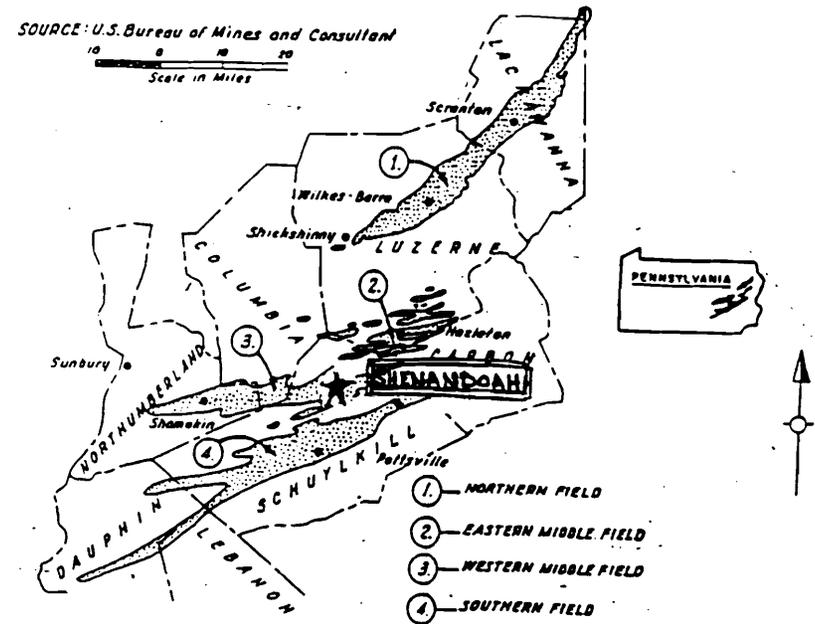


Figure 1 - Locational Map of Shenandoah



WOMEN AND ETHNICITY; WOMEN AND CLASS: GENDER ISSUES IN TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY SHENANDOAH

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ABSTRACT: This paper attempts to examine the historic economic and social roles of women in Shenandoah, an anthracite community in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania. The paper traces Shenandoah through a twenty-year period from 1880 to 1900, and focuses particular emphasis on the lives of the women in the community. Findings from research sources such as the manuscript census, the borough assessment records, the local Shenandoah Herald newspaper, and period documents describing anthracite coal towns are incorporated to provide a brief view of women's economic and social lives in Shenandoah. Special attention is dedicated to women and ethnicity in the coal town.

INTRODUCTION

Shenandoah, Pennsylvania is a coal town situated in the Western Middle Field of the anthracite basin of Pennsylvania (figure 1). From the date of its inception Shenandoah was a coal town. Construction of the borough began in 1862 when a Pottsville-centered mining partnership started construction of the Shenandoah City Colliery near the site of the present town. Yet Shenandoah was never a company town, but was rather a small city and a local commercial center. At its height around 1915, the borough contained 29,000 inhabitants.

Women are not typically the object of study in histories of coal towns, in part because they were forbade by law to work in the mines. In 1885 the Pennsylvania state legislature passed Act Number 165 which "prohibited the employment of women in or about any coal mine or any manufactories of coal, except in an office or in the performance of clerical work." ¹ Thus women were effectively barred from the occupation which employed 70% of Shenandoah male heads of household in the years between 1880 and 1900.

Yet, although they were barred from the primary job market of Shenandoah, women still made important and necessary contributions to family income and family maintenance through both productive and reproductive labor. And women also played a vital role in the creation of a community from a disparate collection of settlers drawn from across Europe and Asia to Shenandoah, Pennsylvania by the lure of a mining economy.

PURPOSE AND DATA METHODS

This paper concentrates on the period between 1880 and 1900, which are the two census years used extensively in this study. Easiest to extract from the historical records are women's work activities, and these constitute the core data of this study. For the year 1880, 1950 households were examined from the manuscript census, and this number includes every household within the borough proper. In 1900, 2181 households were examined, representing a sample across all five wards of the borough. This sampling of households was necessitated by the size of the census data set, which included nearly twice the number of residents as

the 1880 set and could not be covered fully under the time constraints of this project. The manuscript census provided information on occupation of all household members, school attendance by children, and structure of households. Its raw data is supplemented by information researched from the Shenandoah Herald, the sometimes daily, sometimes weekly, town newspaper.

WOMEN AND WAGE WORK

Exclusion from the primary job market of Shenandoah placed obvious restrictions on the employment opportunities available to women. Yet Shenandoah, as a local commercial center, was not without jobs that would employ women. The concentrated urban population of the town created a need for teachers, salesladies, and domestic servants. Still, jobs positions in these service occupations were limited to the volume of services residents of the town could consume. These conditions created an underutilized and cheap female labor pool in the cities of the anthracite region, such as Shenandoah, and it is these conditions which attracted the silk and textile mills to the anthracite towns. Francis H. Nichols, in his article "Children of the Coal Shadow" for McClures Magazine in 1902-1903 wrote:

The factory inspector will tell you, "The mills locate in Anthracite because they all employ girls, and girl labor is cheaper here than anywhere else." A glance at the "textile" map of Pennsylvania will show that wherever there are miners, there cluster mills that employ "cheap girl labor." ²

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And these textile mills did come to Shenandoah. The first mill to arrive was the Schuylkill Hat and Cap Manufacturing Company. According to an October 20, 1894 report in the *Shenandoah Herald*, the Schuylkill Hat and Cap Factory bought the old Herald office and accompanying lots on the northeast side of the borough. This first factory was followed by a series of others, manufacturing shirts, overalls, knit underwear, and trousers. Thus in the mid 1890s there began a long association of textile mills with Shenandoah. These factories relied on a female workforce and also provided home piecework in addition to factory jobs.

WOMEN WHO WORKED

One of the most important distinctions to be made among women who worked for wages and those who did not in late nineteenth century Shenandoah is the distinction between married women and single daughters. For the nation as a whole during this time period, the great majority of working women were single daughters living at home and contributing their wages to the family income. Louise Lamphere wrote in her study of Central Fall, Rhode Island that:

Most wives and mothers did reproductive work in the home to maintain wage-working household members and to care for young children. A few took in boarders. Thus there were two distinct phases of work for women: women as daughters worked for wages in jobs with "intermediate pay," while wives and mothers worked inside the home.³

Lamphere's observations are validated by nation-wide trends which found that 43.5% of single women over the age of 15 worked for wages in 1900, whereas only 5.6% of married women did so and 31.5% of widowed women.⁴ These numbers are further supported by an age group tabulation which shows that the highest percentage of women who worked for wages in 1900 were in their late teens and early twenties, and labor force participation declined in each succeeding age group. These numbers constitute a total population where 20.6% of women over the age of 15 in the United States worked outside the home in 1900, an increase from 19.0% in 1890 and 16.0% in 1880.⁵

MARRIED AND WIDOWED WOMEN

In 1880 Shenandoah there were 16 married women who performed wage work or were proprietresses of businesses, and there were an additional 16 widowed women who were listed as employed by the census. Considering a population of 1950 households, this provides an estimate that 1.64% of married and widowed women were employed in Shenandoah in 1880. Shifting ahead to 1900, the number of married and widowed women performing wage work outside the home had not increased significantly. In 1900, twenty-four married women and thirty-one widowed women were listed as employed by the manuscript census. Relating these numbers to the total number of sampled households, reveals that roughly 2.5% of married and widowed women were engaged in wage work outside the home.

And although these numbers of working married and widowed women are too small to make any major generalizations about their employment, the few cases available suggest that it was predominantly women from longer-established ethnic groups and the middle or upper class who worked outside the home. A few working wives were married to miners or laborers, but the majority were married to carpenters, butchers, merchants, and doctors. And work outside the home was not the option of young wives who had no child-care responsibilities and needed to supplement the income of a young husband, but was predominantly the option of older women, most of them in their forties, who more often had children than not.

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Yet if wage work of married women is examined exclusively, a large part of their contribution to family income has been missed. The 1880 census listed four women, all widows, who operated boarding houses. This classification implies a threshold number of boarders and possibly also a single income from boarders' rents alone, but taking in boarders was a popular economic activity in turn-of-the-century Shenandoah. In that year 296 out of 1950 households, or 15.2% of all households, included one or more boarders. Over half of these households housed only a single boarder, most often male, and more than two-thirds had either one or two boarders.

Thus in 1880 15% of married women performed additional work within the home - cooking and cleaning for boarders - to supplement family income. The 1922 Department of Labor Study "Women in Coal-Mine Workers' Families" reported, for the later period of 1920, that 21.2% of mine workers' wives were gainfully employed, of which 98.1% were employed inside the home caring for boarders and only 1.9% were employed outside the home.⁶ This document demonstrates that taking in boarders was an important facet of married women's contributions to the family income in anthracite towns throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s. But taking in boarders was not an option practiced equally by women of all ethnic groups. The pattern for households with boarders shows that it was predominantly women from recently-arrived ethnic groups who worked inside the home providing for boarders. Not only did 38.7% of married Polish women, roughly twice the proportion of women from other ethnic groups, preside over households including boarders (figure 2), but a much larger number of Polish households included multiple boarders. Thus more Polish wives looked after more boarders than did the married women of any other ethnic group.

For census year 1900, 643 out of 2181 sampled households included boarders; this was 29.5% of Shenandoah households, a near doubling from 1880 when only 15.2% of households included boarders. And not only did more households take in boarders in 1900, but the average number of boarders per household had also increased since 1880. Whereas in 1880 more than 50% of the households with boarders included a single boarder, the number of households lodging one boarder had declined to 31% in 1900, and more than 20% of the households with boarders included four or more lodgers.

Why did this dramatic increase in the number of boarders occur? The one answer which appears most clearly in the lodging records was the intensification of the pace of immigration during the late 1890s. Poles and Lithuanians were arriving in Shenandoah in considerable numbers, and many of these immigrants were single men or married men who had left their families behind in Europe. A full 70% of Lithuanian households, 57% of Polish households, and 53% of Austrian and Hungarian households included boarders in 1900. (figure 2) These were the same ethnic groups which were experiencing ongoing immigration flows in the 1890s and 1900s. Irish, English, Welsh, and German groups, which had passed their peak arrival years, formed households with boarders in less than 10% of the cases, and percentages of households with boarders were only slightly higher for second generation Irish, English, and Welsh, which most likely reflects that these family units were younger, often lacked children of employment age, and would seek boarders as an alternative addition to family income.

And what did this higher number of boarders mean for women in Shenandoah? In 1900 a greater number of married women, particularly Polish and Lithuanian women, accepted the extra cooking, washing, and housekeeping which boarders entailed. They were contributing to the income of the family, but in a way which perpetuated the domestic roles they had as wives and mothers. Women who looked after boarders did not share the opportunities that women who worked outside the home could experience - learning skills, creating social networks, or even escaping from the housework that large families and boarders created. Yet caring for lodgers was an important economic contribution to immigrant family incomes, and did not so much compete with work outside the home for married women, but gave

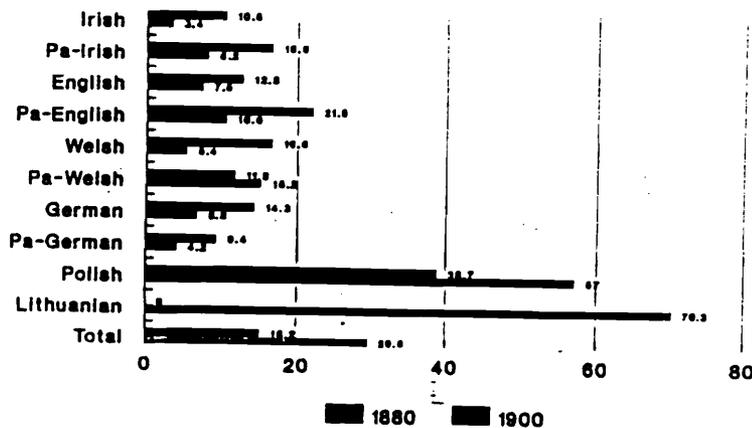
them a wage-earning ability they would not have had because married women so rarely had the opportunity to work outside the home. In effect, taking in boarders was hard work with few rewards for immigrant wives, but it played an important economic and social role within the ethnic communities.

WORKING DAUGHTERS

As mentioned above, the nation-wide pattern for women's employment in the late 1800s and early 1900s was one of single daughters forming most of the female workforce, and married women performing family maintenance activities within the home. National totals for 1900 illustrated that while 43.5% of single women over the age of fifteen worked for wages outside the home, only 5.6% of married women did so.⁷ This general pattern of working daughters also held true for Shenandoah; it was single daughters who formed the bulk of the female workforce in the period between 1880 and 1900.

Figure 2

Ethnic Households with Boarders
% of Households with Boarders



The first decision faced when approaching the topic of the activities of single daughters is which ages are appropriate for the study. The categories used in the Sumner study of 1910 included single women over the age of fifteen,⁸ but on an examination of the manuscript census for Shenandoah, this age did not appear to be the ideal cutoff. The age at which girls, and also boys, began to leave school was much younger than fifteen - it was age ten, and for boys in 1880, it was even sometimes nine or eight. Therefore it is age ten which will form the lower boundary for the study of the employment of unmarried daughters, and age thirty will form the upper boundary, because by this age nearly all daughters had

married and established their own households.

For daughters, the three activity options were school, assisting with housekeeping chores at home, and employment outside the home. The 1880 census listed 1235 unmarried daughters between the ages of ten and thirty who lived with their parents. Of these, 42.6% attended school, 21.1% were employed, and 36.3% assisted with housekeeping at home. In the sample from the 1900 census there were 1125 single daughters between the ages of ten and thirty; 31.8% attended school, 42.0% were employed, and 26.2% assisted with housekeeping. These numbers represent a near-doubling of the number of single daughters who worked, increasing from 21.1% in 1880 to 42.0% in 1900, at the expense of daughters who stayed at home.

In addition, school participation rates increased for all age groups between 1880 and 1900; more single daughters continued with higher education beyond the age of seventeen in 1900 than had done so in 1880. In 1880, three 18-year old girls and one 20-year old girl were in school; the 18-year olds could logically still be high school students, but the 20-year old girl was most likely receiving higher training, suggesting teaching or nursing. By 1900, there were eight 18-year old girls, six aged 19, three aged 20, and a 21-, a 22-, and a 23-year old girl all still in school. Higher education was becoming a greater possibility for women in Shenandoah by 1900.

The activities of single daughters are displayed effectively when individuals are grouped in three-year age groups (figure 3). Concerning 10-12 year old girls, nearly 90% attended school in both 1880 and 1900. For 13-15 year old girls, school participation rates declined to roughly 50% for both periods, with 12% employed and 38% home in 1880, but 25% employed and 25% home in 1900. By the time ages 16-18 were reached, only 12% attended school, 32% worked, and 55% were home in 1880; but in 1900, 20% attended school, 50% worked, and 30% were at home. For ages 19 and above, roughly equal percentages (50-50) of single daughters worked and stayed at home in 1880. But in 1900, roughly 70% of girls over the age of nineteen were employed, and only 30% were at home. In fact, employment rates for unmarried daughters of all ages were higher in 1900 than in 1880, with employment of girls in their twenties experiencing the most dramatic increase.

Examining the five major jobs single daughters filled (domestic servant, dressmaker, teacher, milliner, and store clerk) reveals that roughly 50% of working daughters were servants in both 1880 and 1900 (figure 4). Although employment as domestic servants did decline somewhat from 52.6% in 1880 to 48.1% in 1900, it remained the largest job class for working daughters and employed 142 individuals (out of 270) in 1880 and 275 women (out of 572) in 1900. The second largest job category in both years was dressmaker, which accounted for 31.8% of working daughters in 1880 and 25.5% in 1900. Although this decline in the number of dressmakers first appears to contradict the observation about the arrival of the Schuylkill Hat and Cap factory into Shenandoah in the late 1890s, it may well measure the replacement of home dressmaking with factory work. The 1900 census was rather vague in its identification of women who sewed as an occupation. Some were identified as dressmaker, others as seamstress, tailoress, and tailor, and seventeen were listed as shirt factory operators or foreladies, but it can probably be assumed that more women worked in the hat and cap factory and shirt factory than were listed outright as factory operators. The number of milliners remained constant at roughly 4% of the female workforce between 1880 and 1900, and the number of teachers and store clerks both increased during this period.

There were two major ways in which ethnicity influenced the employment of single daughters in late nineteenth century Shenandoah. One was whether they worked or not, and the other was in what jobs they performed. Ethnic groups practiced different strategies for the allocation of family resources, and this is reflected strongly in whether daughters would

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Figure 3 - Activities of Single Daughters by Age Group 1880-1900

Age Group	#1880	%1880	#1900	%1900	Activity
10-12	339	88.3%	167	87.0%	school
	10	2.6%	7	3.7%	work
	35	9.1%	18	9.4%	home
13-15	155	49.4%	131	53.5%	school
	39	12.4%	56	22.9%	work
	120	38.2%	58	23.7%	home
16-18	31	12.1%	48	20.4%	school
	83	32.3%	113	48.1%	work
	143	55.6%	61	31.5%	home
19-21	1	.6%	10	5.7%	school
	73	48.5%	103	59.2%	work
	83	52.9%	61	35.1%	home
22-24	0	0%	2	1.4%	school
	36	45.6%	101	70.6%	work
	43	54.4%	40	28.0%	home

of 13-15 year olds, 53.3% of 16-18 year olds, 57.1% of 19-21 year olds, and 83.3% of single daughters age 22-27 worked outside the home.

This is not exactly the pattern we would expect to find. Families of recent immigrants, the Irish for 1880 Shenandoah, were economically disadvantaged regarding the occupations of their chief wage earners (Irish heads of household displayed the highest rates of laborer occupations and the lowest rates of skilled miner and non-mine skilled positions of any group in Shenandoah in 1880, save for the just-arriving Poles). We might expect them to send their daughters to work more often than other groups, but the reverse was true; Irish families tended to keep more of their daughters at home. In contrast, second generation Irish families and native Pennsylvanians, whose chief wage earners had some of the highest town rates as non-mine skilled workers and merchants, sent their daughters to work outside the home more than any other ethnic groups. This higher rate of employment of single daughters may be a reflection of the family structure at this time. Second generation families tended to have fewer children, and might thus have less need for daughters to stay home and care for younger children and other working family members. A cultural bias against girls working may also have been present, which would be stronger in the immigrant generation than the American-born generation.

This 1880 pattern was reversed by 1900 when the most recent immigrant groups displayed the highest rates of employment for single daughters. In Polish families, 30% of girls age 13-15 worked outside the home, and these numbers increased to 60% of 16-18 year olds, 70% of 19-21 year olds, and 77.8% of 22-24 year olds. Employment of female children started at a later age in most other ethnic groups. In Irish and Irish-American families less than 10% of girls age 13-15 worked outside the home, and in German and English ethnic families, less than 20% of girls between the ages of 13 and 15 were employed.

Ethnicity influenced not only the likelihood that a girl would work outside the home, but also the type of job she would fill. On average, daughters of older immigrant families had better quality jobs - more were teachers, clerks, and dressmakers, rather than servants. In 1880, the two groups which had the greatest number of daughters employed as domestic servants (65% of their working daughters) were native Pennsylvanians and Irish-Americans - the same groups which displayed the highest overall rate of employment for single daughters (figure 5). In contrast, for Irish families only 15.7% of working daughters were servants and 54.3% were dressmakers with an additional 12.8% employed as teachers.

By 1900, another group had replaced the second generation Irish and native Pennsylvanian daughters at the bottom of the hierarchy of women's employment. This group was the daughters of the Polish and Lithuanian immigrants. In 1900, 77.9% of all working Polish daughters were servants, and an incredible 93.8% of working Lithuanian daughters were domestic servants. These numbers represent 67 out of 86 employed Polish daughters and 45 out of 48 working Lithuanian daughters. Among groups whose daughters were most often employed as servants, the Irish-Americans and native Pennsylvanians still ranked high, but their numbers had declined from 64.9% of second generation Irish daughters who were employed as domestic servants in 1880 to 45.8% in 1900; likewise, the number of native Pennsylvanian daughters who were servants declined from 66.7% in 1880 to 58.5% in 1900. The high rates of Polish and Lithuanian daughters working as domestic servants reflects their fathers' positions at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy of Shenandoah, but because children of immigrants learned English in the elementary schools, they often could be less occupationally restricted than were their fathers and mothers. This is reflected with Polish daughters; although the majority of their fathers were still miners and mine laborers, eleven Polish daughters were dressmakers and one was even a school teacher in 1900.

In contrast, single daughters of Irish and English descent held the largest proportions of

Figure 4 - Occupations of Single Daughters 1880-1900

Occupation	# 1880	% 1880	# 1900	% 1900
servant	142	52.6%	275	48.1%
dressmaker	86	31.8%	146	25.5%
milliner	10	3.7%	21	3.7%
teacher	20	7.4%	69	12.1%
clerk	12	4.4%	61	10.7%
Total	270	100.0%	572	100.0%

remain in school, assist their mothers with housework, or work for wages outside the home.

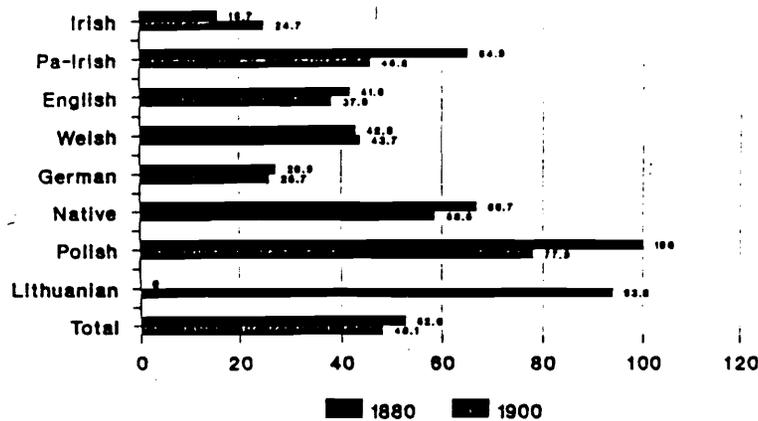
In 1880, English, Welsh, and Irish families all displayed similar tendencies to keep young daughters at home rather than have them work outside the home. Less than 10% of the girls in the 13-15 age group and only 25% of the girls in the 16-18 age groups from the families of English, Welsh, and Irish immigrants worked outside the home, while slightly more than 50% of the girls between the ages of 13 and 18 had left school to assist in housekeeping chores. Second generation Irish and native Pennsylvanian families, though, displayed a different allocation of the labor of single daughters. For native Pennsylvanian families, over 90% of the girls in the 10-12 age group attended school, but numbers of working daughters exceeded rates for English, Welsh, and Irish daughters at all other ages; 22% of girls age 13-15 worked, 38.8% of girls age 16-18, 62% of girls age 19-21, and 50% of girls age 22-27. Rates of employment for single daughters were even higher among second generation Irish families. In the 10-12 age groups, 27.3% of girls worked, and 52.2%

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the higher quality female jobs. For 1900, 18.3% of the daughters of Irish immigrants

Figure 5

Servants
% of Total Daughters who Work



who worked were school teachers, 18.9% of working English and English-American daughters were teachers, and 20.3% of Irish American daughters who worked were employed as school teachers. The predominance of these groups in the higher quality jobs is clearly visible when we note that Irish daughters formed 18.8% of the female workforce, but were 34.0% of teachers, 31.6% of clerks and salesladies, and 26.4% of dressmakers, but were only 9.1% of domestic servants. Daughters of second generation Irish families, who formed 11.9% of the female workforce were 24.0% of all teachers and 28.6% of milliners. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Polish daughters made up 17.4% of the female workforce, but were 26.5% of the servants; and Lithuanian daughters, who formed only 9.7% of the female workforce, were 17.8% of servants, and not one Lithuanian daughter was a teacher, milliner, or saleslady.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Occupation and ethnicity in anthracite coal towns have most often been discussed with reference to male residents alone. Yet women constituted an important part of the coal town workforce in Shenandoah and created ethnic hierarchies of their own in their workplaces. Although their opportunities were more limited than those available to men, women made important contributions to family survival through both their productive and reproductive labor. Whether as wives caring for children and boarders, older daughters staying home to help maintain working family members, or daughters performing wage work outside the home, the contribution of women in anthracite coal towns cannot be ignored.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Florence P. Smith. "Chronological Development of Labor Legislation for Women in the United States". United State Department of Labor: Women's Bulletin; Number 66, 1929, p. 247.
- ² Nichols, Francis H. "Children of the Coal Shadow". McClures; Volume 20, 1902-1903, p. 25.
- ³ Louise Lamphere. From Working Daughters to Working Mothers: Immigrant Women in a New England Industrial Community. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. p. 34
- ⁴ Helen L. Sumner. Woman and Child Labor. New York: MacMillan Company, 1905. p. 205.
- ⁵ Sumner. p. 205.
- ⁶ Mary Anderson. "Home Environment and Employment Opportunities of Women in Coal-Mine Workers' Families". United States Department of Labor Bulletin of the Women's Bureau; Number 45, 1925, p. 39.
- ⁷ Sumner. p. 206.
- ⁸ Sumner. p. 206.

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