxenham, Sec., 28 September 1914, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G17127/14, Sc'14/2195, No. 2834, 1/11, 2751–2900, N.A.A., Sydney; & Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 123.

[45] *Postmaster-General's Department, Sixth Annual Report, 1915–16*, p. 6, p. 7, p. 9, p. 11 & p. 12.

[46] In 1914 the armed forces recruited just 0.5% of the male workforce in Australia. In 1918 the number of recruits peaked at 9.8% of the labour pool. See, Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce', p. 77.

participation rate growing by almost 50% between 1914 and 1918.[47] Although openings for women grew in Australia, they were generally confined to areas long regarded as suitable for females, such as office work and clothing manufacturing.[48] In the P.M.G. Department and elsewhere, older male employees ineligible for military service filled the void left by younger colleagues in the armed forces, with minimal recourse to female labour. To meet the challenge, many men worked overtime, postponed retirement, or returned to the job after attaining maximum age. Unlike the bulk of female workers in Britain, most women employed by the P.M.G. Department, with the exception of a few temporary hands, remained on staff following the Armistice.[49] In charge of the Grade VI facility at Braidwood in 1914, Ethel Cox went on to manage the Grade V office at Gosford from 1920, before becoming acting postmistress at Inverell's Grade IV outlet. Later she transferred to the Grade II office at Bingara, before taking over the Grade III amenity at Maclean in 1925.[50] In contrast to the situation in Britain, the department chose not to discard all temporary and exempt employees after the German surrender, offering, as they did, a ready supply of relatively cheap labour. Mrs Holmes, Exempt Assistant, continued to work alongside her husband G. T. Holmes, Yamba's Postal Assistant (in Charge), well into the 1920s. In December 1921 the department agreed to raise her modest salary, since her services were required and no one could be found to replace her.[51] Women neither displaced male labour during the conflict, nor were they removed *en masse* at war's end.

Pay rates during the war suggest that female departmental workers in no way contributed to a reserve army of opportunistically employed women.[52] Whereas the

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[47] During the period the percentage of females in the British workforce rose from 24% to 37%. Around 22% of the women working in industry in early 1917 had not been previously employed. Many women laboured in munitions factories, while others drove ambulances or toiled on farms. See, Jennifer Crew, 'Women's Wages in Britain and Australia During the First World War', *Labour History*, no. 57, November 1989, pp. 28–30.

[48] Lake and Damousi, 'Introduction: Warfare, history and gender', p. 6; & Scates and Frances, *Women and the Great War*, p. 38. Whereas the number of male factory workers decreased by 20,148 between 1913 and 1917, the number of female factory hands rose by just 4,717. Military orders placed with the textile and clothing industry largely accounted for the modest increase. See, Crew, 'Women's Wages', pp. 29–31.

[49] In Britain, as in Australia, female office workers were retained in substantial numbers beyond the Armistice. The number of women employed in offices more than doubled between 1911 and 1921. See, Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce', p. 76 & p. 78.

[50] "An Appreciation – The late Ethel S. Cox" by "A Friend", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 33, 15 January 1948, p. 11 & p. 12.

[51] Report by W. E. Tomkinson, D.I., Lismore, 12 December 1921, SP32, Yamba, fol. 15 DEC 1921/SB 2769.

[52] Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce', p. 81.

wages of British working women rose between 1914 and 1918 in response to the heavy demand for "male-replacement" labour, the earnings of official and allowance employees of the P.M.G. Department remained comparatively stable owing to the government's austerity policy, restraint in the arbitration court, and ceilings on the scale rates paid to allowance staff. Wage rates in the private sector exhibited a similar level of stability.[53] Importantly, female official employees continued to enjoy theoretical wage parity beyond the Armistice, unlike the women performing piece work in British munitions factories and other "controlled establishments" who only commanded equal pay – a significant boon – for the duration of the conflict.[54]

During the war female staff on the official list experienced further marginalisation. Because of the department's overriding interest in the male wage, women who left the service were invariably replaced by men. In January 1915 Kate Black, Postmistress at Annandale, retired from office, followed by her sister and assistant, widow Mary Mulligan, in April 1915. Their positions were filled by Robert Studdert, Postmaster, and a male offsider.[55] In instances where additional help was required, the department recruited women to the General Division only, eliminating the possibility of female replacements in the Clerical Division – something rendered more remote by a two-year embargo on promotions to conserve funds.[56] Meanwhile, the policy of downgrading small, uneconomic, official offices to allowance outlets put women at increased risk of being made unattached. Once on the unattached list, staff could be transferred to any locality, however remote or inconvenient. Those female officers whose facilities were reduced to allowance amenities often had to accept difficult stations, or else lose their attached status. After her establishment was identified for downgrading in September 1914, the department transferred Eliza Martin from Coopernook to Jones Island in the Clarence River, ignoring her protests that the damp environment would damage her health, protective measures notwithstanding. In April 1918 Miss Martin gravitated to the unattached list after the Jones Island office became

[53] In August 1914 the average female wage in Australia was 49.4% of the average male wage, declining slightly to 48% by war's end. In the United Kingdom, the average female wage in August 1914 was just under half the average male rate, rising to 66.6% of male earnings by November 1918. See, Crew, 'Women's Wages', p. 27 & pp. 35–37.
[54] *ibid.*, p. 31. In Britain and Australia, before and after 1918, female office staff received 2/3rds the male rate and around 5/8ths the male rate, respectively. See, *ibid.*, p. 33.
[55] Betty Mason, 'Annandale Post Office: 1855–1920', *Leichhardt Historical Journal*, no. 10, 1981, p. 23.
[56] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 124 & p. 125.

an allowance facility.[57] Women in unprofitable Grade VI establishments were also rendered unattached with the decision to exchange them for lower-paid assistants-in-charge. In October 1914 Julia Hiley, Postmistress at Concord, moved to the unattached list after an assistant took over her poorly performing outlet.[58]

That said, unattached women in N.S.W. were placed in positions vacated by men who had enlisted in the armed forces. By September 1917, 109 former postmasters, telegraphists, clerical assistants and postal assistants were on active service – their jobs, in some cases, going to females without permanent stations.[59] Late in 1918 Miss Martin again took possession of a position, becoming the official postmistress at Greta.[60] Earlier, in 1915, Julia Hiley had taken charge of the post office at Gladesville.[61] Whereas, in June 1914, four women had been without a specific job, by mid 1919 no females remained on the unattached list.[62]

Predictably, some women eventually found themselves unattached with the demobilisation of war veterans and the return of former employees to the department following the Armistice. In 1925 two females, Minard Crommelin, Senior Postal Assistant, and Agnes Wilson, Relieving Officer, appeared on the unattached list.[63] By that time the marriage bonus, wartime romances, and better vocational prospects outside the public sector had accounted for many departures from the service.

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[57] Memo from Dep. P.M.G. to Public Service Inspr, 228 Pitt St, Sydney, 14 September 1914, SP32, Jones Island, fol. Sb 14/3488; letter from Miss E. M. Martin, Pms, Coopernook, 24 January 1914, *ibid*, fol. SB/456; report by J. Williams for Snr I., 4 April 1918, *ibid.*, fol. IA' 18/714; & file note signed by unidentified official, Staff Section, 5 April 1918, *ibid.*

[58] J. J. Olsen, 'Concord Post Office History', P.R.O., A.P.O., Sydney, July 1973, p. 23 & p. 24.

[59] *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no. 148, Thursday, 6 September 1917, *List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Public Service, 30th June, 1917*, Melbourne, 27 August 1917, pp. 194–196.

[60] *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no. 133, Friday, 5 December 1919, *List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Public Service as on 30th June, 1919*, Melbourne, 23 October 1919, p. 169.

[61] *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no. 109, Monday, 13 September 1915, *List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Public Service as on 30th June, 1915*, Melbourne, 8 September 1915, p. 137.

[62] *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette, List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Public Service as on 30th June, 1914*, Melbourne, August 1914, p. 236; & *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no. 133, Friday, 5 December 1919, *List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Public Service as on 30th June 1919*, Melbourne, 23 October 1919, pp. 209–212.

[63] *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no. 95, Monday, 9 November 1925, *List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Service on 30th June, 1925*, Melbourne, 6 November 1925, p. 218.

Between 1919 and 1923, the number of female official employees in N.S.W. departmental establishments had more than halved, shrinking from 31 to 15.[64]

From the commencement of hostilities, the department prevailed on allowance staff to accept lower wages for the sake of the war effort. In September 1914 the inspectorate asked Lily Walker, Postmistress at Blacktown, to accept a cut in her allowance from 157 pounds 10 shillings to 143 pounds 5 shillings a year in view of instructions to exercise rigid economy.[65] Head Office directed field officers not to sanction any increase in scale rates while the war was in progress.[66] Allowance employees on low wages were expected to augment their income through commercial activities or investments. In January 1916 a senior officer declined a request from Mortlake's postmistress, Helen Harris, for a pay rise, stressing that her wage was not intended to provide a living, but was merely an income supplement.[67]

Sacrifice and its Limits

Most female employees and prospective employees endured their lot in anticipation of future benefits or consideration. Lily Walker, Postmistress at Blacktown, agreed to an allowance reduction, given the "unsettled state of business … caused by the present war". She expected the previous scale rate to be restored upon "business resuming its normal propensities".[68] Arguably, in consenting to the cut, she was in an analogous situation to the men who answered the nation's call to arms with the expectation of job and social security concessions upon their return.[69] The department required women to place their vocational plans in abeyance in anticipation of better times ahead. In June 1917 Inspector S. Morris rejected on economic grounds Mary Pierce's speculative application to operate an allowance office in the Sydney suburb of Banksia, suggesting that further consideration be given to her proposal once the

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[64] *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no. 133, Friday, 5 December 1919, *List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Public Service as on 30th June, 1919*, pp. 145–200; & *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, no. 61, Thursday, 6 September 1923, *List of Permanent Officers of the Commonwealth Service on 30th June, 1923*, Melbourne, 30 August 1923, pp. 172–228.
[65] Memo from "K.W.A.", Snr I., to Mr Inspr Legg, 18 September 1914, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. 1a '14/1180; letter from L. Walker, Pms, Blacktown, to Inspr Legg, G.P.O., Sydney, 22 September 1914, *ibid.*; & memo under from William Legg, Inspr, 23 September 1914, *ibid*.
[66] Circ. Memo No. 3348 from E. J. Young, Dep P.M.G., Sydney, 18 October 1915, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, N.A.A., Sydney.
[67] Memo from unidentified officer to Pms, Mortlake, 3 January 1916, C2593, GA 1241, Mortlake.
[68] Letter from L. Walker, Pms, Blacktown, to Inspr Legg, G.P.O., Sydney, 22 September 1914, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown.

enemy capitulated and the financial situation improved.[70] Women had a contract of sorts with the department that represented an investment in the future.

The department's obvious commitment to the war effort and the spirit of volunteerism abroad set a patriotic example to female staff. During the conflict post offices sold war bonds and savings certificates, dispensed war pensions, and paid military allotments to the dependants of servicemen on behalf of the operative government agencies.[71] At the same time, the department guaranteed the jobs of male employees in the armed forces and paid their life insurance premiums.[72] From the beginning of hostilities, many women gave of their time to raise funds for war charities or to work as ambulances drivers and hospital orderlies.[73] Some volunteered to make up food parcels for soldiers overseas, while others knitted socks, vests and mittens for men at the front. Meanwhile, housewives actively participated in a large-scale recycling programme, saving newspapers, tins, bottles, rubber and other strategic materials.[74] In the circumstances most female employees were persuaded to put aside their personal interests for the sake of the nation.

The threat of office closure and peer pressure combined to enforce conformity. In January 1915 Departmental Secretary Justinian Oxenham directed that allowance establishments, whether economic or otherwise, be shut down in the event that employees refused to accept the scale rate and nobody else could be found to conduct the outlet for the prescribed amount.[75] In January 1918 Head Office closed the postal facility at Bena, a village of 20 households, after declining a request from postmistress Jessie Jeffrey for a raise of a pound a week. At the time the amenity

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[69] Shute, 'Heroines and heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914–18', p. 24 & p. 31.
[70] Letter from Mary E. Pierce, Railway & Bowna Sts, Banksia, to W. E. Johnson M.H.R., 22 May 1917, C2593, GA77, Banksia, fol. 24 MAY 1917/IA 885; & report by S. Morris, Inspr, undated, *ibid.*, fol. IA 17/885.
[71] *Postmaster-General's Department, Fifth Annual Report, 1914–15*, Melbourne, 1914–15–16, p. 15 & p. 16.
[72] Circ. Memo No. 3440 (Memo No. 591) from Justinian Oxenham, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Melbourne, 6 September 1915, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, N.A.A., Sydney.
[73] Scates and Frances, *Women and the Great War*, pp. 50–62.
[74] Most of the women engaged in charity work were attached to volunteer groups formed to aid the war effort. Numbering as many as 10,000, the groups included patriotic clubs, service societies and sewing circles. See, *ibid.*, p. 45, p. 48, p. 49 & p. 56.
[75] Circ. Memo No. 35 from Justinian Oxenham, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, 12 January 1915, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. IA 14/2032.

generated just 56 pounds a year.[76] Two months later the department shut the Bossley Park outlet after postmaster W. S. Baker protested a cut in the annual scale rate from 28 to 13 pounds.[77] In both cases Head Office failed to locate a resident prepared to work the facility for the small allowance.[78] Oxenham mobilised the weight of employee opinion in an attempt to curb dissent, observing that office closures were regrettable from the "dept viewpoint and from that of PMs who accept reduced payment without demur".[79] If patriotism alone was insufficient to induce workers to forego their immediate concerns, there remained bureaucratic coersion and moral force.

In the final stages of the war, some allowance employees demanded a review of their situation, regardless of the sacrificial spirit at large. In January 1918 Pelaw Main's postmistress, Frances Blishe, threatened to resign if she did not receive an additional payment to hire a young male assistant. Previously, the department had suggested that she engage help at her own expense.[80] In October of that year, Failford's postmaster, John Breckenridge, protested the cut in his allowance, stressing that, while local mail contracts had been consolidated, he still had to pay for someone to attend the office on Saturday afternoon when letters were received and despatched for the hinterland.[81] In the last two years of the conflict, rising inflation and disenchantment with the status *quo* placed considerable strain on the community's capacity for selflessness, culminating in the General Strike of 1917.[82] Many people blamed their loss of purchasing power on profiteers and commodity speculators – a situation made worse by wartime trade agreements with Britain. Under the latter the imperial authorities reserved the right to buy the wheat harvest of 1916–17 and all of the frozen meat for export, adding to the price of foodstuffs on the domestic market. In poorer sections of the community, the austerity policy championed by government and businessmen fed

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[76] C. S. Hertz, 'History of Bena Post Office', Historical Section, A.P.O., Sydney, April 1970, p. 3 & p. 4.
[77] Letter from Dep. P.M.G. to R. B. Orchard M.P., Melbourne, 1 March 1918, C2593, GA231, Bossley Park, fol. IA 18/437.
[78] *ibid.*; & Hertz, 'History of Bena Post Office', p. 4.
[79] Circ. Memo No. 35 from Justinian Oxenham, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, 12 January 1915, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. IA 14/2032. A copy of Oxenham's instruction was attached to the Blacktown file, holding the allowance postmistress to her undertaking of September 1914 to accept a lesser salary. See, letter from L. Walker, Pms, Blacktown, to Inspr Legg, G.P.O., Sydney, 22 September 1914, *ibid.*
[80] Report from E. M. Vere, Inspection Branch, Newcastle, to Snr I., 24 January 1918, C2593, GA1434, Pelaw Main, fol. IA 17/2127.
[81] V. L. Cremer, 'Failford Post Office History', Historical Section, A.P., Sydney, March 1987, p. 6.

a mounting level of discontent. Some in the labour movement argued that it impoverished the working classes for whom economies meant denial and joblessness, while enriching wealthier individuals through saving.[83] The war imposed a practical limit on the patriotism of both men and women.

A few allowance postmistresses took advantage of their strategic value to extract concessions from the employer. Frances Blishe's threat to resign in January 1918 won the postmistress at Pelaw Main a pay rise. E. M. Vere of the Inspection Branch recommended that she be allowed another 13 pounds p.a. to hire a boy to collect the mail from Stanford Methyr Railway Station in her place. He reasoned that the extra payment would enable the postmistress to spend more time at the counter attending to customers. While acknowledging the need for economy, Vere drew attention to the demand for postal services among loyalist colliers brought from Victoria. He noted that they were likely to remain indefinitely at Pelaw Main while the strike continued at the nearby mine. Vere observed that many miners called at the office to collect their mail between shifts, placing considerable strain on the facility. In recommending the rise, he pointed to the lack of alternative outlets nearby, suggesting that the additional sum be paid for three months, or until such time as a post office opened at Richmond Vale where the strikebreakers worked.[84] In this instance the postmistress effectively capitalised on the priority accorded coal production in time of war, reflected in repressive legislation introduced in 1918 to curb the high level of disputation in the mining industry.[85]

The department can be seen to have yielded to Frances Blishe in light of her commercial interests and in deference to the licence allowed women in mining communities. If Australia was split along political and class lines from 1917, Pelaw Main's postmistress used family ties and long-standing relationships to straddle the divide, serving both sides simultaneously.[86] While Miss Blishe did the bidding of government in providing a postal service to loyalist miners from November 1917 to

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[82] Smart, 'Feminists, food and the fair price', p. 275.
[83] *ibid.*, p. 279 & p. 267.
[84] Report from E. M. Vere, Inspection Branch, Newcastle, to Snr I., 24 January 1918, C2593, GA1434, Pelaw Main, fol. IA 17/2127.
[85] Ian Turner, '1914–19', in F. K. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, Melbourne, William Heinemann Australia, 1974, p. 341 & p. 342.
[86] Inglis, 'Men, women, and war memorials', p. 44 & p. 45.

May 1918, she also contributed to a relief fund for the striking colliers as the sister-in-law of a local miner and the daughter of Pelaw Main's long-serving former postmaster.[87] Because of her "neutral" standing, she was free to serve the 'blacklegs' while dispensing aid to strikers without being labelled a government or management sympathiser, or an irresponsible radical. Notwithstanding women's increasing politicisation in the later war years, Frances Blishe moved between opposing camps without obvious consequences, exploiting the residual belief in union circles that politics was a masculine pursuit.[88] Like many general storekeepers, Miss Blishe maintained commercial connections in the local community that enabled her to keep faith with both causes. As employers of labour, small shopowners tended to identify with the powers that be, while as suppliers of goods to residents and as vital sources of credit during a strike, they had a vested interest in the wellbeing of inhabitants. As such, they enjoyed cordial relations with government officials and unionists alike.[89] For its part, organised labour remained generally protective of shopkeeper interests, confining its criticism of the capitalist system to the large monopolies.[90] Frances Blishe's actions were nuanced according to circumstances, neither overtly political nor typical of retiring womanhood.

Despite the emphasis on stoicism and selflessness, a few women managed to obtain a wage increase on the strength of their prospects for better-paid employment outside the service. In late 1916 Stanmore's semi-official postmistress, Jane Atkinson, wrote to Head Office on behalf of her two female assistants. She proposed that the elder receive an extra 25 pounds a year and that the younger be allowed an additional 26 pounds p.a. Mrs Atkinson pointed out that they could readily obtain higher-paid positions in private enterprise and compared their situation with that of other female

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[87] Letter from T. W. Jeffries, Honorary Sec., Pelaw Main Progress Association, Aberdare St, Pelaw Main, to Mr Charlton, 6 November 1917, C2593, GA1434, Pelaw Main; memo from unidentified officer to Pms, Pelaw Main, 7 May 1918, *ibid.*, fol. IA 17/2127; & report by E. P. Ramsay, Inspr (Relieving), Grafton District, 28 September 1911, *ibid.*

[88] Union fundraising and other "domestic" duties provided women with the "ideological cover" necessary to participate in political and social life. See, Damousi, 'Socialist women and gendered space', p. 258.

[89] Erik Eklund, 'The "Anxious Class"?: Storekeepers and the Working Class in Australia 1900–1940', in Raymond Markey (ed.), *Labour & Community: Historical Essays*, Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 2001, p. 224. During periods of industrial unrest, shopkeepers provided miners with an alternative source of supplies to management-sponsored co-operatives and often organised welfare assistance for strikers and their dependants. See, *ibid.*, p. 229 & p. 233.

[90] Although employers, storekeepers in industrial and mining communities in N.S.W. often identified with organised labour, unlike their European counterparts. See, *ibid.*, p. 225 & p. 227.

workers.[91] Thanks to the greater availability of office training in state secondary schools and commercial colleges, young women were finding well-paid work in banks, insurance companies and other large business houses.[92] From 1910 girls had benefited from free, post-primary education. Now more parents allowed daughters to complete their schooling in order to prepare them for employment prior to marriage.[93] In the circumstances Inspector M. O'Connor recommended that Mrs Atkinson's assistants receive a wage increase of the order suggested, noting that it was near impossible to obtain competent help at the present rate of pay.[94]

Dealing with "The Enemy"

Throughout the war the P.M.G. Department treated aliens and women accused of disloyalty in a temperate, impartial and generally pragmatic manner. During the conflict Head Office received numerous complaints from the public about postmasters and postmistresses of German birth or ancestory who were allegedly engaged in spying or sabotage. In almost all cases, enquiries failed to uncover clear and unambiguous evidence of subversive activity. Without exception, the department adopted a legalistic approach to allegations, calling on the authorities to investigate the matter before deciding what course to pursue.[95] In October 1915 Head Office directed the official postmaster at Henty to make confidential enquiries of the police regarding Otto Sticker, Allowance Postmaster at Pleasant Hills, after a local resident accused him of being a "disloyal German" and demanded that he and his wife, who assisted him, be removed from office.[96] The senior police officer at Henty reported that Sticker had been born in Australia of German parents and that there was no cause

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[91] Letter from J. Atkinson, P.O., Stanmore, to P. Morris, P.I., Sydney, undated, circa November 1916, SP32, Stanmore; & letter from J. Atkinson, P.O., Stanmore, to Inspr M. O'Connor, Sydney, undated, circa November 1916, *ibid.*

[92] Many young women obtained steno-typing positions after instruction in the simpler Bradshaw system of shorthand. The comprehensive, rather than wholly occupational, state school curriculum enhanced their appeal in the labour market. See, Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce', p. 68.

[93] The number of girls qualified to undertake clerical work probably doubled between 1911 and 1921 from a tenth to a fifth of all 14- to 15-year-olds. See, *ibid.*, pp. 69–73.

[94] Report by M. O'Connor, Inspr, 4 January 1917, SP32, Stanmore, fol. IA 16/348/1.

[95] The department's legalistic or "objective" approach to the conflict extended to the prosecution of women who posted white feathers to men who failed to enlist. See, Circ. Memo No. 3601 from Justinian Oxenham, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Melbourne, 4 December 1915, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, N.A.A., Sydney.

[96] Extract from letter written by Mr E. Williams, Osborne, 26 October 1915, SP32, Part 2, Pleasant Hills, fol. 28 OCT 1915/IA 1505; & Staff Cards – P.O. file, C3629/2, Pleasant Hills, entries for 22 September 1913 and 26 October 1915, N.A.A., Sydney.

to doubt his loyalty. Up until that time he had conducted the facility in a satisfactory manner and there was no reason why he should be dismissed. In deciding to let the matter rest, the department took stock of the problem it was likely to have finding replacements for Sticker and his wife. Over the years few inhabitants of Pleasant Hills had expressed an interest in running the postal outlet, given the modest allowance.[97]

Due process and staffing considerations also informed the department's response to charges laid under the War Precautions Act in November 1917 against Ellen Berg, Exempt Postal Assistant at Yetman. According to the police, the Australian wife of the naturalised Swedish postmaster had been heard to utter anti-British sentiments and praise the quality of German clothing! Mrs Berg denied the charge of disloyalty and pointed out that she had a brother and four cousins at the front.[98] Ignoring calls from a few residents for the Bergs' dismissal, Head Office elected to retain their services, given a lack of sufficient legal evidence against the couple.[99] Prior to the postmaster's appointment, the bureaucracy had encountered considerable difficulty finding staff to manage the isolated outback facility.[100]

All through the war, the P.M.G. Department remained receptive to local opinion. Anxious to preserve community goodwill, Head Office confirmed Berg and his wife's ongoing tenure after consulting Yetman's leading citizens, including James White, recruitment officer. He dismissed the accusations, describing the postmaster as an efficient and loyal employee. A petition from residents expressing faith in Berg strengthened the utility's resolve to retain the couple.[101] Similarly, in the absence of local objections, the department allowed Miss Ellmoos to run the allowance outlet at

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[97] Report by S. C. Francis, Inspr, Albury, 3 November 1915, SP32, Part 2, Pleasant Hills, fol. IA 15/1505; letter from Acting Dep. P.M.G. to Mr E. Williams, Osborne, 8 November 1915, *ibid.*, fol. IA 15/1505; & recommendation from Dep. P.M.G. for the appointment of William Voss as Pmr, Pleasant Hills, 21 December 1911, *ibid.*, fol. Db 11–5039.

[98] Letter from William Legg, Inspr (Relieving), Armidale, to Officer in Charge, Police, Yetman, 14 November 1917, SP32, Yetman, fol. IA 17/2120; report from Ernest J. Stephenson, Constable, Police Station, Yetman, to Mr Inspr Legg, Armidale, 19 November 1917, *ibid.*; letter from A. Berg to D.I., Armidale, 28 November 1917, *ibid.*; & statement by Edith Berg, Yetman, 7 December 1917, *ibid.*

[99] Report by W. A. Varley, D.I., on tour, Kentucky, 6 February 1918, *ibid.*, fol. 30 JAN 1918/IA 306; & copy of letter from William Webster, P.M.G., P.M.G. Dept, to J. Gallacher, Yetman, N.S.W., 17 April 1918, *ibid.*, fol. 23 MAY 1918/IA 1126.

[100] Report by W. Morris, Inspr, 8 January 1917, *ibid.*, fol. Sc 16/1974; & note overleaf signed by W. Morris, Inspr, 25 January 1917, *ibid.*

[101] Letter from James White, Tucka Tucka, Yetman via Inverell, to Inspr Varley, 29 November 1917, *ibid.*; letter from G. W. Dight Jnr, "Horses and Cattle", Yetman, 29 November 1917, *ibid.*; & petition from Yetman residents to Mr Varley, P.I., Armidale, 8 December 1917, *ibid.*

St George's Basin throughout the conflict, despite police confirmation that she was an "unnaturalised German".[102]

Head Office's regard for due process contrasted with the partisan reaction to aliens and purported enemy sympathisers elsewhere in the community. In the wake of allied propaganda alleging German atrocities in Belgium, and the British and Australian reversals at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, many individuals and groups came to view all things foreign with suspicion.[103] Responding to the complaints made against the postal staff at Yetman, local policeman Constable Stephenson reported being "very suspicious of his (Berg's) nationality by his speach [*sic*]." He decided to treat the postmaster as a German, despite documentary proof of his Swedish origins.[104] The government's elastic, somewhat inexact, definition of an enemy alien added to the xenophobia. Over the course of the conflict, it was expanded to include people of German ancestry, however remote, citizens of neutral countries, Irish nationalists, American supporters of the Industrial Workers of the World, and critics of the administration.[105] The reaction of the Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (R.S.S.I.L.A.) to the allegations concerning Edith Berg illustrated the level of unease surrounding people of foreign birth. Calling for a veteran to replace the postmaster, League Secretary A. G. Potter asserted that an ex-serviceman would be preferable to "a man from a country who [*sic*] attitude in the present war is not exactly above suspicion".[106]

During the war and in subsequent years, the system of veteran preference placed female applicants for post and telegraph employment at a disadvantage. Under amendments to the Commonwealth Public Service Act of August 1915, returned servicemen had priority over all other candidates for appointment and promotion. Found throughout the federal and state public services, veteran preference turned on the widespread conviction that the nation owed its former soldiers and sailors a living, be it a job or a pension, in return for their defence of country and empire, and their

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[102] Correspondence cards, letter from Inspector General of Police, 17 November 1916, C2593, GA244160, Part 1, St George [*sic*] Basin; & letter from Miss Ellmoos, 8 April 1920, *ibid*.
[103] Scates and Frances, *Women and the Great War*, p. 131.
[104] Report from Ernest J. Stephenson, Constable, Police Station, Yetman, to Mr Inspr Legg, Armidale, 19 November 1917, SP32, Yetman.
[105] Scates and Frances, *Women and the Great War*, p. 131.

part in the development of the nation state and national identity.[107] This attitude to veterans prevailed despite disquiet among "civilian" employees and the other beneficiaries of government assistance who were adversely affected by the men's disproportionate claim on the nation's resources.[108]

The federal government looked to ensure that returned servicemen, who were often in poor health, enjoyed a 'comfortable life', deeming allowance post offices suitable billets for the nation's heroes. Like the job of railway-gatekeeper or that of lift driver in an office building or emporium, management of a small postal outlet appeared to impose minimal demands on the individual.[109] The P.M.G. Department contributed to the belief in government and veteran circles that postal work was appropriate for returned men by promoting the engagement of invalids, while discounting the rigours of the job. Commenting on the application received from Walter Butfield in May 1922 for the position of postmaster at Sunny Corner, District Inspector J. R. Nash observed that the former soldier would never again be fit for manual employment owing to a "partially useless" arm. Accordingly, he had no hesitation in recommending him for the office.[110] The application lodged by Frank Boyer for the same job in August 1920 underscored the view that management of a post office was a suitable occupation for partially incapacitated men. The returned serviceman explained that he had been gassed in the trenches and was not strong enough to follow his career as an engineer: in the circumstances "lighter duty" in the country would be good for his health.[111] In January 1922 Richard Jackson Graham applied for the position of postmaster at Come by Chance with similar considerations in mind. The

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[106] Letter from A. G. Potter, Sec., Returned Sailors and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, N.S.W. Branch, 315–321 Pitt St, Sydney, 19 November 1917, SP32, Yetman, fol. 21 NOV 1917/IA 2215.
[107] The initial intention was to grant preference to servicemen who had qualified for public service admission before enlistment, but loose wording in the 1915 amendments to the Public Service Act allowed them to qualify upon return to Australia. The Public Service Act of 1917 enabled veterans to gain entry to the Clerical Division through separate examinations. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 123.
[108] Many public servants claimed that the veterans placed in permanent positions after sitting modified entrance examinations lacked the education needed to perform the duties properly. See, *ibid.*, p. 125.
[109] Massy Greene and other federal politicians pressed for the appointment of injured veterans to small post offices and railway-gate houses in recognition of their limited employment potential. See, Clem Lloyd and Jacqui Rees, *The Last Shilling: A History of Repatriation in Australia*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1994, p. 38.
[110] Report by J. R. Nash, D.I., 30 May 1922, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner, fol. GA/22/1278.
[111] Letter from Frank Henry Boyer, "Brynmaux", Moore St, Campsie, N.S.W., to the P.M.G., Martin Place, Sydney, 9 August 1920, *ibid.*

invalided ex-soldier was willing to do "any light work", pointing out that he received a pension of 11 shillings a week in recognition of his limited capacity.[112]

The system of influence that had operated since the employment of the first paid postmistress in 1838 underwent a fundamental change as a consequence of the war. Under the impact of veteran preference, patronage came to embrace the virtues of national sacrifice, rendering returned men especially deserving. Accordingly, a Chief Office directive of May 1917 required that ex-servicemen be considered for employment before the wives and relatives of deceased former officers of the department.[113] Thereafter, staff, Repatriation Department officials, local Repatriation Committees, and returned servicemen's organisations were invited to nominate suitable veterans for positions.[114] In April 1919 District Inspector W. A. Varley endorsed Bertie Newland's candidature for the job of allowance postmaster at Drake, after the former soldier was "strongly recommended" for the post by R. Eagle, Controller of Stores, and Inspector W. Morris of the New England District Office.[115] Outside of the department, many people held veterans in similar regard. In July 1920 local resident A. J. Leyden called on Chief Office to raise the salary paid to W. H. May, Allowance Postmaster at Araluen, arguing that it was not a living wage. Leyden implied that the former soldier was worthy of particular consideration, having "returned to his native land a poorer man physically".[116] Veteran preference at once expanded and reordered the hierarchy of patronage.

The importance attached to sacrifice in wartime disadvantaged a number of female job applicants by placing a renewed emphasis on the moral attributes of candidates at the expense of quantifiable merit and experience. Veterans were endorsed almost wholly in terms of abstract personal qualities in keeping with the value-laden nature of patriotism. Nominating former soldier Eli Glover for the allowance postmaster's

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[112] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr by Richard Jackson Graham, 9 January 1922, C2593, GA WP 12, Come by Chance, fol. GA 42/380; & letter from J. Graham, West Tamworth, to P.I., Narrabri, 26 January 1922, *ibid.*

[113] Circ. Memo No. 4454 from E. J. Young, Dep. P.M.G., P.M.G. Dept, G.P.O., Sydney, 16 May 1917, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, N.A.A., Sydney.

[114] The Department of Repatriation sent lists of discharged men to the Public Service Inspector as a matter of course. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 124 & p. 126.

[115] Report by W. A. Varley, Inspr, 16 April 1919, C2593, GA559, Drake; & report by W. A. Varley, D.I., Armidale, 1 April 1919, *ibid.*, fol. 7 APR 1919/IA 614.

[116] Letter from J. Leyden to P.M.G., Melbourne, 26 July 1920, C2593, GA36, Araluen, fol. 3 AUG 1920/IA 1404.

position at Barringun in October 1921, the Acting Secretary of the Bourke Repatriation Committee described him as "sober honest (and) courteous."[117] In May 1922 the officer-in-charge at Coledale Post Office recommended ex-serviceman William Costello for the job of postmaster at Scarborough on the strength of his sobriety, steadiness and courteous behaviour.[118] The importance placed on veteran virtue meant that women with greater expertise and/or experience were often overlooked. In March 1919 the department put Cyril Kable, a war pensioner with no relevant experience, in charge of Cargo's semi-official outlet in preference to fellow applicants, Louise Hey, Acting Assistant at Griffith's official facility, and Miss Howieson, Acting Allowance Postmistress at Euabalong.[119] Head Office also favoured ex-soldier Frank Boyer for the vacant position at Sunny Corner available from June 1920. Accordingly, it dismissed an application from Violet Newton, who had assisted at Walla Walla's semi-official outlet for over two years.[120] In many cases the moral right of veterans to a living transcended considerations of efficiency.

As an alternative source of cheap labour, returned servicemen posed a direct threat to women seeking allowance employment. Intent on minimising overheads, the department looked specifically to war pensioners to maintain unprofitable services in rural areas where there were minimal opportunities to supplement meagre post office earnings through outside activities. In May 1922 Head Office approached the Repatriation Department about filling a subsequent vacancy at Sunny Corner. The official involved suggested that, while there was no chance of deriving an additional income in the former mining settlement, a veteran on a pension might live "comfortably" there.[121] Though pitched at ex-servicemen, the position attracted the attention of Mrs M. Sharp, a resident of Sunny Corner. In her application, the widow explained that she had been struggling to support a daughter and two school-age sons since her husband's death almost ten years earlier. Even so, overtures to the

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[117] Letter from John McQuarrie, Acting Sec., Dept of Repatriation, Local Committee No. 219, Area Bourke, October 1921, C2593, GA93, Barringun.
[118] Memo from S. Morris, G.P.O., Sydney, to Pmr, Coledale, 26 May 1922, C2593, GA244320, Scarborough, fol. GA 22/2319; & memo from S. Frost, Pmr, Coledale, undated, *ibid.*
[119] Report by Inspr Leece, Parkes, 18 March 1919, C2593, GA West 36, Cargo, fol. 19 MAR 1919/479.
[120] Letter from F. H. Boyer, "Brynmaux", Moore St, Campsie, N.S.W., to P.M.G., Martin Place, Sydney, 9 August 1920, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner; report by J. R. Nash, D.I., 14 August 1920, fol. IA '20/1474; & letter from Violet Newton, Walla Walla, to D.I., 2 July 1920, *ibid.*
[121] Letter from unidentified Inspr to Dep. Controller, Repatriation Dept, Chalmers St, Sydney, 23 May 1922, *ibid.*

repatriation agency saw war pensioner Walter Butfield appointed to the job.[122] The engagement of veterans took no account of women in Mrs Sharp's position – this in spite of community support for a civilian widows' benefit, reflected in the establishment of a Royal Commission in 1923 to inquire into a national insurance scheme.[123] No longer could women claim to be the sole subsidisers of departmental operations.

Meanwhile, women competed with one another for postal work as the department attempted to accommodate the widows of fallen soldiers. In January 1923 Head Office chose Mary Lawler for the vacant position at Sunny Corner following Walter Butfield's early departure. At the time it was unable to find a suitable ex-serviceman to fill the job. The wife of a soldier killed in France in 1916, Mrs Lawler was selected in preference to Mrs Sharp, "civilian" widow and past candidate for the position.[124] The favour shown to war widows emanated from the conviction that society had a duty to care for the dependants of soldiers who had paid the supreme sacrifice. Eugenists added weight to the belief by raising the spectre of widespread physical and moral decay after the death of the nation's 'fittest' on the battlefield. Concern in government and in the wider community for the wellbeing of war widows and their families prompted the establishment of the Soldiers' Childrens Education Scheme and the creation of Legacy in 1923, which together covered the school fees of fatherless offspring. Legacy organised holidays for war widows and children, while the R.S.S.I.L.A. met their medical needs at a free clinic in Sydney.[125] In common with ex-servicemen, war widows gained a living without regard to their intrinsic value as employees.

In June 1928 former army nurse Hilda Ruston applied to operate the non-official post office at Come by Chance, testing the limits of veteran preference. She did so in the absence of specific legislation preventing ex-army "sisters" from pleading special

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[122] Letter from Mrs M. Sharp, Sunny Corner, 15 May 1922, *ibid.*; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Walter Frederick Butfield, on 1 July 1922, 3 July 1922, *ibid.*, fol. 4 JUL 1922/GA 1757.
[123] T. H. Kewley, *Social Security in Australia 1900–72*, 2nd edn, Sydney, Sydney U.P., 1973, pp. 143–145.
[124] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Mary Lawler, on 1 January 1923, 4 January 1923, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner; letter from W. F. Butfield, Pmr, Sunny Corner, to Mr Nash, P.I., undated, *ibid.*, fol. GA 23/50; & letter from Mrs M. Sharp, Sunny Corner, 15 May 1922, *ibid.*
[125] Garton, *The Cost of War*, p. 202 & p. 203.

consideration in relation to government positions.[126] In her *pro forma* application for employment, Miss Ruston detailed her war experience under the heading of "returned serviceman", thereby placing herself in the ranks of her former patients.[127] In so doing, she challenged the circumscribed, wholly masculine, definition of military personnel embraced by veterans' organisations. For its part, the R.S.S.I.L.A. sought to affirm the "maleness" of the war experience. In an article printed in the 1928 edition of the League journal, *Reveille*, ex-servicemen attending the Anzac Day March were urged to join their comrades in the middle of the street and desist from walking along the pavement in the company of wives and family.[128] Hilda Ruston's application to run the facility at Come by Chance proved successful, albeit in the absence of alternative submissions.[129] In drawing attention to her war service, the ex-army nurse looked to extend contemporary understanding of a veteran.

A number of men who had been denied the chance to serve their country vied with women for departmental employment on the basis that they were Anzacs in spirit, if not in fact. Between 1914 and 1918, approximately 20,000 men were refused entry to the armed forces owing to physical defects, mental shortcomings or advanced age.[130] William Rogers, a 39-year-old blacksmith with no military service, identified with war veterans in his *pro forma* application of August 1920 to run the postal outlet at Sunny Corner, placing the word "Rejected" in brackets beside the question as to whether or not he was a returned soldier.[131] In so doing, he spared himself the stigma attached to 'shirkers' and profiteers who refused to join the forces and benefited financially and socially by the war.[132] Rogers was one of 10 candidates for the job, seven of whom were women.[133] After the only returned serviceman withdrew his application, Head Office chose Elizabeth Slattery, widow of a departmental linesman,

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[126] Inglis, 'Men, women, and war memorials', p. 56.
[127] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by Hilda Ruston, 8 June 1928, C2593, GA WP 12, Come by Chance, fol. GA 28/1551. Unlike the men they had cared for, former military nurses were not automatically entitled to preferential treatment in relation to government positions. See, Inglis, 'Men, women, and war memorials', p. 56; & Garton, *The Cost of War*, p. 4.
[128] Inglis, 'Men, women, and war memorials', p. 56.
[129] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Hilda Lucy Rushton, on 1 July 1928, 5 July 1928, C2593, GA WP 12, Come by Chance, fol. GA 6 JUL 1928/1551.
[130] Alison Pilger, 'The other "Lost Generation": Rejected Australian volunteers, 1914–1918', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 21, 1992, p. 11.
[131] *Pro forma* Application for the Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by William Henry Rogers, 11 August 1920, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner.
[132] Garton, *The Cost of War*, p. 20.
[133] Report from J. R. Nash, D.I., to D.O., Bathurst, 29 June 1920, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner.

to fill the vacancy.[134] In November 1926 Mrs E. Piggot lodged an application for the position of allowance postmaster at Angus Place on behalf of her husband David. At pains to stress his preparedness to enlist, she explained that he had been an invalid throughout the war and hence unable to do his duty. Without an eligible veteran to call on, the department chose Piggot for the job.[135] Women competed against men who defined themselves in terms of what they were not.

In spite of veteran preference, women continued to operate postal outlets in instances where there were no physically or mentally fit men available. In July 1927 the department placed Ruby Ward in practical charge of the non-official outlet at Come by Chance, her truck-driver husband made nominal postmaster. Previously, wounded former soldier Richard Jackson Graham had withdrawn his application for the job due to poor health and the lack of medical assistance if required.[136] In March 1920 Head Office had put Kathleen Bullman in control of Merrygoen's postal outlet in place of her husband. An ex-serviceman, Bullman had acquired a severe mental disorder at the front and had left for Western Australia after his discharge from Callan Park Psychiatric Hospital.[137] During the war many soldiers succumbed to 'shell shock', a debilitating condition that often left them dependent and unemployable.[138] Anxious to minimise the impact of the illness on service delivery, the department customarily instructed officials to make confidential enquiries regarding the mental state of veterans seeking employment.[139] Often Head Office chose women for positions in lieu

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[134] Letter from F. H. Boyer, "Brynmaur", Moore St, Campsie, N.S.W., to Inspection Branch, G.P.O., Sydney, 16 August 1920, *ibid.*; letter from E. M. Slattery, Oberon, to Mr Nash, 10 August 1920, *ibid.*; & *pro forma* Recommendation for Appt of Allow. Pmr, Elizabeth May Slattery, on 1 September 1920, "or soon after", completed by J. R. Nash, Inspr, 11 August 1920, *ibid.*

[135] Letter from E. Piggot, on letterhead, Vale of Clwydd Colliery No. 2 Company Limited, Wolgan via Wallerawang, 12 November 1926, C2593, GA30, Angus Place, fol. GA 26/3098. The proposed facility was downgraded to a receiving office before opening. See, *pro forma* Notice of Appt of David James Piggot as Receiving Office Keeper, 23 February 1927, *ibid.*, fol. GA 27/424.

[136] Letter from Pmr, New Angledool, 8 July 1927, C2593, GA WP 12, Come by Chance, fol. GA 27/1987; *pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by William Eastwood Ward, 24 July 1927, *ibid.*; *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, William Eastwood Ward, on 15 August 1927, 24 August 1927, *ibid.*; & letter from J. Graham, West Tamworth, to P.I., Narrabri, 26 January 1922, *ibid.*, fol. GA 22/380.

[137] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Notice of Appt of Kathleen Bullman as Pms on 3 March 1920, 3 March 1920, C2593, GA WP 32, Merrygoen; & report from J. Nash, D.I., to D.I., Bathurst, 20 February 1920, *ibid.*

[138] A number of military and medical experts believed that shell shock was a fraudulent condition common among malingerers and 'immature personalities'. See, Garton, *The Cost of War*, pp. 147–151.

[139] Memo from S. Morris, G.P.O., Sydney, to Pmr, Coledale, 26 May 1922, C2593, GA244320, Scarborough, fol. GA 22/2319; memo from S. Frost, Pmr, Coledale, undated, *ibid.*; & report by H. Price, Pmr, Clifton, 5 July 1923, *ibid.*

of ailing ex-servicemen. It did so despite claims from veterans' groups that many employers were failing to replace female workers with their members because women were cheaper to hire and less inclined to organise industrially.[140]

If moral considerations took on renewed significance under the system of veteran preference, the department sometimes found it necessary to appoint skilled and experienced women to allowance positions in the interest of efficiency. In March 1922 Head Office chose Alice Watts, a trained operator with nine years' service, to run the postal and telecommunications facility at Drake – her appointment informed by the office's strategic importance as a relay station on the main Sydney–Brisbane telegraph route. The department settled on Miss Watts after the repatriation authorities failed to uncover a veteran with the credentials needed for the job.[141] In October 1925 the inspectorate put Lilly Hornadge in charge of Bibbenluke Post Office after saddler J. A. Perkins, an ex-serviceman and fellow applicant, was found to lack the education required to run the outlet.[142] The growing range of war and veteran-related functions performed by allowance facilities meant that skill and experience became significant factors in the selection of staff. In addition to their usual postal, telegraphic and social-security duties, employees paid war pensions, issued war gratuity bonds, and accepted war-service home repayments.[143] Efficiency assumed critical importance from October 1919 with the release of the first report of the Royal Commission examining federal government expenditure. Charged with identifying inefficiencies and potential economies, the Commissioners criticised the P.M.G. Department, drawing attention to the unnecessary work undertaken by the N.S.W. Inspection Branch, the absence of standardised orders for telecommunications equipment, the failure to observe basic business principles, and the bureaucracy's indifferent attitude

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[140] Garton, *The Cost of War*, p. 14, p. 89 & p. 90.

[141] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Alice Watts, on 1 March 1922, C2593, GA559, Drake; letter from W. McGregor, D.I., P.M.G. Dept, to Miss Alice Watts, Wilde's Meadow via Moss Vale, 10 February 1922, *ibid.*, fol. GA 22/385; & report by E. Alldis, P.I. (Relieving), Armidale, 13 February 1922, *ibid.*, fol. 14 FEB 1922/GA 385.

[142] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Lilly Hornadge, on 1 October 1925, 3 October 1925, C2593, GA158, Bibbenluke, fol. 6 OCT 1925/GA 2380.

[143] *Postmaster-General's Department, Tenth Annual Report, 1919–1920*, Melbourne, 1920–21, pp. 14–16. As well as performing the duties detailed above, allowance employees collected customs duty on parcels and sold beer stamps, state duty stamps, promissory notes, and entertainment tax tickets and stamps on behalf of various government agencies. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Eleventh Annual Report, 1920–1921*, Melbourne, 1922, p. 15.

towards taxpayer interests.[144] Greater efficiency promised a way of offsetting the higher cost of labour. The latter stemmed from the arbitration court determinations of 1920 awarding cost-of-living bonuses to officers, and from the payment of an endowment to official staff with dependent children under age 14 from January 1921.[145] Improvements in efficiency would also help to pay for the refurbishment of the telecommunications network, which had been allowed to languish over the war period and now had to accommodate a burgeoning demand for telephones.[146] On occasions, sentiment yielded to operational considerations.

The widespread preoccupation of veterans and other working men with the male wage ensured that females remained on the payroll. Although formally opposed to the employment of married women after the war, the department had no choice but to allow wives to manage allowance post offices owing to insufficient numbers of ex-servicemen prepared to accept the small wage. In April 1920 Head Office agreed to retain Mrs Arneil as Waterfall's postmistress after attempts to locate a former soldier or sailor prepared to work the postal facility for 58 pounds p.a. came to naught. Inspector S. Morris noted that, while N.S.W. memorandum 5154 of 29 July 1919 recommended against the employment of financially dependent wives, veterans felt that the scale rate was inadequate to cover the living expenses of a family man.[147] Widows retained a presence in allowance outlets for the same reason. Elizabeth Slattery, a widow of independent means, was hired to run Sunny Corner Post Office in September 1920, after ex-soldier Frank Boyer withdrew his application, complaining that 115 pounds p.a., less 10% rent for the government residence, was not a living wage. What with two children to feed and educate, he would have "hardly

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[144] H. B. Templeton, Deputy Postmaster-General, Queensland, was seconded to the Royal Commission. The Commissioners recommended the establishment of a Board of Management composed of businessmen, and advised by scientific management experts, to run the department. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, pp. 149–152. The Anderson inquiry had already identified the need for greater efficiency. In his report of August 1915, R. M. Anderson, businessman and former City Treasurer and Town Clerk of Sydney, condemned the lack of uniform control over state offices, the dual system of accounts, and the unnecessary nature of much internal correspondence. See, *ibid.*, p. 99.

[145] *Postmaster-General's Department, Eleventh Annual Report, 1920–1921*, p. 17; & Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 159.

[146] *Postmaster-General's Department, Tenth Annual Report, 1919–1920*, p. 17 & p. 19.

[147] Circ. Memo (N.S.W.) No. 5154 from Dep. P.M.G. relative to Metro No. 4 District, 29 July 1919, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, N.A.A., Sydney; note under signed by Accountant, undated, C2593, GA1886, Waterfall, fol. 11 AUG 1919/IA 1660; report by S. Morris, Inspr, 29 March 1920, *ibid.*, fol. IA 19/1660; & *pro forma* Recommendation for Appt of Allow. Pmr, Mrs Arneil, completed by S. Morris, Inspr, 10 April 1920, *ibid.*, fol. 12 APR 1920/IA 679.

enough to exist".[148] The findings of the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage held in 1919–1920 affirmed the principle of a living wage. Handed the brief to investigate the efficacy of the award, Justice Piddington confirmed that it had declined in real value since 1911, failing to keep abreast of prices and rents.[149] Given the legislative and social investment in the male breadwinner, veterans expected a livelihood sufficient to support themselves and their dependants.[150] In the case of Post Office employment, the expectation remained unrealistic while salary scales were tied to office earnings and constrained by a rural recession from 1919 exacerbated by drought.[151] In short, women continued to secure departmental employment by default.

A sense of dissatisfaction prompted several returned soldiers to vacate the field in favour of women. After an exciting, if dangerous, life at the front, many veterans experienced difficulty applying themselves to mundane jobs on 'civvy street'. Some expressed boredom and impatience with routine tasks, while others reported a general restlessness, manifesting itself in an irregular pattern of employment.[152] Widow Ellen Clemenger owed her position at Gundaroo to the discontent felt by postmaster and returned soldier Bernard Foster, who left in August 1918 to take up a public service post in Sydney.[153] Inspector M. O'Connor reported that Foster found the small rural settlement "too slow" for his liking. Inspector W. H. McGregor observed that veterans looked for a more exciting life, concluding that few, if any, would want to "tie themselves down in a quiet place like Gundaroo".[154] War widow Mary Lawler took control of the Sunny Corner outlet when, after just six months in the job, ex-soldier Walter Butfield resigned. According to him, business was "slack" and the work

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[148] *Pro forma* Recommendation for Appt of Allow. Pmr, Elizabeth May Slattery, on 1 September 1920, "or soon after", completed by J. R. Nash, Inspr, 11 August 1920, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner; report by J. R. Nash, D.I., 14 August 1920, *ibid.*, fol. IA '20/1474; & letter from F. H. Boyer, "Brynmaux", Moore St, Campsie, N.S.W, to Inspection Branch, G.P.O., Sydney, 16 August 1920, *ibid.*

[149] Marilyn Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man: Debates in the Labour Movement over Equal Pay and Motherhood Endowment in the 1920s', *Labour History*, no. 63, November 1992, p. 10. In his report of November 1920, Piddington recommended an adult basic wage of 302 pounds a year. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 158.

[150] Organisations representing returned servicemen lobbied for war pensions equivalent to a living wage. See, Garton, *The Cost of War*, p. 92 & p. 93.

[151] Heather Radi, '1920–29', in Crowley (ed), *A New History of Australia*, p. 376 & p. 379.

[152] Garton, *The Cost of War*, p. 20 & p. 25.

[153] Report by W. H. McGregor, Inspr, 13 August 1918, C2593, GA808, Gundaroo, fol. IA 18/1426; & urgent telegram approving appointment of Bernard Foster as Pmr, Gundaroo, 14 May 1918, *ibid.*

[154] Report by M. O'Connor, Inspr (Relieving), 1 July 1918, *ibid.*, fol. IA 2 JUL 1918/1426; & report by W. H. McGregor, Inspr, 13 August 1918, *ibid.*, fol. IA 18/1426.

"awfully monotonous".[155] The restlessness of some veterans conferred renewed value on the sedentary habits of women. Reporting on the departure of Bernard Foster from Gundaroo, Inspector McGregor noted that his female successor was a long-term resident who had occupied the same house for several years.[156] Once again, women stepped into a breach left by men who would rather be elsewhere.

Women also continued to find paid work in allowance outlets as a result of the rekindled interest in male outdoor activities consequential to the war. In the opinion of several medical experts, open-air work would guarantee the physical and moral wellbeing of men who had grown accustomed to life out of doors in the service of their country. The federal government subscribed to the beneficial effect of the open air on veterans, establishing the soldier settlement scheme that exposed individuals to the elements. Designed also to minimise the risk posed by ex-soldiers to the political and social order, the scheme traded on the lore of the bush worker who lived a physically and psychologically sound life under the sun and stars.[157] As such, it promised a way of overcoming the disturbing impact of shell shock-induced hysteria. Hitherto, hysteria had been viewed as a uniquely female condition. For returned men, this unwelcome by-product of war threatened their self-image by subverting the legendary stoicism and stridently masculine propaganda that constituted the Anzac tradition.[158] Arguably, Bernard Foster's decision to forfeit his position at Gundaroo – a decision that saw Edith Clemenger chosen as his replacement – emanated partly from a belief in the restorative and redemptive qualities of the open air. In his letter of resignation, the wounded veteran cited the need for more "outdoor recreation" – something not available "under existing conditions" – for the sake of his health.[159] Walter Butfield's plan to purchase a share in a dairy farm at Portland after leaving

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[155] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Mary Lawler, on 1 January 1923, 4 January 1923, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner; letter from W. F. Butfield, Pmr, to Mr Nash, P.I., Bathurst, undated, *ibid.*, fol. GA 23/50; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Walter Frederick Butfield, on 1 July 1922, 3 July 1922, *ibid.*, fol. 4 JUL 1922/GA 1757.

[156] Report by W. H. McGregor, Inspr, 13 August 1918, C2593, GA808, Gundaroo, fol. IA 18/1426.

[157] Garton, *The Cost of War*, p. 120 & p. 121. Open-air employment enabled veterans to avoid the threat to manhood posed by petty and tedious office work after the gravity and rigour of combat. See, *ibid.*, p. 22.

[158] Alistair Thomson, 'A crisis of masculinity?: Australian military manhood in the Great War', in Damousi and Lake (eds), *Gender and War*, p. 133 & p. 134.

[159] Letter from Bernard Foster, P.O., Gundaroo, to Inspr, P.M.G. Dept, Cootamundra, 17 June 1918, C2593, GA808, Gundaroo.

Sunny Corner also suggests a faith in the therapeutic powers of the elements.[160] Those veterans who opted for the outdoor life helped to preserve the largely "feminine" character of the allowance post office.

Obstacles to Equality

During the war and beyond, female P.M.G. Department employees on the official list experienced less-than-complete wage equality. In May 1916 Justice Powers of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court awarded a basic wage of 150 pounds a year to married men only, taking into account the increased cost of living. From Powers' perspective, most single males of working age were or should be at war, while females, who had only themselves to provide for, had no claim to the same salary as men with dependants.[161] The Court's determination made the first inroad into the principle of equal pay for equal work by a body other than the Public Service Commissioner's Office.[162] In 1920 Powers' colleague, Justice Starke, rejected a submission from the Australian Post and Telegraph Association (A.P.T.A.) for a basic wage of 200 pounds a year, regardless of gender or marital status, to cover the higher price of goods and labour. The A.P.T.A. had come into existence after members of the A.C.P.T.O.A. resolved at their annual conference in 1917 to change the name of the national body.[163] Asserting that need, rather than work value, should determine remuneration rates, Starke allowed men 196 pounds a year and women just 147 pounds p.a.[164] Apparently, inflation was something only experienced by men.

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[160] Letter from W. F. Butfield, Pmr, to Mr Nash, P.I. Bathurst, undated, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner, fol. GA 23/50. Some veterans may have preferred an occupation outside of the department, given the common perception of government employment as charity. See, Stephen Garton, 'Return home: War, masculinity and repatriation', in Damousi and Lake (eds), *Gender and War*, p. 125.

[161] 'Commonwealth Clerks Arbitration Court Award', *Register*, Adelaide, 5 May 1916, p. 6; & Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 128.

[162] In September 1916 Justice Powers refused an application to fix the adult minimum wage at 150 pounds p.a. in respect of single women in the telegraph branch, observing that they were not required to keep a spouse and children. See, 'Post and Telegraph Officers Arbitration Court Award', *Mercury*, Hobart, 20 September 1916, p. 4. In August 1919 Powers awarded different wage rates to adult and married males, single males under 25, and females in the federal public service. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 130 & p. 131.

[163] Gerald E. Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A: A Study of White Collar Public Service Unionism in the Commonwealth of Australia', Occasional Papers No. 2, Dept of Political Science, Australian National University, Canberra, 1966, footnote 1, p. 3.

[164] John S. Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions: A History of the Telegraphist and Postal Clerk Unions of Australia*, Sydney, Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists, 1980, p. 183; & Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 271 & p. 272. In 1919 J. G. Willson, General Secretary of the A.P.T.A., sought an extension of the war bonus award to cover all female officers. See, *ibid.*, p. 236.

The feeling that more women were putting employment before domestic responsibilities underpinned the discriminatory attitude to female workers. In June 1919 the editor of the *Age* newspaper observed that 'the greatest and perhaps the most threatening social change … worked by … nearly five years of war has been the enormous influx of women into industry and commerce' – hence the question: 'If women are to claim … equality with men in the economic sphere, who is to look after the home?'[165] Evidence placed before the federal and N.S.W. government inquiries into wage levels and living conditions seemed to bear out the editor's concern. Between 1911 and 1921, the number of female office workers in Australia had more than doubled.[166] Moreover, witness testimony appeared to confirm the existence of flappers – young women who, according to conservative community leaders, lived a self-centred, materialistic existence without regard for home and kin.[167]

Commenced in 1923, the reclassification of Commonwealth public servants did nothing for employment equality. Effective from 1 July 1924, but not completed until March 1928, the process involved an assessment of individual duties and the production of organisational diagrams for consideration by the Public Service Board.[168] Reclassification ensured that officers received an adult minimum wage based on the cost of living as determined by the Commonwealth Statistician, along with salaries comparable to those in the private sector.[169] The exercise was aimed at improving the quality of workers by means of salary barriers calculated to encourage further study and training. Henceforth, telegraphists seeking promotion had to sit a series of technical examinations at particular points along a broad salary continuum. The Board, moreover, pitched the female rate of pay at a lower level than the male rate with respect to new appointees and women in receipt of less than the revised amount. In establishing a gendered wage differential, it extinguished the long-standing claim by female official employees to equal remuneration for equal work.[170]

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[165] Extract from the *Age*, 5 June 1919, Lake and Damousi, 'Introduction: Warfare, history and gender', p. 7.
[166] Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce', p. 77.
[167] Gail Reekie, 'Decently dressed?: Sexualised consumerism and the working woman's wardrobe', *Labour History*, no. 61, November 1991, pp. 99–102.
[168] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 180, p. 184 & p. 199.
[169] Overlapping salary scales between divisions took account of those lower-ranked officers who had greater experience than some higher-ranked individuals. See, *ibid.*, p. 183 & p. 187.
[170] *ibid*., p. 181. Reclassification guaranteed uniform salaries for the same work within the same sex, and provided for annual increments subject to good conduct, diligence and efficiency in recognition of

Following reclassification of the Mail Branch, the basic wage for those women ineligible to receive male rates was set at 144 pounds p.a., or 54 pounds below the male equivalent.[171] Changes to the divisional structure through reclassification further undercut the concept of gender parity. In the future, Third Division (formerly Clerical Division) jobs would be placed in the Fourth Division (the former General Division) if they were deemed to require no more than elementary qualifications, or were thought to be suitable for women.[172] In one swoop reclassification rid the department of its tradition of relative equality without recourse to legislation.

The cause of employment equality also suffered with the decline in female union representation. Long the advocate for wage justice, the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association saw its membership and influence in A.C.P.T.O.A. affairs diminish in the years following the 1908–1910 Royal Commission on Postal Services, as Duncan McLachlan's employment policy took its toll on female personnel. In 1915 the union belatedly attempted to expand its power base by inviting all female departmental employees, both permanent and temporary, to become members. By then the female telephonists and other women workers had gravitated to alternative staff associations.[173] In December 1921 the Victorian women's association dissolved amidst calls for the abolition of the A.P.T.A. and the formation of separate Clerical and General Division unions.[174] The advent in 1919 of the radical 'one-big-union' movement contributed indirectly to the demise of the women's organisation by depriving it of its reason for being. Though its criticism of belligerent capitalism failed to strike a chord with most A.P.T.A. members, the movement's concern for workers in general, rather than sectional interests, subsumed the quest for gender

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the enhanced value of employees over time. Henceforth, seniority was determined according to the date of entry into a division, and not according to salary. See, *ibid.*, p. 184.

[171] *ibid.*, p. 186. In December 1923 the Public Service Arbitrator awarded women a lower basic wage, asserting that they had fewer needs than men. He held that the 'effective benefit' for women on a lower wage was equal to that for men on a higher wage, given the same margins for skill. See, *ibid.*, p. 185.

[172] *ibid.*, p. 183. The new Public Service Board established the Third and Fourth Divisions under a revised regulation effective from 9 July 1923, while assigning officers in the former Administrative Division to the First or Second Divisions. The Second Division included personnel from the old Professional Division and individuals from the former Clerical Division on more than 750 pounds p.a. Some unions continued to carry the old divisional names in their title. See, *ibid.*, p. 171.

[173] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 204.

[174] *ibid*., p. 285, p. 288, p. 289, p. 293 & p. 295.

parity in the workplace.[175] The recently formed Australian Telegraphists' Union (A.T.U.) had room for female operators in the clerical stratum, but made no provision for a separate women's branch after the A.P.T.A. was terminated in 1922.[176] While some women joined the A.T.U., others entered rival associations established from 1926, making for fragmented union coverage.[177] Outside of government, shrinking female representation on the Victorian Trades Hall Council did not augur well for the future of parity claims. During the war women constituted about 10% of all delegates, dropping to 5% thereafter, with a decline in support from organised labour for female workers.[178] Without a strong union commitment to equality in employment, it remained a marginal objective.

Up until the eventual demise of the national union in May 1922, pressures within the A.C.P.T.O.A. and the A.P.T.A. rendered the male rank and file largely unresponsive to the needs of female staff and ultimately led to the disintegration of the latter body. Many members expressed dissatisfaction with the union leadership because of its failure to achieve substantial gains through arbitration. Although the salaries of public servants in general now lagged behind those in private enterprise, the telephone technicians' union and the telephone operators' association had won major concessions from the court by employing aggressive industrial strategies.[179] Anger over the ineffectiveness of the union hierarchy contributed to growing militancy in the A.P.T.A. from 1917. In the N.S.W. branch, discontent culminated in a series of postwar clashes between the Piper–Mullin–Myers–Worner faction advocating radical reform, and the Robins–Porteus–Miles–Costin–Hyslop bloc favouring traditional unionism.[180] Meanwhile, relations between the national executive and ordinary members deteriorated with respect to the hefty salary paid to J. G. Willson, General

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[175] *ibid.*, p. 247. The one-big-union movement saw the abolition of the female branch of the Victorian Clerks' Union. See, Melanie Nolan, 'Sex or Class?: The Politics of the Earliest Equal Pay Campaign in Victoria', *Labour History*, no. 61, November 1991, p. 119.
[176] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 296 & p. 297. Efforts by the Government Service Women's Federation, which had been established to regain equal pay for female officers, came to nothing with Justice Starke's decision in 1920 to refuse it registration. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 132.
[177] The Australian Telegraphists' Union had several rivals, including the Australian Third Division Telegraphists' and Postal Clerks' Union and the Australian Fourth Division Postmasters', Postal Clerks' and Telegraphists' Union. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 206.
[178] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 118.
[179] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 125 & p. 137. Justice Powers disallowed the wartime plaints lodged by the A.C.P.T.O.A., comparing the favourable situation of officers with the hardships endured by the nation's fighting men. See, Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 214.
[180] *ibid.*, p. 216 & p. 235.

Secretary.[181] During the war the rift between Clerical Division members and their General Division counterparts had widened with the department's decision to confer greater operational responsibilities on the latter in an attempt to contain wage pressures.[182] Caught up in internal squabbles, the A.P.T.A. leadership failed to furnish submissions to the Royal Commission upon the Public Expenditure of the Commonwealth of Australia of 1918–1921, and to other public inquiries. Because of this, it lost contact with the politicians it had earlier cultivated and further isolated itself in the industrial arena – all of which fuelled dissatisfaction among ordinary members.[183] The Sydney-centric policies of the Willson-dominated Executive Council prompted a number of Victorian operators to set up the A.T.U. in late 1919. On 17 January 1920, the N.S.W. telegraphists resolved to form a state branch of the new organisation.[184]

Abolition of the A.P.T.A followed a special conference held in Sydney on 2 May 1921, at which a majority of members voted in favour of the A.T.U. and opted for separate General Division associations.[185] Many Clerical Division officers, including some postmistresses, joined the Commonwealth Postmasters' Association. The balance – excluding the 812 telegraphists and 400 clerical assistants eligible for membership of the A.T.U. – was absorbed by the Commonwealth Public Service Clerical Association and other Clerical Division unions.[186] The General Division postal assistants still in the A.P.T.A. changed the constitution to restrict entry to permanent and temporary staff in their stratum. Contemporaneously, they put an effective end to the Association by setting up the Australian Postal Assistants' Union

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[181] Many unionists condemned General Secretary J. G. Willson's censorship of dissenting views in the *Transmitter*. His decision to stand as a Nationalist candidate at the 1919 federal election only made matters worse. See, *ibid.*, p. 205, p. 206 & p. 229. Growing support in some branches for "one big union" added to the tension between the national executive and the membership. See, *ibid.*, p. 236.
[182] The distinction made between Clerical and General Division employees in arbitration awards contributed to the differences between union members. See, *ibid.*, p.229 & p. 237.
[183] The inquiries included the Royal Commission on Public Service Administration of 1918-1920, and the Piddington Royal Commission on the Basic Wage, 1919-1920. See, *ibid.*, p. 249, p. 250 & p. 282.
[184] *ibid.*, p. 258 & p. 259. The state branches opposed quarterage fees and a levy imposed on them by the Executive Council to fund arbitration actions and discharge debts. See, *ibid.*, pp. 262–266.
[185] *ibid.*, pp. 285–290. On 15 May 1920, the state branches authorised the Victorian men's union to assume the powers of the Executive Council. See, *ibid.*, p. 267 & p. 268.
[186] *ibid.*, p. 277. Of the 812 telegraphists eligible to join the A.T.U., 685 became members, allowing for the organisation's registration as at 1 November 1920. See, *ibid.*, p. 279.

in its stead.[187] Internal dissent distracted unionists from the cause of employment equality and fragmented the female constituency.

All the while the national post and telegraph association had been transfixed by the loss of members and prospective members to outside occupations that promised greater vocational satisfaction.[188] Attracted by the prospect of a more fulfilling career, Norman Gilroy, the future Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, resigned from the Engineering Branch at Lismore in 1917 to enter the seminary. Before the war, he had worked as a postal assistant (operator) at Bourke and as a relieving telegraphist at Narrabri. With the outbreak of hostilities he volunteered for the transport service and served as a shipboard wireless operator at Gallipoli, gaining re-admission to the department after returning to Australia.[189] Concerned for his future, Edward Ford, operator at Melbourne's Chief Telegraph Office, left his position to complete a medical degree, going on to become the Resident Medical Officer at Royal Melbourne Hospital and later the Senior Lecturer in Anatomy and Histology at Melbourne University.[190] By rendering the work more tedious and less enjoyable, technological advances accelerated the exodus from telegraphy. In her retirement years, former Assistant Lilian Tobin recalled that her sister, Louisa, when Operator at Tumbulgum, found hand punching the tape to feed through the Wheatstone machine a difficult and pleasureless task.[191] W. Holman, Canberra's postmaster from September 1926, recollected years later that the perforation of tape called for a punch in each hand. He remembered it as a laborious, but necessary, process if officers were to achieve the prescribed transmission rate of 10 words a minute.[192] Operators lamented the loss of telegraphy's romantic appeal. Reflecting on his time at the Sydney G.P.O., H. C. Hadley recalled that the Wheatstone and Multiplex devices made for speedier

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[187] *ibid.*, p. 282, p. 285, p. 295 & p. 297. A resolution affirmed at the special conference of the A.P.T.A. in May 1921 led to the decision to alter the union's constitution. See, *ibid.*, p. 289.
[188] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 125.
[189] Norman Gilroy served on the troopship, "Hessen", at Gallipoli. See, "Congratulations", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 7, 17 September 1945, p. 13.
[190] Edward Ford studied medicine at night before leaving the department. Immediately prior to resigning, he worked in Telegraph Accounts and the Money Order Office. See, "A Distinguished Scientist – Professor Edward Ford", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 32, 15 December 1947, p. 27.
[191] *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 9, 15 November 1945, p. 4.
[192] "The Dim Past as Recalled by Mr W. Holman", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 5, 16 July 1945, p. 10.

communications: "all wonderful in their way, but lacking the fascination of the old morse key and sounder of our early days".[193]

The leadership of the A.P.T.A. had little time to consider the circumstances of female members as it contemplated the union's relevance following the establishment of the Postal Institute in Melbourne in October 1918, usurping, as it did, the educational and social functions of the association.[194] The Institute's founder, Postmaster-General William Webster, looked to enhance the efficiency of the department by raising the level of employee expertise. With this objective in mind, the N.S.W. Postal Institute (established in 1921) conducted classes in a range of examinable subjects, including English, arithmetic, postal accountancy, telegraphy and telephony.[195] Webster maintained that criminality and left-wing extremism stemmed from exposure to an unhealthy social environment. Accordingly, Institute management introduced a number of "diversionary" sporting activities and assisted in the establishment of staff choirs and dramatic societies.[196] In the absence of a solid industrial agenda, the A.P.T.A. had lost much of its reason for being.

The Postal Institute can be said to have dulled the impetus for gender reform in the P.M.G. Department by helping to depoliticise employees. Taking his inspiration from the Railway Institutes in Sydney and Melbourne and from scientific management theory, William Webster tried to moderate union influence on workers by encouraging the development of a workplace culture and increased fellowship among staff.[197] Departmental Secretary Justinian Oxenham saw the Postal Institute as a way of breaking down the employer/employee divide, providing an environment in which senior officials and junior staff could commune free of the hierarchical structure that

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[193] "The Dim Past, recollections of Mr H. C. Hadley, Telegraphist", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 18, 15 August 1946, p. 19.
[194] Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.', p. 226.
[195] The Institute ran correspondence courses for students in outer suburban and country areas. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Twelth Annual Report, 1921–1922*, Melbourne, 1923, p. 21.
[196] Gordon Goudie, *API, The First Seventy Years: The History of the Australian Post-Tel Institute in New South Wales 1921–1991*, Sydney, The Fine Arts Press, 1991, p. 11; & *Postmaster-General's Department, Tenth Annual Report 1919–1920*, p. 24.
[197] Lucy Taksa, '"All a Matter of Timing": Workplace Restructuring and Cultural Change in the NSW Railways and Tramways Prior to 1921', Paper 106, School of Industrial Relations and Organisational Behavour, University of N.S.W., Sydney, January 1996, p. 11 & p. 20; & Goudie, *API, The First Seventy Years*, p. 11.

prevailed during office hours.[198] The N.S.W. Institute operated a staff canteen, established a cricket club, organised flower shows and card evenings, and held concerts and dances – all intended to foster a sense of unity among employees from disparate areas.[199] The organisation also weakened the hold of unions over staff and, with it, the chances of achieving genuine equality, by linking promotion to qualifications and training. In so doing, it challenged the policy of union preference and ensured staff conformity.[200] Female members could attend classes in typing, shorthand, correspondence and bookkeeping, as well as courses in public speaking and elocution.[201] Major employers of female labour, department stores also looked to welfarism to contain unionism and generate staff loyalty in the face of postwar industrial unrest. A number of emporia offered women courses in commerce and selling, organised sporting and recreational activities, and provided a free medical service. Some published a house magazine and appointed female welfare workers to attend to staff problems. Others offered sales bonuses and set up provident societies and savings clubs, giving employees a vested interest in good industrial relations and a stake in their stores' success.[202] In short, women were exposed to a process of acculturation.

Disunity and Multiple Priorities

During the war, rifts developed between the Women's Political Association and other women's organisations that undermined the cause of employment equality both inside and outside of the P.M.G. Department. Committed to securing equal pay for equal work by legislative means, Vida Goldstein lost considerable electoral support in her quest for a Senate place in 1917 as a result of the W.P.A.'s anti-war and anti-conscription campaigns. Perceived as disloyal or pro-German by some women's groups, Goldstein alienated herself from Mrs Deakin, Miss Deakin, and other moderate and left-liberal women who had helped form the Housewives' Co-operative

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[198] *ibid.*, p. 18.
[199] *ibid.*, p. 22. The Postal Institute operated a cafeteria to cater for employees on broken shifts who might otherwise fall victim to criminal or radical political influences. See, *ibid.*, p. 18.
[200] Taksa, "All a Matter of Timing", p. 20. The Postal Institute resembled the Workers' Education Association (W.E.A.) in undermining union preference in employment. See, Lucy Taksa, 'The Workers' Education Association and the Pursuit of National Efficiency in Australia Between 1913 and 1923', Working Paper No. 111, School of Industrial Relations and Organisational Behaviour, University of N.S.W., Sydney, March 1997, p. 22.
[201] Goudie, *API, The First Seventy Years*, p. 18.

Association in June 1915. Female members of the Labor Party and the Victorian Socialist Party condemned her candidature, fearing it would fragment the anti-conscription vote.[203] Because of the W.P.A.'s relatively radical stance, the *Woman Voter* experienced financial problems from 1915 as advertisers deserted the publication.[204] Vida Goldstein placed constraints on potential support from Labor women by denouncing the Party's Defence Act, which compelled men to fight, and by criticising the lack of provision for independent action by female members. She also disapproved of Labor's pledge system, which excluded people unable to subscribe to its entire platform.[205] Meanwhile, a yawning gulf had opened up between the W.P.A. on one side, and the Australian Women's National League and the National Council of Women (N.C.W.) on the other, over the latter's endorsement of the conflict and conscription. Many National Council members were deeply committed to the war effort, working as Red Cross volunteers and undertaking various patriotic activities.[206] The issue of profiteering widened the divide between the W.P.A. and the A.W.N.L., League leaders refusing to concede that middlemen were manipulating the market.[207] Without the endorsement of outside groups, and in the absence of a formal party structure, the W.P.A. disbanded in 1919 while Goldstein was away in England.[208] Because of its policies and the views of its leader, the Association lacked the backing in numerical and philosophical terms needed to prosecute wage reform.

Differences of opinion among female activists on the subject of employment did nothing to facilitate the development of a united front with respect to equal pay. An opponent of female labour, Adela Pankhurst, member of the W.P.A. and the Victorian Socialist Party, objected to the low wages paid to many women who filled in for men

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[202] Gail Reekie, '"Humanising Industry": Paternalism, Welfarism and Labour Control in Sydney's Big Stores, 1890–1930', *Labour History*, no. 53, November 1987, p. 1, p. 3, p. 5 & pp. 13–17.
[203] Smart, 'A Mission to the Home', pp. 217–219; & Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 147, p. 156 & p. 176.
[204] Some newspapers refused to print notices of W.P.A. meetings. See, *ibid.*, p. 159, p. 165 & p. 169.
[205] *ibid.*, p. 175 & p. 209.
[206] *ibid.*, p. 155; & Judy Smart, 'Hughes, Agnes Eva (1856?–1940)', *A.D.B.*, online edn, Australian National University, 2006, http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090389b.htm, p. 1, 9 October 2009; & Ada Norris, *Champions of the Impossible: A History of the National Council of Women of Victoria 1902–1977*, Melbourne, The Hawthorn Press, 1978, p. 35.
[207] Smart, 'A Mission to the Home', p. 219. Vida Goldstein alienated the Ladies Benevolent Society by asserting that women wanted work rather than charity. See, Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman*, p. 151, p. 155 & p. 157.
[208] *ibid.*, p. 199 & p. 224.

on active service. She claimed that employment 'defeminised' women, placed undue stress on working-class domestic life, and damaged the reproductive health of the nation. She and like-minded women looked to raise the standing of motherhood and regarded childrearing as a worthy alternative activity to paid work.[209] Elizabeth Roth of the Socialist Labor Party refused to equate female employment with freedom, drawing attention to worker exploitation and poor conditions. She and other socialist women looked forward to the marriage reforms that would follow the defeat of capitalism. The initiatives would remove the economic necessity for women to work, with the state paying wives to stay at home and rear their children.[210] Although initially opposed to female labour, particularly in factories, socialist and feminist May Hickman took a more pragmatic view of working women. She insisted on equal opportunity for females in the workplace, including freedom to enter the professions – a position consistent with her commitment to the principle of economic and social parity.[211] While the value of paid work remained in dispute, Vida Goldstein could hardly claim to represent the interests of all women, female Post Office employees included.

Disagreement among women over how best to advance their interests diminished the prospect of a combined effort to achieve wage justice in the P.M.G. Department and elsewhere. Socialist Betsy Matthias, a member of the Sydney Branch of the Women's Peace Army, rejected the proposition that feminism could be an agent of change. She questioned the efficacy of the women's movement and the female franchise, pointing to the failure up until that time to win universal equal pay by legislative means. Elizabeth Roth and other socialist women refused to countenance a separate feminist agenda. They insisted that male and female issues were indivisible and that freedom for women would only be realised with the death of capitalism.[212] Betsy Matthias, along with Marcia Reardon of the Australian Socialist Party (A.S.P.), claimed that feminism under Vida Goldstein and other self-supporting spinsters was of middle-class concern only.[213] Many socialists opined that gender politics fragmented the

[209] Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, p. 61, p. 63, p. 69, p. 82 & p. 85.
[210] Under a socialist regime, much domestic work would be based on a commercial or community model, freeing mothers from the most onerous household tasks. See, *ibid.*, p. 82 & p. 83.
[211] *ibid.*, p. 37, p. 63 & p. 95.
[212] *ibid.*, p. 31 , p. 32, p. 98, p. 106 & p. 107.
[213] The A.S.P. became the Communist Party of Australia (C.P.A.) in 1920. See, *ibid.*, p. 99, p. 104, p. 105 & p. 107.

working class and emasculated the revolutionary spirit.[214] Whereas the majority dismissed constitutional feminism as a force for reform, arguing that equal pay would necessarily follow capitalism's demise, some left-wing women regarded gender solidarity as fundamental to the process of female liberation. Activists Muriel Heagney and Jean Daley embraced feminism within the confines of the Labor Party. Much of their time was spent fending off criticism from male members who looked upon it as a middle-class indulgence alien to working-class interests.[215] In general, those socialist women seeking reform by democratic means favoured a feminist agenda, while those demanding radical solutions were less sympathetic.[216] Among those individuals enthused by the possibility of revolutionary change, real gender equality in the Post Office and elsewhere barely ranked as an issue.

However strongly they may have felt about parity in employment, women's groups devoted considerable time to the pursuit of legal and social equality and the attainment of equal moral standards – goals that had occupied the minds of female activists since the 1890s.[217] While advocating equal pay for equal work in the public service, the Victorian Branch of the National Council of Women paid little attention to the circumstances of female staff in the P.M.G. Department. From the mid 1920s, the N.C.W. spent much of its energy lobbying for uniform national marriage and divorce laws, citing discriminatory and contradictory state statutes that put men before women.[218] While pressing for employment equality, the Victorian Women's Post and Telegraph Association took an active interest in such matters. From the early 1900s, *Inconnue*, the *Transmitter's* anonymous female correspondent, had reported on the injustices surrounding divorce and the campaign for law reform.[219] The Housewives' Association was just as anxious to secure fairness for women under the legal system.

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[214] *ibid.*, p. 88 & p. 89.
[215] *ibid.*, p. 78 & p. 79; & Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 102. Constitutional feminist Rose Scott believed that the barriers that separated the genders were of much greater significance than class differences. See, Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, p. 91.
[216] *ibid.*, p. 87. For many radical socialists who looked forward to the defeat of capitalism, middle-class feminists wanting a constitutional solution to inequality were part of the problem. See, *ibid.*, p. 90.
[217] By way of example, the Female Suffrage League and Women's Political Education League had long argued that female lawyers should be allowed to practice. The W.P.E.L. had also pressed for the age of consent to be raised so as to curb the sexual abuse of girls. See, Allen, *Rose Scott*, p. 59 & p. 213.
[218] Norris, *Champions of the Impossible*, p. 41 & p. 63. In 1927 the N.C.W. lobbied all parliamentary candidates to support measures that would guarantee absolute equality for women in legal and other matters. See, *ibid.*, p. 56.

While repeatedly calling for equal pay for equal work at state conferences, the Association demanded equal rights of guardianship over children and lobbied for the preservation of a wife's Australian nationality independent of her husband's. At the same time, the organisation sought to raise the economic and social status of housework to that of a profession, and bolster the electoral power of the consumer. To that end, it conducted lectures on housekeeping and childcare, and sponsored radio broadcasts calculated to enhance the public profile of women in the home.[220] Intent on improving the moral standards of young males and protecting girls from sexual abuse, the N.C.W. lobbied for the age of consent to be raised to 16.[221] Meanwhile, the Australian Federation of Women Voters and the Women's Service Guild agitated for the introduction of a sex education programme for boys that promoted abstinence and self-control.[222] Without a central focus on workplace inequality, most women's organisations were not in a position to appreciate the unique problems faced by female Post Office employees.

Women's groups tended to give priority to issues surrounding maternal citizenship, drawing inspiration from the alleged morality, compassion and social sensitivity of females. While pressing the case for equal pay in the teaching profession, the N.C.W. made overtures to the Victorian Government from 1915 for the recruitment of female police officers, rather than leave men to collect evidence in cases that involved women. The organisation also agitated for the appointment of female magistrates to children's courts in an attempt to protect the young from exposure to hardened criminals.[223] After the war it continued in the role of protector, lobbying for compulsory maintenance payments on behalf of divorced women, stricter film censorship, and harsher penalties for sex crimes against children.[224] Adamant that women had a meaningful contribution to make to public affairs, the Housewives' Association sought equal representation on all tribunals dealing with the home and the cost of living. Most state branches of the Association subscribed to the peace

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[219] 'Women's Page By "L'Inconnue"', *Transmitter*, vol. XIII, no. 5, 18 September 1903, p. 6. *Inconnue* also discussed the establishment of dedicated children's courts, a major objective in feminist circles. See, 'Women's Page By "L'Inconnue"', *Transmitter*, vol. XVII, no. 6, 18 October 1907, p. 10.
[220] Smart, 'The Politics of Consumption', p. 28 & p. 30; & Smart, 'A Mission to the Home', p. 223.
[221] Norris, *Champions of the Impossible*, p. 63.
[222] Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 94 & p. 95.
[223] Norris, *Champions of the Impossible*, p. 35, p. 36 & p. 39.
[224] *ibid.*, p. 41, p. 43, p. 50 & p. 52.

movement on the basis that women had a maternal stake in global harmony.[225] While advocating equal pay, the Labor Women's Central Organising Committee and the Australian Federation of Women Voters (A.F.W.V.) condemned the family wage. They felt that economic dependency reduced housewives to the status of sex slaves.[226] Intent on securing the financial and personal sovereignty of housebound women, Jessie Street and the A.F.W.V. proposed laws that would require men to pass a proportion of their earnings directly to their wife for the benefit of the family.[227] The maternal citizenship agenda was far too expansive to engage with the circumscribed subject of female employment in the P.M.G. Department.

Abolition of the Basic Wage

In the mid 1920s, female activists devised a strategy to win equal pay that called for the dismantling of the family wage. Generating considerable opposition among male workers and disquiet in government, the tactic may be seen to have done a disservice to the cause of gender equality in the Post Office by drawing men's attention to the negative implications of female economic independence. The architects of the plan to secure wage equality included Jessie Street, then President of the Feminist Club, and Lena Lynch, Secretary of the Labor Women's Central Organising Committee in N.S.W. Both women lamented the failure of the franchise to achieve significant gains for their sex. They reasoned that replacement of the basic wage with an ongoing, state-funded, motherhood allowance, along with a childhood endowment paid directly to wives, would neutralise its rationale and, with it, the argument that equal pay would depress male earnings.[228] Their strategy was put to the test in 1927, when Stanley Melbourne Bruce, Nationalist Party Prime Minister, appointed a Royal Commission to consider the feasibility of a federal motherhood and/or childhood endowment with a view to reducing wage costs. Muriel Heagney, Jean Daley, Lena Lynch and other female witnesses called before the body put the case for government benefits as the rightful entitlements of wives and offspring. Men from the Labor Party who testified

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[225] Smart, 'A Mission to the Home' p. 223; & Smart, 'The Politics of Consumption', p. 28.
[226] Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 92.
[227] Jessie Street and the A.F.W.V. pursued the idea into the 1930s. See, Marilyn Lake, '"The Inviolable Woman": feminist conceptions of citizenship in Australia, 1900–1945', in Jane Long (ed.) *et al.*, *Forging Identities: bodies, gender and feminist history*, Nedlands, University of Western Australia, 1997, pp. 232–235; & Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 107 & p. 108.

before the Royal Commission refused to countenance a female 'income', recognising it as an attack on the family wage.[229] By and large, the Commissioners took a similar position. In their Majority Report, they rejected the idea of a continuous motherhood allowance, claiming that it would confer a degree of financial freedom on wives and jeopardise the survival of the family unit. In the Minority Report, Commissioners John Curtin M.P. and Mildred Muscio, President of the N.C.W., opined that a motherhood benefit was antithetical to family life, but approved of a childhood payment that would help to guarantee the financial viability of the household.[230] While female economic autonomy appeared to put male earnings and the domestic status *quo* at risk, equal pay, even in theory, would remain the preserve of a few single women, irrespective of the tactics employed to extend its reach.

Femininity as a Labour Market Commodity

During the period a woman's very femininity became an employee asset in the P.M.G. Department, compounding workplace inequality by perpetuating gender difference. Although technically competent, Mary Walsh secured the position of allowance postmistress at Jenolan Caves in early 1918 primarily on the basis of her sex. The Superintendent of the N.S.W. Tourist and Information Bureau had specifically requested that a "female … with telegraphic ability" be put in charge of the post office at the popular natural attraction. Miss Walsh's engagement stemmed from a growing awareness in government, tourist organisations, and retail business of the commercial and public relations value of women. District Inspector Nash stressed the need to ensure that the right person filled the post, observing that people "from all parts of the world visit Jenolan Caves which is (the) principle [*sic*] resort of its class in the Commonwealth".[231] In April 1920 Head Office placed Alice Cliff in control of the semi-official office at Medlow Bath partly in recognition of the important role played by tourism in the scenic Blue Mountains town.[232] In 1928 Departmental

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[228] *ibid.*, p. 98 & p. 99; & Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man', p. 4. Jessie Street opposed payment of the family wage to single men, claiming that it was likely to be squandered. See, Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 3, p. 104 & p. 105.

[229] *loc. cit.*; & Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man', pp. 19–21.

[230] Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 106; & Lake, 'The Independence of Women and the Brotherhood of Man', p. 21.

[231] Letter from M. J. Walsh, Bathurst, to Public Service Inspector, Sydney, 12 February 1918, C2593, GA903, Jenolan Caves, fol. IA 18/276; & report by J. R. Nash, D.I., 17 December 1917, *ibid.*

[232] *Pro forma* Recommendation for Appt of Allow. Pmr, Alice May Cliff, on 1 April 1920, completed by J. R. Nash, D.I., 2 March 1920, C2593, GA1172, Medlow Bath, fol. 3 MAR 1920/A 442. The post

Secretary Harry Brown set out to exploit the marketing and public-relations potential of women by recruiting a select group of female telephonists or "Hello Girls", each with "a smile in her voice". As well as performing the usual switchboard duties, the women promoted extra telephone extensions for the office, along with other departmental services, directing interested subscribers to dedicated canvassers seeking additional custom.[233] Meanwhile, the department stores were showing a greater interest in female staff from a business and public-relations perspective. The development coincided with efforts to promote long-term customer relationships by way of credit, time payment, lay-by, and cash-on-delivery facilities. Henceforth, emporia hired women on the strength of their physical and oral presentation, favouring attractive, well-spoken individuals.[234] Although opening up new avenues of employment, femininity was arguably an occupational disadvantage in setting women apart from men.

The inability of many women's organisations to adequately accommodate the 'flapper' phenomenon and the emphasis on female beauty placed additional obstacles in the way of employment equality, alienating the groups from potential supporters. Many older feminists, who had laid claim to political and social equality by downplaying the physiological aspects of womanhood, had difficulty accepting the sexuality and "lewd" behaviour exhibited by some young women. To their mind, the development was dangerous, disempowering and degrading. For members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) and other church-based bodies, the appearance of young women who drank alcohol, smoked, wore revealing clothes and enjoyed licentious Hollywood cinema was near intolerable after spending many years trying to curb human excess.[235] Responding to what seemed like moral

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office occupied a store and tea rooms own by Mrs Cliff's parents-in-law. Her appointment followed the accidental death of her husband. See, letter from Pmr, Medlow Bath, 16 February 1920, *ibid.*; & letter from Alice Cliff, c/– Mrs J. Cliff, Medlow Bath, to D.P.I., Bathurst, 18 February 1920, *ibid.*

[233] Hello Girls were hired on the premise that women were the natural facilitators of human discourse and harmonious relations, and were uniquely suited to switchboard work because of a pleasing oral presentation and pacifying disposition. See, *Postal Notes*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1928, p. 7; & *Postmaster-General's Eighteenth Annual Report 1927–1928*, p. 12.

[234] Reekie, "Humanising Industry", pp. 2–6.

[235] Smart, 'Feminists, flappers and Miss Australia', p. 6. Rose Scott deplored the appearance of flappers, maintaining that women needed to cultivate men's respect. See, Allen, *Rose Scott*, p. 242. Conor argues that the flappers' critics were victims of the confusion surrounding subject and object. The latter stemmed from the women's desire for autonomous 'visibility', from the commodification of everything female, and from the long-standing negative perception of 'street women'. See, Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, p. 3, p. 10 & p. 11.

regression, the W.C.T.U. lobbied for a prohibition on alcohol and a ban on contraceptives. The organisation also pressed for stricter censorship of books and films, while promoting modest dress for women.[236] Because of their inability to find room for the changes affecting young females, many women's groups lacked the mandate to speak on their behalf.

Many older feminists disapproved of the Miss Australia quest from 1926 and other beauty contests that appeared to objectify women. Members of the A.W.N.L., the Housewives' Association and assorted church groups feared that the Miss Australia pageant would undo much of their work in seeking to raise the moral standard of working-class girls – this despite the fact that most of the contestants had middle-class backgrounds. Critics of the event insisted that the sponsor, Smith's Newspapers, was shamelessly exploiting females to boost circulation.[237] The contestants begged to differ, claiming to have been empowered by the importance attached to their appearance.[238] In time, some women's groups came to terms with the contest, won over by the patriotic and eugenic rhetoric that surrounded it. Others remained opposed to the event.[239] The W.C.T.U. rejected beauty contests period, insisting that they were injurious to women – its outdated sense of morality contributing to a decline in membership from the late 1920s.[240] Much of the feminist movement had lost touch with the interests of young women, making the goal of employment equality ever more elusive.

The priority accorded the male wage both inside and outside of government in the later war years and the immediate postwar period undercut the case for genuine gender equality in the P.M.G. Department. Focused on the careers of young men, Chief Office issued a directive in January 1920 requiring district inspectors to identify

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[236] Smart, 'A Mission to the Home', p. 226. The Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.) tried to deal with its members expectations of greater freedom, providing hostel accommodation for 'business girls' in the capital cities, and venues for mixed dancing in an effort to channel youthful energy along manageable lines. See, Smart, 'Feminists, flappers and Miss Australia', p. 7 & p. 8.
[237] Smith's Newspapers went out of the way to ensure that the contest was respectful of women. To minimise accusations of impropriety, contestants underwent a 'medical test' performed by doctors, and were accessed according to personality, athletic prowess (satisfying eugenic considerations), domestic skills, and middle-class cultural competencies, including public speaking. See, *ibid.*, pp. 8–14.
[238] *ibid*., p. 9, p. 12 & p. 13.
[239] The language used by event organisers helped to legitimise and normalise the display of female sexuality. See, *ibid.*, p. 14 & p. 15.
[240] Smart, 'A Mission to the Home', p. 226 & p. 227.

semi-official facilities that might be upgraded to official establishments and assigned to junior males on the unattached list.[241] As a result of the exercise, a number of women were displaced by young men. According to the report of the Royal Commission on Public Service Administration completed in 1920, government departments were only hiring women in order to release promising youths from routine work and improve their chances of promotion to higher-paid positions.[242] Alarmed by the impact of inflation on male earnings, the Victorian Trades Hall Council had lobbied the federal government from 1918 to establish a royal commission on the basic wage so as to determine what was a reasonable standard of living for a family of five headed by a male breadwinner.[243] For as long as the remuneration rates of males were of paramount importance, gender equality in the workplace remained a peripheral issue.

All the while the popularity of marriage and domestic life reduced employment equality to a less-than-pressing matter. In light of the contraction in vocational opportunities and the bonus paid to intending brides since 1902, 214 female official employees, including telephonists, left the N.S.W. branch of the P.M.G. Department to be wed in the period 1914 to 1921.[244] For many years female Post Office workers had been relatively well placed to secure husbands. Counter duties and telephonic work afforded them the prospect of meeting a potential mate, either in person or on the line.[245] Taking the overall situation of female employees into account, the Labor Women's Central Organising Committee had to conclude that, while most women put marriage before career, whether by choice or necessity, universal equal pay was unlikely to be realised. In the circumstances Committee members resolved to devote

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[241] Circ. Memo, un-numbered, 12 January 1920, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, N.A.A., Sydney.

[242] Desley Deacon, 'Women, Bureaucracy and the Dual Labour Market, an Historical Analysis', in Alexander Kouzmin (ed), *Public Sector Administration: New Perspectives*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1983, p. 178 & p. 293.

[243] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 117. A ruling in 1921 by Justice Powers of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court served to discourage employers from hiring women to perform work that men might rightly regard as their own. See, *ibid*., p. 97 & p. 98.

[244] *Tenth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Commissioner (1913–14)*, Melbourne**,** p. 42; *Twelfth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Commissioner, 1917*, Melbourne, p. 30; *Thirteenth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Acting Commissioner, 1917–18*, Melbourne, p. 37; *Fourteenth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Acting Commissioner, 1917–18–19*, Melbourne, p. 33; *Fifteenth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Acting Commissioner, 1920*, Melbourne, p. 37; *Sixteenth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Acting Commissioner, 1920–21*, Melbourne, p. 36; & *Seventeenth Report on the Commonwealth Public Service by the Acting Commissioner, 1922*, Melbourne, p. 37.

more time to improving the standard of living of working-class families.[246] Programmes designed to raise the status of unpaid domestic work may be seen to have rendered matrimony and home life more desirable in the minds of some young women. From the 1910s, state schools taught girls the domestic arts according to the principles of scientific management, tuition in cooking, sewing and budgeting benefiting from a link to the more prestigious physical and social sciences. Classes run by the Housewives' Association covering household finances, efficient cleaning practices and family hygiene added to the standing of home duties *vis-a-vis* paid work.[247] While many females were induced to see marriage and domesticity as a worthy alternative to economic independence, parity in employment remained a minority concern.

Marriage appeared to have much in its favour. From the early postwar years it was increasingly presented as a solution to the alleged loneliness of spinsterhood and a way by which women could satisfy their sexual needs while avoiding the stigma attached to pregnancy out of wedlock. That respectable women had physical urges had only recently been acknowledged by "experts".[248] Although the young single woman working in an office was seen to live a free, sometimes glamorous, life, women's magazines suggested that matrimony offered the greater freedom, promising sexual fulfilment without the risk to reputation and the threat of venereal disease.[249] Marriage remained an attractive proposition while disincentives attached to spinsterhood existed. Despite vocational gains, the vast bulk of single female employees in government and private enterprise still earned less than male co-workers, their wages set at a level that discouraged long-term careers.[250] Lending institutions frequently discriminated against spinsters, refusing them a loan or credit without a male guarantor. Similarly, landlords often treated single women as bad risks, doubting their ability to meet the rent and maintain the property.[251]

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[245] Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce', p. 73.
[246] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 120.
[247] Jill Julius Matthews, 'Education for Femininity: domestic arts education in South Australia, *Labour History*, no. 45, November 1983, p 52 & p. 53.
[248] Catriona Elder, '"The Question of the Unmarried": Some Meanings of Being Single in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s', *Australian Feminist Studies*, no. 18, Summer 1993, p. 155, p. 158 & p. 161.
[249] *ibid.*, p. 162.
[250] *ibid.*, p. 160; & Nolan, 'Making Clerks and Re-Shaping the White-Collar Workforce', p. 72 & p. 73.
[251] Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson (Australia), 1975, p. 121 & p. 136.

For as long as many women felt duty-bound to put family care before paid work, equality in employment remained an abstract objective. Despite the common belief that females had become 'a permanency in industry', many single women were still expected to put their parents first, given the shortfall in potential suitors caused by the war.[252] In June 1920 Miss L. Nichols wrote to the Bathurst inspectorate, tendering her resignation as allowance postmistress at Sunny Corner. She explained that her father and mother had purchased a house in the Sydney suburb of Chatswood and had asked her to live with them. She was leaving the job with some regret, having been "treated with great courtesy by all postal officials, as well as the general Public".[253] Over the period the contribution of single women to the care of ageing parents grew more critical in the face of mounting inflation, placing, as it did, a heavy burden on the old age pension and precluding the possibility of paid help.[254] Meanwhile, increased stress from the early 1920s on the physical and psychological needs of children was preventing mothers from fully availing of job opportunities. In deference to childrearing authorities, women laboured to ensure that their offspring had a nutritious diet and resided in a hygienic environment. Experts in the area contributed to the 'emotionalization' of housework – meal preparation and cleaning becoming expressions of motherly love. Psychiatrists and psychologists expected women to provide for the mental well-being of their children based on the belief that an individual's early years shaped his or her adult character.[255] Mothers risked being seen as remiss if they left their children in the care of outsiders to pursue employment.[256] In June 1923 Mary Lawler surrendered her job as postmistress at Sunny Corner, underscoring the apparent incompatibility of paid work with effective mothering. In a letter to the Bathurst inspectorate, the widow intimated that she was leaving because of her inability to perform her postal duties while attending to her

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[252] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 164.
[253] Letter from L. Nichols to D.P.I., Bathurst, 1 June 1920, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner, fol. 4 Jun 1920/IA 1028.
[254] J. F. Cairns, 'Working Class Foundations of the Welfare State', in Roe (ed.), *Social Policy in Australia*, p. 35 & p. 36.
[255] Belinda Probert, *Working Life: Arguments about work in Australian society*, Melbourne, McPhee Gribble Publishers, 1989, p. 84.
[256] Many mothers observed scientific management principles designed to maximise output and make optimal use of time. See, Katie Holmes, *Spaces in her Day: Australian women's diaries of the 1920s and 1930s*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 67. Denise Riley suggests that female carers became custodians of the newly created 'social sphere' with the advent of the welfare state. In this third domain, women had oversight of family and community health, fertility, education, and sexual morality. Riley cited in Maureen Molloy, 'Citizenship, Property and Bodies: Discourses and the Inter-War Labour Government in New Zealand', *Gender & History*, vol. 4, no. 3, Autumn 1992, p. 296.

child. She explained that her daughter had been ill with the mumps, while she had been suffering from influenza: "I had her & the office to look after in addition to the housework … it is a bit too much to do everything when one is not well".[257] Whereas once the post office afforded women the facility to combine employment with family care, societal expectations, the higher cost of living, and a rigorous childrearing regime made their task ever more difficult.

Employment Criteria Reassessed

In the interests of thrift, the department increasingly chose women with alternative sources of income to run allowance postal outlets, reasoning that they would be less inclined to seek a raise than those without. In 1919 Chief Office directed that, in cases where the position paid less than 110 pounds a year, inspectors appoint, wherever possible, applicants who proposed to operate another business in conjunction with the postal facility.[258] Around the same time, the N.S.W. Deputy Postmaster-General decreed that, in all such instances, candidates must have another source of income.[259] In August 1925 the inspectorate rejected a submission from Rebecca Bevan to manage the post office at Greenwell Point for 88 pounds p.a. because she had no alternative occupation, having yet to open the small business she had planned for want of suitable premises. District officials opted instead for local teacher Clifford Hamey, who left his wife, Minna, to conduct the facility from the school residence.[260] In isolated country areas, negligible business opportunities eliminated a number of potential employees. In July 1920 Miss Y. Piggot withdrew her bid for the job of postmistress at Sunny Corner after concluding that there was little chance of earning a living in the depopulated mining village. District Inspector Nash turned to widow Elizabeth Slattery, who received two pounds a week from rental property, to fill the vacancy. He noted that the allowance of 92 pounds p.a. was not a "living wage" and that the settlement afforded no prospect of supplementary employment.[261]

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[257] Letter from (Mrs) M. Lawler, Sunny Corner, to P.I., Bathurst, 5 June 1923, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner.
[258] Report by W. Morris, Inspr, Tamworth, 2 January 1919, C2593, GA1815, Upper Manilla, fol. Ia 2540.
[259] Report from J. R. Nash, D.I., to D.I., Bathurst, 20 February 1920, C2593, GA WP 32, Merrygoen.
[260] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by Rebecca Mary Bevan, 8 August 1925, C2593, GA234667, Greenwell Point; report by unidentified D.I., Metro No. 4, 14 August 1925, *ibid.*, fol. GA 25/1897; & report by P. Rockliff, D.I., Metro No. 4, 27 April 1929, *ibid.*, fol. GA 29/795.
[261] Letter from Y. Piggot, Rydal, to Mr Nash, D.I., Bathurst, 21 July 1920, C2593, GA1651, Sunny Corner; & *pro forma* Recommendation for Appt of Allow. Pmr, Elizabeth May Slattery on 1

In the early postwar period, departmental officials began to assess the economic viability of alternative sources of income in an effort to limit requests for pay rises from allowance staff. In January 1919 Inspector W. Morris declined an application from dressmaker Doris Warren to run the post office at Upper Manilla on the grounds that there was "very little opening" for a woman with her skills in the small country town. Overtures from needleworker Dorothy Hayes for the same position met with a similarly pessimistic appraisal of her earning potential.[262] Sometimes the department went so far as to dismiss women deemed to have inadequate supplementary earnings in favour of those with more substantial incomes. In February 1920 Miss Sullivan, Postmistress at Merrygoen, had her services terminated on the basis that the 26 pounds a year the local publican paid her to keep his books was insufficient to discourage her from seeking a raise. At the time her postal allowance amounted to 86 pounds p.a. Miss Sullivan's replacement, Kathleen Bullmann, drew an income from property worth between 750 and 850 pounds a year and laid claim to spacious office accommodation opposite the railway station.[263] Women were subject to a vetting process independent of their ability to perform the task at hand.

Single Entrepreneurial Women and Female Economic Power

Demographic change saw a growing number of women invest in allowance post offices and other enterprises to guarantee their livelihood.[264] During the war Australia lost over 62,000 men, significantly depleting the stock of potential marriage partners. Over the following decade, thousands of survivors succumbed to wounds and other injuries, further limiting the supply of male suitors.[265] In the circumstances many single women went out of their way to secure their financial future. With her long-term finances in mind, Ashbury storekeeper Eliza King approached the department in March 1926 about becoming a stamp vendor, "with or without commission", in the

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September 1920, "or soon after", completed by J. R. Nash, Inspr, 11 August 1920, *ibid.* Inspector Nash discounted applications from two women without alternative incomes. See, report from J. R. Nash, D.I., to D.O., Bathurst, 29 June 1920, *ibid.*

[262] Inspector Morris rejected applications from ten other women for want of separate incomes. See, report by W. Morris, Inspr, Tamworth, 2 January 1919, C2593, GA1815, Upper Manilla, fol. Ia 2540.

[263] Note overleaf signed by Dep. P.M.G., 10 February 1920, C2593, GA WP 32, Merrygoen, fol. Ia 19/2765; & report from J. Nash, D.I., to D.I., Bathurst, 20 February 1920, *ibid.*

[264] Beverley Kingston, 'The Lady and the Australian Girl: Some Thoughts on Nationalism and Class', in Grieve and Burns (eds), *Australian Women: New Feminist Perspectives*, p. 39.

[265] A. G. Butler, *The Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services in the War of 1914–1918, Vol III, Special Problems and Services*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1940, Table 12, p. 818.

hope of being appointed the postmistress, if and when a postal outlet was set up in the newly established Sydney suburb. Her initiative was rewarded two months later when Head Office installed an allowance facility in her shop.[266]

Given the tragedy of war, and despite its large stake in matrimony, society increasingly allowed spinsters deemed to be beyond marrying age to follow a 'calling' other than the care of aged parents. In their case, work was seen as consolation for the lack of sexual and familial fulfilment to be found in marriage.[267] Ida Hurley, Austinmer's allowance postmistress, made practical use of the licence given to mature single women. In October 1919 she advised the department of her plans to construct a new post office with an attached residence on land she had recently purchased, explaining that the venture would free her from having to pay rent and afford her the job security presently denied her. Under the terms of her lease, the landlord was only required to give her a month's notice to vacate. A shortage of property in the seaside settlement and a heavy call on holiday accommodation rendered her housing needs all the more pressing.[268] The aftermath of war and the concessions permitted older spinsters encouraged women to look to their economic futures.

Throughout the conflict and into the 1920s, female allowance employees demanded greater personal and administrative independence. Arguably, a second income and the prospect of alternative employment in factories and offices had the effect of raising their expectations regarding working conditions and made for a greater sense of personal worth.[269] Subject to heavier surveillance in line with scientific management principles, some postmistresses complained of oppressive supervision and insisted on more respect.[270] In January 1915 Senior Inspector R. W. Arnott issued a circular citing the case of a woman who resigned after receiving a rudely worded instruction from an officious bureaucrat. He observed that allowance employees with alternative

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[266] Report by W. A. Orr, Acting Inspr, 15 March 1926, C2593, GA46, Ashbury, fol. GA 9 FEB 1928/343; *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Allow. Pms, Eliza King, 7 May 1926, *ibid.*; & Gerald Healy, Frances Pollon (ed.), *The Book of Sydney Suburbs*, rev. edn, Pymble, Harper Collins, 1988, p. 7 & p. 8.
[267] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 163 & p. 164. Many in the community still refused to regard older spinsters as productive beings, deeming them sexless or worthless. See, *ibid.*, p. 166.
[268] Letter from I. Hurley, Pms, Austinmer P.O., to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 24 October 1919, C2593, GA225656, Austinmer, fol. 25 OCT 1919/IA 2442; & report by S. Morris, Inspr, 15 April 1919, *ibid.*
[269] Raelene Frances interprets strikes and protests in clothing factories against 'speeding up' as evidence of a push for greater workplace autonomy. See, Frances, *The Politics of Work*, p. 99.
[270] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 149.

incomes expected courteous treatment and were often offended by the tone of branch communications.[271] Meanwhile, the move towards a regulated 44-hour week in large business houses stimulated the quest for greater administrative freedom. This development further institutionalised the practice of paying staff according to time on duty, rather than according to work performed or business transacted.[272] In August 1923 Miss M. Wych, Postmistress at Lilyfield, protested to the department about the length of the working day after her allowance was cut due to declining business: "My time is taken up with the Office … from nine until six o'clock. I think it is a disgrace … to expect the duties performed well for that amount (ie 45 pounds p.a.)."[273] That same month storekeeper Emily Lawson, Postmistress at Oakdale, demanded a wage commensurate with office hours, complaining: "I cannot get away to make a shilling".[274] In short, many women placed an increased value on their person and their time.

From the mid 1920s, the department exhibited a growing tendency to treat married women as independent beings, thanks largely to their separate commercial and financial interests. Head Office's decision in June 1929 to retain the services of Lily Black (*nee* Walker), Blacktown's non-official postmistress, after her husband was convicted of street betting illustrated the changing attitude to working wives.[275] Arguing for her retention, Inspector A. Cohen pointed out that Mrs Black had been meeting the couple's home mortgage repayments from her allowance. He noted that the offender had disposed of his store in 1921 and had not been in regular employment since then, apart from assisting in the post office. As such, Black had forfeited his claim to breadwinner status. Commenting on Mrs Black's character, Police Inspector Lindfield concluded that "no reflection could be cast on the

[271] The Deputy Postmaster-General confirmed that correspondence should be "courteous and avoid language likely to cause friction". See, Circ. Memo No. 2964 from R. W. Arnott, Snr I., P.M.G. Dept, G.P.O., Sydney, 11 January 1915, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, N.A.A., Sydney.
[272] Nolan, 'Sex or Class?', p. 105 & p. 115.
[273] Letter attached from W. Wych, Pms, Lilyfield, 27 August 1923, C2593, GA1060, Lilyfield, fol. 29 AUG 1923/GA 2538; & note under signed by C. G. Brown, Accountant, 7 September 1923, *ibid*.
[274] Letter from Emily Lawson, Pms, Oakdale, to Dep. P.M.G., Sydney, 3 August 1923, C2593, GA1380, Oakdale, fol. 4 AUG 1923/GA 2273. Mrs Lawson's demands were in line with scientific management practice whereby employees were paid to work a specific number of hours each day. See, Frances, *The Politics of Work*, p. 88; & Kevin Blackburn, 'The Quest for Efficiency and the Rise of Industrial Psychology in Australia, 1916–29', *Labour History*, no. 74, May 1998, p. 124.
[275] *Evening News*, Monday, 20 May 1929 (cutting, no page number), in SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. GA 29/1128; letter from E. J. Baldwin, Acting Sec., Commissioner's Office, Police Dept, Sydney, to

Postmistress who was not concerned with the betting transactions and … (was) entirely opposed to the illegal business carried on by her husband".[276] The decision to keep her on strength coincided with the growing realisation that wives had little moral authority over husbands. This reality was evident in the general failure of the temperance movement and other female initiatives to curb male excesses.[277] Constable Crisp's remark that Lily Black was the victim of "circumstances over which she had no control" recognised the powerlessness of women in these instances.[278]

As autonomous economic entities, married businesswomen might be relied upon to protect the financial interests of the service, given the increased incidence of fraud, theft and bankruptcy among allowance staff and the general public.[279] In January 1925 Head Office placed Mrs E. Davis in charge of Tempe's allowance post office after her husband, postmaster and pastry cook Leslie Davis, left without notice to tour Victoria with a military band. Inspector W. S. Gentle took stock of rumours that Davis was failing to meet his financial obligations. Accordingly, he proposed that the incumbent's wife take over the facility, noting that she ran a confectionery business in her own name and was economically independent of her spouse. For some time Mrs Davis had performed most of the office work and had always been honourable in her dealings with the department. Gentle therefore had "no reason to fear defalcations" while she had charge of the amenity.[280]

Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, G.P.O., Sydney, 1 June 1929, *ibid.*; & memo from S. C. Francis, Senior Inspr, to Dep. Director, 18 June 1929, *ibid.*

[276] Constable Crisp of Blacktown Police stressed that Mrs Black was economically and socially independent, and was well regarded in the community, "both as a citizen and as Postmistress". Inspector Cohen implied that she was meeting the expectations of citizenship through her participation in economic and social life. See, report from A. Cohen, D.I., Metro No. 2, to Dep. Director, 14 June 1929, *ibid.*, fol. GA 29/1126.

[277] Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth–Century Australia*, Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1984, p. 80 & p. 81.

[278] Report from A. Cohen, D.I., Metro No 2, to Dep. Director, 14 June 1929, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. GA 29/1126.

[279] Report by W. S. Gentle, Inspr, Metro No. 2, 17 December 1924, C2593, GA1689, Part 1, Tempe, fol. 19 DEC 1924/GA 3178.

[280] *Pro forma* Acknowledgement of Notice of Appt of Allow. Pms, Estel Evelyn Davis, on 1 January 1925, 27 January 1925, *ibid.*, fol. GA 25/271; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Ethel Evelyn Davis, on 1 January 1925, 3 February 1925 (Mrs Davis' first name is shown variously as Estel or Ethel), *ibid.*; & report by W. S. Gentle, Inspr, Metro No. 2, 17 December 1924, *ibid.*, fol. 19 DEC 1924/GA 3178.

Thanks in part to the concept of a "calling", older single women increasingly gained the respect and friendship of officials and male workers, as well as the right to pursue a productive life independent of marriage. A number were lauded for displaying the same dedication to employment as married women showed to family.[281] Recommending Mary Walsh for the job of allowance postmistress at Jenolan Caves in December 1917, District Inspector Nash described the applicant as a "splendid official" and suggested that the department was fortunate to have "such a capable person available". Nash drew attention to the extensive experience she had acquired while employed at the semi-official offices in Delungra and Come by Chance, and at the official establishments in Wollongong and Bathurst.[282] Recalling his time at Deniliquin and Tamworth, retired telegraphist P. J. Arnold was equally generous in his praise of female co-worker Mary Buckley, describing her as "a great operator" with perfect "signals and *penmanship* (my emphasis)".[283] Good penmanship, once a male preserve, might now be possessed by a woman. Memories of official postmistress Ethel Cox were just as complimentary. In her obituary, "A Friend" remembered the good relationship she had with male staff at Bingara in the 1920s. Miss Cox laboured alongside Les Duprez, "a fine pal and friend" from "down south", and used her ready sense of humour to win over skeptical males.[284] Meanwhile, Minard Crommelin, who worked as a postmistress, senior postal assistant and postal clerk at several offices over the course of her career, demonstrated that the single life could be fulfilling and worthwhile. Gaining an enviable reputation as a keen hiker and bushwalker, Miss Crommelin went on to receive public accolades in later years for her conservation work on the N.S.W. Central Coast.[285]

By the third decade of the 20th century, "the working woman" was well entrenched in Australian popular culture. Between the years 1910 and 1921, the expanding service sector saw the proportion of women engaged in clerical, commercial and sales duties

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[281] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 163 & p. 164.
[282] Report by J. R. Nash, D.I., 17 December 1917, C2593, GA903, Jenolan Caves; & letter from M. J. Walsh, Bathurst, to Public Service Inspr, Sydney, 12 February 1918, *ibid.*, fol. IA 18/276.
[283] "The Dim Past, reminiscences from P. J. Arnold", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 15, 15 May 1946, p. 13.
[284] "An Appreciation – The Late Ethel Cox" by "A Friend", *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 33, 15 January 1948, p. 11 & p. 12.
[285]After retiring in 1937, Miss Crommelin acquired a seven-acre bushland site at Pearl Beach, where she set up a fauna and flora reserve. In 1959 she received an M.B.E. for her conservation work. See, 'Minard Crommelin', *Australian Post Office Magazine*, vol. 5, no. 5, February–March 1959, p. 24.

grow from 10.6% to 22.4% of all female workers. With the growth in female employees went increased regard for the notion of economically independent womanhood.[286] Women's magazines added to the community's understanding of the young female office worker, portraying her as glamorous, free spirited, and sometimes hedonistic.[287] Known for her tendency to postpone marriage, her preference for small families, and her preparedness to leave unsatisfactory marriages, the working woman was thrown into sharp relief by the cost-of-living inquiries held in 1918. The proceedings identified the young female employee as an independent consumer with certain material requirements. The latter included a wardrobe satisfactory to employers and clothing specifically designed for sport and other recreational activities. The same woman purchased cosmetics, allowing her to mimick the appearance of Hollywood actresses and the models found in magazines.[288]

If "the working woman" had become a commonplace, many females failed to identify with the concept. Nellie Keen, former boarding-house keeper and candidate for the vacancy at Scarborough Allowance Post Office in July 1919, refused to see herself as a clerical worker in any guise, explaining: "although I am not what you can call *an office woman* (my emphasis) I used to do all the Keen's Books … before he (her husband) went to the war". Mrs Keen discounted the expectations surrounding the education and acquired abilities of working women, intimating that she hoped to pick up the necessary skills in "a couple of days".[289] Her alternative self-image bespoke the situation of many boarding-house proprietors, allowance postmistresses, and other women employed in "domestic" environments, where there was no clear demarcation between occupational and personal affairs. It is doubtful that Lucy Parkinson regarded herself as an office woman in the accepted sense. A "self-made woman", she only applied for the job of non-official postmistress at Baryulgil in 1903 after marrying and learning to read and write, running the post office alongside her boarding-house, grocery, butchery, and gold-buying business.[290] Arguably for Nellie Keen and Lucy Parkinson, the working or office woman was an exotic creature outside of their

[286] Reekie, 'Decently dressed?', pp. 98–100.
[287] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 155 & p. 156.
[288] Reekie, 'Decently dressed?', pp. 98–100.
[289] Letter from Nellie Keen, Scarborough P.O., 15 July 1919, C2593, GA244320, Scarborough.
[290] Unlike female office staff, Mrs Parkinson did not expect regular recreation leave, retiring after 45 years without having taken a holiday. See, 'First Holiday for 45 Years', *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 33, 15 January 1948, p. 10.

experience. Many women took a negative view of the latest developments in gender identity, arguing that females had un-sexed themselves by taking paid work and behaving in a worldly manner.[291] "Old-Fashioned", a reader of the women's magazine, *New Idea*, asserted that females who smoked and drank were unwholesome, their conduct antipathetic to a "true man's ideal of womanhood".[292] Despite community recognition of the concept and the media's fixation with the idea, "the working woman" met with less-than-universal acceptance.

Some country women viewed the latest thinking surrounding female beauty with a critical eye. From the later war years, interest in female reproductive health slowly gave way to an emphasis on physical appearance. Beauticians and women's magazines maintained that heavy outdoor labour, which exposed women to the elements, contributed to premature ageing. Job vacancies for women in small rural post offices provided for the change in feminine priorities and enabled poorer farmers to avoid the scorn of urban feminists contemptuous of men who put female kin to hard manual work around the property, with a consequent loss of feminine appeal.[293] In September 1925 farmer William McLennan wrote to Sir Austin Chapman M.P. on behalf of his married daughter, Mrs Harry Atkins, who looked to fill the vacancy at Bibbenluke Allowance Post Office.[294] At the time the agricultural recession caused by the postwar decline in commodity prices had a severe impact on farm incomes.[295] Despite the stress on female aesthetics, Mrs Atkins appears to have taken only passing notice of activist and media concern regarding outdoor work. In his letter to Chapman, her father explained that she planned to alternate her office duties with "a little dairying", if appointed.[296] Like Mrs Atkins, spinster Florence Watson viewed the opposition to farm work from an autonomous perspective, continuing the herd cows

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[291] Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle, 'Introduction', in Caine and Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian feminisms*, p. 9.

[292] 'Document 2.5, "Quasi-men or third sex?", contribution by "Old-Fashioned" to *New Idea*', in *ibid.*, p. 51.

[293] Heather Gunn, 'Women's bodies, 1924–1926: A site for rural politics', in Long (ed.) *et al.*, *Forging Identities*, p. 181, p. 182, p. 184 & p. 185.

[294] Letter from William McLennan, Bibbenluke, to Sir Austin Chapman, Parliament House, Melbourne, 2 September 1925, C2593, GA158, Bibbenluke, fol. 12 SEP 1926/GA 2206; & *pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by Henry Edward Atkins, 8 September 1925, *ibid.*

[295] War's end brought a drop in demand for food and natural fibres, while farm mechanisation contributed to over-production. In Australia the failure of soldier settlements – a consequence of small, uneconomic holdings, insufficient capital and farmer inexperience – exacerbated the agricultural downturn. See, Gunn, 'Women's bodies, 1924–1926', p. 181 & p. 182.

after taking charge of the Newrybar outlet in her father's name in July 1923.[297] Granted the risks associated with farm labour, some dairy women were comfortable with the idea of dual indoor and outdoor occupations, reasoning that limited exposure to sun, wind and rain would not greatly damage their appearance.[298] Such women negotiated changing cultural imperatives on their own terms.

The war and its immediate aftermath witnessed the consolidation of long-standing trends in the postal and telecommunications service. Regardless of the international conflict, female official employees remained a small minority in physical and remunerative terms beyond the Armistice. Despite a discriminatory reclassification process and the possibility of being made unattached, they preserved their niche in the departmental labour market as an ironic consequence of their industrial impotency – their dwindling numbers, the demise of the Victorian women's association, and the disintegration of the A.P.T.A. minimising their perceived threat to the male wage. Femininity as an employee attribute and the perpetuation of gender difference guaranteed women a place in the departmental workforce, albeit at the expense of genuine equality. While the unions were distracted by infighting and concerned for the future of telegraphy and for their *raison d'etat*, female official employees can be said to have retained their positions by default. In effect, the women's movement affirmed their secondary status by refusing to back Vida Goldstein's ongoing initiative to extend the reach of wage equality through legislation. Disagreement as to the most effective course of action, and the wide range of priorities across the movement, precluded the development of a unified and concerted approach to wage parity. These factors buttressed women's relative disadvantage in the department. For as long as older feminists refused to come to terms with the changes affecting young women, they lacked the authority to campaign for equality on their behalf. Consequently, ageing female official employees remained in their near-unique position – equal to male colleagues in law only. By depoliticising women and

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[296] Letter from William McLennan, Bibbenluke, to Sir Austin Chapman, Parliament House, Melbourne, 2 September 1925, C2593, GA158, Bibbenluke, fol. 12 SEP 1926/GA 2206.

[297] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by George William Watson, 4 July 1923, C2593, GA1336, Newrybar, fol. GA 23/196; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, George William Watson, on 4 July 1923, 5 July 1923, *ibid.*, fol. 10 JUL 1923/GA 1967.

distracting them from their immediate interests, Postal Institute membership reinforced the status *quo*. Arguably, marriage and renewed domestic obligations had a similar effect, directing attention away from paid work and towards the home. Throughout the war the Post Office remained receptive to public opinion, which, together with its regard for due process, informed the official response to accusations of disloyalty. In the case of allowance postmistresses, "immobility" continued to be a significant employment factor as veterans opted for the outdoor life or went in search of a more exciting occupation outside of the department.

The period tested the limits of many institutions. If the department expected women to adopt a sacrificial posture in wartime consistent with their gender, the selflessness they exhibited was neither unconditional nor open-ended. Rising prices and organisational and economic inequalities weakened the sacrificial resolve of some staff, causing the bureaucracy to resort to office closure and peer pressure in an attempt to enforce conformity. Despite the call for sacrifice, some women looked to their personal interests, capitalising on the war effort, industrial disputation, and their "neutral" standing to obtain pay rises. Others took advantage of their education and alternative employment opportunities to wring concessions from the department. During the conflict the passive role bestowed on women came under increased pressure as female workers struggled to protect their earnings and attempted to exploit their growing marketability. If not overtly political in their actions, some women exhibited a measure of political sensitivity in negotiating an independent course between warring factions. From the mid 1920s, the male-oriented family wage was no longer unassailable, as activists conspired to exchange it for welfare benefits that would have stripped it of its reason for being. As a result of war, the old system of patronage yielded under the weight of the veteran preference system and a revised set of moral values. Henceforth, war pensioners vied with females for undemanding "women's work" outside the legislative framework underpinning the male wage. Over time, army nurses and male "civilians" tried to extend the parameters of veteran preference and, with it, popular understanding of the Anzac tradition. The preferential system frequently proved incapable of meeting the utility's operational needs, the physical, mental and attitudinal shortcomings of ex-servicemen ensuing that proficient

[298] Gunn, 'Women's bodies, 1924–1926', p. 186 & p. 187.

women retained a presence in the department. Meanwhile, the department's interest in efficiency highlighted the practical limits of state paternalism. Elsewhere, efforts to contain overheads eroded women's long-standing claim to allowance/non-official employment by placing a premium on a second income. Thanks to the notion of a calling, the department and many male members of staff cast aside the traditional perception of older spinsters as incidental or aberrant, recognising their employee qualities and personal worth. In some cases the economic sovereignty of married women caused the bureaucracy to reassess its decades-old opposition to working wives. As a result a few women achieved independent employee status. Contemporaneously, the accepted right of the employer to regulate staff as he saw fit was constrained by female economic power and a heightened awareness of the value of workers' time. On another level, the individual's personal reading of popular culture tested the limits of 'working woman' ideology and concern for physical appearance. Over the period some institutions and concepts proved their durability, while others were found wanting.

Chapter Six: The Depression Years, 1929–1938

In this, the final chapter, I deal with the condition of female P.M.G. Department employees in N.S.W. from October 1929 and the "Wall Street Crash", to the close of December 1938, by which time women had been employed in that state's postal service for a full 100 years. I consider the impact of the Great Depression on employment, the effects of the departmental austerity programme, and the heightened opposition to working women. Additionally, my study covers the increased emphasis on commercial expertise and the media's growing influence in staff appointments. I return to themes canvassed in previous chapters, including sacrificial womanhood, the "sedentary" character of postal duties, and the post office as female space. My work also takes into account the latest developments with respect to patronage, female domesticity, respectability and employee attributes. Similarly, I revisit the issue of workplace equality and the department's overarching interest in the male breadwinner, while assessing the bureaucracy's willingness to treat women performing paid and unpaid duties as autonomous workers.

Revisionist historiography of the period has sought to correct popular misconceptions surrounding the Great Depression. Peter Spearrit criticises 'simplistic' treatments of the era that document widespread, if not universal, distress and economic impotency in the working population, arguing for a multi-class approach to the subject that recognises the presence of fortuitous forces and a personal capacity for agency.[1] He suggests that for people lucky enough to remain in employment, the economic downturn was relatively inconsequential, noting that real wages were generally stable or above the historical trend, thanks to a reduction in the price of goods and labour. Like Spearrit, Judy Mackinolty takes a nuanced view of the depression, stressing that it had an uneven impact on individuals. While acknowledging the high level of

[1] Spearrit finds fault in Wendy Lowenstein and Ray Broomhill's interpretations of the era. They present a monolithic picture of distress in which individuals are seen as passive or reactive victims of the economic downturn, rather than active protagonists in a fluid environment. See, Peter Spearrit, 'Mythology of the Depression', in Judy Mackinolty (ed.), *The Wasted Years? Australia's Great Depression*, North Sydney, George Allen & Unwin, 1981 p. 7; Wendy Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour: An oral record of the 1930s depression in Australia*, Melbourne, Hyland House, 1978; Ray Broomhill, *Unemployed Workers: a Social History of the Great Depression in Adelaide*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1978; & Nadia Wheatley, 'The disinherited of the Earth', in MacKinolty (ed.), *The Wasted Years?*, p. 28 & p. 38.

unemployment, she notes that most self-employed professionals survived the downturn, and that smaller investors suffered a partial, rather than catastrophic, loss of income due to declining returns on shares and property. She points out that many women remained outside the labour market, whether by choice or circumstance, working as unpaid helpers in family businesses or on family farms.[2] David Potts argues that contemporary media accounts of hardship did not accurately reflect the experience of most people. He draws attention to ongoing employment for most workers, an overall improvement in community health, and declining death rates.[3] It is in this context that I examine the treatment of P.M.G. Department staff during the period, employment conditions in general, and the situation of individual women.

In considering the response of workers to the austerity measures introduced by government to counter the economic crisis, I take account of the literature dealing with female attitudes at the time. Judy Mackinolty maintains that most women adopted a sacrificial, stoic or self-effacing mentality in the face of widespread male unemployment and mounting hostility towards female labour. According to her thesis, women believed that men were more severely affected by joblessness, given the emphasis on male self-sufficiency and the threat posed by domestic confinement to the male self-image.[4] Wendy Lowenstein shares Mackinolty's view of women in Depression-era Australia. She cites selfless working wives who, in an effort to protect the dignity of their unemployed housebound husbands, continued to perform home duties after a hard day's labour, rather than ask them to help.[5] Janie Stone challenges the model of passive, sacrificial womanhood. She points to militant female factory workers who took independent industrial action to protect their terms of employment

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[2] Mackinolty stresses that, although many professional people such as lawyers, doctors, dentists and pharmacists experienced a drop in income, most were "relatively unaffected" by the depression, provided they managed to stay in business. See, Judy Mackinolty, '"Woman's place…" the Position of Australian women during the Great Depression', in *ibid.*, p. 95, p. 96 & p. 98.

[3] David Potts, *The Myth of the Great Depression*, Carlton North, Scribe Publications, 2006, p. 1, p. 2, p. 9, p. 43, p. 49 & p. 90.

[4] Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 95. Female auxiliaries attached to mining unions tried to minimise the harm done to the ego of unemployed or striking miners by offering assistance to their wives rather than to the men themselves. See, Leanne Blackley, "You didn't admit that you were hard up" – Working Class Notions of Moral Community in Wollongong, 1921–1954', in Raymond Markey (ed.), *Labour and Community: Historical Essays*, Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 2001, p. 137.

[5] Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 2.

in response to cutbacks.[6] Stone effectively disputes the argument posited by Judy Mackinolty, Anne Summers and Margaret Power that women buttressed the status *quo* in difficult economic times, minimising the possibility of political and social upheaval by their acquiescence.[7] With these contrasting views in mind, I look at the role of female employees in subsidising departmental operations, as well as their protests over wage cuts and changes to duties.[8]

My investigation of the employment options open to women in the P.M.G. Department during the Great Depression engages with the forces both conducive and hostile to female economic independence inside and outside of the service. I examine the impact of government economy measures, the stress on salesmanship and business acumen, and the trade in non-official outlets. Likewise, I consider the bureaucracy's relationship with the media, and the department's residual regard for widows and single women, despite its fixation with the male wage and interest in veteran welfare. Particular attention is paid to concern in the department and community for ageing spinsters. Then, older single working women were often treated as objects of pity, notwithstanding recent recognition of their achievements and their right to an independent and worthwhile existence.[9] Contemporaneously, I discuss the decline in respectability as an employment criterion and the conservative backlash against "modern" women. On the subject of respectability, Catriona Elder stresses that, despite the revised code of conduct portrayed in film and magazines, women were left to formulate their own version of personal morality.[10] In addition, I look at the demographic, economic and social factors that saw young females gravitate to the "sedentary" occupation of country postmistress and continue to reside with parents.

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[6] Stone refers to instances of industrial action taken by women, including a strike in August 1932 by Victorian textile workers after a 15% cut in wages, and a protest a year later by women in Orange and Goulburn against an award reduction, 'speeding-up', and night work. See, Janey Stone, 'Brazen hussies and God's police: Fighting back in the depression years', in Sandra Bloodworth and Tom O'Lincoln (eds), *Rebel Women in Australian working class history*, Richmond East, Interventions, 1998, p. 50 & p. 51.

[7] See, *ibid.*, p. 40. Stone posits the presence of an independent political consciousness among working women. See, Sandra Bloodworth and Tom O'Lincoln, 'Introduction', in Bloodworth and O'Lincoln (eds), *Rebel Women*, p. 17; Stone, 'Brazen hussies and God's police', in *ibid.*, pp. 44–48; & Joy Damousi, *Women Come Rally: Socialism and Gender in Australia 1890–1955*, Melbourne, Cambridge U.P., 1994, p. 5, p. 16 & p. 17.

[8] Wheatley, 'The disinherited of the Earth', pp. 28–38.

[9] Catriona Elder, '"The Question of the Unmarried": Some Meanings of Being Single in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s', *Australian Feminist Studies*, no. 18, Summer 1993, pp. 157–165.

[10] *ibid.*, p. 155.

The life they led contrasted with contemporary representations of young, mobile, urban-based women who enjoyed physical, economic and sexual autonomy.[11]

In reviewing the situation of female Post Office employees with respect to gender equality, I address staff attrition and cheap feminised labour, unpaid work in non-official offices, and the attention paid to employee personality. I also consider membership of the Postal Institute, union preoccupations, disunity in the women's movement, and the renewed focus on marriage and domesticity. My analysis of efforts to achieve parity in the workplace deals with the change in feminist tactics over time. Increasingly, women's groups stressed the sameness of the sexes, placing less emphasis on gender difference after it was identified as an obstacle in the quest for equality.[12]

Economic Crisis and Cost Saving

The Great Depression precipitated a dramatic downturn in postal and telecommunications business. During the financial year 1930–31, the total number of mails handled by the P.M.G. Department nationwide decreased by 8.58% compared with the previous 12 months. Over the same period, parcel volumes dropped by 29.98%, while C.O.D. business fell by 16.35%.[13] The decline in commercial activity also brought about a reduction in money order receipts in 1930–31, the number and value of orders falling by 10.56% and 9.50%, respectively, compared with 1929–30. Meanwhile, postal note sales waned by 7.48%, while the value of notes contracted by

[11] The young, mobile, urban-based women included outdoor adventurers and indoor-oriented funseekers. See, *ibid.*, pp. 153–156.

[12] Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1999, pp. 168–179. Despite the stress on gender sameness, several Australian women writers still subscribed to maternal citizenship. They rejected the competitive, "male" model of human development that had informed the wage parity debate up until that time and had led to war and economic excess. The women proposed, as an alternative, a co-operative, "female" model that promoted feminine softness and moderation. See, Drusilla Modjeska, 'Rooms of their own: the Domestic Situation of Australian Women Writers between the Wars', in Elizabeth Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Class and History: Feminist Perspectives on Australia 1788–1978*, Sydney, Fontana Collins, 1980, p. 336.

[13] *Postmaster-General's Department*, *Twenty-First Annual Report, 1930–1931*, Canberra, 1932, p. 7. Only a rise in postal charges from 4 August 1930 enabled Postal Branch earnings to be maintained. See, *ibid.*, p. 6 & p. 11.

8.57%.[14] More importantly, the economic malaise made for a decline in telegraph traffic, the number of telegrams transmitted within Australia shrinking by 3.80% in 1929–30, and by 17.42% in 1930–31.[15] The downturn also brought a rash of telephone cancellations as business houses looked to cut costs, and householders dispensed with what now appeared to be an unnecessary luxury. For the first time on record, disconnections exceeded connections.[16] The cancellation of services and the tendency among thrifty subscribers to make fewer and shorter calls translated into a 5% reduction in telephone revenue for the financial year 1930–31.[17]

The economic downturn witnessed a contraction in the demand for labour. With an eye to containing expenditure in hard times, Chief Office placed restrictions on the recruitment of official and non-official employees, left vacancies unfilled wherever possible, and dismissed many temporary members of staff.[18] At the same time, it limited the need for workers by closing or downgrading several marginal outlets. In N.S.W., two official establishments, one semi-official facility, and a net total of 19 non-official offices shut their doors in the financial year 1929–1930.[19] In 1930–31 the department closed five official offices, one semi-official outlet, and no less than 128 non-official amenities (net). With economies in mind, senior management imposed an embargo on the opening of new facilities, except where they were absolutely necessary.[20]

Official employees endured a decline in their terms of employment during the Great Depression. In July 1931 federal parliament passed the Financial Emergency Act in an effort to minimise government spending. As a result of the legislation, Commonwealth public servants earning up to 250 pounds a year had their salaries cut

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[14] *ibid.*, p. 8.
[15] The number of overseas telegrams decreased by a similar magnitude. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Twentieth Annual Report, 1929–30*, Canberra, 1929–30–31, p. 15; & *Postmaster-General's Department*, *Twenty-First Annual Report, 1930–1931*, p. 19.
[16] *ibid.*, p. 16.
[17] *ibid.*, p. 6.
[18] *ibid.*, p. 14 & p. 15.
[19] In the financial year 1929–1930, 33 non-official facilities were abolished and 14 opened. Closures were partly offset by a net increase of 23 telephone offices, several having been converted from unprofitable non-official outlets. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Twentieth Annual Report, 1929–30*, p. 6.
[20] In 1930–1931 the department closed 132 non-official outlets in N.S.W. and opened four. In the same period, it established a net total of 40 telephone offices. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty–First Annual Report, 1930–1931*, p. 6.

by 18%, while officers receiving between 250 and 1000 pounds p.a. suffered a 20% reduction.[21] Permanent staff drawing up to 745 pounds p.a. had already experienced a salary cut from April 1931 after a drop in the price of goods and labour. Under the cost-of-living provisions, adult males and married minors had 18 pounds deducted from their annual earnings, while adult women were paid 12 pounds less a year.[22] Ethel Cox, Postmistress Grade III at Maclean, saw her salary drop from 416 pounds to about 321 pounds four shillings p.a. Similarly, Stella Waddell, Postal Assistant (Female) Grade 2 at the George Street West office, had her wage reduced from 182 pounds to around 138 pounds 15 shillings a year.[23] To contain overheads, Chief Office required workers to take time off in lieu of overtime pay and exhaust accumulated leave before retirement.[24]

In deference to the dire economic situation, the P.M.G. Department also trimmed the wages of non-official staff. Under the Financial Emergency Act, postmasters and postmistresses suffered a cut in scale rates from July 1931, employees earning up to 25 pounds a year experiencing a 2.5% reduction, those on 50 pounds p.a. a 5% reduction. For each additional 50 pounds or part thereof beyond the latter threshold, the department imposed a further 1% cut, someone on 150 pounds a year incurring a 7% loss in earnings.[25] Looking to further reduce costs, Head Office reviewed telegram delivery allowances. Under the revised payments schedule, Lily Black, Postmistress

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[21] The Financial Emergency Act gained assent on 17 July 1931. See, 'Reduction of Wages of Service Employees', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 11, 27 July 1931, p. 1. The federal government introduced the austerity measures following a conference of state premiers and treasurers in late May 1931. At the meeting it was proposed that wages and pensions be cut by 20%, a resolution approved on 2 June 1931. See, 'Passing Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 10, 26 June 1931, p. 1.

[22] Single officers under 21 had their wages reduced by nine pounds p.a., while temporary and exempt employees in official establishments experienced similar cuts. See, P.S.B. Circ. No. 1931/3 from F. G. Thorpe, Sec., Public Service Board of Commissioners, Canberra, F.C.T., to all Departments, 24 April 1931, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G.31/47, 1/76, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

[23] No definitive lists of permanent officers of the Commonwealth Public Service were printed for the years 1929 to 1933. Salary details were extracted from lists published in November 1934 after the restoration of former wage rates. The cuts under the Financial Emergency Act and the cost-of-living provisions were deducted from the salaries of Miss Cox and Miss Waddell as at 30 June 1934 to arrive at the approximate reductions imposed in 1931. The women received about 333 pounds four shillings p.a. and 150 pounds 15 shillings p.a., respectively, prior to removal of the 12 pound annual cost-of-living adjustment. See, *List of Permanent Officers of the Postmaster-General's Department (Excluding the Central Staff) in the Commonwealth Public Service as at 30th June 1934*, Melbourne, 23 November 1934, p. 212 & p. 228.

[24] 'Australian Federation of Postal Unions', report of meeting held on 30 September 1931, *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 14, 26 October 1931, p. 6.

at Blacktown, received 10 pounds less a year to dispense telegrams, while Ida Hurley at Austinmer had to accept six pounds ten shillings less p.a. for the same duty.[26] For the sake of economy, the department transferred some tasks performed by non-official staff, including the clearance of posting boxes outside offices and the collection of unprocessed mail, to official personnel at the former's expense. In August 1930 Miss W. Wych, Postmistress at Lilyfield, had her allowance trimmed from 45 pounds to 31 pounds 10 shillings a year after the inspectorate arranged for postmen from Rozelle Post and Telegraph Office to clear the receptacle outside her premises, collect all registered parcels and newspapers lodged over the counter, and deliver the material to the larger centre for date stamping. Previously, Miss Wych had emptied the box herself, date-stamped the mail, and tied the letters in a bundle before passing them to Rozelle staff.[27] In short, the department required non-official employees to share liability for its losses.

Employment constraints and wage cuts constituted part of a larger effort to ameliorate the worst effects of the depression. With a view to shoring up revenue flow, Chief Office increased postal charges from 4 August 1930 and intensified its telephone marketing campaign in an attempt to generate new business and persuade customers to retain their connections.[28] To minimise costs the department suspended mail deliveries on public holidays and reduced the number of telephone directories issued to country customers from two to one a year.[29] Office construction was curtailed and repairs suspended, except in cases where efficiency might be compromised.[30] For financial reasons, the department also placed in abeyance the further development of

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[25] Circ. Memo No. 7048, Addendum No. 2, from H. P. Brown, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne, C.2, to D.P.I., Kempsey, 20 July 1931, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G.4518/31, 3/21, 1/76, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

[26] Mrs Black's delivery allowance was reduced from 30 pounds to 20 pounds p.a. See, statement from Lily Black, "Postmaster", addressed to D.P.I., Metro No. 2, 24 June 1931, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. GA 31/1527. Miss Hurley's payment was cut from 39 pounds to 32 pounds 10 shillings p.a. See, note from C. Tidswell, D.I., Metro No. 4, to Acting Snr I., 1 July 1931, C2593, GA225656, Austinmer, fol. 4 JUL 1931/GA 1548.

[27] Memo from A. P. Westhoven, Accountant, Expenditure Section, Accounts Branch, to Acting P.I., Metro No. 1, 21 July 1930, C2593, GA1060, Lilyfield; letter from J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, to Pms, Lilyfield, 19 August 1930, *ibid.*, fol. GA 30/1653; memo from Acting Insp., Metro No. 1, G.P.O., Sydney, to Pmr, Rozelle, 15 July 1930, *ibid.*, fol. Ga 30/1653; & memo from Acting Insp., Metro No. 1, to Snr I., 17 July 1930, *ibid*., fol. Ga 30/1653.

[28] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-First Annual Report, 1930–1931*, p. 11 & p. 17.

[29] *ibid.*, p. 14 & p. 17.

[30] Circ. Memo No. 6927 from J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, P.M.G. Dept, G.P.O., Sydney, to D.I., Kempsey, 29 April 1930, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G.30/694, 1/73–1/76, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

many telecommunications services.[31] From April 1930 it imposed a temporary ban on the purchase of new furniture and deferred orders for more office machines in view of the unfavourable exchange rate and the nation's poor balance of payments.[32] In cases where replacements were unavoidable, Australian-made products were to be acquired wherever possible.[33]

Another Call for Sacrifice

Recalling the situation in wartime, the P.M.G. Department prevailed on employees and the community to forego their immediate concerns for the sake of the nation. Under pressure from the banks and the press to cut government expenditure, Labor Prime Minister James Scullin argued that the salary reductions and other austerity measures were vital if the country was to avoid defaulting on its loans and lose its creditworthiness – a scenario that would inevitably result in even greater hardship. Calling for sacrifice and unity of purpose in the federal public service, Scullin pointed to farmers, manufacturers, businessmen, private-sector employees, and pensioners who had already been financially disadvantaged by the depression.[34] Harry Brown, Director-General, Posts and Telegraphs (formerly Departmental Secretary), echoed the Prime Minister's appeal to the better nature of employees. For example, in October 1934 he proposed that non-official personnel be required to provide an uninterrupted telephone switchboard service between 9 am and 6 pm at no extra cost to the department in instances where traffic volumes did not warrant extended or continuous exchange provisions.[35] N.S.W. Deputy Director J. W. Kitto had already

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[31] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Second Annual Report, 1931–1932*, Canberra, 1933, p. 13.

[32] Circ. Memo No. 6927 from J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, P.M.G. Dept, G.P.O., Sydney, to D.I., Kempsey, 29 April 1930, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G.30/694, 1/73–1/76, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

[33] Circ. Memo No. 6954/1/2 from S. C. Francis, Snr I., Inspection Branch, G.P.O., Sydney, to D.I., Kempsey, 9 July 1930, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, 1/74, 6951–6990, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney. With savings in mind, the department instructed staff to use both sides of the paper when typing, and to recycle obsolete forms as backing paper for files. See, Circ. Memo N.S.W. No. 7013 from S. C. Francis, Snr I., Inspection Branch, G.P.O. Sydney, to D.I., Kempsey, 27 November 1930, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, GB'30/2460, 1/75, 6991–7025, N.A.A., Sydney.

[34] 'Reduction of Wages of Service Employees', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 11, 27 July 1931, pp. 1–4. The Arbitration Court had already cut the wages of many private sector workers by 10%, and the salaries of state public servants had been reduced by between 5% and 11%. See, Gerald E. Caiden, *Career Service: An Introduction to the History of Personnel Administration in the Commonwealth Public Service of Australia 1901–1961*, Carlton, Melbourne U.P., 1965, p. 225.

[35] Circ. Memo No. 7198 from H. P. Brown, Director-General, P.M.G. Dept, Melbourne, C.2, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, 19 October 1934, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G.34/8663, A34/3288, 1/81, 7191–7230, 1933–1934, N.A.A., Sydney. By 1934 the economy had

called on communities to put the national interest before their own. Rejecting overtures in April 1932 from residents wanting a non-official office established in the Sydney suburb of Allawah, Kitto drew attention to the sacrifice being made by country customers who had seen their uneconomic postal outlet closed and now had to travel long distances for departmental services. He noted that metropolitan areas had been spared the worst of the cutbacks since fewer savings were to be made in the cities.[36]

Whereas the department's official employees had been generally accepting of wartime privations, their unions initially refused to embrace the sacrifices expected of members in the depressed economic environment. On 29 June 1931, the public-service staff associations held a mass meeting at St James Hall in Sydney to denounce the proposed salary reductions.[37] The unions argued that the cuts would diminish the purchasing power of members, further reduce business activity, and fuel unemployment. They also protested that lower salaries would restrict the ability of workers to contribute to superannuation schemes, erode the value of their retirement pensions, and encourage private enterprise to impose additional wage cuts.[38] The Australian Postal Clerks' Union claimed that the planned reductions were unfair, challenging the Prime Minister's assertion that the load would be borne by all Australians. It noted that Commonwealth Bank officers, who were more highly paid than public servants, had only experienced a 10% decrease in salary.[39] For the sake of equity, the union's federal executive wanted the Financial Emergency Act deferred until the banks – vocal proponents of the wage cuts – lowered their interest and

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already begun to recover. The former Secretary of the Postmaster-General's Department, Harry Brown, assumed the title of Director-General, Posts and Telegraphs, in approximately 1934. See, 'Sir Harry Brown', *North Shore Times*, 14 June 1967 (cutting, no page number, detached).

[36] Report of deputation from Allawah Progress Association introduced by Albert Lane M.H.R., and consisting of Mr Bunting, President, Dr Shallard and Alderman Ferry, waiting on Dep. Director, with reply by J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, 18 April 1932, C2593, GA21, Allawah, fol. 15 JUN 1932/GA 1225, p. 4.

[37] 'Reduction of Wages of Service Employees', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 11, 27 July 1931, pp. 1–4.

[38] *ibid*., p. 5. For some time the *Sydney Morning Herald* had pressed for a cut in departmental salaries, alleging staff inefficiency and incompetence. See, 'The Same Old Lies', 'letter from "H.O."', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 100, 26 August 1930, p. 20.

[39] 'Passing Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 13, 26 September 1931, p. 1.

mortgage rates.[40] From the associations' perspective, sacrifice was impossible unless all parties accepted an equal share of the burden.

Some non-official staff protested against the rationalisation of outlets and the allowance reductions on the grounds of fairness and on the strength of their commitment to the service. In May 1931 Elsie Cleveland, "assistant" at Lugarno, wrote to J. T. Tully M.H.R. regarding the department's plan to close the postal outlet while continuing to operate a manual telephone exchange from the building. Under the new arrangement, she was expected to provide a switchboard and post-bag service to residents without payment, except for a small commission on stamp sales. Mrs Cleveland appealed for equity in the matter and emphasised her commitment to the business: "Now, Sir, I have had this office for five years and have done my best to work it up and now to come at asking me to do it for nothing I consider a bit over the odds".[41] Miss W. Wych, Postmistress at Lilyfield, expressed similar sentiments in a letter to federal politician E. G. Theodore of August 1930. She felt that the cut to her wage was "most unfair" and pointed to her family's decades-old investment in the postal amenity: "We have had this Office for 30 years … That is all the consideration give [*sic*] for faithful & long service. The salary should have been increased instead of decreased".[42] For workers with a substantial financial and long-standing familial stake in the department, the economies amounted to a loss of faith.

A few non-official employees opposed the austerity regime on the basis that they were being asked to subsidise official operations. Aggrieved by the loss of income caused by the withdrawal of her box-clearing duties, Miss Wych suggested that non-official facilities were propping up the postal service. In her letter to E. G. Theodore M.P., Lilyfield's postmistress likened her outlet to a departmental establishment: "It is almost the same as an Official Office with the exception of money-order and no delivery from here". She went on to stress her remaining responsibilities, which

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[40] *ibid.*, p. 2. The unions expressed frustration with banks that were slow to reduce interest on advances under the financial emergency plan. See, *Postal Advocate*, vol. VI, no. 8, 15 August 1931, p. 2.
[41] Transcript of letter from Mrs Cleveland, P.O., Lugarno, to Mr Tully M.H.R., 27 May 1931, C2593, GA111, Lugarno, fol. NSW 31/748.
[42] Letter from V. C. Bagot, Commonwealth Treasury, Canberra, F.C.T., to J. W. Kitto, Director of Postal Services, Sydney, N.S.W., 4 September 1930, enclosing letter from Miss W. Wych, Pms, Lilyfield, to E. G. Theodore M.P, 25 August 1930, C2593, GA1060, Lilyfield, fol. 5 SEP 1930/GA 1850.

included the receipt of mail lodged with her in readiness for the thrice-daily collection.[43] Robert Lowe, Postmaster at Lower Portland, maintained that non-official employees were underwriting the regulated wage-fixing system enjoyed by official staff. As a result of the Financial Emergency Act, his allowance had shrunk from 158 pounds 10 shillings to 145 pounds 15 shillings a year, dropping further to 105 pounds p.a. following a contraction in local business activity. In a letter to the department of September 1932, Lowe argued that it was unfair that non-official employees should be subject to the austerity legislation, given that their wages were not linked to an independent award, unlike those of official personnel.[44] While Lowe and other non-official staff were forced to accept *ad hoc*, non-negotiable scale rates, permanent officers had their salaries determined by the Public Service Arbitrator and Public Service Board. The latter took into consideration union concerns for the maintenance of annual increments and cost-of-living adjustments, irrespective of office takings.[45] Typically self-employed small business people, non-official postmasters and postmistresses fell outside the ambit of most staff associations, placing them at considerable economic disadvantage. The 1933 census highlighted the financial situation of individuals working for themselves. It revealed that over 44% of self-employed women earned less than 52 pounds in the previous year, while a further 29% took between 52 pounds and 103 pounds p.a.[46] Accordingly, many small shopkeepers lived in constant fear of descending into the ranks of 'wage slaves'.[47] For a number of non-official employees, sacrifice meant carrying departmental services.

Despite dissent, most workers tolerated the economies, fearing the imposition of harsher measures if they rejected them. Responding to the banks' ultimatum to approve the Financial Emergency Bill or lose access to credit, the federal government rushed through the legislation before the unions could mobilise an effective

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[43] *loc. cit., ibid.*

[44] Lowe observed that non-official staff had never enjoyed the benefits that were only now being denied to permanent officers as a result of the Financial Emergency Act. See, letter from Robert Lowe, Pmr, Lower Portland, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, Sydney, 21 September 1932, C2593, GA1104, Lower Portland.

[45] Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 157, p. 158 & p. 167.

[46] Mackinolty notes that many self-employed women, including shopkeepers, tea-room proprietors, dressmakers, milliners, hairdressers and music teachers, barely made a living. See, Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 101.

[47] Stuart Macintyre argues that shopkeepers, minor professionals and salary earners with incomes of between 200 pounds and 500 pounds p.a. constituted the 'anxious class' – a group that lived in constant

opposition.[48] The union hierarchy grudgingly consented to the salary reductions, worried that members would be exposed to more severe cutbacks if it failed to acquiesce. It feared that by rejecting the economies, the staff associations would be excluded from future negotiations, leaving the government, the Public Service Board, and the Public Service Arbitrator free to manage the public payroll as they wished.[49] The opposition Nationalist Party could be counted on to inflict heavier penalties on what it saw as a privileged class of employees, given that workers in private enterprise had already experienced a 10% cut in the basic wage.[50] Accordingly, permanent officers lodged relatively few complaints regarding reduced salaries over the ensuing months and years. As for allowance personnel, an examination of 40 odd non-official offices uncovered just four grievances.[51] Hence, in the Annual Report of 1930–31 (published in 1932), Postmaster-General J. E. Fenton could claim, somewhat simplistically, that staff had exhibited a "remarkable spirit of co-operation and responsiveness" in relation to the austerity programme.[52]

The financial sacrifices borne by other Australians may have rendered P.M.G. Department employees more receptive to government economies. To reduce employer overheads, the Commonwealth Arbitration Court cut the basic wage for private sector workers under federal awards by 19 shillings and six pence a week, or 50 pounds 14 shillings p.a., effective from 1 August 1932.[53] Around the same time, the State

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dread of social decline. See, Erik Eklund, 'The "Anxious Class"?: Storekeepers and the Working Class in Australia 1900–1940,' in Markey (ed.), *Labour & Community*, p. 224.

[48] 'Passing Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 12, 21 August 1931, p. 1.

[49] John S. Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions: A History of the Telegraphist and Postal Clerk Unions of Australia*, Sydney, Union of Postal Clerks and Telegraphists, 1980, p. 211. The public sector unions accepted their lot, anxious not to give government an excuse to lay off more staff. They feared the possible consequences of direct action, such as imprisonment and social anarchy. See, Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 231.

[50] 'Passing Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 15, 26 November 1931, p. 1.

[51] An examination of union publications from the period suggests that staff associations were more concerned with divisions between and within organisations, and with questions of employee status, than with pay *per se*. Complaints from non-official staff regarding wage cuts and changes to duties were confined to the Lilyfield, Lower Portland, Lugarno and Rocky Glen offices. The balance of outlets examined were: Adjungbilly, Albion Park, Allawah, Annangrove, Asquith, Auburn North, Austinmer, Avoca Beach, Banksia, Barringun, Bellambi, Berowra, Bigga, Blacktown, Blaxland, Bonville, Brighton le Sands, Carlton, Clemton Park, Coledale, Dover Heights, Eastern Creek, Eureka, Homebush West, Manahan, Milparinka, Mount Colah, Newrybar, Normanhurst, Northmead, Oakdale, Pelaw Main, South Bathurst, Sutton, Wamberal and Wongarbon.

[52] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-First Annual Report, 1930–1931*, p. 15.

[53] The basic wage under federal awards was based on the circumstances of workers in the six capital cities. The Arbitration Court had already imposed a 10% cut in real wages in February 1931, along with a nominal 13% reduction due to the declining cost of living. See, 'Survey of Conditions In

Industrial Commission fixed the adult male basic wage at three pounds 10 shillings a week, or 182 pounds p.a. The new award represented a reduction of 12 shillings and six pence a week, or 32 pounds 10 shillings p.a., with respect to the Commission's previous declaration of December 1929.[54] Under the Financial Emergency Act, all old-age and invalid pensioners received two shillings and six pence less a week. The same legislation saw the maternity allowance cut from five pounds to four pounds, couples with combined incomes exceeding 260 pounds p.a. losing the benefit. In addition, the government asked consumers to absorb an increase in sales tax from 2.5% to 5% on all imports and on goods made on or after 11 July 1931 in an attempt to improve the nation's balance of payments.[55]

While the spectre of unemployment loomed large, most departmental employees could be expected to countenance the austerity programme. Trade union statistics indicate that the number of unemployed rose significantly from 1930, peaking in 1932, when 29% of all unionists lacked jobs. Over the next five years, the labour market remained weak, if relatively stable.[56] In N.S.W., 32,800 women, or 43.3% of the total female workforce, were unemployed, compared with 27.5% of male workers.[57] The 1933 census indicated that just 0.64% of women were employers in their own right, and only 1.55% worked for themselves.[58] Without an independent income, most jobless women had to return to domestic life.[59] In the circumstances job security had priority over a satisfactory wage rate.

The prospect of unemployment appeared all the more awful for the lack of adequate relief provisions. In the early years of the Great Depression, the federal Labor

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Outside Industries', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 26, 26 October 1932, p. 22 ; & 'Editorial Notes', *Postal Advocate*, vol. VI, no. 8, 15 August 1931, p. 1.

[54] 'Survey of Conditions In Outside Industries ', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 26, 26 October 1932, p. 22.

[55] Furthermore, the government proposed to raise the super-tax on property from 7.5% to 10%. See, *Postal Advocate*, vol. VI, no. 8, 15 August 1931, p. 7 & p. 8.

[56] G. D. Snooks, '"Robbing Peter to Pay Paul": Australian Unemployment Relief in the Thirties', Working Paper No. 41, Paper N for the Conference on the Recovery from the Depression in the1930s convened by the Dept of Economic History and the Centre for Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, August 1985, p. 2.

[57] *ibid.*, p. 18.

[58] The 1933 survey revealed that, while 12.33% of females were wage or salary earners, only 0.18% had apprenticeships. Another 0.82% worked part time only. See, Mackinolty, "Woman's place...", p. 95.

[59] A small minority of unemployed women became voluntary fundraisers or welfare workers for charities and trade union auxiliaries. Blackley, "You didn't admit that you were hard up", pp. 133–137.

government intentionally limited unemployment assistance in an attempt to balance the budget and facilitate the repayment of overseas loans.[60] Those relief projects initiated by the administration were financed from consolidated revenue.[61] Large-scale 'reproductive' projects calculated to meet interest and sinking fund charges eventually won approval, however insufficient capital investment prevented them from expanding much beyond 1931.[62] A range of Commonwealth, state and local government instrumentalities, as well as several residents' organisations, operated training schemes for the unemployed. However, few programmes were suitable for females because of an emphasis on heavy manual labour. What job training existed for women was restricted to short-term instruction in factory work, domestic service, office duties, dressmaking, and commercial skills such as ticket writing.[63] Administrative changes and an arbitrary approach to assistance undercut the efficiency and effectiveness of relief programmes. Set up in September 1932 to co-ordinate initiatives, the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Employment was abolished in November 1934, its brief passing to the Under-Secretary for Employment. The shift in bureaucratic responsibility undermined efforts to maximise the efficacy of job-creation projects and ensure continuity of policy. In many small towns, policemen were enlisted to dispense relief, frequently complicating the delivery of services.[64]

Blessed with a full week's work and a regular income, female departmental employees might have been expected to tolerate economies at a time when underemployment was commonplace. In an attempt to minimise joblessness, many employers prevailed on female workers to share positions and hours among

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[60] The unwillingness of Australian banks to finance debt expenditure, an embargo on overseas advances until 1933, and demands in the Senate for strict economy contributed to an overarching concern for thrift. See, Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 7 & p. 8.
[61] Snooks, '"Robbing Peter to Pay Paul"', p. 3 & p. 4.
[62] *ibid.*, p. 9. Prior to the introduction of substantial work relief programmes, federal help for the unemployed was generally confined to food assistance. In the financial year 1930–1931, work relief schemes grew by 81.7% compared with the previous 12 months. The programmes declined from 1932 until 1935–36, after which they remained at around the same level of activity until 1939. See, *ibid.*, p. 3 & p. 9.
[63] In N.S.W., 8,000 women found intermittent paid work in sewing depots supplying clothing to charity. Another 400 to 600 females worked two half days a week for food and ten shillings in the hand. See, *ibid.*, p. 18. Anne Summers stresses that the relief work available to women was ultimately unproductive in only dealing with the immediate symptoms of the economic crisis, rather than addressing the underlying causes. See, Stone, 'Brazen hussies and God's police', p. 43.
[64] The Under-Secretary for Employment resigned in February 1936, further compromising endeavours to co-ordinate relief. See, Snooks, '"Robbing Peter to Pay Paul"', p. 5 & p. 6.

themselves at the cost of take-home pay. While the Commonwealth Public Service chose not to adopt the practice, job rationing could be found in domestic service, in clothing and textile factories, and in retail stores and commercial offices. A number of factory owners compounded the problem of underemployment by laying off workers at short notice in response to cancelled or fluctuating orders.[65]

Arguably, the conviction that the sacrifice asked of Australians would be of finite duration enabled P.M.G. Department employees to endure their lot. Prime Minister Scullin opined that the depression and the austerity regime would be relatively short lived, confidently anticipating the reinstatement of casual and exempt workers in due course.[66] Postmaster-General J. E. Fenton suggested that the downturn in earnings was a temporary aberration, implying that staff could expect better times ahead. He predicted that most people who had disconnected their telephones would want them reconnected once the economic situation improved.[67] Although the delegates to the preliminary conference of the Federal Public Service Unions in August 1931 were less optimistic about the future, they moved that the wage cuts be seen as a temporary imposition and looked forward to a return to prosperity over the longer term.[68]

Irrespective of government economies, the non-official post office provided general storekeepers with a hedge against the threat of bankruptcy and increased competition from chain stores and self-service outlets. Popular for their low prices, the latter allowed customers to handle goods before purchasing them, courtesy of an open plan and central counter. For small shopkeepers, income from a postal outlet helped to offset the cost of providing customer credit and a home-delivery facility – things not

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[65] Muriel Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?: A Survey of Women's Work in Victoria with Special Regard to Equal Status, Equal Pay and Equality of Opportunity*, Melbourne, Hilton and Veitch, 1935, p. 80; & Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 101.

[66] Scullin also anticipated the restoration of previous pension rates in good time. See, 'Reduction of Wages of Service Employees', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 11, 31 July 1931, p. 4.

[67] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-First Annual Report, 1930–1931*, p. 16. Predicting an upturn in the economy, N.S.W. Deputy Director J. W. Kitto assured the deputation wanting a post office opened at Allawah that favourable consideration would be given to the request once revenue flow improved. See, report of deputation from Allawah Progress Association introduced by Albert Lane M.H.R., and consisting of Mr Bunting, President, Dr Shallard and Alderman Ferry, waiting on Dep. Director, with reply by J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, 18 April 1932, C2593, GA21, Allawah, fol. 15 JUN 1932/GA 1225, p. 5.

[68] 'Editorial Notes', *Postal Advocate*, vol. VI, no. 8, 15 August 1931, p. 1.

offered by self-service establishments.[69] These constraints on cash flow, combined with customer thrift in difficult economic times, drove many general storekeepers out of business and fuelled competition between rival shop owners for the post office. In August 1930 W. R. Groves from the Sydney suburb of Manahan asked to be put in charge of the local postal outlet. According to him, the present postmaster, another grocery shop proprietor, was "likely to walk out at any time", leaving the area without a postal amenity.[70] If sacrifice was necessary, then the post office was a salve to many small businesses.

Innately conservative, shopkeepers with post offices largely acquiesced to the economies. Although permitted to join the Australian Post and Telegraph Association from 1919, most non-official postmasters and postmistresses chose not to combine, preferring to endure the deteriorating terms of employment in isolation. As property owners and hirers of labour, non-official office managers and other small business people tended to identify with employer interests and were generally reluctant to unionise.[71] Faced with mounting industrial unrest from the mid 1930s, those serving mining communities retained an apolitical posture, anxious not to alienate the local population while seeking to preserve their social standing.[72]

The few concessions offered to non-official staff made the sacrifice more bearable. In an attempt to minimise the intrusion of telephone exchange services on home life, the department began to install selective ringing mechanisms in post-office switchboards from April 1930. The devices eliminated the need to restore party line indicators at the conclusion of calls, allowing individuals offering exchange services outside office hours more time with the family.[73] Robert Lowe, Postmaster at Lower Portland, wrote to Head Office about the disruption to family life caused by the telephone exchange.

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[69] Beverley Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley: A history of shopping in Australia*, South Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1994, p. 61.
[70] Letter from W. R. Groves, The Bungalow, Canterbury Rd, Bankstown, to P.M.G., 28 August 1930, C2593, GA1128, Manahan, fol. 1 SEP 1930/GA 1803.
[71] Gerald E. Caiden, 'The A.C.P.T.A.: A Study of White Collar Public Service Unionism in the Commonwealth of Australia 1885–1922', Occasional Papers No. 2, Dept of Political Science, Australian National University, Canberra, 1966, p. 277; & Eklund, 'The "Anxious Class"?', p. 228.
[72] *ibid*., p. 224 & p. 225.
[73] H. P. Brown, Secretary of the Department, ordered the installations, overturning his own embargo on the supply of selective ringing devices for reasons of economy. See, Circ. Memo No. 6930½, from H. P. Brown, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs,

He complained that his daughter was tied to the switch most of the day and that the household was plagued by frequent calls after hours.[74] Union pressure outside the department for a 40-hour week based on an eight-hour working day, followed by eight hours with family and eight hours' sleep, added to employee expectations surrounding leisure, rest and domestic life.[75] To placate disaffected staff, Departmental Secretary Harry Brown granted a pay rise to non-official switchboard attendants. From July 1933 they received 10 pounds more a year for handling calls outside office hours, while those providing a continuous service were allowed an extra out-of-hours payment. To compensate for the overall inconvenience, Brown ordered that staff residing on exchange premises be paid a minimum of 95 pounds a year and that personnel living in detached housing receive at least 120 pounds p.a.[76] The sacrifice required of employees in the home did not go unrecognised.

Opposition to the government's economic policy generally evaporated with the early reinstatement of wage rates, in whole or in part, and with the decision to phase in any future salary reductions.[77] Responding to the improved economic situation from 1933, Chief Office restored the salaries of permanent officers to their former levels and partially reinstated the wages of non-official staff. The action followed the government's decision to relax the strict cost-saving regime.[78] To minimise hardship, senior management directed in June 1935 that any future cuts to housing and lighting allowances be spread over two years in cases where they were prompted by a contraction in office takings, or constituted a significant component of the scale rate.[79]

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16 April 1930, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G'29/8955, 1/73, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

[74] Letter from Robert Lowe, Pmr, Lower Portland, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, Sydney, 21 September 1932, C2593, GA1104, Lower Portland.

[75] Answers com., Eight-hour day, http://www.answers.com/topic/eight-hour day, 12 March 2010; & Caiden, *Career Service*, p. 253 & p. 254.

[76] Circ. Memo No. 7048, Addendum Serial No. 20/1933, from H. P. Brown, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne C.2, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, 17 July 1933, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, G.5946/33, 1/73, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

[77] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 74.

[78] The High Council of Commonwealth Public Service Unions lobbied for the early restoration of wage levels. Under the 1933 federal budget, officers on less than 260 pounds a year had their salaries reinstated in full: those receiving up to 389 pounds p.a. had to wait a further 12 months. See, Frank Waters, Dennis Murphy (ed.), *Postal Unions & Politics: A History of the Amalgamated Postal Workers' Union of Australia*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1978, p. 51 & p. 52; & *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty–Fourth Annual Report, 1933–1934*, Canberra, 1934–35, p. 11.

[79] Circ. Memo No. 7048, Addendum, from T. G. Leece, Snr I., Inspection Branch, G.P.O., Sydney, 13 June 1935, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, 1/73, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A. Sydney.

Heightened business activity underpinned the concessions. In 1933–34 postal earnings grew by 4.29% compared with the previous financial year, jumping to 5.62% over the next 12 months.[80] In the same period, the number of mails handled nationally expanded by 1.06%, increasing by 2.71% in 1934–35.[81] Gains made in the postal area were replicated in telecommunications sector. In 1933–34 telegraph revenue expanded by 4.39% over the preceding 12 months, while telephone earnings grew by 4.30%, with the restoration of cancelled lines and the connection of new services.[82] Departmental employees found themselves in a superior position to many private-sector clerical workers who, in spite of economic progress, remained on low wages well into 1939, when their old pay rates were finally restored.[83] In light of the recent improvements, P.M.G. staff could choose to see the cutbacks as a passing misfortune.

Enhanced employment prospects accompanied the gradual recovery. In 1933–34 non-official post offices in N.S.W. increased in number by a net figure of seven compared with 1932–33, growing by a further six in the subsequent financial year.[84] In deciding in April 1933 to establish a postal facility at Allawah under storekeeper Ellen Shaw, Head Office took stock of the economic upturn. Just a year earlier, the progress association's request for a post office had been placed in abeyance owing to the sharp decline in revenue.[85] In January 1934 Mrs Shaw consolidated her position as postmistress with the decision to raise her allowance and introduce a money-order

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[80] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1933–1934*, p. 6; & *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fifth Annual Report, 1934–1935*, Canberra, 1934–35–36, p. 5.

[81] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1933–1934*, p. 7; & *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fifth Annual Report, 1934–1935*, p. 7. In 1933–34 the number of money orders and postal notes sold increased by 2.30% and 17.22%, respectively. Their value rose by 2.73% and 11.33%, respectively, compared with the previous 12 months. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1933–1934*, p. 8.

[82] In 1933–34 the department recorded a net gain of 13,740 telephone connections, compared with a loss of 13,429 connections in 1931–32. See, *ibid.*, p. 6 & p.12.

[83] In the interim, office employees in the private sector often worked overtime for no extra pay. See, Waters, *Postal Unions and Politics*, p. 52; & Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 74.

[84] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1933–1934*, p. 6; *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Third Annual Report, 1932–1933*, Canberra, 1932–33–34, p. 6; & *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fifth Annual Report, 1934–1935*, p. 6.

[85] Memo overleaf from C. Tidswell, D.I., Metro No. 4, to Supt of Telephones, Sydney, 20 April 1933, C2593, GA21, Allawah, fol. GA 33/221; & report of deputation from Allawah Progress Association introduced by Albert Lane, M.H.R., and consisting of Mr Bunting, President, Dr Shallard and Alderman Ferry, waiting on Dep. Director, with reply by J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, 18 April 1932, *ibid.*, p. 4.

service following an upswing in local business activity.[86] Presented with evidence of economic improvement, staff had good reason to believe that the worst was over.

Opposition to Working Women

Alarmed by the high level of unemployment in the early years of the Great Depression, some male unionists disapproved of the women working in their midst. Noting the proliferation of female phonogram operators, the Western Australian Branch of the Commonwealth Postmasters' Association feared the women would usher in a low-wage regime. A member of the Australian Postal Clerks' Union saw the development as "the thin end of the wedge". He predicted that females would soon be doing "the duties now carried out by manual (male) labour".[87] Some men believed that working women were unfairly advantaged with respect to the cost-of-living adjustments made in October 1932, noting that adult males had eight pounds removed from their annual salaries, whereas adult females had just five pounds deducted.[88] The Victorian Branch of the Australian Postal Clerks' Union opposed the use of female labour in non-official offices, pointing out that facilities were often kept by women rather than war veterans.[89] Outside of the department, Queensland trade union officials denounced the engagement of married women, and demanded laws that would require wives to obtain a work permit from the Industrial Court. Meanwhile, in Victoria, like-minded unionists actively resisted the admission of wives to the workforce.[90] In a time of economic crisis, women were reminded of their tenuous hold on paid work.

Many in the community maintained that wives who had the support of male breadwinners, but chose to work, were denying family men and needy individuals a livelihood in testing economic circumstances. In May 1931 an anonymous correspondent styling him or herself, "Only a Fair thinker", wrote to the Postmaster-General complaining that Lily Black continued to occupy the position of non-official

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[86] Report from C. Tidswell, D.I., Metro No. 4, to Dep. Director, 2 January 1934, *ibid.*, fol. GA 33/2423.
[87] 'Western Australia, Annual Report, 1929–1930', *Postmaster*, vol. 9, no. 2, 31 July 1930, p. 15; & 'Employment of the Fair Sex', 'letter from "Wake Up", Tasmania', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 9, 26 May 1931, p. 16.
[88] 'Service Wage Reduction', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 27, 26 November 1932, p. 5.
[89] 'Victorian Branch, report of monthly committee meeting, 18 April 1932', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 21, 26 May 1932, p. 21.

postmistress at Blacktown – this despite having a husband in employment and just one child to support. The writer suggested that a destitute person with a large family would be equally capable of running the office.[91] The belief that working women prevented family men from obtaining paid work prompted the N.S.W. government to remove married female teachers from state schools and led to the dismissal of women in the private sector.[92] The department responded to community sentiment in favouring men with financial responsibilities over married women for non-official positions. In December 1932 Head Office chose William Low, a shopkeeper with no relevant experience, for the job of postmaster at Wamberal, rejecting overtures from Mary Clark to run the village's postal amenity.[93] A former temporary employee, Mrs Clark had worked in the semi-official outlets at Greta, Coopernook, Cundletown, Wyong and Tighe's Hill, and had assisted the manager at Ourimbah's official establishment prior to her marriage.[94]

In the harsh economic environment, the department appointed veterans to non-official facilities before widows and spinsters. From the onset of the depression, returned servicemen's organisations lobbied politicians on behalf of jobless members, arguing that they had an overarching right to a living in light of their costly contribution to imperial and national defence.[95] In May 1933 Head Office chose veteran Harold Littlejohn to manage the post office at Wongarbon, dismissing representations from former Prime Minister Billy Hughes M.P. on behalf of Mary Connell, officer-in-charge at Ford's Bridge and candidate for the job of postmistress.[96] Although a strong advocate for ex-servicemen, Hughes maintained that the widow had a superior claim to the position, given the high cost of medical attention at her remote outback

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[90] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 99. Some women disguised their marriage for fear of being dismissed. See, *ibid.*, p. 103.
[91] Letter from "Only a Fair thinker" to P.M.G., undated, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. 12 MAY 1931/GA 945.
[92] Marjorie Theobald and Donna Dwyer, 'An Episode in Feminist Politics: The Married Women (Lecturers and Teachers) Act, 1932–47, *Labour History*, no. 76, May 1999, p. 59, reproduced in Jstor, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27516628, 9 October 2009.
[93] *Pro forma* Inspectors' Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, William Low, completed by H. R. Connelly, D.I., Newcastle, 20 December 1932, C2593, GA1853, Wamberal, fol. GA 32/2308.
[94] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr …, completed by Mary Ella Clark, 10 December 1932, *ibid.*
[95] Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War*, Melbourne, Oxford U.P., 1996, p. 102.
[96] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Harold Littlejohn, on 18 May 1933, 22 May 1933, C2593, GA WP 44, Wongarbon, fol. 23 MAY 1933/GA 941.

station.[97] Mrs Connell pleaded with N.S.W. Deputy Director J. W. Kitto to be re-considered for the job, noting that the successful applicant was a share farmer who already had a livelihood. Unlike Littlejohn who lacked relevant experience, she had worked in Victorian and N.S.W. post offices for almost 20 years.[98] Even so, Kitto refused her request, stressing that the department was obliged to give veterans first priority.[99] In his application Littlejohn explained that he could no longer follow his present occupation due to a knee injury sustained while on active service. Ineligible for a war pension, he had a wife and four young children to keep.[100]

In October 1936 the department appointed ex-soldier Frederick Newlyn to Fairlight Post Office, discounting an application from Miss M. Clark, stationery supplier, lending library operator and Commonwealth Bank agent, to run the facility.[101] Protesting the veteran's selection in a letter to Minister for Defence Archdale Parkhill, Miss Clark pointed out that her brother, the initial purchaser of the business, was a returned soldier. Further, her invalid widowed sister and business partner had served as an army nurse during the war. Accordingly, she insisted on being shown the same consideration as "any ex-serviceman". Head Office stood by its decision to appoint Newlyn, the owner of a fruit and confectionery shop, overlooking its previous objection to green grocers.[102] District Inspector A. L. Paviour felt that Miss Clark's situation did not justify a departure from the policy of veteran preference as interpreted by the authorities, and claimed to have been unaware of her sister's military service.[103] In a letter to Archdale Parkhill, the Deputy Director noted that Miss Clark's application had been "fully considered", but failed to mention her

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[97] P. J. Byrne, former inspector, ex-alderman, and constituent, alerted Hughes to Mrs Connell's condition. See, letter from William Hughes M.P., Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, to J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director of Posts and Telegraphs, G.P.O., Sydney, 12 May 1933, *ibid.*

[98] Mary Connell described her situation as "absolutely desperate". See, letter from Mary Connell, Ford's Bridge, via Bourke, to Mr Kitto, 11 May 1933, *ibid*.

[99] Letter from J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, to Mrs M. G. Connell, Ford's Bridge via Bourke, N.S.W., 15 May 1933, *ibid.*, fol. 16 MAY 1933/GA 908.

[100] Letter from H. Littlejohn, "Verona", Geurie, to P.M.G., Canberra, 6 April 1933, *ibid.*

[101] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Non-Off. Pmr, Frederick Arthur Newlyn, 28 October 1936, C2593, GA683, Part 1, Fairlight; & letter from M. Clark, 105 Sydney Rd, Redhill, Manly, to Dep. P.M.G., G.P.O., Sydney, 9 October 1936, *ibid.*, fol. 15 OCT 1936/GA 2640.

[102] For many years the department had rejected applications from green grocers to run postal facilities, concerned that the mail was likely to be soiled by dirty hands. Miss Clark's customers felt that a green grocer's shop was "an unsuitable place" to conduct banking business and wanted her to retain the bank agency. See, letter from Miss M. Clark to Archdale Parkhill M.P., 4 Bridge St, Sydney, 17 November 1936, *ibid.*

[103] Paviour disregarded the nature of Newlyn's business. See, report from A. L. Paviour, D.I., Metro No.1, to Snr I., 25 November 1936, *ibid.*, fol. GA 36/2640.

sister's war experience.[104] The economic downturn tended to consolidate and circumscribe the recruitment policy favouring returned servicemen.

In its efforts to assist male breadwinners in time of need, the department disregarded the circumstances of widows dependent on inadequate investment incomes. During the depression the women left property or company shares by deceased spouses often experienced financial distress owing to limited rental returns, a deflated property market, and declining dividends.[105] In choosing veteran William Low to run Wamberal's non-official outlet in December 1932, Head Office dismissed a request from Barclay Millar, local government councillor, to have Annabelle Edwards, widow of the previous postmaster, appointed as his replacement.[106] In a letter to S. L. Gardner M.H.R., Millar explained that Mrs Edwards was totally reliant on the rental income from the building in which the facility was located, and could not afford to renovate it in order to secure a higher return. As a property investor, the widow was ineligible to receive a pension – this in spite of her near destitution. Accordingly, she was better off applying for the job of postmistress, which paid 119 pounds 15 shillings p.a., than continuing to draw the rent.[107] Even so, Deputy Director J. W. Kitto refused to concede Mrs Edward's need for employment, suggesting that, since Low had become her tenant, her financial problems would be solved.[108]

The department also discounted the situation of widowed landlady Susan Davidson in choosing to retain the services of the postmaster at South Bathurst. In December 1934 Head Office confirmed the tenure of baker Oswald Webb after receiving a request from Mrs Davidson to resume control of the postal outlet.[109] In a letter to J. N. Lawson M.P., solicitor J. W. F. Stephen explained that the landlady required paid

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[104] Letter from J. S. Duncan, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, to Sir Archdale Parkhill, M.P., Minister for Defence, 4 Bridge St, Sydney, 26 November 1936, *ibid.*, fol. GA 36/2640.
[105] Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 98.
[106] Letter from J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, to S. L. Gardner M.H.R., "Rosevale", Dangarfield via Aberdeen, 21 December 1932, C2593, GA1853, Wamberal, fol. GA 21 DEC 1932/2352.
[107] Letter from Barclay C. Millar, Box 54, P.O., Gosford, to S. L. Gardner M.H.R., "Rosevale", Dangarfield via Aberdeen, 23 December 1932, *ibid.*; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, William Low, completed by H. R. Connelly, D.I., Newcastle, 20 December 1932, *ibid.*, fol. GA 32/2308.
[108] Letter from J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, to S. L. Gardner M.H.R., "Rosevale", Dangarfield via Aberdeen, 21 December 1932, *ibid.*, fol. GA 21 DEC 1932/2352.
[109] Report from T. G. Leece, Snr I., to Dep. Director, 4 December 1934, C2593, GA1607, South Bathurst, fol. GA 34/2437.

work since the rent from the post-office building, a property left to her by her husband, failed to cover the interest on the mortgage.[110] Recommending that Webb be kept on, District Inspector H. J. Humphries noted that he had invested his life savings in the business and had "a very delicate wife" and two children to house and feed. Humphries implied that the widow had a lesser claim to the job, alluding to the potential sources of support within her family: "Mrs Davidson has a married son at work, one unmarried son conducts a hairdressing saloon and another works at a saddlery."[111] He ignored her financial difficulties. For five years prior to 1924, she had run the post office before resigning due to ill health. Since her husband's recent death, Mrs Davidson had been unable to service the mortgage. In arguing for Webb's retention, Humphries overlooked the incumbent's plan to relocate his business to premises immediately opposite, which would have denied the widow an income until another tenant could be found.[112] The notion of female economic dependency could still exclude needy women from the workforce.

Women Retained

Granted various impediments, women retained a place on the departmental payroll while non-official offices provided a satisfactory alternative to official establishments in a depressed economy. A definitive assessment of the female contribution to departmental services cannot be extracted from the record. However, a survey of 40 non-official facilities in N.S.W. that operated between 1929 and 1938 reveals that around 30% were managed by women, while about 75% of the outlets nominally held by males were under the practical control of wives or daughters at any one time.[113] Given the significant role of women in the provision of non-official amenities, the P.M.G. Department was not about to give them up willingly.[114] Responding to "Only

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[110] Letter from J. W. F. Stephen, Browning and Stephen, Solicitors, Bathurst, to J. N. Lawson M.P., Parliament House, Canberra, F.C.T., 15 November 1934, *ibid.*

[111] Humphries noted that Mrs Davidson's two unmarried sons lived with their mother. See, report from H. J. Humphries, D.I., Bathurst, to Dep. Director, 29 November 1934, *ibid*., fol. GA 34/2437.

[112] Letter from J. W. F. Stephen, Browning and Stephen, Solicitors, Bathurst, to J. N. Lawson M.P., Parliament House, Canberra, F.C.T., 15 November 1934, *ibid.*; & report from H. J. Humphries, D.I., Bathurst, to Dep. Director, 29 November 1934, *ibid.*, fol. GA 34/2437.

[113] See footnote 51 for details of the offices in question.

[114] The British experience suggests that a purging of women from retailing, health care and office administration – occupational areas in which females were over-represented – would have had severe implications for the economy in forcing employers to compete for male replacements. See, Keith Grint, 'Women and Equality: The Acquisition of Equal Pay in the Post Office 1870–1961', *Sociology*, vol. 22, no. 1, February 1988, p. 93.

a Fair thinker's" call for the removal of married woman Lily Black from the office at Blacktown, District Inspector F. Hunter confirmed her tenure and reaffirmed the decision of September 1930 to defer plans to establish an official facility in the outer Sydney suburb because of inadequate funds.[115] He noted that Mrs Black and staff performed a vital service, transporting mail to and from the railway station, delivering telegrams, and operating a telephone switchboard to 8.00 pm every night. Since the office was relatively cheap to maintain, Hunter saw no reason to replace the incumbent with an official employee on a higher wage.[116] After receiving a submission in April 1934 from local resident R. Whitelaw calling for an official establishment, District Inspector H. G. Ockwell conducted a second investigation that confirmed the economical nature of the service provided.[117] He calculated that an official building without living quarters would cost another 2,000 pounds p.a. to staff. In any event, postmistress Lily Black provided a facility that was comparable to a departmental outlet, affording customers "prompt and undivided attention". Ockwell concluded that they would be no better served if Head Office agreed to Whitelaw's request.[118] Worked by the postmaster's wife and daughter, Coledale Post Office also offered residents a viable alternative to an official amenity. Recommending Janet Meades for the job of postmistress after the death of her husband in January 1937, Acting District Inspector W. G. Piper noted that the facility compared favourably with departmental offices, presenting "a very creditable and tidy appearance".[119] Despite hostile sentiments abroad, the department retained a vested interest in female labour.

In an era of high unemployment, married women continued to find paid work in non-official offices, regardless of pressure for the removal of wives with wage-earning husbands. Men fortunate enough to be employed often laboured in poorly paid, short-term positions subject to job sharing.[120] In the circumstances the department often kept wives on strength to supplement their spouses' income. In rejecting "Only a Fair

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[115] Letter from "Only a Fair thinker" to P.M.G., undated, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. GA 12 MAY 1931/945; & note signed by D.I., Metro No. 2, 1 September 1930, *ibid.*, fol. 3 JUL 1930/GA 1387.
[116] Report from F. Hunter, D.I., Relief, Metro No. 2, to Acting Snr I., 14 May 1931, *ibid.*, fol. GA 945/31.
[117] Letter from R. Whitelaw to K. H. Stewart M.P., Minister for Commerce, House of Representatives, Canberra, 6 April 1934, *ibid.*
[118] Report from H. G. Ockwell, D.I., Metro No. 2, to Dep. Director, 19 April 1934, *ibid.*, fol. GA 20 APR 1934/881.
[119] Report from W. G. Piper, Acting D.I., Metro No. 4, to Snr I., 29 January 1937, C2593, GA230316, Coledale.

thinker's" demand that Lily Black, Postmistress at Blacktown, be replaced by a jobless person, District Inspector Hunter noted that, although her husband had "fairly regular employment", his tenure remained "problematical" owing to the vagaries of the economy. He therefore proposed that Mrs Black's services be retained.[121] Married women with husbands in work continued to operate post offices while small business failures caused the department to put service continuity before any obligation to individuals in economic distress. In July 1936 Head Office rejected an application from Charles Stewart, temporary mine employee and government relief worker, to replace James Butler, Postmaster at Pelaw Main, who allowed his wife to run the postal outlet.[122] Calling for a change of management, Rowland James M.P. noted that Stewart had lost a leg in the war and was of excellent character. He observed that Butler was a timber contractor, a bag merchant, and an insurance agent who held several "very remunerative" public offices, including the presidency of Tarro Shire Council. Accordingly, James insisted that the department uphold the system of veteran preference and replace an able-bodied man of means with a near-destitute, invalided, former soldier.[123] Even so, Head Office decided to keep Butler on the books after District Inspector G. Goodier reported that the facility was conducted very efficiently by his wife, that it was economically viable, and that the postmaster had no intention of resigning.[124]

In spite of the system of veteran preference and regard for the male wage, the department remained sensitive to the financial needs of widows and single women. In September 1930 Departmental Secretary Harry Brown directed that, after returned servicemen and the needy kin of soldiers killed on active service, employment priority be given to the dependants of deceased officers in receipt of a pension or income that

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[120] Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 4 & p. 10.
[121] Letter from "Only a Fair thinker" to P.M.G., undated, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. GA 12 MAY 1931/945; & report from F. Hunter, D.I., Relief, Metro No. 2, to Acting Snr I., 14 May 1931, *ibid.*, fol. GA 945/31.
[122] Letter from Chas. W. Stewart, "Kanowna", Hebburn St, Pelaw Main, to R. James, M.P., 4 July 1936, C2593, GA1434, Pelaw Main, fol. GA 36/1691.
[123] Butler was also president of Kurri Kurri Hospital and sat on the Hunter Water Board. See, letter from W. S. Stanton for Director-General, P.M.G. Dept, Melbourne, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, 13 July 1936, reference to letter from R. James M.P., *ibid.*, fol. 15 JUL 1936/GA 1691.
[124] Report from G. Goodier, D.I., West Maitland, to Snr I., 17 July 1936, *ibid.*, fol. GA 36/1691.

was insufficient to provide a living.[125] In September 1938 R. W. Hamilton, Head of Accounts Branch, arranged for Daisy Foster to take over Berowra's non-official post office after the death of her husband. Concerned for her welfare, Hamilton instructed the inspectorate to appoint Mrs Foster on 1 September 1938, rather than 12 September as planned. That way the allowance of seven pounds accruing between those dates, and owing to the husband, could be paid to his widow. Had she been hired on the 12th, Head Office would have needed to withhold payment pending the granting of probate on her spouse's estate.[126] In March 1934 Sylvia Williams took charge of Sutton's non-official outlet with the passing of her widowed mother. At the time Miss Williams had no income and could expect little help from her parent's estate.[127] To provide immediate financial relief, the inspectorate appointed her postmistress two days prior to her completing a formal application for the job.[128] An enduring phenomenon, departmental paternalism extended beyond a perceived obligation to former soldiers and sailors.

The department remained especially receptive to the interests of older spinsters with limited marital and job prospects. In March 1936 Head Office reaffirmed Mary Walsh in the role of non-official postmistress at Jenolan Caves, rejecting a proposal from the N.S.W. Government Tourist Bureau to have the manager of Caves House, a Bureau employee, placed in charge of the post and telegraph facility.[129] The department recognised that Miss Walsh, formerly an official employee, would be hard pressed to find another job in view of her age and non-transferable skills. In a letter to Acting

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[125] Circ. Memo No. 6977 from H. P. Brown, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, 9 September 1930, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, 1/76, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

[126] Memo attached from R. W. Hamilton, Accountant, Accounts Branch, G.P.O., Sydney, to D.I., Metro No. 1, 28 September 1938, C2593, GA146, Berowra, fol. 27 SEP 1938/GA 1822.

[127] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Sylvia Agnes Williams, 3 March 1934, C2593, GA1655, Sutton; *pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by Agnes Williams, 2 July 1929, *ibid*.; memo from S. Morris, D.I., Cooma, to Dep. Director, Sydney, 1 June 1934, enclosing Letters of Administration in the estate of Agnes Williams, *ibid*., fol. GA 34/565; & letter from W. Jeffrey, Accountant, to F. P. Woodward, Solicitor, Queanbeyan, N.S.W., 7 June 1934, *ibid.*

[128] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Sylvia Agnes Williams on 1 March 1934, completed by S. Morris, D.I., Cooma, 13 March 1934, *ibid.*, fol. 14 Mar 1934/GA 565; & *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Sylvia Agnes Williams, 3 March 1934, *ibid.*

[129] The department had recently approved such an arrangement at Mount Kosciuszko, where the non-official office was taken over by Bureau staff. See, report from T. Leece, Snr I, to Dep. Director, 18 March 1936, C2593, GA903, Jenolan Caves, fol. GA '36/628. Miss Walsh had previously conducted the semi-official outlets at Delungra and Come by Chance, and had assisted at Bathurst's official post

District Inspector G. R. Watts, the postmistress pointed out that her 20 or so years as a trained telegraphist had put her at an occupational disadvantage, making the task of securing alternative work "very difficult".[130]

Often the department engaged older single women in response to representations from the community on their behalf. In October 1937 Head Office chose Muriel Meynink to run the non-official post office at Carlton following the death of her mother in August 1936. In light of a substantial increase in business over the previous financial year, the department had planned to convert the facility to an official establishment.[131] Fearing that a veteran might be put in control of the upgraded amenity, William Currey, returned soldier and holder of the Victoria Cross, approached Billy Hughes M.P. about having Miss Meynink appointed in her mother's place. The war hero drew attention to her 20 years' service as an office assistant and referred to her deceased father's 33 years in the postal utility. Currey alluded to the ageing spinster's limited marital and vocational outlook, observing: "The lady ... is now 54 years of age and too old to marry or look for another job". He noted that a petition had been circulated among local residents calling for her appointment. Currey expressed dissatisfaction with the government's recruitment practices: "Now, after the death of the mother, the daughter …. stands a chance of being sacked owing to the Soldiers' Preference Act. If the petitioning is ignored I think it will be another case of Soldiers' preference wrongly applied".[132] Addressing community concerns, J. S. Duncan, N.S.W. Deputy Director, arranged for the office to be retained as a non-official facility so that Muriel Meynink might occupy the postmistress position, citing her age and limited employability as reasons for the department's change of heart.[133]

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office. See, report by J. R. Nash, D.I., 17 December 1917, *ibid.*; & memo from unidentified D.I. to Miss M. J. Walsh, Acting Assistant, Bathurst, 14 December 1917, *ibid*.

[130] Letter from M. Walsh, Pms, Jenolan Caves, to Mr Watts, undated, *ibid.* Grint notes that workers with 'firm-specific' skills gained over many years often suffered in a depressed labour market – their expertise of limited utility outside their chosen field. See, Grint, 'Women and Equality', p. 92. Accordingly, elderly spinster Julia McGregor was left to manage Morangarell's non-official office until January 1930, when she retired voluntarily at age 82. See, 'In Days of Old by "Jacobum"', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 95, 24 February 1930, p. 17.

[131] Miss Meynink (surname alternatively spelt "Meynick") had acted as Temporary Postmistress after her mother's death. See, report from J. S. Duncan, Dep. Director, to Director-General, Posts and Telegraphs, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne, 15 October 1937, C2593, GA(–), Carlton, fol. GA 37/2311.

[132] Letter from W. Currey V.C., 22 Percival St, Bexley, to Right Hon. W. M. Hughes, 14 Nelson Rd, Lindfield, 10 October 1937, *ibid.*, fol. Central P.M.G. Dept, N.S.W. 22 OCT 1937/1673.

[133] Report from J. S. Duncan, Dep. Director, to Director-General, Posts and Telegraphs, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne, 15 October, 1937, *ibid*., fol. GA 37/2311.

In the minds of many, spinsters over 30 had been 'left on the shelf' and ought to be pitied, notwithstanding recent acknowledgement of their right to an independent and productive existence. Society had sympathy for older women who had devoted themselves to the care of aged parents, and conferred career status on any subsequent vocation – their job an alternative object of dedication.[134] In the circumstances departmental employment policy needed to be flexible.

The P.M.G. Department offered mature spinsters a livelihood at a time when many experienced discrimination in the community, regardless of concessions. In the interwar years, single middle-aged women faced heavy competition from younger females in the marriage and job markets because of a greater emphasis on youthful beauty and a corresponding intolerance of ageing. Women's magazines, beauticians and cosmetic companies urged females to resist the ravages of time that robbed them of their looks, sexuality and fertility, and sabotaged their matrimonial prospects. Many employers still believed that the ageing process rendered women inflexible and less amenable to rational management.[135] Consequently, businesses frequently refused to hire females over 30, or else laid them off before their younger co-workers.[136] The 1933 census underscored the minimal job opportunities for older women, revealing that the majority of female wage earners (69.4%) were less than 30 years old.[137] An ambivalent attitude towards older spinsters handicapped many in the labour market. Although consideration was shown to carers of aged parents and recognition given to their employment requirements, mature single women were still seen by some as aberrant or 'unnatural' beings.[138] Tainted vocationally and socially, older spinsters found themselves in need of official indulgence.

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[134] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 160, p. 163 & p. 164.
[135] Katie Holmes, *Spaces in her Day: Australian Women's Diaries 1920s–1930s*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, pp. 136–138. Because of the aversion to ageing, older women seldom featured in women's magazines, except in the case of famous people or unusual callings. See, *ibid.*, p. 144. Intolerance of ageing stemmed, in part, from a growing fear of death in the community, with a *per capita* increase in the number of older people – a function of lower birth rates and reduced infant mortality. See, *ibid.*, p. 137.
[136] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 148.
[137] Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 99. The 1933 census underscored the negative perception of older women in terms of reproduction by placing females over 45 in the "Sterile" category. See, *ibid.*, p. 95.
[138] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 165, p. 167 & p. 168.

During the period the media exercised mounting influence in the appointment of non-official staff. Alive to the commercial value of good public relations, Departmental Secretary Harry Brown invited the newspapers, staff and interested citizens to identify problems with the service and propose ways in which it might be made more effective and efficient. Because of his reputation for prompt action in response to criticism, the metropolitan and regional dailies christened him, "Horsepower Brown", a play on the initials of his given names, Harry Percy. Under Brown's stewardship the department developed a strong relationship with the media, investing heavily in newspaper advertising and inaugural airmail flights designed to stimulate custom and popularise the postal and telecommunications utility.[139]

The appointment in April 1933 of Ellen Shaw to the job of postmistress at Allawah underlined senior management's sensitivity to adverse press.[140] Two months earlier the department had received a letter from journalist A. P. Hanlon of the *Sydney Morning Herald* calling for a non-official post office to be set up in the "civilian" widow's confectionery and fancy goods store. The writer complained of having to lodge letters at the Hurstville facility because the local posting box was cleared too early in the afternoon to allow for the delivery of mail posted later in the day to city and suburban addresses by the next morning. He suggested that an outlet in Allawah, where letters could be posted over the counter, would provide for the late despatch of correspondence. In closing, Hanlon mentioned that he was an Allawah resident and a telephone subscriber.[141] In response to his letter, Senior Inspector T. Leece instructed the district office to make expeditious recommendations regarding the proposal and have Mrs Shaw complete a *pro forma* application for employment.[142] District Inspector C. Tidswell reported that a facility in Allawah would serve about 600

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[139] Marcella Hunter, *Australia Post: Delivering More than Ever*, Edgecliff, Focus Publishing, 2000, pp. 94–97. Under Harry Brown, the department produced films for public exhibition, mounted displays at selected events, and invited the public to inspect postal and telecommunications facilities – initiatives intended to generate community goodwill. It also postmarked mail with advertising slogans, produced colourful posters and pamphlets promoting products and services, and printed a range of ornamental telegram forms and envelopes for Christmas, etc. See, *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fifth Annual Report, 1934-1935*, p. 17 & pp. 24–25. Harry Brown was knighted in 1938. See, 'Sir Harry Brown', *North Shore Times*, 14 June 1967 (cutting, no page number, detached).

[140] *Pro forma* Notice of Appt of Pms, Ellen Rebecca Shaw, 13 April 1933, C2593, GA21, Allawah, fol. GA 33/221.

[141] Letter attached from A. P. Hanlon, 29 Illawarra St, Allawah via Kogarah, to P.M.G, Sydney, 6 February 1933, *ibid*., fol. 8 FEB 1933/GA 221.

[142] Memo from T. Leece, Snr I., to D.I., No. 4, 23 February 1933, *ibid.*, fol. G 33/221.

residents and ought to be opened without delay.[143] As late as November 1932, the same official had advised that, while potential earnings justified an outlet, budgetary constraints precluded it.[144]

The department chose Ellen Shaw to manage the facility in preference to fellow applicant, E. F. Stacy, a temporary officer who had been dismissed due to the depression.[145] Mrs Shaw's appointment appeared to contradict departmental policy. In September 1930 Chief Office had directed that employment priority be given to retrenched temporaries after veterans, the relatives of dead servicemen, and the dependants of deceased officers. Temporaries had lost their jobs through no fault of their own and were, in many cases, long-serving employees with few transferable skills who were likely to experience problems finding another position.[146] In his application for the job of postmaster, Stacy confided that it had been "very difficult" to obtain paid work after many years in the service.[147] Public relations considerations favoured some individuals while ignoring others.

Employment by Default

All the while the "buying" and "selling" of post offices ensured that women retained a presence in non-official outlets. Because of the relative dearth of job vacancies for married women at the time, wives wanting an independent income often chose to invest in a post office or other business. The findings of the 1933 census appeared to

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[143] *Pro forma* District Inspr's Report – Proposed P.O., completed by C. Tidswell, D.I., Metro No. 4, 27 February 1933, *ibid.*; & note signed by C. Tidswell, Metro No. 4, 14 February 1933, *ibid.*, fol. G 33/221.

[144] Report by C. Tidswell, D.I., Metro No. 4, 23 November 1932, *ibid.*, fol. GA 32/2136. In April 1932 Head Office had dismissed a request from the local progress association to establish a postal outlet at Mrs Shaw's store on financial grounds. See, report of deputation from Allawah Progress Association introduced by Albert Lane, M.H.R., and consisting of Mr Bunting (President), Dr Shallard and Alderman Ferry, waiting on Dep. Director, with reply by J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, 18 April 1932, *ibid.*, p. 4.

[145] Letter from E. F. Stacy, 120 Carrington Ave, Hurstville, to J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, 1 February 1933, *ibid*., fol. 3 FEB 1933/GA 191.

[146] To qualify for special consideration, former temporaries needed to have worked for two and a half years in a job that did not prepare them for outside employment. See, Circ. Memo No. 6977 from H. P. Brown, Sec., P.M.G. Dept, Treasury Gardens, Melbourne, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, 9 September 1930, C3102/1, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, 1/76, 6921–7065, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.

[147] Letter from E. F. Stacy, 120 Carrington Ave, Hurstville, to J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, 1 February 1933, C2593, GA21, Allawah, fol. 3 FEB 1933/GA 191. In reply Head Office informed Stacy that, should an outlet be opened at Allawah, he would be considered along with others. See, letter from J. W. Kitto, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, to E. F. Stacy, 120 Carrington Ave, Hurstville, 3 February 1933, *ibid.*, fol. GA 33/191.

confirm the phenomenon. While married women over 30 composed just 8% of all female wage and salary earners, a full 34% were employers or self-employed.[148] From 1929 the trade in post offices received a boost through departmental efforts to guarantee continuity of service and contain costs in the context of multiple business failures. Thereafter, Head Office directed all non-official employees to sign a written undertaking to conduct the outlet for three years. In the event that they relinquished their post in the interim, they had to find a suitable replacement at no additional cost to the department, subject to official approval.[149] In February 1936 Mrs H. E. English, Postmistress at Mt Colah, informed Head Office that Bessie May planned to purchase her store and that she would be resigning in her favour. Leaving no doubt that she regarded the business and post office as one and the same thing, the postmistress asked to be allowed to retain her position if Mrs May's application for her job was unsuccessful.[150] In April 1937 Dorothy Cole, "assistant" at Adjungbilly, sold her shop to Gertrude Quilty and nominated the purchaser as her successor. Mrs Cole disposed of the business despite the fact that her husband James held the office of postmaster.[151] In August of that year, Mrs J. Houlihan, shopkeeper and "assistant" at Sutton, advised the department that she had "sold the P.O. to Mrs Chas Read who now owns the Store here".[152] By trading in facilities between themselves, women helped to preserve the postal outlet as a "female" space.

Throughout the 1930s veterans continued to exhibit a discretionary attitude towards departmental employment, allowing women to find work in non-official offices. Despite the high level of unemployment, a small minority of jobless males, including some returned servicemen, chose not to re-enter the workforce until such time as wage rates or working conditions had recovered to their satisfaction.[153] In February

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[148] Mackinolty, "Woman's place …", p. 99.
[149] *Pro forma* statement signed by M. E. Crowther, 4 July 1929, C2593, GA1377, Numulgi.
[150] Letter from H. E. English, Pms, Mt Colah, 1 February 1936, C2593, GA1247, Mt Colah.
[151] Mrs Cole clearly saw the post office store as her own, having in her words, "disposed of *my* business" (my emphasis). See, letter from D. Cole, Adjungbilly P.O., via Tumut, N.S.W., to D.I., Cootamundra, 22 April 1937, C2593, GA9, Adjungbilly; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Non-Off. Pmr, James Cole, 2 September 1935, *ibid.*, fol. 24 SEP 1935/GA 2194.
[152] Letter from Mrs J. Houlihan, P.O., Sutton, to Inspr, 31 August 1937, C2593, GA1655, Sutton; & *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Charles Eric Read, who intended to engage his wife, Madeline Read, as his assistant, 3 September 1937, *ibid.*
[153] R. Gregory *et al.*, 'Sharing the Burden: The Australian Labour Market During the 1930's', Working Paper No. 47, Paper K for Conference on the Recovery from the Depression in the 1930s convened by the Dept of Economic History and Centre for Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, August 1985, p. 2.

1932 Head Office placed storekeeper Thomas Colbeck in charge of the postal facility at Banksia on the understanding that his widowed daughter, Constance Barnes, would work it as his "assistant".[154] Veteran Mr D. Cowie had declined the department's invitation to take over the outlet, maintaining that the wage was insufficient inducement to leave the country town of Young for the Sydney suburb. Instead, he asked to be considered for a larger facility that commanded a higher pay rate, if and when one became available.[155] A small outlet without money order or banking services, Banksia Post Office attracted an allowance of just 24 pounds p.a.[156] Some veterans elected not to take up positions, however lucrative, simply because they were not to their liking. In September 1938 Head Office put Daisy Foster, widow of the deceased postmaster, in control of the Berowra outlet following fruitless endeavours to locate an ex-serviceman willing to take over. The job paid 237 pounds 13 shillings a year.[157] Not all veterans were appreciative or accepting of state paternalism.

Meanwhile, men concerned for their masculinity in a "domestic" space continued to surrender their claim to post office employment, making way for female jobseekers. Unemployment, by its very nature, removed men from the public sphere and relegated them to the world of women – a situation that frequently resulted in a loss of face and a damaged self-identity. Demoralised by their confinement to the home, jobless males often refused to perform tasks around the house, some descending into a life of indolence, alcoholism, gambling and crime.[158] In February 1930 Charlotte Orr lodged a written application to run a non-official post office at Avoca Beach should one be approved. In her letter Mrs Orr made oblique reference to the discomfort felt by unemployed men in a "female" environment, asking to be appointed in place of her son, a jobless veteran who sought mail contract work in preference to serving behind a counter.[159] Some men applied to manage a post office in anticipation of the day when they could resume an outdoor occupation. In December 1932 unemployed

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[154] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Thomas Henry Colbeck, 4 February 1932, C2593, GA77, Banksia, fol. GA 32/286; & memo from C. Tidswell, D.I., Metro No. 4, to Dep. Director, 19 February 1932, *ibid.*
[155] Letter from D. Cowie, "Renown", William St, Young, to Mr Tidswell, D.I., 8 February 1932, *ibid.*
[156] *Pro forma* letter from C. Tidswell, D.I., Metro No. 4, to ex-servicemen regarding vacancy, 5 February 1932, *ibid.*
[157] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report on Transfer of a Non-Off. Office to Daisy Alice Foster, 27 September 1938, C2593, GA146, Berowra, fol. 27 SEP 1938/GA 1822.
[158] Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 2.

builder Eric Gleeson completed a *pro forma* application for the job of non-official postmaster at Wamberal. He did not envisage working indoors for long if appointed, proposing that his sister, Olga, take over the outlet just as soon as the economy improved and he could return to his trade.[160] The depression only served to reinforce the perception of the post office as a female precinct.

Employment Equality – A Lost Cause

Few women in N.S.W. occupied official postmistress, telegraphist, postal clerk or postal assistant positions on the eve of the centenary of the appointment of Mary Ann Rutledge, Australia's first paid postmistress, in February 1838. By June of 1937, just two women held the office of Postmistress, Ethel Cox at Maclean on 434 pounds a year, and Janet Lobban, unattached, on 344 pounds p.a. The manager of a Grade 3 facility, Miss Cox had a staff of seven, consisting of a Senior Postal Clerk Grade 1, a Postal Clerk, a Postman, a Mechanic (Telephone) Grade 2, two female Telephonists and a Telegraph Messenger. Only one woman, Natalie Marx at Strathfield, who earned 284 pounds a year, occupied the post of Senior Postal Clerk (Female) Grade 1. She was joined by five officers in Postal Clerk (Female) positions: Doris Quint at Bundarra; Rebecca Hayne at Enfield; Minard Crommelin at Mosman; Gwendolene Milligan at Westgate; and Lilian Tobin, unattached – all in receipt of 236 pounds p.a. Just one woman held a postal assistant's job: Stella Waddell, Postal Assistant (Female) Grade 2 at Broadway on 182 pounds a year.[161] In the other state administrations, female official employees were even harder to identify.[162] The denial of access to the Clerical or Third Division examination from 1905, low-paid female designations, and the ban on working wives had stemmed the supply of women with the qualifications and background needed to fill more senior posts in the department. Only Ethel Cox, Janet Lobban and Natalie Marx – each of whom had joined the service before 1905 – boasted Third Division status, with the balance of women

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[159] Letter attached from Mrs C. Orr, Avoca Store and Refreshment Rooms, Avoca, Kincumber, to Pmr, G.P.O., Sydney, 10 February 1930, C2593, GA57, Part 1, Avoca Beach, fol. GA 12 FEB 1930/368.
[160] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Eric George Gleeson, 10 December 1932, C2593, GA1853, Wamberal.
[161] *Commonwealth of Australia Permanent Staff Lists*, No. 1, 4 January 1938, p. 217 & p. 278.
[162] As at 30 June 1937, Victoria had three Third Division female operators in the Telegraph Branch compared with 199 males, along with a Third Division Postal Clerk (Female) and a Fourth Division Postal Clerk (Female). Western Australia claimed a Fourth Division Postmistress Grade 1 and a Fourth Division Postal Clerk (Female). Tasmania boasted a Third Division female Telegraphist and a Fourth

confined to the General or Fourth Division. All three officers were approaching retirement, with no likelihood of female replacements.[163] A discriminatory employment policy, along with a war of attrition waged against women, had successfully undermined the principle of gender equality in the workplace.

For as long as the department placed women in poorly remunerated, feminised occupations and in assorted temporary positions, parity in employment remained an elusive objective. Over the years the number of women performing minor office work and telephonic duties rose as the number of official postmistresses, female telegraphists, female postal clerks and female postal assistants declined. By 1938 the N.S.W. branch alone accounted for four female junior clerks, 70 female typists, 83 female machinists, eight female (office) supervisors, 38 female phonogram attendants, 20 female telephone monitors, and no less than 787 female telephonists.[164] The use of female phonogram attendants in the Chief Telegraph Office, who were charged with processing telegrams received directly by telephone, allowed for the removal of better-paid telegraphists from some minor suburban and country outlets.[165] By paying temporary staff a higher starting wage than official employees, the department discouraged women from demanding permanent tenure. Prior to the wage cuts of July 1931, a temporary female postal clerk received 184 pounds a year following appointment, whereas a woman in an equivalent permanent position commanded just 172 pounds p.a.[166] What women gained in numbers they lost in occupational standing.

Prevented from sitting the Third Division examination, female P.M.G. Department employees were excused from having to prove themselves the equal of men. In this respect they differed from female telegraphists and sorting clerks in the British Post Office who had gained equal pay from 1920 solely on the basis of test results and qualifications. In that organisation the policy of hiring women from the middle class,

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Division Postal Assistant (Female). The Queensland and South Australian administrations had no women on the official list in the above employment categories. See, *ibid.*, pp. 297–522.

[163] As at January 1938, Ethel Cox was 57 (D.O.B. 2 September 1880); Janet Lobban, 58 (D.O.B. 26 September 1879); and Natalie Marx, 62 (D.O.B. 1 October 1875). See, *ibid.*, p. 243, p. 274 & p. 261, respectively.

[164] Of the 787 female telephonists, 572 attended switchboards in urban, suburban and country post offices, while another 29 were on the unattached list. The balance, 186, worked in the Sydney G.P.O. and in dedicated exchange buildings. See, *ibid.*, pp. 134–278.

[165] 'Western Australia', *Postmaster*, vol. 9, no. 2, 31 July 1930, p. 14.

[166] 'The Result', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 91, 25 October 1929, p. 6.

wherever possible, saw entrance standards reviewed on a regular basis to exclude educated working-class females from the service. Consequently, selection criteria for women were far more rigorous than for men seeking equivalent positions.[167] In Australia, female Post Office staff typically lacked the credentials held by female teachers and other women on near equal pay outside the department. In the 1930s female candidates for teacher training in Queensland sat the Junior Public Examination of the University of Queensland alongside males.[168] Successful applicants could expect to receive a salary only marginally lower than the male rate after completing their studies.[169] Dunkley's claim to equal pay on the basis of equivalent qualifications had ceased to be credible.

The reality that female relatives provided unpaid labour in non-official postal outlets did nothing to enhance the argument in favour of employment equality. For small family businesses unable to afford paid help in a depressed economy, wives and single daughters constituted commercial assets.[170] The citizens' deputation despatched in April 1932 to secure a postal amenity for Allawah reported that storekeeper Ellen Shaw had "an able family of girls who could give attention to the Postal business".[171] For young spinsters, the post office offered an agreeable alternative to tenuous or 'dead-end' employment outside the home.[172] Intent on containing overheads, many manufacturers hired adolescent females to undertake routine machine work, with little chance of advancing to better-paid jobs elsewhere in the factory.[173] As in the past, employers often dismissed female hands when they became eligible for adult rates of

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[167] In the British Post Office, equal pay was granted to particular grades and specific age groups, extending to most women in the major grades by 1961. See, Grint, 'Women and Equality', p. 88 & p. 89.

[168] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 95.

[169] Female teachers in Queensland were paid between 86% and 93% of the male rate. See, *ibid.*, p. 96.

[170] Family businesses were often embroiled in fierce price-cutting wars and depended on unpaid female labour. See, 'Recollections of Colin Steen, Adelaide, S.A.', in Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 34.

[171] Report of deputation from Allawah Progress Association, introduced by Albert Lane, M.H.R., and consisting of Mr Bunting, President, Dr Shallard and Alderman Ferry, waiting on Dep. Director, 18 April 1932, C2593, GA21, Allawah, fol. 15 JUN 1932/GA 1225.

[172] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 107 & p. 108. Jean Daley and other Labor Party women urged parents to help their single daughters become self-supporting so as to minimise the risk of male domination, poverty and illegitimate births. See, Marilyn Lake and Katie Holmes (eds), *Freedom Bound II: Documents on Women in Modern Australia*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 39.

[173] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 44. Girls occupied 'dead-end' jobs in the clothing and textile industries, in food processing plants, and in factories producing soap, candles, and other household requisites, where they received an average of 28 shillings and seven pence a week. See, *ibid.*, p. 57.

pay, prompting many girls to understate their age so as to delay retrenchment.[174] During the 1930s Blacktown postmistress Lily Black co-opted her single daughter to help run the busy postal outlet.[175] A full 82% of the female population identified in the 1933 census fell into the ambiguous 'Not Applicable' category composed of women and girls outside the paid workforce, slightly more than 25% of whom performed shopkeeping or other tasks in family-owned enterprises.[176] While females furnished free labour, all demands for employment equality appeared excessive.

For as long as the vast bulk of working women outside the department were engaged in areas where a gendered wage differential existed, female official employees had little chance of recovering their full entitlements under the law. Most women working in the public and private sectors were employed under separate awards typically set at 52% of the male rate. Only a tiny minority, including journalists, musicians and some municipal council employees, drew the same salaries as their male counterparts.[177] In contrast to female departmental officers, with the same diverse range of duties as their male colleagues, most working women were to be found in a few, poorly paid, narrowly based, gendered occupations in factories and offices. At the time women were represented in just 87 of the 909 vocations identified by the Commonwealth Statistician.[178] Because female labour was generally cheap, by 1934 more than one in every three factory workers in N.S.W. was a woman.[179] Although not untouched by the depression, clothing and textile manufacturers remained major employers of women on modest wages, their relatively rapid recovery from the economic downturn a function of residual domestic demand and limited dependence on imported raw materials. Conversely, heavy engineering firms and capital goods manufacturers – traditionally large employers of male labour – performed sluggishly throughout the 1930s. Stiff competition from overseas factories ensured that their demand for

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[174] *ibid.*, p. 55.
[175] In October 1935 Miss Black was 17 years old. See, letter from Lily Black, Blacktown, to Mr Ockwell, D.I., 14 October 1935, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown.
[176] Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 95 & p. 96.
[177] Although neither the Commonwealth Public Service Board nor the Public Service Arbitrator had arrived at a female basic wage, the minimum standard for women was typically set at 50 pounds less a year than for men. See, Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 75, p. 76 & p. 92.
[178] *ibid.*, p. 14.
[179] In 1886 one in seven factory hands was a female: by 1903 the ratio had shrunk to one in four. In Victoria, where industrialisation was more advanced than in N.S.W., the workforce participation rate for women was even more impressive. Whereas, in 1886 only one in five manufacturing employees had been female, by 1934 over half of all factory hands were women. See, *ibid.*, p. 20.

workers remained modest.[180] In effect, female official employees had priced themselves out of what was an otherwise circumscribed, albeit expanding, low-wage labour market.

Throughout the 1930s female departmental officers were increasingly appraised in terms of their personality, neutralising any residual claim they may have had to equal treatment on the basis of equal employee attributes. The development can be ascribed, in part, to the success achieved by the department's elite Hello Girls – telephonists with pleasing voices chosen for their public-relations and commercial value. From 1933 the women were called on to make initial contact with new telephone subscribers, welcome them to the service, familiarise them with the instrument, and refer those interested in auxiliary amenities to canvassing staff. The public applauded the initiative. For their part, departmental canvassers convinced many business customers to purchase extra lines or paid entries in the telephone directory, and dissuaded other subscribers from having their line cancelled in the adverse economic climate.[181] The same regard for personality saw young women hired to drive lifts in department stores, irrespective of protests from limbless and maimed veterans who treated elevator driving as their domain.[182] Like telephonists, female telegraphists and postmistresses were assessed in terms of personal presentation. Reporting on the retirement of Miss Raftery, telegraphist, to the Victorian branch of the Australian Postal Clerks' Union in November 1932, a male colleague referred to her "charming disposition" and "expansive smile", but had little to say about her workplace performance.[183] Similarly, while members of the Commonwealth Postmasters' Association in South Australia acknowledged her efficiency, Miss Liston, Penola's former postmistress, was best remembered for her "lovable and generous disposition".[184] Outside the Post Office, many older single women were celebrated for

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[180] *ibid*., p. 14.
[181] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report 1933–1934*, 1934–35, p. 12 & p. 13. Specialised telephone canvassers had been employed from 1927. Their activities intensified with the onset of depression. By 1931, 20,529 orders for new connections had been obtained, helping to offset cancellations. See, *Postmaster-General's Department*, *Twenty-First Annual Report 1930–1931*, p. 17.
[182] Besides being more attractive and cheaper to hire, female lift drivers were more personable than veterans and were reported to be better able to answer shoppers' enquiries. See, Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, p. 56.
[183] 'Victorian Branch', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 27, 26 November 1932, p. 7.
[184] 'South Australia', *Postmaster*, vol. 9, no. 2, 31 July 1930, p. 13.

their commitment to careers and were congratulated on their long service.[185] In the P.M.G. Department, personality tended to subsume vocational ability, regardless of praise for individual achievements.

The fact that women were construed in a variety of ways tempered the case for workplace equality based on universally acknowledged, gender-neutral, employee qualities. Over time, female departmental staff had exhibited an ability to observe confidentiality, respecting the personal affairs of telegraph customers, pension recipients and lapsed telephone subscribers. In private enterprise, employers invested considerable confidence in female secretaries to protect business secrets and privileged information entrusted to them.[186] Since the early 1920s, post office customers had come to expect an enhanced level of personal privacy, courtesy of detached suburban housing, home telephones and affordable private transport.[187] The department's objections to plans put forward by the Government Tourist Bureau to take over Jenolan Caves' non-official office pointed to increased faith in the discretion of female officers.[188] Senior Inspector Leece reported that the postmistress, Mary Walsh, was "a most reliable lady" who could be "depended on to observe the closest secrecy". He implied that her proposed replacement, Mr Stilling, Bureau employee and manager of Caves House, could not be counted on to respect customer privacy to the same degree, especially when it came to the business affairs of rival boarding-house keepers.[189] Even so, jokes about curious and indiscreet women abounded. In the June 1935 edition of *Postal Notes*, an item appeared entitled "Efficiency De Luxe". The joke concerned a man in a small country town, who, anxious to know when his mother-in-law planned to pay her married daughter a visit, enquired at the post office whether a post card had arrived advising of her intentions. The postmaster turned to his wife: "Did you see a post-card for Mr Blank?". "Yes"

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[185] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 163 & p. 164.
[186] Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992, p. 212.
[187] Heather Radi, '1920–29', in F. K. Crowley (ed.), *A New History of Australia*, Melbourne, William Heinemann Australia, 1974, p. 379 & p. 388.
[188] Letter from H. J. Lamble, Director, Government Tourist Bureau, Challis House, Martin Place, Sydney, 4 March 1936, C2593, GA903, Jenolan Caves, fol. 6 MAR 1936/GA 628.
[189] Report from T. Leece, Snr I, to Dep. Director, 18 March 1936, *ibid.*, fol. GA '36/628. Acting District Inspector Watts opined that Miss Walsh, a competent operator, was better placed to preserve confidentiality than Stilling, who would have to transmit telegrams by telephone, allowing customers to overhear messages. Watts noted that there was no traffic noise in the quiet bushland setting to drown out his voice. See, report by G. R. Watts, Acting D.I., Bathurst, 16 March 1936, *ibid.*, fol. GA '36/628.

she replied, "it's here somewhere. She'll be here at 3'oclock to-morrow afternoon."[190] Although women had been telegraphists for many years, their domestic instincts were often seen to be incompatible with electronic technology. Reporting for *Postal Notes* on the death of official postmistress Ethel Cox, "A Friend" from the Bingara office remembered her as an obsessive cleaner: "Even the "Morse" got a bath from time to time and with no light hand at that. She would remark: "There seems to be something wrong with that thing; it won't work now, and I only cleaned it up a bit!". An inspection would uncover a tiny fine wire broken or "dead earth" because of the soaking it had got".[191] Without a uniform appreciation of their value as workers, female staff could not always expect to be treated seriously.

While women on the permanent list inhabited the margins of union life, the issue of parity in employment remained an industrial irrelevancy. In N.S.W., men monopolised executive positions in the Commonwealth Postmasters' Association and the Australian Postal Clerks' Union, denying women a conspicuous presence in employee affairs.[192] Absent from the associations' central policy-making bodies, females were largely confined to fundraising and other "support" duties. In the Australian Postal Clerks' Union, women managed a fund set up to assist temporary officers who had been dismissed in response to the economic crisis, but were unrepresented in the political proceedings of the organisation.[193] On a social level, females remained on the periphery. Staff associations continued to hold all-male smoke concerts and to conduct sporting events where women were spectators rather

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[190] 'Efficiency De Luxe', *Postal Notes*, vol. 11, no. 1, 20 June 1935, p. 2.

[191] 'An Appreciation – The Late Ethel S. Cox', 'report by "A Friend"', *Postal Notes*, New Series, no. 33, 15 January 1948, p. 12 & p. 13.

[192] See, for example, the 'Commonwealth Postmasters' Association, New South Wales Branch, Annual Report, 1929–30', *Postmaster*, vol. 9, no. 2, 31 July 1930, p. 8. Women played a slightly more significant role in the interstate branches of unions. In the Victorian branch of the Postmasters' Association, Mabel White was one of two financial auditors, while Misses Gilchrist, Sullivan and Quin served on the committee. See, 'Victoria', *ibid.*, p. 9. In the Western Australian branch, Miss Hackett attended monthly meetings on an irregular basis. See, 'Western Australia, Annual Report 1929–1930', *ibid.*, p. 14.

[193] 'New South Wales', 'report of monthly committee meeting', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 9, 26 May 1931, p. 6. While a few engaged in strikes, female unionists in general contented themselves with "domestic" tasks, such as collecting funds and organising food for men engaged in industrial action. Some women baked their own bread in protest against the high price of the commercially produced staple. See, Stone, 'Brazen hussies and God's police', p. 40, p. 45, p. 47, p. 51 & p. 52. Stone argues that miners' wives actively embraced a political agenda, but concedes that the male rank and file were reluctant to allow them to sit on strike committees or contribute to policy formulation. See, *ibid.*, p. 46, p. 47 & p. 49.

than participants.[194] Despite their long-standing relationship with unions, females were still physically and emotionally detached from the male membership. Reporting in July 1931 on the retirement of Catherine Maguire to the Victorian Branch of the Australian Postal Clerks' Union, a male committee member observed that the postmistress had always been "ready to meet the staff *as far as she was able* (my emphasis)."[195] The retirement of Miss Gillmore, telegraphist, in March 1932 elicited an equally measured response. The latter suggested a lack of familiarity or empathy on the part of male co-workers, who restricted their commentary to wishing their colleague "a happy reward for the work she has given the Department".[196] Isolated, both socially and industrially, female officers had little hope of interesting male staff in their minority concerns.

Preoccupations

The chances of achieving true gender equality in the P.M.G. Department continued to fade as women invested an increasing amount of time in Postal Institute affairs, arguably to the detriment of their industrial interests. During the Great Depression, female members of the Postal Institute involved themselves in activities designed to boost worker morale and compensate for wage cuts, organising free staff concerts and negotiating discounted tickets to newly released films. In addition, they established the P.M.G. Girls' Unemployment Fund to aid retrenched female staff. Between 1930 and 1935, Institute members collected over 750 pounds, distributing the money among 65 former colleagues.[197] Women also took an active role in the production of *Postal Notes*. First issued in June 1934, the Institute journal set out to generate a greater sense of unity among departmental employees, inviting contributions from staff that would help to familiarise workers with one another.[198] During the period, women represented the Postal Institute in various choral competitions involving a

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[194] See, for example, 'New South Wales Branch', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 93, 20 December 1929, p. 10.
[195] 'Victorian Branch', 'report of monthly committee meeting, 20 July 1931', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 12, 21 August 1931, p. 28.
[196] 'South Australian Branch', 'minutes of committee meeting on 18 March 1932', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 20, 26 April 1932, p. 15.
[197] Gordon Goudie, *API, The First Seventy Years: The History of the Australian Post-Tel Institute in New South Wales 1921–1991*, Sydney, The Fine Arts Press, 1991, p. 22, p. 23 & p. 27.
[198] *Postal Notes*, vol. 1, no. 1, 15 June 1934, p. 1, reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 28.

range of business houses.[199] The above activities further immersed women in Institute life, arguably at the cost of industrial consciousness.

Focused on their survival throughout the 1930s, the P.M.G. staff associations put aside the seemingly less important matter of gender equality. Anxious to preserve their membership, industrial power and financial viability, federal public service unions joined forces to campaign against the removal of preferential treatment provisions for unionists. The action followed the defeat of the Scullin government in December 1931 at the hands of the United Australia Party under Labor defector Joseph Lyons.[200] Concerned for their membership over the long term, unions objected to the Public Service Board's practice from July 1931 of dismissing junior probationers and placing permanent officials in their jobs. Many of the positions entailed simple delivery and cleaning work.[201] The staff associations were equally annoyed by the transfer of redundant Third Division officers to the Fourth Division, damaging the career prospects of juniors in the lower stratum.[202] Meanwhile, the union leadership worried over the fate of junior postmasters, some of whom questioned whether it was worthwhile remaining members and staying in the service. The individuals concerned complained that the salary cuts prevented them from maintaining the appearance expected of men in their position and forced them to defer marriage.[203] Anxious for their members' future, the associations representing telegraphists resisted the replacement of Morse equipment in smaller offices with phonogram facilities and lamented the advent of picturegram technology from 1929. The latter allowed for the transmission of photographs and text – a development that threatened to deskill many officers and render others superfluous.[204] Moreover, the unions feared that the new Murray Multiplex telegraph system would translate into

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[199] Goudie, *API, The First Seventy Years*, p. 24.
[200] Union members had enjoyed preferential treatment in terms of recruitment and arbitration from June 1930. See, 'New South Wales Branch Annual Report, 1929–30', *Postmaster*, vol. 9, no. 2, 31 July 1930, p. 8; & Colin A. Hughes and B. D. Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890–1964*, Canberra, Australian National U.P., 1968, p. 17.
[201] Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 213.
[202] 'South Australian Branch', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 94, 20 January 1930, p. 16; & 'New South Wales, report of committee meeting on 18 January 1932', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 19, 26 March 1932, p. 5.
[203] 'Correspondence', 'The Salary of Grade 1 P.M.s', 'letter from "Poverty-Stricken Service"', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 27, 26 November 1932, p. 19; &'New South Wales Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 13, 26 September 1931, p. 9.

fewer members. The equipment required just one sender instead of the usual two machine operators, and one receiver in place of the customary three or four.[205] At a time when the unions' very existence was at risk, the situation of a few female officers hardly seemed to matter.

During the early 1930s, staff associations fought to protect members from attacks by outside interests, leaving them little time to address sectional concerns within. Committed to defending the reputation of P.M.G. Department employees, union leaders pilloried the banks and the anti-Labor press for portraying workers as inefficient malingerers in order to justify the salary reductions.[206] On another front, the unions combined to resist moves by the N.S.W. state government to tax federal public servants in an attempt to cover the cost of unemployment assistance.[207] In such an environment, the collective interests of all unionists came before the issues affecting a seemingly insignificant minority.

Divisions between and within unions further eroded the cause of gender parity. Afflicted by chronic disunity, the Commonwealth Postmasters' Association, the Australian Telegraphists' Union and the Australian Postal Clerks' Union competed vigorously with one another for members across a range of designations, leading to frequent allegations of poaching.[208] The Fourth Division postal clerks' association accused the Third Division postmasters' and telegraphists' unions of elitism in refusing to co-operate industrially.[209] The Commonwealth Postmasters' Association

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[204] 'New South Wales Branch, report of committee meeting on 16 December 1929', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 94, 20 January 1930, p. 7 & p. 8; & 'New Telegraphs Superintendent for Melbourne', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 6, 26 February 1931, p. 18.

[205] In contrast to the Murray Multiplex system, the Wheatstone–Creed system required two telegraphists to prepare and transmit the message by way of the perforated tape. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 199.

[206] 'Executive Council, report of meeting of Executive, 5 January 1931', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 6, 26 February 1931, p. 9; & 'Passing Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 7, 26 March 1931, p. 1.

[207] 'New South Wales, report of meeting of Committee on 19 January 1931', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 6, 26 February 1931, p. 25.

[208] 'South Australian Branch', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 96, 24 March 1930, p. 10.

[209] 'Passing Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 91, 25 October 1929, p. 1. The Postal Clerks' Union was opposed to efforts by the Postmasters' Association to deny Postmaster Grade 1s the title of Postmaster. See, 'Correspondence', 'Ingratitude', letter from "Grade 1, P.M., NSW", *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 96, 24 March 1930, p. 32. The Third Division Telegraphists' and Postal Clerks' Union feared that the Public Service Board was looking to reconstitute the Third Division and advantage the Fourth Division. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 216 & p. 217.

considered the Australian Postal Clerks' Union to be dangerously radical, arguing that older, more-senior officials should set a good example to young, often impressionable, junior employees by defending the status *quo*.[210] Advances in machine telegraphy widened the rift between Third and Fourth Division unionists. In the late 1920s, the department began to replace the Wheatstone–Creed equipment with the Murray Multiplex system in large offices connected to interstate and busy intrastate routes. The new technology permitted up to eight channels or circuits on the one line, the older duplex and quadruplex machines allowing for just two or four. Because of the heavy physical demands placed on staff by the new equipment, the department usually assigned younger and fitter Fourth Division telegraphists to Multiplex-equipped centres. The practice left Ethel Cox at Maclean and other older Third Division operators in smaller country towns to languish in Morse-key "backwaters". A bid by the Fourth Division Australian Postal Assistants' Union to have telegraphy declassified in terms of designation added to the ill feeling between associations.[211] Meanwhile, the Australian Postal Clerks' Union struggled to overcome conflict between conservative members and the "Communists" in their midst. The latter saw the former as dupes of the capitalist press and admonished the leadership for failing to prevent the salary cuts, notwithstanding the acquiescence of unionists in general. On a broader level, the unions' N.S.W. branches condemned their national bodies over an alleged deal done in the Melbourne-based federated council to limit wage claims in light of government economies.[212] While women were divided among themselves by disparate union issues, neither they nor their male co-workers were likely to find common cause with respect to gender equality.

The Great Depression generated renewed concern for the careers of young males, deflecting attention from female officers. Anxious to see an improvement in the educational standard of telegram boys faced with economic uncertainty, the editor of *Postal Notes* applauded the resumption of entrance examinations for messengers late in 1934. He noted with satisfaction that "a number of lads with excellent school

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[210] 'Non-Militant', *Postmaster*, vol. 9, no. 2, 31 July 1930, p. 4; & 'Personal Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 91, 25 October 1929, p. 20.
[211] The Public Service Board and the Department also sought to have telegraphy declassified. See, Baker, *Communicators and Their First Trade Unions*, p. 199.
[212] 'Correspondence', 'letter from N. McNeil', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 13, 26 September 1931, p. 25; & 'Correspondence', 'We are not all Ingrates', 'letter from "TELEGRAPHIST"', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 19, 26 March 1932, p. 15.

records (had) gained admission to the Service". The magazine also praised the reintroduction of examinations for postmasters and postal clerks, urging young men to study for promotion rather than rely on seniority for advancement.[213] In November 1936 *Postal Notes* commenced a column headed "The Man of the Month" with the intention of encouraging youths to aspire to senior positions. The editor expressed the earnest hope that stories of senior officials who had "risen from the ranks" would inspire junior males to emulate them.[214] An enduring fixation with the male wage rendered incidental most things female.

A Change of Strategy

During the period women's groups changed their tactics in the pursuit of employment equality, emphasising the sameness of the sexes rather than difference. Keen to argue the case for gender sameness, Linda Littlejohn from the United Associations of Women and like-minded activists formed the Australian Open Door Council in Sydney in 1929. Soon after, a Victorian branch of the Council was set up in Melbourne. Littlejohn, along with Muriel Heagney, had concluded that stress on female difference, reflected in protective legislation and the notion of maternal citizenship, had been counterproductive, sabotaging the claim to vocational equality by setting the sexes apart from one another. Henceforth, less attention would be paid to motherhood, childbirth, childrearing, and the sexual abuse of women.[215] Rather than highlight the unique qualities of females, Heagney focused on the similarities between men and women, stressed their shared humanity, and concentrated on their common interests as voters and taxpayers.[216] She drew attention to the relative disadvantage of Australian working women, noting that most received just 52% of the wage paid to men, whereas their counterparts in Britain commanded 58% of the male rate, U.S. women 59%, and Swedish women 61%.[217] Accordingly, Heagney pressed for a minimum or basic adult wage, irrespective of gender. She insisted that females had a right to enjoy the highest possible standard of living independent of a male

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[213] 'Advancement in the Service', *Postal Notes*, vol. 2, no. 2, 20 July 1935, p. 1.
[214] 'The Man of the Month', *Postal Notes*, vol. 3, no. VIII, 20 January 1937, p. 3.
[215] Consequent to the change in tactics, Littlejohn and Heagney expected that protective measures would be applied equally to men and women. See, Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 168, p. 171, p. 173 & p. 174.
[216] *ibid.*, p. 180. From Heagney's perspective, equality in employment was a fundamental entitlement that transcended gender. See, *ibid.*, p. 178.
[217] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 30.

breadwinner.[218] Activist Jessie Street also stressed gender sameness in putting the case for equality in employment. In a pamphlet produced by the United Associations of Women, she argued that female public servants had just claim to wage parity since they, like their male colleagues, contributed to national coffers.[219] To underline the similarities between the sexes in an economic sense, Street lobbied for a motherhood allowance that accurately reflected the value of the work performed by women at home. A royal commission had previously rejected proposals for a dedicated female payment. Street implied that a state benefit would satisfy the desire among married women for economic independence and persuade them to leave the labour market.[220] Dating from the early 1900s, the notion of gender sameness had gained new currency.

The near unique situation of female official post and telegraph employees as nominal recipients of equal pay was overlooked as activists concentrated on ridding working women of the stigma attached to cheap labour – something the former had never provided, at least not in absolute terms. Muriel Heagney maintained that the trade unions would only take the case for equal pay seriously when females stopped undercutting male rates.[221] Conceding that women had the advantage over men while they worked for low pay, Heagney suggested that the only way to remove competition between males and females was to fix wages according to the nature of the work, rather than according to sex, equalising remuneration levels in the process.[222] In 1937 she persuaded the N.S.W. Clerks' Union to convene a conference to discuss the issue of equal pay. At the event Heagney presented wage parity as a necessary precondition for the full economic and social equality of women. Subsequently, she took charge of the Council of Action for Equal Pay, which co-ordinated a campaign for gender-neutral wage rates. Meanwhile, the United Associations of Women joined forces with the N.S.W. Teachers' Federation in a bid to secure equal pay for female members.[223]

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[218] *ibid.*, p. 34 & p. 35.
[219] Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 108. Littlejohn, Heagney and Street stopped short of asserting gender sameness in all things, such as physical strength, identifying similarities between the sexes, rather than claiming identical characteristics.
[220] *ibid.*, p. 107 & p. 108.
[221] *ibid.*, p. 176 & p. 179.
[222] Heagney stressed that the replacement of women workers by men would not add to the total number of job vacancies, and was therefore no solution to labour market problems. See, Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 13 & p. 14.
[223] Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 181. Conflict between Muriel Heagney and Jessie Street compromised the operation of the Council of Action for Equal Pay, the two women disagreeing over the timetable for the attainment of equal remuneration. Street's initiative to secure equality through the arbitration court

These initiatives ignored the reality that equal pay on its own did not guarantee an end to discrimination when faced with a hostile and ambivalent employer and a distracted and generally unsympathetic union movement.

The sameness argument failed to win over male workers and underscored shortcomings in feminist policy. Dismissive of the female right to employment promoted by Heagney, Littlejohn and Street, the South Australian Branch of the Labor Party passed a resolution in 1936 to the effect that only women in need, or without the financial support of male kin, should be permitted to work.[224] Intended to protect the male breadwinner in a depressed labour market, the resolution exposed the folly inherent in the assertion of gender sameness in terms of human, labour and citizenship rights, without a fundamental redefinition of those rights with respect to women. Joan Scott observes that so long as the sameness of the sexes is seen in relation to the masculine condition – in this case the male right to employment – sexual difference cannot be expunged.[225] Along with other working women, female P.M.G. Department employees still wanted for a universally acknowledged entitlement to paid work.

From the beginning of the Great Depression, the Commonwealth Arbitration Court took a particular interest in the lot of male wage earners to the detriment of female employees. To maximise job prospects for men in a sluggish economy, Justice Dethridge arrived at a determination in 1930 that limited the earnings of female fruit pickers in Mildura to two-thirds the male rate, annulling previous wage parity provisions and discounting the principle of equal pay for equal work.[226] In April 1934 the Court dismissed a claim by clothing industry workers for a separate female basic wage, affirming the common practice of paying women 52% of the male award.[227] By then, female Post Office employees on equal pay were something of an aberration in the labour market.

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possibly exacerbated the dispute between the women. Heagney and Street's relationship began to break down from 1941. See, *ibid.*, p. 185.

[224] *ibid*., p. 177.

[225] Joan Wallach Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, Boston, Harvard U.P., 1996, p. 3 & p. 4; & Lake, *Getting Equal*, p. 174.

[226] In 1912 Justice Higgins had awarded equal pay to female fruit pickers in Mildura who did the same work as males. See, Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 35.

[227] *ibid.*, p. 39. On 5 May 1935, the Arbitration Court brought down a ruling providing for a separate and lower rate of pay for female factory hands under the metal trades award. See, *ibid.*, p. 60.

Women's groups committed to the principle of employment equality remained incapable of mounting a concerted campaign to achieve their objective due to a critical lack of unity. Though both conservative in orientation, the Australian Women's National League and the Country Women's Association clashed over the former's plans to establish branches in rural areas where the C.W.A.'s natural constituency resided.[228] Similarly, the C.W.A. and the Housewives' Association fell out over the latter's inroads into country districts and its vocal opposition to tariffs and bounties that artificially inflated the price of butter and sugar.[229] Insular in character, female members of the Communist Party kept their distance from middle-class feminists. They expressed contempt for the Australian Federation of Women Voters under Bessie Rischbieth and its practice of soliciting support from parliamentary candidates. They claimed that the Federation, along with the United Associations of Women led by Jessie Street and Linda Littlejohn, were self-serving organisations that advanced members' interests rather than the cause of equality.[230] Without a united approach outside of the department to the matters affecting women, female Post Office employees were left to represent themselves.

Regressive Developments

The Great Depression ushered in a new era of social conservatism in which the morality of working women and the perceived threat posed by females to the male ego became pressing issues. Jessie Street noted a negative association in the community between "sinful" working women who allegedly competed with men for scarce jobs, and females who smoked and used cosmetics.[231] In the May 1932 edition of the *Australian Postal Clerk*, reference is made to a complaint from a male

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[228] Judith Smart, '"Principles Do Not Alter, but the Means by Which We Attain Them Change": the Australian Women's National League and Political Citizenship', *Women's History Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, March 2006, p. 54.

[229] Judith Smart, 'A Mission to the Home: the Housewives' Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and Protestant Christianity, 1920–1940', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 13, no. 28, 1998, p. 223.

[230] The Communist women exhibited a high level of internal solidarity, an inevitable by-product of persecution from outside. In August 1931 they resolved to organise special meetings and study circles in an attempt to combat middle-class feminists and 'social fascists'. See, Damousi, *Women Come Rally*, p. 132, p. 133, p. 139 & p. 153. Women's groups eventually came together around the Australian Women's Charter from 1943. The document upheld the principle of equal pay and dealt with women's health, V.D. treatment, housing and childcare. It called for child endowment and a widows' pension equivalent to the male basic wage. See, *ibid.*, p. 154.

telegraphist who objected to the amount of make-up worn by women in the Sydney G.P.O. Phonogram Room. According to him, there was "as much powder in the air sometimes as in an arsenal".[232] Other men felt that women with "masculine" habits were putting male identity at risk. In the September 1935 issue of *Postal Notes*, a male employee in the Sydney G.P.O. explained why he had taken to smoking a pipe: "I abandoned the effeminate habit of cigarette smoking when my girlfriend became a zealous devotee. I had to be different. I fear the day when the sex (female) appropriates the pipe; then for men it will be the hashish and the hubble bubble."[233] For as long as women were seen to be morally suspect or the usurpers of male prerogatives, equality in the workplace remained an unattainable objective.

While most women's organisations embraced both paid work and home duties, a renewed focus on matrimony and domesticity consequential to the depression served to weaken the case for parity in employment. Confronted with a declining marriage rate stemming from the economic malaise, proponents of matrimony argued that the institution aided the male unemployed by removing women from the labour pool. They also asserted that marriage afforded intending brides a more gratifying sexual relationship than that available to spinsters.[234] With the welfare of male breadwinners in mind, the Mothers' Union proposed that girls stay at home or assist in other households rather than deny men a living in a contracting labour market.[235] Sensitive to criticism of them in parts of the community, some working women allegedly felt guilty about drawing a wage when men were jobless.[236] In the circumstances most

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[231] 'Jessie Street, Document 2.13, "Attacks on women workers", letter to Editor, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 February, 1934, Jessie Street papers, National Library of Australia, MS 2683/38', reproduced in Lake and Holmes (eds), *Freedom Bound II*, p. 74.

[232] 'New South Wales Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 21, 26 May 1932, p. 6. The new conservatism manifested itself in measures intended to protect female virtue, such as stricter controls on dancing competitions and the accreditation of dance teachers. See, Jill Julius Matthews, 'Dancing Modernity', in Barbara Caine and Rosemary Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1995, p. 81 & p. 85.

[233] 'Sunshine, Bees and the G.P.O.' by "R.A.F.", *Postal Notes*, vol. 2, no. IV, 20 September 1935, p. 2.

[234] Mackinolty, "Woman's place …", p. 104. Marriage was viewed as a way of satisfying the sexual needs of women – a problematic issue while females remained unwed. See, Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 153 & p. 162.

[235] Sabine Willis, 'Homes are Divine Workshops', in Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Class and History*, p. 189. Muriel Heagney noted the presence of a "propaganda" campaign designed to encourage females to engage in home-based activities, rather than compete with males for employment. See, Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 11.

[236] Holmes, *Spaces in her Day*, p. 26.

single women, according to Muriel Heagney, planned to resign after marrying.[237] While many females remained in employment by choice, or to support jobless male relatives, considerable energy was invested in the validation of home duties and the domestic domain.[238] In July 1930 the National Council of Women passed a resolution requiring that a female engaged in housework be described in government documents and publications as a 'household worker' rather than a 'domestic'. Council members in Western Australia conveyed the resolution to the Prime Minister. He saw to it that the proposed change was adopted by all federal government agencies, including the P.M.G. Department.[239] Alarmed by radical unionism and industrial unrest from the mid 1930s, the Australian Women's Guild of Empire argued that the home was the principal source of 'co-operation and loving friendship' in society and the basis for a harmonious relationship between capital and labour.[240] All the while housekeeping skills gained in utility as wives and adult daughters prepared economical meals and repaired worn clothing to minimise household expenditure in lean times.[241] Irrespective of support for working women, the domestic life and outside employment increasingly came to be seen as incompatible.

Arguably, the Great Depression damaged the case for equality in employment by reinforcing the view that a woman's primary obligation was to beautify the world and create a domestic asylum removed from life's harsh realities. In the November 1932 issue of the *Australian Postal Clerk*, the Victorian correspondent reported on the female operators in Melbourne's Chief Telegraph Office who brought home-grown flowers to work. He applauded them for raising the spirits of staff and adding a splash of colour to the workplace.[242] Whereas some male telegraphists condemned female officers for wearing too much make-up, the *Australian Postal Clerk's* N.S.W. correspondent found the women's appearance uplifting, with or without cosmetics.[243] Meanwhile, the beauty columnist in *Postal Notes* reminded readers of their duty to

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[237] Heagney reported that most wives appeared to prefer housework to paid work. See Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 102.
[238] Mackinolty, "Woman's place …", p. 95 & p. 96.
[239] A departmental directive required officials to observe the proposed change. See, Circ. Memo No. 6959 from S. C. Francis, Snr I., P.M.G. Dept, G.P.O., Sydney, to D.I., Kempsey, 30 July 1930, C32102, P.O. Circulars, Comm. and State, 1/74, 6951–6990, 1930–1931, N.A.A., Sydney.
[240] Josie Castle, 'The Australian Women's Guild of Empire', in Windschuttle (ed.), *Women, Class and History*, p. 295 & p. 297.
[241] Lowenstein, *Weevils in the Flour*, p. 2; & Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 107.
[242] 'Victorian Branch', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 27, 26 November 1932, p. 7.

look good, both inside and outside of the office.[244] In keeping with women's responsibility to provide domestic sanctuary from adverse economic forces, Accounts Branch staff in the Sydney G.P.O. presented colleague Gwen Morgan with a dinner and tea service upon her departure in February 1936 to be married.[245] The argument for parity in employment remained problematic while women tended to be valued more for their decorative qualities and homemaking abilities than for their capacity as workers.

A New Measure of Employee Worth and a Liberalised View of Female Morality

During the 1930s one-on-one salesmanship and business prowess became important criteria for departmental employment. Responding to the economic downturn, Chief Office invested heavily in commercial expertise, launching an advertising and sales campaign calculated to recover lost business and expand the customer base. From 1930 the department, intent on boosting telegraph earnings, had dedicated officers meet passenger trains and ships and solicit custom from travellers.[246] Postmaster-General A. J. McLachlan applauded the success achieved by departmental canvassers acquainted with "the principles and practices of salesmanship", pointing to "the (commercial) advantages of personal contact with individual members of the public".[247] At the Official Conference of Postmasters held in Sydney in June 1937, the Acting Senior Inspector observed that salesmanship called for refinement and tact in dealing with customers.[248] In this respect the Post Office followed the lead of department stores. Emporia staff attended to customers on a personal level in a gracious manner, assessed their taste and probable budget, and brought to bear a broad knowledge of products, special orders and delivery services – all of which put subtle pressure on the potential buyer to purchase.[249] In September 1936 the

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[243] 'New South Wales Notes', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 21, 26 May 1932, p. 6.
[244] *Postal Notes'* beauty column was written by local beauticians or was based on syndicated "advice" from Hollywood stars. See, for example, 'Beauty Hints by Mrs Rolleston, 88 King Street, Sydney', *Postal Notes*, vol. 4, no. 1, 30 June 1937, p. 12 & p. 13; & 'Our Women's Section: Beauty Hints by Ginger Rogers', *Postal Notes*, vol. 4, no. 2, 20 July 1937, p. 9.
[245] 'Personal Notes', *Postal Notes*, vol. 2, no. 10, 20 March 1936, p. 14.
[246] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-First Annual Report, 1930–1931*, p. 21.
[247] *Postmaster-General's Department, Twenty-Fourth Annual Report, 1933–1934*, p. 21.
[248] 'Address by the Acting Senior Inspector', Official Conference of Postmasters, 14 and 15 June 1937, p. 10.
[249] Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, p. 61.

department chose Thomas Mallam to run the non-official post office at Dover Heights largely on the basis of his commercial prowess. District Inspector N. R. Cottrall noted that the applicant had worked in Farmer and Company's city emporium where he had acquired sales skills and "a thorough understanding of the public". Cottrall opined that Mallam would be a more attentive employee than John Howells, storeholder and fellow candidate for the position of postmaster. He observed that Mallam planned to open a sub newsagency that would require his constant presence. Howells, on the other hand, worked in the city and would be absent from the shop for much of the day, leaving his wife in charge. Inspector Cottrall implied that Mrs Howells would be the poorer salesperson, having to run the office while attending to domestic chores and a boarder.[250]

Outside of the P.M.G. Department, salesmanship ensured that domestic responsibilities and paid work were increasingly seen as mutually exclusive.[251] In December 1932 local resident H. O. Jackson recommended storekeeper Arthur Roberts for the job of postmaster at Wamberal on the strength of his commercial acumen, discounting an application from housebound widow Annabelle Edwards to operate the non-official post office.[252] For independent grocers, salesmanship had assumed critical importance. Faced with strong competition from chain stores, small business proprietors looked to customer relations as a way of offsetting their relative lack of buying power and the negative impact of competitors' catalogues on turnover.[253] In the new retail environment, postal employees and other traders were called on to sell a product, rather than simply provide one.

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[250] Report from N. R. Cottrall, Metro No. 3, to Snr I., 21 September 1936, C2593, GA557, Dover Heights, fol. GA '36/1856.

[251] Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, p. 178. Gluckmann notes a similar phenomenon in inter-war Britain. Employers typically devalued casual "domestic" work, such as commercial washing and ironing, compared with tasks performed outside the home, even though the women involved had gained quasi sales skills in negotiating their terms of employment with clients. See, Miriam A. Gluckmann, 'Some Do, Some Don't (But in Fact They All Do really); Some Will, Some Won't; Some Have, Some Haven't: Women, Men, Work, and Washing Machines in Inter-War Britain', *Gender & History*, vol. 7, no. 2, August 1995, p. 276.

[252] Letter from H. O. Jackson, Wamberal, 9 December 1932, C2593, GA1853, Wamberal; & *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr …, completed by Annabelle Edwards, 10 December 1932, *ibid*.

[253] Appearing in the daily press, chain-store catalogues invited product comparison on the basis of price rather than quality, discounting the ability of small independent grocers to identify savings and value-for-money goods on behalf of customers. See, Kingston, *Basket, Bag and Trolley*, p. 66.

By the 1930s few women secured departmental positions solely on the basis of their respectability. Over time, the number of character references written on behalf of female candidates for non-official employment had declined significantly. Whereas the bureaucracy's records previously contained numerous testimonials, an examination of files for 40 non-official post offices covering the years 1929 to 1938 revealed just three references, all dealing with a single female applicant. In two of the three testimonials, mention is made of efficiency or business skills, as well as moral standing.[254] Putting aside the increased stress on personality and sales expertise, the waning of respectability as an employment criterion can be traced to the erosion of traditional, circumscribed ideas surrounding female propriety. The recent discovery by medical experts and sociologists that the middle-class female had sexual needs, and therefore a right to a satisfying relationship, rendered obsolete the 19th-century concept of the passionless 'good' woman.[255] The new, more-liberal code of conduct that accompanied their findings was put to the test in dance halls, cinemas, and other sexualised entertainment venues where middle-class females came into close physical and social contact with 'bad' women. Despite the predictions of critics, their association did not have a patently negative impact on the former.[256] Meanwhile, Hollywood and the print media presented positive images of female motorists, aviators, and other free-spirited women, legitimising more flexible modes of behaviour.[257] Modern dance accelerated the demise of an earlier, less tolerant view of respectability. Promoted as an aid to good health, it expanded the range of acceptable female activities, eclipsing the older, narrower ideal of female gentility that had seen girls from the ruling class instructed in formal dance styles to prepare them for polite society.[258]

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[254] See footnote 51 for details of the offices examined. The three references were written on behalf of married woman Mabel Morrice, applicant for the job of Postmistress at Bellambi in February 1938. They consisted of a testimonial from W. Morrison, Manager, Commonwealth Bank, Camden, of 14 February 1938; a reference from Rev. Charles Thomas, late Rector, Sutton Forest, of 15 February 1938; and one from Keith Smart J.P., Camden General Agency, of 10 February 1938. See, C2593, GA226501 (GA114), Bellambi. In his application of September 1932 for the job of Postmaster at Asquith, Alexander Massie enclosed two references for his wife who was to act as his unpaid assistant. See, *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Alexander Massie, 28 September 1932, C2593, GA49, Asquith.
[255] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 152 & p. 153.
[256] Matthews, 'Dancing Modernity', pp. 83-86.
[257] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 155.

The Plurality of the Depression Experience

Although many non-official postmasters and postmistresses endured hardship in the Great Depression, some individuals fared better than others. Throughout the 1930s Blacktown Post Office experienced a strong demand for services, with the subdivision of large pastoral holdings into small poultry and dairy farms supplying the Sydney market.[259] For the financial year 1929–1930, postmistress Lily Black drew an annual wage of 517 pounds 15 shillings at a time when some non-official staff earned as little as 15 pounds p.a.[260] From 1934 Leonard and Olive Mooring, operators of the postal outlet and newsagency at Auburn North, catered for an expanding population lured to the area by land subdivisions for veteran housing, by jobs at the nearby oil refinery, linoleum factory, brickyard and meat processing plant, and by plans for the construction of a bridge across the Parramatta River at Silverwater.[261] From 16 July 1934 to 30 June 1935, the couple sold 431 pounds worth of stamps, whereas sales worth just 200 pounds had been anticipated. Over the same period, customers bought postal notes amounting to 3,304 pounds when the department reckoned on purchases not exceeding 550 pounds. Consequently, Leonard Mooring's allowance rose from 15 pounds 15 shillings a year following the opening of the office on 6 July 1934, to 42 pounds p.a. from 1 July 1935.[262] Some women seeking non-official employment took advantage of the fall in property prices and the cost of labour to have premises erected.[263] In November 1930 Annie Walker applied for the postmistress position at Eastern Creek prior to having a shop selling soft drinks and confectionery built adjacent to her residence.[264] Irrespective of the downturn, a number of female job

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[258] Apart from health benefits, modern dance was seen to have educational value. Accordingly, middle and upper-working class girls were encouraged to attend dancing classes and perform in school musicals. See, Matthews, 'Dancing Modernity', p. 83.

[259] Frances Pollon, *Parramatta: The Cradle City of Australia: Its History from 1788*, Parramatta, The Council of the City of Parramatta, 1983, p. 282.

[260] Report from F. Hunter, D.I., Relief, Metro No. 2, to Acting Snr I., 14 May 1931, SP32, Part 2, Blacktown, fol. GA 945/31.

[261] Report from H. G. Ockwell, D.I., Metro No. 2, to Snr I., 27 October 1933, C2593, GA51, Auburn North, fol. GA 33/2072; *pro forma* District Inspr's Report – Proposed P.O., completed by H. G. Ockwell, D.I., Metro No. 2, 21 July 1933, *ibid.*, fol. GA '33/1315; & letter from A. E. Collings, Hon. Sec., North Lidcombe Progress Association, to Mr Ockwell, D.I., Metro No. 2, G.P.O., Sydney, 8 August 1933, *ibid.*

[262] During the same period, the office handled 340 registered letters, when the inspectorate anticipated just one hundred. See, report from H. G. Ockwell, D.I., Metro No. 2, to Snr I., 23 October 1935, *ibid.*, fol. GA35/1772; & letter from L. G. Mooring, Pmr, Auburn North P.O., to Mr Butler, Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, Sydney, 17 October 1935, *ibid.*

[263] Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 98.

[264] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by Annie Mary Walker, 24 November 1930, C2593, GA591, Eastern Creek.

seekers could count on financial and moral support from relatives. In February 1936 Bessie May purchased the post office store at Mt Colah with help from her family. The widow of a returned soldier, Mrs May worked as a secretary for her brother, dentist Arthur P. Tankard, and had recently moved from the Sydney suburb of Oatley to the family home at Thornleigh close to the postal outlet. In the event her quest for the job of postmistress was unsuccessful, the applicant's brother had promised to retain her services.[265] Most dentists and other professionals who dispensed essential services survived the depression, provided they managed to contain their overheads.[266] Though unwelcome, the economic crisis had a variable impact within the working population.

During the depression some women seized on the increase in motor vehicle ownership, launching business ventures that capitalised on their "sedentary" habits. Despite the downturn, a growing minority of households managed to purchase a car by combining the financial resources of individual family members. As a result, more city people took day excursions in the country, visiting places often beyond the reach of the railway.[267] Women with small businesses attached to homes or motor garages were well placed to cater for the tourists, providing a seven-day-a-week refreshment service. In her application of November 1930 to operate a postal amenity at Eastern Creek from a store serving passing motorists, Annie Walker made much of her immobility, pointing out that she would live on the premises and be in attendance "all day and any hour of the night".[268] In February 1933 Elsie Smith, the manageress of tea rooms adjoining a motor garage at Albion Park Rail, asked to be put in charge of the local postal outlet. Hoping to attract passing trade, Mrs Smith assured the department that she would always be available to serve customers owing to the nature of her business.[269]

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[265] Letter from H. E. English, Pms, Mt Colah, to D.I., Metro No. 1, 1 February 1936, C2593, GA1247, Mount Colah; & *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Bessie Dean May, 30 January 1936, *ibid.*
[266] Mackinolty, "Woman's place…", p. 98.
[267] In spite of the economic reversal, the number of vehicle registrations increased after 1932. See, Potts, *The Myth of the Depression*, p. 21.
[268] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by Annie Mary Walker, 24 November 1930, C2593, GA591, Eastern Creek.
[269] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Elsie Rose Smith, 21 February 1933, C2593, GA225162, Albion Park Rail.

Uneven Change

Because of the economic crisis, women working in non-official post offices assumed even greater responsibility for the viability of the household. In April 1931 R. Shelley, "unemployed" postmaster at Rocky Glen, wrote to the department seeking an increase in his allowance – a request that highlighted his wife's significant contribution to the couple's finances. Shelley explained that, despite his best efforts, he had been unable to obtain relief work and needed assistance to meet his expenses. At the time he was wholly dependent on the five pounds and five pence a month he received in return for the postal duties performed by his wife in his name.[270] In her letter to Mr Tully M.H.R. of May 1931 regarding the proposed closure of Lugarno Post Office, "assistant" Elsie Cleveland made tangential reference to her contribution to family coffers, observing: "times are pretty hard with us and the few shillings are a great help".[271] Thanks to supplementary female earnings, many families of modest means were able to purchase a home and buy a range of newly available consumer goods.[272] Some elderly men were entirely reliant on single daughters who ran post offices on their behalf. From September 1928 to August 1933, spinster Evelyn Moore "assisted" her father, Edward Moore, Postmaster at Kioloa. By the latter date, she was keeping her then 79-year-old parent, who was ineligible to receive a pension and had no other form of income.[273] Robert Lowe's single daughter played an equally critical, if tenuous, role in supporting her father. In September 1932, Lowe, Postmaster at Lower Portland, advised the department that he might have to resign since his "assistant" had recently married and he could not afford to hire a replacement.[274]

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[270] Copy of letter from R. Shelley, "Rocky Glen", to Mr Cunningham, 13 April 1931, C2593, GA1527, Rocky Glen. From 1935, the Victorian Railways Department paid the wives and other relatives of gatekeepers a separate allowance of between one shilling and six pence, and four shillings and five pence a day for the "assistance" they gave male kin. See, Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 90.

[271] Transcript of letter from Mrs Cleveland, P.O., Lugarno, to Mr Tully M.H.R., 27 May 1931, C2593, GA111, Lugarno, fol. NSW 31/748.

[272] Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?*, p. 100.

[273] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr …, completed by Edward James Moore, undated, C2593, GA982, Kioloa, fol. GA 28/2325; *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Edward James Moore, on 1 September 1928, *ibid.*; *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr …, completed by Evelyn Bernice Moore, 6 November 1933, *ibid.*; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pms, Evelyn Bernice Moore, on 1 August 1933, *ibid.*, fol. 28 NOV 1933/GA 2331.

[274] Letter from Robert Lowe, Pmr, Lower Portland, to Dep. Director, Posts and Telegraphs, Sydney, 21 September 1932, C2593, GA1104, Lower Portland; & memo from H. R. Connelly, D.I., Newcastle, to Dep. Director, 10 October 1932, *ibid.*, fol. GA 32/1878.

In many instances female labour was proving indispensable in the operation of a postal outlet and the maintenance of a household. Given this economic reality, the P.M.G. Department moved to further acknowledge women as employees in their own right. In 1935 Chief Office introduced a revised *pro forma* inspector's report with a heading containing the prefix "Postm" in place of "Postmaster", allowing the appropriate gender title to be inserted. Previously, in the case of a female appointee, the word "Postmaster" had been struck out or typed over to read "Postmistress". In addition, the department looked to formally recognise the role of "assistants", transferring control of some non-official facilities from nominal postmasters to female kin. Shortly before her father's death in 1933, Head Office placed Evelyn Moore in charge of the Kioloa amenity. Although her father had been the non-official postmaster at Kioloa since 1928, the 41-year-old woman had performed the office duties from the beginning.[275] The department took steps to affirm female workers in both semantic and practical terms.

The bureaucracy's focus on efficiency and service meant that many more women working in non-official facilities came to be seen as business assets, if not sovereign employees. In June 1933 the district inspector overseeing the post office at Normanhurst recommended that both the postmaster and his wife be tutored in the management of money orders before introducing the financial amenity to the area. This precautionary measure took account of the critical part played by "assistants" in the operation of outlets.[276] The district inspector responsible for the Northmead office also took stock of the important functions undertaken by unpaid female help, arranging in November 1933 for the officer-in-charge at North Parramatta to instruct the postmaster, William Comfort, and his wife Gertrude, in money-order practices.[277]

By treating postmaster and wife as a single productive unit, the department affirmed married women in the role of assistant. Reporting on Thomas Mallam's application of

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[275] *Pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pms, Evelyn Bernice Moore, on 1 August 1933, C2593, GA982, Kioloa, fol. 28 NOV 1933/GA 2331; *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Evelyn Bernice Moore, 6 November 1933, *ibid.*; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Edward James Moore, on 1 September 1928, *ibid.*

[276] Report from unidentified D.I., Metro No. 1, to Dep. Director, 1 June 1933, C2593, GA1346, Normanhurst, fol. GA 33/976.

[277] Memo from unidentified D.I., Metro No. 2, to Pmr, Northmead, 8 November 1933, C2593, GA1353, Northmead, fol. GA 33/1830; & *pro forma* Application for Position of Allow. Pmr ..., completed by William Frank Norton Comfort, 25 September 1928, *ibid.*

September 1936 to run the Dover Heights' outlet, District Inspector Cottrall observed: "Mr and Mrs Mallam are very superior to the average non-official Postmaster". The official appraised candidate and spouse in terms of their collective potential, describing them as "superior people accustomed to dealing with the public".[278] In a commercial sense, husband and wife were as one.

The department's growing preparedness to treat unpaid female "assistants" more like employees can be traced to changes in the relationship between husband and wife. By the 1930s companionate marriage had made for closer financial and emotional ties between spouses. As a result, wives were more likely to enter into business partnerships with husbands. Prior to a similar request in February 1930, Charlotte Orr had appealed to Inspector Leece in October 1929 to support a joint application from her husband and herself to manage a post office at Avoca Beach. She explained that they were building refreshment rooms at the seaside resort and hoped to open a postal amenity on the premises.[279] William Bourke, Blaxland's non-official postmaster, clearly saw his wife as an equal business partner. In October 1930 he sought permission to construct a new postal outlet and residence on land recently purchased by the couple. His letter read: "I am hoping that the fact that *we* (my emphasis) have kept the Post Office satisfactorily for so many years and are willing to ... provide suitable premises will be in *our* (my emphasis) favour".[280] Over time, many husbands and wives had become interdependent financial and social entities.

The changing nature of the gifts given to some departing employees illustrated the increased tendency to confer sovereign status on working women. In February 1930 the residents of Lake Bathurst presented their non-official postmistress, Mrs George Shumack, with a handbag containing a roll of bank notes to mark her retirement after 50 years' service. In deciding what to give the elderly woman, the local inhabitants

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[278] Report from N. R. Cottrall, D.I., Metro No. 3, to Snr I., 21 September 1936, C2593, GA557, Dover Heights, fol. GA '36/1886; & report from N. R. Cottrall, D.I., Metro No. 4, to Snr I., 9 December 1936, *ibid.*

[279] Letter from Charlotte J. Orr, "Avoca", Kincumber, to Inspr Leece, Orange, 29 October 1929, C2593, GA57, Part 1, Avoca Beach.

[280] Letter from William L. Bourke, Pmr, Blaxland, to D.P.I., Bathurst, 30 October 1930, C2593, GA190, Blaxland. Storekeeper Alexander Massie saw himself and his wife, Irene, as a single business entity, enclosing written references for both of them in an application for the job of postmaster at Asquith. See, *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr …, completed by Alexander Armstrong Massie, 28 September 1932, C2593, GA49, Asquith.

took into account her standing outside the home and her future financial needs.[281] On the occasion of her transfer to Orange in November 1932, staff at Canberra Post and Telegraph Office presented temporary officer Vera Kemp with a bedroom clock and a candlestick – portable gifts of a personal nature that took into consideration her vocational mobility.[282]

Nevertheless, most female non-official employees failed to win the formal recognition of bureaucracy. While amending some printed stationery that confirmed the existence of female workers, the department continued to use forms bearing the word "Postmaster" when dealing with facility managers of either sex. In official correspondence some bureaucrats employed the male designation as a generic title in respect of staff they knew to be female. When, in May 1937, Newrybar's postmistress, Dorothy Noble, asked for five days' leave, District Inspector W. Orr agreed to the "non-official postmaster" absenting herself from the office.[283] Economic and social advances were no guarantee of recognition in an arbitrary administration still uneasy about the presence of female labour.

Despite the trade in non-official offices and acknowledgement of some single daughters, the department generally refused to accord wives the status of *bona fide* employees. In September 1932 Mr J. Heaven, Postmaster at Asquith, advised the inspectorate that Mrs I. Massie had purchased his store and that he would be resigning in her favour. Even so, Head Office placed the new owner's husband in charge of the outlet, regardless of the purchaser's intention to manage it.[284] The utility also ignored the financial and vocational stake Mrs Read had in Sutton Post Office, appointing her spouse postmaster in October 1937, despite her having bought the premises. The seller, Mrs Houlihan, clearly regarded Mrs Read as the new office manager, drawing attention to the experience she had gained as Sutton's "Postmistress" prior to her

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[281] 'In Days of Old by "Jacobum"', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 5, no. 95, 24 February 1930, p. 18.
[282] 'Canberra Clippings', *Australian Postal Clerk*, vol. 6, no. 27, 26 November 1932, p. 9.
[283] Memo from W. A. Orr, D.I., Lismore, to Dep. Director, 7 May 1937, C2593, GA1336, Newrybar, fol. 17 May 1937/GA 1196.
[284] Letter from J. Heaven, P.O. Stores, Asquith, to D.I., No. 1 Metro District, G.P.O., Sydney, 26 September 1932, C2593, GA49, Asquith; *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Alexander Armstrong Massie, 28 September 1932, *ibid.*; & *pro forma* Notice of Appt of Non-Off. Pmr, A. A. Massie, 10 October 1932, *ibid.*

marriage some years earlier.[285] Largely preoccupied with the male wage, the department was slow to concede the community's broad acceptance of working wives with economic and social power.

Because of depleted matrimonial prospects, limited employment opportunities in rural areas, low wages and traditional family practices, some young women were fated to live the sedentary life of a single country postmistress. Many rural women remained unwed throughout the 1930s owing partly to the fact that large numbers of unemployed and underemployed men had vacated the marriage market.[286] In country districts offering minimal job prospects, single females who became postmistresses customarily co-habited with parents prior to marriage. Their situation contrasted with that of young, urban-based spinsters who, in the popular imagination, lived apart from family.[287] In most cases their modest earnings precluded the possibility of leaving home to pursue an independent existence in the city, if such was their wish.[288] Then women on just one to two pounds a week had little hope of securing separate accommodation. A flat rented for about six shillings and eight pence per week, while board in a private home cost around three shillings and six pence a week.[289] The life led by Sylvia Williams, who kept the non-official post office at Sutton – a settlement affording few openings outside the grazing industry – was arguably shaped by some of the demographic, economic and social forces described above.[290] Hired in March 1934, Miss Williams had assisted in the office for some time prior to her mother's death. She continued to reside in the family home after taking over the facility, her salary just 89 pounds p.a. at age 28.[291] Dorothy Noble, Non-Official Postmistress at Newrybar, a village almost wholly given over to dairying, was similarly placed. She

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[285] Letter from Mrs J. Houlihan, P.O., Sutton, 31 August 1937, C2593, GA1655, Sutton; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Charles Eric Read, on 1 October 1937, completed by (–) D.I., Cooma, 5 October 1937, *ibid.*

[286] Mackinolty, "Woman's place …", p. 104.

[287] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 154.

[288] Beverley Kingston, *My Wife, My Daughter, and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*, Melbourne, Thomas Nelson (Australia), p. 1975, p. 121.

[289] Mackinolty, "Woman's place …", p. 100.

[290] Grazing was a significant rural activity in the Sutton hinterland. See, *pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr …, completed by James David Houlihan, 25 May 1935, C2593, GA1655, Sutton.

[291] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr ..., completed by Sylvia Agnes Williams, 3 March 1934, *ibid.*; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Sylvia Agnes Williams, on 1 March 1934, completed by S. Morris, D.I., Cooma, 13 March 1934, *ibid.*, fol. 14 MAR 1934/GA 565.

received about 110 pounds p.a. and lived with her parents.[292] Every working day she closed the office for lunch and took her midday meal at the family home 100 yards away.[293] The lot of both employees was at odds with the popular perception of young women in the city who revelled in their physical, financial and sexual freedom.[294] If society was now more accepting of female economic and social mobility, circumstances saw many young country women consigned to an "immobile" existence without a partner.

The eight or so years between the beginning of the Great Depression and the centenary of the appointment of Australia's first paid postmistress were punctuated by change. During the period respectability played a lesser role in the appointment of women to the post and telegraph service as traditional notions of female behaviour yielded to new social realities. Salesmanship became a significant employment factor in a business anxious to rebuild its revenue and customer base in the wake of a severe economic downturn. By the 1930s the media exercised considerable influence in the selection of staff – a function of the department's commercialisation and sensitivity to public opinion. Over the years the bureaucracy increasingly came to view women as workers in their own right, given their greater liability for the economic survival of the family. Meanwhile, growing regard for efficiency and service added to the standing of females in non-official post offices. This, together with the stronger economic and emotional bond between couples, and their joint financial ventures, sometimes led the department to treat postmaster and wife as a single and indivisible commercial unit. In some ways the depression years ushered in a new employment paradigm.

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[292] *Pro forma* Application for Position of Non-Off. Pmr …, completed by Dorothy Isabel Noble, 12 January 1934, C2593, GA1336, Newrybar; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Non-Off. Pmr, Dorothy Isabel Noble, on 31 January 1934, 9 February 1934, *ibid.* Miss Noble's estimated allowance is an extrapolation based on her predecessors' wages. See, *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, Herbert Lyle Shipman, on 2 November 1928, completed by W. A. Orr, D.I., Lismore, 2 November 1928, *ibid.*, fol. GA 28/2477; & *pro forma* Inspr's Report of Appt of Allow. Pmr, George William Watson, on 4 July 1923, completed by A. Cohen, Acting D.I., Lismore, 5 July 1923, *ibid.*, fol. GA 23/1967.

[293] Memo from W. A. Orr, D.I., Lismore, 15 April 1936, *ibid.*, fol. 14 APR 1936/GA 930.

[294] Elder, "The Question of the Unmarried", p. 154. The National Council of Women of Victoria noted that many daughters worked to support parents without an income, and campaigned unsuccessfully to

At one and the same time, continuity characterised the period. If some non-official employees openly objected to the economies brought by the depression, most workers heeded the call for sacrifice, as in the past. In their case, office closure, peer pressure and intrinsic conservatism ensured conformity – as did departmental concessions. Meanwhile, official employees, both male and female, remained largely compliant, fearing stronger measures if they resisted the salary cuts. For female workers in official and non-official outlets, conformity was preferable to unreliable outside employment or joblessness. In any event, the limits of employee sacrifice remained untested, with the early reinstatement of former wage rates. As in the past, the department prevailed on women to subsidise services – this in the face of opposition to female labour and calls for the removal of individuals with spouses in paid work. For the most part, the organisation continued to observe the central tenet of political economy that allowed employers to engage whoever they liked, independent of moral considerations. As always, post-office work enabled women to shore up the male wage and fortify the household against hostile economic forces. As in previous generations, men sometimes relinquished their claim to paid work in favour of the opposite sex, rather than jeopardise their masculinity in a "female" work environment – this despite an economic crisis. Moreover, official and community patronage still provided for older spinsters. Regardless of the decline in the moral economy, bureaucrats and outsiders took pity on mature single women forced to compete in marriage and labour markets intolerant of female ageing. Like their 19th-century predecessors, female non-official employees had some say in the recruitment of staff, thanks to the trade in post offices. Spinsterhood and hostility towards working wives meant that women continued to invest in a postal outlet. As always, experiences differed between individuals. While many women endured hardship during the depression, others prospered with the expansion of suburbia, or availed of the new business opportunities brought by the declining cost of labour and material and the growth in motor vehicle sales.

For female official employees in N.S.W., genuine equality remained as elusive as ever. By 1938 attrition had seen them reduced to an insignificant, ageing, non-renewable cohort, rendering the quest for true parity in departmental employment

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have them paid a taxation allowance. See, Ada Norris, *Champions of the Impossible: A History of the*

largely irrelevant. While women could be found to fill feminised or temporary positions, or perform unpaid duties, equality in the workplace remained a difficult notion to promote. For their part, the unions were too divided and too obsessed with their survival to care. Isolated industrially, administratively and socially, the few female employees still on the official list lacked the incentive to compete with male colleagues, effectively exchanging advancement for job security. The organisational and social distractions that accompanied membership of the Postal Institute only helped to ensure the survival of the gendered status *quo*. Divisions between women's groups, the centrality of the male wage in difficult economic times, and a male-centric interpretation of human rights, combined to impede feminist initiatives to secure equality for women in general. Meanwhile, stress on personality and the general absence of women from union and employee affairs contributed to a perception of gender difference. The latter stood in the way of efforts by female activists to emphasise the sameness of the sexes. For reformers intent on advancing the right to equal treatment on the basis of equal capacity, the task was made more difficult by the lack of a universal, non-gendered understanding of employee qualities. Notwithstanding the best endeavours of feminists to promote gender parity, the 1930s witnessed a reaffirmation of the domestic life, given concern for male jobs, renewed stress on household skills, and a conservative reaction to female economic and social autonomy.

During the period female post and telegraph employees continued to labour in a paradoxical environment subject to the vagaries of an arbitrary administration. The P.M.G. Department in N.S.W., while favouring individuals with commercial acumen, still felt compelled to assist women on the basis of moral obligation, need or age. While the bureaucracy allowed females on the official list to languish, it raised the standing of some women in non-official offices, albeit in a piecemeal fashion. What gains were made by a few individuals were offset by the discriminatory practices imposed on many more by a male-oriented regime. If young city women were now noted for their mobility and independence, a number of their country cousins continued to work as "sedentary" postmistresses and reside with their family – a

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National Council of Women of Victoria 1902–1977, Melbourne, The Hawthorn Press, 1978, p. 69.

consequence of demographic change, poor wages and force of custom. The more things changed the more they stayed the same.

Conclusion

The story of women employed by the postal and telecommunications utilities in N.S.W. over the century following the appointment of Mary Ann Rutledge to Cassilis Post Office in February 1838 was one of expediency and reciprocity. By furnishing needy immigrant women with a livelihood, the N.S.W. Post Office Department gained access to a ready source of labour at a time when the governing class and the colonial born were outside the female employment market and when court officials were burdened with extraneous mail duties. Beneficiaries of patronage exercised by bureaucrats, politicians and leading citizens, female immigrants provided the department with a sedentary, generally compliant, and reliable workforce. This was in a period when many working men identified with an incompatible convict work regime, lived transient lives out of doors, resisted regulation, and were apt to be irresponsible. From the government's perspective, 'respectable' female immigrants from Britain were preferable to local convict women – most seemingly beyond redemption. Prior to the advent of official post offices, many males expected prohibitively high wages, given competing business interests and the general shortage of manpower. By providing a pool of low-cost labour, women helped the postal department to deliver the amenities promoted by paternalistic administrations and demanded by expanding communities. Patronage of respectable women in need of paid work allowed the new middle class to exercise political and social control commensurate with its growing economic power. On another level, influence helped to confer order on an unstable and "anonymous" society. In times of crisis, females offered the post and telegraph service an accessible resource that complemented, rather than displaced, male labour. At other points in the past, women stepped into the breach left by men anxious to escape the "domestic" confines of the post office for the sake of their health and personal identity.

From early on, the N.S.W. post and telegraph service furnished women with a secure, socially acceptable livelihood that incorporated extraordinary rights and responsibilities. Widows and daughters of deceased former employees benefited most from the employment opportunities. A job in the Post Office partly compensated for the absence of superannuation provisions, a sluggish marriage market, and the general

shortage of openings for genteel, but sometimes inadequately educated, women needing an independent income. Thanks to the domestic character of post offices, postmistresses and female assistants preserved their moral standing in society, avoiding the disdain reserved for women who worked outside of the home. Just as importantly, postal employment afforded mothers and daughters the facility to care for family members while earning a living. In their dual roles, female workers-cum-carers bridged the gap between public and private domains. In return for running small, otherwise-uneconomic offices, female official employees gained access to government accommodation, providing kin with shelter and the means of pursuing an independent living under the same roof. Because of the dispersed nature of departmental operations, rural postmistresses acquired rare powers of patronage and took on a significant advisory role in relation to local services. Moreover, several female officers were given unprecedented authority over male underlings. The relationship between employer and employee was one of mutual gain.

The expansion of the postal service in N.S.W. and the arrival of the telegraph in the mid 19th century brought unparalleled benefits to women. From September 1862 female official employees found themselves in receipt of equal pay, courtesy of a fortuitous combination of circumstances. The department's relative autonomy, its isolation from the low-wage regime operating in Australia's other communications utilities, and the additional financial responsibilities that went with official offices, both facilitated and justified equal pay. Women's long-standing importance in the local economy, and the absence of a gendered wage differential from the start, enhanced the claim by female permanent staff to equal remuneration. Frequent changes in Postmaster-General from 1865 effectively ensured that wage parity remained uncontested. Wage equality and non-gendered duties allowed official post and telegraph mistresses to exercise extraordinary supervisory control over male workers – this when women purportedly lacked the leadership qualities and intellectual rigour of men. With the appointment of the first female telegraphists, women shared in the prestige attached to a highly valued occupation. Unlike most middle- and middling-class women, female permanent employees moved in the male-dominated world of work, gathering vocational intelligence along the way. Up until 1901, they preserved their claim to workplace equality with the aid of sympathetic

politicians and bureaucrats – wage parity and their partial occupation of a dual labour market insulating them from growing opposition to working women.

The 100 years subsequent to the appointment of Australia's first paid postmistress were distinguished by conflict and competing priorities. For much of the period, the postal and telecommunications authorities harboured an ambivalent attitude towards women, concerned to defend the male breadwinner from the alleged threat posed by female workers, while seeking to provide for individuals in financial distress. While increasingly anxious to protect the male wage, the department continued to recruit "cheap" female labour to operate otherwise-unviable outlets, subsidise discounted services, offset infrastructure overheads, and counter business downturns. Although committed to the ideal of the self-sufficient male wage earner, the bureaucracy looked to augment household income and relieve men of demoralising indoor work. To this end, management allowed wives and daughters to "assist" absent husbands and fathers. In time women with male subordinates yielded to conflicting masculinities and the military leadership model. If the department set out to help needy women with employment, its fixation with the male worker ensured that females went without formal telegraphic training for most of the period. Consequently, only the wealthier or better connected obtained operator positions. For much of the time, senior bureaucrats, politicians and unionists were divided on the subject of female labour. Edward Cracknell and Timothy Coghlan in the late 19th century, and Duncan McLachlan and William Webster in the early 20th century, maintained that women were either unable to manage the physical and mental demands of employment, or were a threat to male earning power. Conversely, their contemporaries, Saul Samuel, John Fitzgerald Burns and Edward Kraegen, insisted that females had just claim to paid work as the occupational equals of males, utilising circumspect language and procedural devices to contain opposition. The conflicting views held by these individuals underlined the disparate nature of the state. Efforts by feminists in the 1920s to render the male wage redundant and prepare the way for universal equal pay sparked hostility among working men who were unwilling to surrender their breadwinner status. The protests mounted by the latter to protect male economic sovereignty lacked validity in the case of allowance postmasters who depended on female kin to earn a living. While some female reformers changed tack, stressing

gender sameness rather than difference, they made little headway, frustrated by the heavy investment in worker and citizenship rights that had men at their centre.

Women, like politicians and bureaucrats, were divided among themselves, precluding the possibility of a united approach to gender equality both inside and outside of the post and telegraph service. Focused on the interests of official postmistresses and female telegraphists, unionist Louisa Dunkley largely ignored the concerns of Post Office employees in feminised occupations. Consequently, union coverage tended to be fragmented and disparate in nature. While generally endorsing the principle of equal pay, powerful women's groups refused to back Vida Goldstein's campaign to secure universal wage equality via the federal legislature owing to her anti-war and anti-conscription agendas. The dearth of support for her parliamentary candidature and her aversion to the party system eroded what chances female P.M.G. employees had of recovering lost job entitlements by legislative means. Meanwhile, disagreement among female activists over how best to induce change, whether through constitutional feminism or socialist revolution, prevented them from taking collective action in pursuit of wage justice. Disputes among these women over the value of paid work had similar consequences.

Over the course of the century, female Post Office employees were caught between competing forces. For much of the period, they struggled to satisfy their need for paid work, while attempting to fulfil societal expectations surrounding marriage and childrearing. The clash of priorities took place in an environment charged with concern for the survival of the race and informed by efforts to popularise home life. Postmistresses and female "assistants" torn between office and domestic responsibilities sometimes had no option but to resign. Although most women opted for married life, a shortage of potential suitors and successive economic downturns ensured that single females remained on the payroll, regardless of diminishing career prospects and schemes to encourage staff turnover. As recipients of equal pay on the one hand, and as providers of "cheap" labour on the other, female official employees in N.S.W. found themselves in a bind. If they took the claim for employment equality under the Commonwealth too far in the absence of unambiguous legislative justification for equal pay, they could jeopardise their tenure. After all, their jobs were only secure while they were less expensive to employ than men, wage parity

provisions notwithstanding. From 1901 competition between “formal” equality and genuine equality, and the debate as to whether industrial action or the democratic process was the best means of effecting change, complicated the quest for workplace justice. Meanwhile, the protective measures introduced partly as a result of a contradictory same-but-different feminist argument made it that much harder for female employees to prove themselves the equal of men. On another level, postmistresses affected by a heightened appreciation of family life from the early 1900s conferred added importance on the post office as a domestic space. Contemporaneously, other women reacted to altered economic and social circumstances by looking to exploit the commercial value of postal premises. Along the way they cast off their personal attachment to the workplace. From the 1920s, many young city women appeared to live a physically, vocationally and socially mobile life independent of kin. Their life contrasted with the reality facing a number of young rural women who responded to the lack of potential husbands, inadequate wages, and weight of custom by embracing the sedentary existence of a country postmistress living with her family. Women either yielded or adapted to a conflicting and dynamic situation.

Hired for their purported passivity, women frequently challenged the department in an effort to defend and advance their interests. Some postmistresses used obstructionist tactics to preserve their expertise and marketability, while others exploited their local knowledge to obtain concessions. Still other female workers demanded payment according to hours worked, emboldened by the prospect of alternative employment and by greater material expectations from the early 20th century. Marginalised by the bureaucracy, female “assistants” sometimes engaged in word play to gain recognition as *de facto* office managers. Through their actions, women subtly altered the power dynamic between employer and employee, patron and beneficiary. From their perspective, the advantages derived from the working relationship were hard won.

If conflict or resistance distinguished the century, so did compromise and moderation. Beneficiaries of patronage themselves, the early departmental bureaucrats delayed full implementation of the meritocracy advocated by the new middle class so as to provide for women in need. To that end, they retained matriarchal post-office families and overlooked the necessity for telegraphic training. Thanks to the extra-parliamentary

powers of the Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner and the inspectorate's additional authority, women continued to find favour well into the 20th century. Because of equal pay, male employees in 19th-century N.S.W. generally abided female co-workers, unlike their intercolonial counterparts, who denounced women as 'cheap labour'. If women were not always welcome, regard for community opinion and due process ensured that they were treated in a temperate manner, even when charged with disloyalty in time of war. During the Great War, most female employees conformed to the model of sacrificial womanhood, regardless of privation. Then, and during the Great Depression, the majority of women heeded calls for economy – the promise of future benefits, peer pressure, and various concessions conditioning their attitude to cutbacks. Arguably, membership of the Postal Institute eroded enthusiasm among female officers for workplace reform by directing their attention towards training and staff fellowship, and away from their immediate situation. The prospect of marriage and increased domestic obligations had a similar effect, focusing the mind on the home rather than paid work. Presented with opposition to working women from the late 19th century, female official employees arguably settled for something less than absolute parity, despite theoretical equality. In the process they vied with one another for positions in single-sex offices that offered job security and sanctuary from sexualisation. Victims of a divide-and-rule strategy, women continued to countenance lesser alternatives to genuine equality from Federation, gravitating to small offices with minimal opportunities for promotion. The postings made good pragmatic sense, given an ineffectual union, the proliferation of "female" jobs, and the residual perks of government employment. Female official employees demonstrated a healthy understanding of what was possible, moderating their expectations accordingly. The relationship between the department and its female workers can be said to have functioned at an "optimum" level.

The history of female post and telegraph staff in N.S.W. from 1838 to 1938 chronicles the mixed and shifting fortunes of women in a government utility. Initially the beneficiaries of favour dispensed by influential individuals, female employees and prospective employees lost some of their persuasive power with the shift from a small, arbitrarily administered department to a sizeable, decentralised, precedent-driven, if sometimes "irrational", bureaucracy. For some time female permanent officers owed their position to sympathetic politicians and union leaders. All the

same, theirs was a tenuous existence, with most women experiencing a relative decline in standing following the departure of their champions. Gradually, workers with quantifiable skills came to challenge those women who were wholly dependent on moral considerations for employment. Meanwhile, technology helped to decide the fate of individuals. Whereas some female telegraphists suffered a loss of expertise with the removal of Morse equipment from smaller offices, other women without specialised training gained in employability with the installation of A.B.C. machines and telephone switchboards. Once members of a vocational elite, female telegraphists saw their status diminish with the growth in operator numbers. A failure to invest in transferable, external qualifications only hastened their decline. Initially tolerated, working wives fell foul of efforts from the 1890s to stem waning population growth, bolster male earnings, and compel men to accept their family responsibilities. Likewise, single women found it that much harder to pursue a career in the post and telegraph service due to mounting interest in female reproductive capacity. Prior to Federation, N.S.W. women enjoyed wage parity on a circumstantial basis. From 1901 they were forced to justify their salary after their Victorian peers set out to prove themselves the equal of men. Moreover, from the late 19th century, female officers witnessed the gradual decline of traditional respectability as an employee attribute, with the development of a more flexible code of conduct that made for greater occupational choice.

During and after the Great War, fortuitous forces continued to act upon women. The international conflict expanded and re-ordered the definition of the morally deserving, requiring women to compete with veterans and relatives of deceased servicemen for postal work. Despite the severity of the 1930's depression, some women managed to erect premises suitable for non-official postal operations by capitalising on lower labour and material costs. Others exploited the trade in post offices, the growing popularity of motor vehicles, and their immobility as business proprietors in their quest for postal employment. Over the years a few allowance/non-official postmistresses, and some female "assistants", achieved recognition as sovereign workers in keeping with their sex's growing economic power and critical contribution to household income. Many more women went unacknowledged in organisational terms owing to an inconsistent, *ad hoc* administration. Discriminatory policies implemented after Federation and persisting into the 1930s saw women opt for

positions outside of the post and telegraph department. The few ageing female official employees in N.S.W. who still enjoyed wage equality, at least in theory, occupied a shrinking, non-renewable niche in the labour market. A boon when introduced, equal pay ultimately cost jobs, vindicating the critics who had feared it would be women's undoing.

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[*] I am unable to supply the definitive location of all unpublished primary and secondary sources, and of all published primary sources formerly held by Australia Post Historical Archives in N.S.W. Prior to its closure in 2005, the facility was located at Australia Post's State Headquarters, corner Cleveland and Chalmers Streets, Strawberry Hills, Sydney. With my departure from Australia Post in November of that year, much of the material was consigned to an off-site commercial repository, pending possible transfer to the Sydney Office of National Archives of Australia. (N.A.A. already holds items in the same series). As at December 2009, a final list of repository holdings has yet to be prepared, and the material remains inaccessible to the public. For several years Australia Post maintained historical collections in some of the other state capitals. The corporation operates separate repositories for modern or "active" records.