

"Ethnicity, Race, and Women's Work in  
Mid-Nineteenth-Century West Virginia Cities"

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The Marsden sisters, born in England, were milliners. Louisa Rockerbraun, from Germany, was a grocer, and Anne Lee was an African-American prostitute in Wheeling, Virginia, before the Civil War. They were unusual because they were not domestics or washwomen - the jobs that most immigrant women, and most African-American women had, in Wheeling, Parkersburg, Martinsburg, and Charleston, West Virginia, by 1870. The stories of the Marsdens, Rockerbraun, Lee, and the hundreds of other immigrant and African-American women in these cities help us understand the ways in which women earned their living in these cities and the impact of ethnicity and race on their choices.

Cities long have been magnets for those seeking work, for they offer "a greater variety and number of employment opportunities, suggesting that labor force participation will be higher in cities" (Isserman and Rephan 6). And, noted Donna Gabaccia, "International migrations of women to the United States had a pronounced urban bias because cities offered women the best chances to work for wages, whether they came alone or in family groups" (33). In *From the Other Side: Women, Gender, & Immigrant Life in the U.S., 1820-1990*, Gabaccia points out that, in the nineteenth century, "wages lured the largest numbers of women, relative to men, to experiment with migration to the United States. Most of those female jobs were in U.S. cities. . . . Within the United States, too, . . . black and white women dominated urban migrations" (33).

Historians of women have traditionally focused their attention on wage-earners in large cities. Historians of southern women have said little about urban immigrants, but much more about blacks, and urban historians do not usually focus on Appalachia. To help fill some of the gaps in this literature, I focus on urban women within Appalachia. Our stereotypical image of antebellum immigrants in Appalachian history tends to focus on the pre-Civil War Irish men who came to build the turnpikes or railroads, not German and Irish domestic servants in Wheeling. Nor have we paid much attention to slave women who worked in Martinsburg's hotels, but the experiences of immigrant and African-American women in the smaller cities that became part of West Virginia with the formation of the state in 1863 show that these cities were also magnets for wage-earning women. The larger the city, the more opportunities there were for wage-earning women. The low percentage of women over 10 employed state-wide in 1870 (5 percent versus 13 percent nationally) continues to the present. I want to begin, then, by setting the four stages for this story, then talk about immigrant women, then African-American women.

Wheeling was, by far, the largest city west of the mountains in Virginia. In 1830, Wheeling first reached the census definition of "urban" - 2,500 people. 1830 also marked the beginning of the first major wave of migration into the United States, with immigrants coming primarily from western and northern Europe (Gabaccia 3). While officially in a southern state, Wheeling lies north of the Mason-Dixon line and just across the Ohio River from freedom for slaves. Of my four cities, Wheeling had the smallest percentage of African-Americans in 1860. It also was the most heavily industrialized of the four cities and had the most diversified economy. The city was the capital of the Restored Government of Virginia during the Civil War and the first capital of the new State of West Virginia.

A Professor Ross, in 1864, noted that: "In manufactories, Ohio county surpasses any other portions of the State," including the "6 Glass works" and "one Woolen factory" where he said

women had the best chances of finding employment (“Description of Ohio County”). Because of its location on major transportation routes and the multitude of jobs available, Wheeling had the largest percentage of immigrants of my four cities in 1860. In fact, Ohio County, with Wheeling as the county seat, then had the largest number of immigrants in the counties that would become West Virginia - 5,511 people or 35 percent of the total. Ohio County was so far ahead of any other county that the next closest, Mason County, had only 1,194 (DeBar 183).

By 1860, the year the first migration wave ended, Martinsburg and Parkersburg reached the census definition of urban. Martinsburg, the county seat of Berkeley County, was the only city in the group that was not west of the mountains. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad reached Martinsburg in 1842, and the city's economy revolved around the railroad thereafter. Indeed, the city is in West Virginia only because the railroad was such a vital Union resource during the war. Martinsburg, in 1860, was the only one of the three cities to have a sizeable slave population. In 1870, this was the third largest city in the state.

Parkersburg is located on the Ohio River at the mouth of the Little Kanawha River and at the terminus of the Staunton-to-Parkersburg Turnpike. In 1857, the Northwestern Virginia Railroad reached the city. Parkersburg in 1860 was seven people short of the 2,500 mark with 2,493 people in 1860. Because census takers then could miss people as they do now, I have included Parkersburg in my study. In 1861, Parkersburg was "a place of considerable business and contains . . . 4 steam mills, 2 tanneries, and 1 carding factory" (Hawes 62). By 1870, Parkersburg was the second largest city in the state and boasted that it furnished "a nice home for the emigrant coming to our borders" (“Editorial Correspondence” 2).

Charleston became the new capital of West Virginia in 1870. City leaders eagerly anticipated the arrival of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad the next year. My study ends in that year, with the new state of West Virginia poised for rapid growth based on exploitation of natural resources and an expanded transportation system.

I want to begin my comments about these women wage-earners by explaining some of the limitations of my sources. The 1860 census was the first to list occupations for women. All the women in this study were those who were publicly identified in some way with a job title, not women working informally in the underground economy which has long been a part of the state's economy. For example, the census did not identify an occupation for women keeping boarders in their homes if these women were not officially keeping boarding houses, although keeping boarders was clearly a way for women to earn money. Unfortunately, neither the 1860 nor 1870 censuses gives relationships to the heads of the household or marital status. I have designated women as heads of the household or non-heads, determined by whether the census taker listed them first in the household. Very few women who were heads of households were identified with occupations.

Most of these women are very illusive. I have tried to match names across censuses from 1860 to 1870, but it has proven to be almost impossible to find anyone listed both years, making it very risky to try to speculate about social mobility. Job titles are inconsistent within a given census and change over time; mantua makers become dressmakers, for instance. There are few marriage records for these women in the courthouses. Naturalization records provide little help,

as the 1855 Naturalization Act provided that "Any woman who is now or may hereafter be married to a citizen of the United States, and who might herself be lawfully naturalized shall be deemed a citizen." I have found only one or two Wheeling women who took the oath of allegiance to their new country.

With these caveats in mind, let me turn, next, to immigrant women's experiences. During the 1830s, large numbers of Germans migrated to Virginia via New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans (Schuricht 2:29). Some of those who left Germany after 1848 came to Virginia, but most stayed in eastern cities or went further west (Schuricht 2:33). Germans more consistently migrated in family groups and often came to the U.S. primarily for economic reasons, claims Roger Daniels (146). Census takers in western Virginia cities almost always used "Germany" to identify birthplaces in 1860, being more specific by state in 1870, when most came from Baden, Brunswick, Hanover, Wurtemberg, and Hesse.

Once in the U.S., only a minority of Germans lived in cities. German-born women were less likely to enter the labor force than other immigrant or native-born American women. They held fewer factory jobs and clerical jobs and concentrated, says Daniels, in service sector jobs as bakers, domestic workers, hotel keepers, janitors, laundry workers, nurses, peddlers, saloon keepers, and tailors. Many were in family-owned businesses or businesses in the German-American community (Daniels 150). In Wheeling, for instance, Henrietta Zeigle of Germany was a confectioner, Barbara Fruchell and Rockerbraun were grocers.

Irish coming before the famine were heavily Roman Catholic and were most often men (Daniels 128). Women who came "either joined male relatives or came in family groups," but a few single women also came and, like the men, sent remittances home to their families (Daniels 130). During the famine years, most of the Irish came in family units, although they may have come "serially in chain migration." There were still more men than women, but the difference was not as large as before the famine. After the famine years, more women came than men as marriage options became even more difficult in Ireland (Daniels 141). Almost one-half (45 percent) of all Irish emigrants, men and women, between 1850 and 1880 were between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four (Daniels 142). Germans and Irish together were almost 70 percent of all foreign-born in the U.S. in 1860.

The new state of West Virginia, and Ohio County, sought out immigrants. On March 2, 1864, the legislature passed an act to encourage immigration to the state and appointed J.H. Diss Debar as commissioner of immigration the next day (DeBar n.p.). In 1870, DeBar published *The West Virginia Hand Book and Immigrant's Guide* to publicize the state. Gov. William E. Stevenson, that year, pointed out that the state had to have immigrants "to be more prosperous and powerful . . . . Capital and labor from abroad must not be treated as dangerous innovations; but as things to be sought after and encouraged. . . ." ("Governor's Message" 2).<sup>i</sup> There were then 17,091 immigrants in the state (Walker 324). In the four counties in my study, 70 percent of the immigrants were still from Germany and Ireland, and 51 percent of all the immigrants in the state lived in these counties, as there were 4,348 Germans and 1,675 Irish among the 8,633 foreign-born (Walker 375).

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Some generalizations will put these women into broader contexts. The majority of foreign-born women were not heads of households. Immigrant women found work in urban domestic service, textile mills, and garment production, responding "primarily to U.S. labor market demand for unskilled and semiskilled female labor" in the nineteenth century" (Gabaccia 33). These were the jobs "at the bottom of the occupational ladder," jobs that native-born white women gave up as new opportunities opened for them (Gabaccia 46). Probably, immigrant women, like men, "depended on family and friends to help them find work and to show them the ropes once employed. Such networking meant that an ethnic group might be concentrated in jobs of a certain type simply because the network's earliest members had happened to find jobs in that field. This was especially true for women -- employers rarely expressed strong preferences for women workers of a particular background" as they did with men (Gabaccia 47).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the single largest occupation group for women was domestic service. In 1850, more women were in domestic service than in teaching and manufacturing combined. However, women shunned domestic service whenever they could, even though writers tried to convince them it was a good preparation for marriage and a good way to earn money. Wages were usually lower for domestic work than for factory work so women who chose this option had few others. Gabaccia notes that immigrant women coming to the United States in the nineteenth century who had worked as domestic servants in Europe found even more opportunities for this work in their new country because so many middle-class homes could afford to have domestic servants (Gabaccia 34).

Irish women trying to find domestic service jobs before the Civil War faced discrimination that Roger Daniels described as "sheer bigotry." Part of this was due to the fact that native-born white women often thought that "standards of cleanliness and hygiene in Ireland were not of the highest and that young Irish women were not likely to know much about the techniques necessary to run a middle-class American household" (131). But, the Irish women learned the high standards that Catharine Beecher set forth in *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* in 1841, a book that would become the standard reference for decades to come. By 1850, Irish servants had "an essential role in thousands of northeastern homes." Native-born Americans and second-generation immigrants did not want to be servants, so the Irish and, sometimes, Germans, helped solve the "endemic servant problem" where there were no slaves (Daniels 131).

"Large numbers" of Irish in mid-nineteenth century urban America were "at the very bottom of the economic structure, overrepresented as common laborers and domestic servants . . . . In the antebellum South it was widely believed that Irish should be employed in dangerous, high mortality jobs rather than risking the life of valuable Negro slaves" (Daniels 136-137). That would not be quite as much of an issue in these western Virginia cities because there were few immigrants where there were many slaves and few African-Americans were there were large numbers of Irish.

Still, Protestant employers worried that Irish Catholic servants, while they did speak English, would corrupt their children. While the Germans rarely spoke English, they usually had more experience as domestics in Germany and knew more about "bourgeois standards of cleanliness" (Gabaccia 48). Perhaps that is why one Wheeling resident advertised for "A good, careful

woman, who knows how to do all kinds of housework. A good German woman preferred. An applicant, well recommended, will find a lifetime situation, if she wants it, at the best wages” in the *Wheeling Intelligencer* in 1858, while another sought “A servant girl - German preferred” in 1864 (“Wanted” 2). Kathleen Conzen, in her work on German immigrants in Milwaukee, has suggested that the German girls who did day work in Anglo homes helped acculturate their parents since they learned English and learned about middle-class American life (Daniels 150).

Irish and German women, before the 1880s, also had few other options than domestic service, but domestic service also was an improvement over the farm work they had done at home (Gabaccia 48). In Wheeling and Parkersburg, domestic service was a job for young, and probably unmarried, women. In 1860, 70 percent of Wheeling's domestics were immigrants - and all but 5 percent of that 70 percent were from Germany and Ireland; 67 percent of Parkersburg's domestics were immigrants, but only 28 percent were German or Irish (1860 Census). The overwhelming majority presumably lived in their employers' homes, since they had different last names from their employers and were listed last in the household enumerations. This confirms Gabaccia's finding that “most immigrant servants and factory operatives were young and unmarried” (47). They worked long hours, with little control over their own time, for low cash wages, since employers considered room and board part of their compensation (Gabaccia 48).

In Martinsburg, in 1870, only 10 of the 111 domestics were foreign-born, but 44 were black. None were household heads. None lived in households where the head had the same last name. Census takers also identified 41 housekeepers, including one who was a housekeeper at a hotel. Again, none were heads of households; only 5 of these women were foreign-born, and only 3 were black, so we can speculate that census takers may have used different terminology for the same job, depending on the ethnicity and, especially, race of the person counted. In Charleston, only 21 percent of the domestics were foreign-born - but 60 percent were black.

Families that could not afford a slave or domestic may still have hired someone to do their laundry, for that was probably the most physically strenuous domestic jobs. Beecher found that it was “a common complaint, in all parts of the country, that *good* washers are very rare” (Beecher 308). In 1860, washing was a job for German and Irish immigrant women in Wheeling and for free women of color who headed households in Martinsburg. They were older than the domestics, although the census does not tell us if they were widows. Washing was not an easy job, so women who did this must have had few options. It is not clear in all cases whether urban washerwomen took in washing or went to another's house to do it, but the large number of women who headed households and were washerwomen suggest that the job offered more freedom of movement than live-in domestic work.

Some immigrants found employment in domestic jobs in hotels. The McLure House, Wheeling's premier hotel in 1860, employed fourteen Irish immigrant women as domestics and a Virginia-born housekeeper. Thomas S. Conley, proprietor of Parkersburg's Swan House hotel, employed two 20-year-old Irish women as servants (“Swann House” 1; Wood County 1860 Census). William A. Tefft was the proprietor of the United States Hotel in Parkersburg, where he employed two Irish women as house servants, one 22 and one 28 (“United States Hotel” 2; Wood County 1860 Census). In Martinsburg, in 1870, Dora Seikle, born in Hesse Cassel, was a

domestic in a hotel (Berkeley County Census 1870). A few German, French, Dutch, and Irish immigrants worked in Wheeling's hotels in 1870, but native-born women dominated these jobs in that city, while Irish women dominated the hotel jobs in Parkersburg that year (Ohio County Census 1870; Wood County Census 1870).

In northeastern cities, immigrant women worked in shoe and textile mills by the mid-nineteenth century. In southern cities like Richmond, slave women worked in factories. Wheeling, in 1860, more closely followed the northeastern model, since immigrants from England, France, Germany, Ireland, Scotland were seamstresses, probably working for the city's merchant tailors. However, there were fewer immigrants than native-born white women in this occupation in 1860 (Ohio County Census 1860). Similarly, Irish and German women were seamstresses in Martinsburg, but native-born women also dominated this profession in 1860 and monopolized it in Parkersburg (Berkeley County Census 1860; Wood County Census 1860).

In 1860, a number of Wheeling immigrant women were involved in other aspects of the sewing and clothing trades as mantua makers, dressmakers, and milliners. Mantuas were long loose cloaks for women. The immigrant mantua makers included Ellen Anderson, a thirty-year-old Irish immigrant. Anna Grow, 28 years old, was a dressmaker from Ireland. Mary L. Allen was a 27-year-old dressmaker born in Canada. Joanna Adrian, an English mantua-maker in Wheeling, was in business from at least 1839 to 1860 in Wheeling; she was 45 in 1860 (Ohio County Census 1860).

Miss Elizabeth & Miss Mary Marsden were straw and fancy milliners in 1859 in Wheeling. They were almost certainly sisters, since both were born in England. Elizabeth 25 in 1860, said the census enumerator, but, when she applied for her marriage license to John Wallis [Walters] the next year, she gave her age as 30 (Ohio County Marriage License 4:34). The Marsdens were in the millinery business as E. Walters and M. Marsden in 1862. Mary married John B. Colvig in April 1863, when she was 31 years old (Ohio County Marriage License 6:40). Elizabeth was in business by herself in the fall and advertised her shop as having the "Sign of the Big Bonnet" ("Grand Opening" 1863, 1). She sold a "splendid assortment of Ladies' Bonnets," plus bonnet ribbons, ladies' hair knots, head dresses, caps, ladies and children's hats, veils, gloves, ladies' corsets, hoop skirts, dress trimmings, cloaks, mantillas, ladies sun shades, parasols, umbrellas, "and a host of articles too numerous to mention" ("Grand Opening" 1864, 1). Mary Colvig opened her millinery in the spring of 1865, "a few doors below her old stand" (and her sister's business) ("New Millinery Establishment" 2).

By 1870, in Wheeling, the number of jobs in merchant tailor firms was declining as the introduction of the sewing machine mechanized clothing production. Still, some German women were seamstresses, sewed for tailors, and worked in tailor shops. Others worked in a brewery, in a tobacco factory, and in a glass house. We do not know the specific jobs these women had in factories, but women were the washers and packers in glass houses. English, Irish, and Scottish women were seamstresses and tailoresses. Still, the vast majority of women in all of these industries were native-born white women (Ohio County Census 1870). Census enumerators found no immigrant women in industry in Charleston, Martinsburg, or Parkersburg in 1870, but there were few industrial jobs for any women there (Kanawha County Census 1870; Berkeley County Census 1870; Wood County Census 1870).

A few immigrant women also worked in the sewing and clothing trades in other cities by 1870. In Parkersburg, Clara Heinsfurter was a twenty-year-old native of Bavaria who was in the "millinery &c." business (Wood County Census 1870). Clara may have been in business with Lena Heinsfurter, a twenty-seven-year-old native of Bavaria also in the "millinery &c." business and living in the same household as Clara (Wood County Census 1870). Mrs. Rebecca Collins, a milliner born in Switzerland, was thirty-eight years old in 1870 (Wood County Census 1870). We know more about her from the R.G. Dun & Co. records, but publishing this requires prior permission from Dun & Bradstreet, and there was not time to get that permission for this paper. In Charleston, Mary and Margaret Davis were mantua makers who had been born in Ireland (Kanawha County Census 1870).

A few foreign-born women were in other businesses, particularly providing food and lodging. In Wheeling, in 1860, in addition to the German women noted at the beginning of this paper, Julia Garforth from England was bottling ales and 22-year-old Margaret Culp was a boarding house keeper from Ireland (Ohio County Census 1860). In Martinsburg, immigrant women operated hotels and boarding houses. In 1869, Baden-born Mrs. Julia C. Westphal purchased Martinsburg's Valley House hotel (Berkeley County Deed Records 379).<sup>ii</sup> The City apparently contracted with Mrs. Westphal [no first name] to keep a "destitute woman," since they paid her \$2.00 for this service in October 1869 (Martinsburg Minute Book 244). In 1870, Julia Westphal was thirty-five years old and shared her household with two children; she hired Bridget McCarthy, a twenty-one-year-old Irish woman, as her domestic servant (Berkeley County Census 1870). Two Irish women, 76-year-old Johannah and 60-year-old Mary A. Coneys ran boarding houses in Parkersburg in 1860 (Wood County Census 1860). Well, that's what the census takers recorded, but Coneys was well known to the local law enforcement officials. The grand jury presented indictments against her for unlawful retailing of ardent spirits in 1861, 1862, 1863, and 1864, and for petit larceny in 1863, 1864, and 1865 (Wood County Law Docket). Nineteen-year-old Mary FitzMorris of Martinsburg, born in Ireland, kept a grocery in 1870 and was the youngest shopkeeper identified in any of the cities (Berkeley County Census 1870).

There were still some jobs that apparently stayed closed to immigrant women, such as public school teaching, in spite of the fact that there was a German department in the Wheeling public schools after the Civil War. One notable exception was the Sisters of St. Joseph in Wheeling in 1860, some of whom were German and who would have taught in their own schools or worked in Wheeling Hospital.

Now let me turn to African-American women. The earliest possible evidence of nineteenth-century Wheeling businesswomen, an 1815 newspaper account in the *Wheeling Intelligencer* noted that "Black Rachael had a millinery shop with a small house and a large lot with an abundance of fruit" (Newton, et al. 183-184, 187). If "Black Rachael" was one of the city's free African-American women, she was the only African American woman identified to date who was a shop keeper.

Slaves must be included among the urban working women in Martinsburg, Wheeling, and

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Parkersburg, but, in Wheeling and Parkersburg, slavery was not as important as it was in the towns that stayed in Virginia or as it was in Martinsburg. The census did not identify slaves by name, so it is harder to gain information about them. We do know that slaves were bought, sold, and freed in Wheeling. In 1830, for instance, the *Wheeling Compiler* included an ad announcing “For sale, a healthy and strong Negro Girl 16 years old” (“A Negro Girl” 3). Without the detailed records of the slave owners, it is only possible to surmise that slave women in western Virginia shared the responsibilities of slave women elsewhere. They may have helped their owners on small farms or did the work of domestic servants in non-slave-holding areas, doing laundry, cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. At least three Martinsburg hotel keepers owned slaves in 1860, as Henry Staub then had 6 female and 3 male slaves; George W. Ramer had 1 female and 2 males, and William Reamer had 4 females and 2 males (Berkeley County Slave Census 1860).

The only comprehensive study of nineteenth-century African American history in western Virginia is still John Reuben Sheeler's "The Negro in West Virginia Before 1900," a doctoral dissertation completed in 1954. Sheeler rarely referenced the work of urban slaves, but at least a few urban women can be identified from his meticulous search through wills and other legal records.

George Brown, a young Methodist circuit rider preaching in Wheeling in 1820, preached a sermon soon after coming to the city that stirred the conscience of prominent slave-holder Noah Zane, who freed two slave women he had just sold for \$1,400. The women were to be sent South but had not yet been delivered to their purchaser, and Zane cancelled the transaction (Sheeler 98).

Christenah and William Beymer, her son, were slave owners who operated an ordinary or house of private entertainment in Wheeling. Beymer received a license to operate an ordinary at her home from the Ohio County Court on May 8, 1832 (Ohio County Order Books 25:100). On December 21, 1835, the court recorded a sale of one female slave, named Mary Jane [?] on November 18, 1835, from Jeremiah Shepherd to William Beymer (Ohio County Order Book 26): 562). Probably, she worked at the ordinary or hotel. Christiana Beymer was the head of her nineteen-person household in 1840; the 2 white females were one between 10 and 15 and one between 70 and 80 (Beymer). In addition, there were 2 male slaves between 24 and 36, 3 females between 10 and 27 and 2 between 24 and 36 (Ohio County Census 1840). On December 31, 1845, Christina Beymer received permission from the Wheeling city council to transfer her license to keep an ordinary to Samuel Beymer, another son (Wheeling Minute Book 303). In March 1854, she freed two of her women slaves, Caroline and Frances (Ohio County Court Records).

By 1858, one mulatto slave girl had done housework by hire for a Wheeling tavern keeper for twenty years and had two children by him. Overburdened by debts, the man sent the woman and her two children off on a trip to Cincinnati, selling them to the person who was to "take care" of them on the trip (“Alledged Kidnapping” 3).

The urban environment provided some freedom of movement for slaves in western Virginia cities, as it did in larger cities like Charleston, South Carolina, Richmond, and New Orleans.

Many of the slaves in Wheeling could move about without restriction, and there were occasional complaints filed against masters for allowing this freedom (Sheeler 131). Because there were so few slave women in Wheeling or Parkersburg, their emancipation would have had minimal impact on the city's economy.

Free African American women in antebellum Virginia were still restricted in many ways. Laws passed by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1806 and 1831-32 required all free African Americans to have permission to remain in Virginia; any African Americans who were freed had to leave the state within twelve months or be sold by the sheriff or city sergeant back into slavery (Sheeler 122). Probably as a result of that bill, the Ohio County Court brought an indictment against Rebecca Nelson, a free black, for "unlawfully remaining in the Commonwealth" in August 1832 (Ohio County Order Books 25:167).

Free blacks had to get permission to work, and many still felt African Americans should only do agricultural work, leaving the trades to white men. In focusing on men, Sheeler noted that the law made the free black "a more helpless worker than the white artisan and laborer, and consequently, a better slave than the slave for whom the master had a definite responsibility" because he would work at such low wages. Skilled labor was never legally prohibited, "but the spirit of that law became traditional and pervaded for more than a century" (Sheeler 124).

"Black washerwomen, female cooks, nurses and domestic servants worked in much the same manner whether they were slaves or free blacks," and both "provided essentially the same services for white families" (McGraw and Kimball 27). Washing was "one of a very few occupational choices open to black women" in antebellum Richmond, and that also seems to have been the case in Wheeling (McGraw and Kimball 25). By 1851, Mary A. Coats, Lucy Fawcett, C. McPherson, Minty A. Thomas, and Evelina Woods were washerwomen in Wheeling, the first such references to a trade that would be dominated by African-American women in some West Virginia cities (Taylor). In Wheeling in 1860, four washerwomen were African Americans (Ohio County Census 1860). The other major choice was sewing, both in Richmond and Wheeling (McGraw and Kimball 25). Lettie McKee was a seamstress in 1851, and Polly Myers was a chambermaid that year (Taylor).

By 1870, African-American women dominated the ranks of domestic workers in Martinsburg. None were heads of households. Of the 111 domestics noted above, 44 were African-Americans, as were two of the 3 hotel chambermaids, the 1 house cleaner, 1 house servant, mulatto, all 4 cooks, 1 pastry cook, and 2 of the 4 nurses, but only 3 of the 41 housekeepers, leading one to ask whether census takers applied labels in racially-determined ways or whether the jobs really were different. The nurses were really domestic workers, since there were no professionally trained nurses at the time in the state. Thirteen of the 15 washwomen were African Americans, 1 of whom lived and worked in a hotel. In addition, one of the 12 seamstresses was a mulatto, and Elizabeth Burling, a teacher, was born in New York. She was then 20 years old and lived with two of the school's white teachers, so she may have worked for the Freedmen's Bureau schools (Berkeley County Census 1870).

African-American women also engaged in illicit wage-earning activities. In July 1833, Anne Lee appeared before the justice of the peace in Ohio County on a charge of keeping a house of ill

fame and posted a \$50 bond. Lee was a free woman described in court documents as "not of good name & fame nor of honest conversation but is an evil doer [unclear] Disturber of the Peace of the Commonwealth & Keeper of a Bawdy House so that murder Homicide stifles discords & other grievances & Damages amongst the citizens of the County" took place there. However, in spite of that record, the charges seem to have been dismissed at the September term, and no further record could be found of Anne Lee (Ohio County Court Records 1833).

By 1870, there was no house of "*public ill fame*" in Wheeling, but there were "several private brothels or places of assignation for the accommodation of libertines and their paramours." Dr. James E. Reeves estimated the number of prostitutes in 1870 as not exceeding "63 white, and about the same number of colored, persons of well established character." He attributed those figures to "an energetic Member of the Police force" (Reeves, *Physical and Medical* 44). In 1871, Reeves estimated the number of prostitutes as not more than seventy-five white prostitutes, "and about the same number of colored, persons of well-established character." He still attributed his figures to "an energetic member of the police force." This is an impossibly high number of African American prostitutes because there were only a total of 390 African Americans in the city in 1870 (Reeves, *Health and Wealth* 137-138).

The December 1867 Wood County grand jury issued new indictments against Susan Langley, an African American, for keeping a house of ill fame (Wood County Law Order Book 6:509). A second writ was issued against Langley in April 1868, summoning her to the first day of the next court term (Wood County law Order Book 7:3). She was indicted for keeping counterfeit money in September 1871. At that time, she asked the court to be tried by a jury of African Americans but was overruled. Still, the jury accepted her not guilty plea, and the case was dismissed (Wood County Law Order Book 8:277). Langley was not out of trouble with the law, but her other exploits came after time period.

In conclusion, immigrant and African-American women in Wheeling, Martinsburg, Parkersburg, and Charleston, like their sisters elsewhere, generally had the most difficult and lowest-paid jobs in mid-nineteenth-century cities. They followed national trends in that German and Irish women dominated domestic service where there were large groups of German and Irish immigrants, and African-Americans dominated similar jobs where there were large African-American populations. They were transient wage-earners, in most cases. While historians have ignored their presence in the state's past, their contributions to the urban economy made life much easier for the cities' wealthier residents and guests. In that sense, they are much like the too-often-invisible women working in today's cities in low-paid jobs, as housekeepers, and in the tourism industry.

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Appendices

**Foreign-born in Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio County (Wheeling), Berkeley County (Martinsburg), Wood County (Parkersburg), Kanawha County (Charleston)**

	1860	1870
Virginia	35,058	
West Virginia	16,545 (47.2%)**	17,091
Ohio County	5,511 (35.0%)*	6,020 (35.2%)
Wheeling		4,153 (24.3%)
Berkeley County	630 (4.0%)*	639 (3.7%)
Martinsburg		488 (2.9%)
Wood County	708 (4.4%)*	1,287 (7.5%)
Parkersburg		801 (4.7%)
Kanawha County		687 (4%)
Charleston		214 (1.3%)

\*\* percentage of total Virginia figure

\* of figure of counties that will become West Virginia

1860: total = 6,849 immigrants or 42 percent of counties that become West Virginia total in these counties

1870: total = 8,633 immigrants or 51 percent of West Virginia total in these counties; immigration population in these cities is 5,656 or 33 percent of West Virginia immigrant total

**Blacks in Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio County (Wheeling), Berkeley County (Martinsburg), Wood County (Parkersburg), Kanawha County (Charleston)**

	1860	1870
Virginia	455,443	13,640
West Virginia		
Ohio County	226 (.05%)	
Wheeling	197 (.04%)*	390 (2.9%)
Berkeley County	586 (.13%)	
Martinsburg	350 (.07%)	476 (3.5%)
Wood County	255 (.05%)	
Parkersburg	236 (.05%)*	447 (3.3%)
Kanawha County		
Charleston		761 (5.6%)

\* of figure of counties that will become West Virginia

\*\* percentage of total Virginia figure

\*\*\*assuming all slaves in county are in city (unlikely) because no separate slave census for city

urban black population in 1870 is 15.2 percent of state black total

## Population Figures: Wheeling

	1830	1840	1850		1860		1870
			M	W	M	W	
whites (native only for 1870)			5660	5519	6811	7175	14737
slave			11	33	42*	58*	
free black			105	107	46	51	390
foreign born			not available		not available		4153
total	5221	7885	5776	5659	6899	7284	19280

\*These are county figures, as those are the only ones available.

1840 and 1850 figures from J.D.B. DeBow, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer 1853), 193.

Ohio County, in 1850, had 5,005 people born in the United States outside of Virginia and 4,015 born in foreign countries out of a total population of 18,006 (J.D.B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States* [Washington, D.C.: A.O.P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1854], 326-327).

The census table does not separate out native-born white and native-born black, so I have assumed that all blacks were native-born.

## Parkersburg

	1860		1870
	M	W	
white (native only for 1870)	1,221	1,212	4298
slave	85*	91*	
free black	28	32	447
foreign-born	not available		801
total	2493		5546

The census table does not separate out native-born white and native-born black, so I've assumed that all blacks are native-born.

\* figures are for county slave population, as city figures are not available.

## Martinsburg

	1860		1870
	Men	Women	
white (native only for 1870)	1495	1519	3899 *
slave	90	150	
foreign-born			488
free black	45	65	476
total	1630	1734	4863

Figures for 1870 are for Martinsburg township.

\* Census table does not separate native-born white and native-born black so have assumed all blacks are native-born.

## Charleston

	1870
native-born white	2187 *
free black	761
foreign-born	214
total	3162

The census table does not separate out native-born white and native-born black, so I have assumed that all blacks are native-born.

**Martinsburg - 1860 - occupation by birth, race, head (H) & non-head (N)**

	German		Irish		other foreign		white VA		black VA		other black		other native white	
	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N
boarding house keepers													2	
confectioners														
laundresses, washwomen			1				2	1	11	9				
mantua makers													1	
milliners							2	2						
seamstress	2	3	3	6			10	40					3	19
servants				1				1		4				
teachers							1	2						
<b>totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>			<b>15</b>	<b>46</b>		<b>13</b>				<b>19</b>

foreign-born in county = 5.0% of population

foreign-born women workers in city = 12.7% of population

free black women in city = 3.7% of population

free black women workers in city = 9% of population

white women in city = 87% of population

white women workers in city = 68.3% of population

**Martinsburg - 1870 - occupation by birth, race, head (H) & non-head (N)**

	German		Irish		other foreign		white Va/WV		black Va/WV		other black		other white native	
	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N
brdg hse, hotel							1						1	
chambermaids-hotel										2				1
cooks, inc. hotel, brdg hse, pastry									1	4				
dressmakers							1	2						2
housekeepers		2		3				22		3				9
retail grocery				1										
laundresses, washwomen										14				1
milliners, inc. apprentice								3						2
music teachers														2
nurses								2		2				
seamstress								10		1				
servants & related occupations		7		3				46		43		5		8
storekeeper				1										
teachers								4						
<b>totals</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>7</b>			<b>2</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>69</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>34</b>

foreign-born in city = 10 %

foreign-born women workers in city = 7.8%  
57.7%

native-born white population in city = 80.2%

native-born white women workers in city =

free black population in city = 9.8%

free black women workers in city = 34.6%

**Parkersburg - 1860 - occupation by birth, race, head (H) & non-head (N)**

	German		Irish		other foreign		white VA		black VA		other black		other white native	
	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N
bar room			1											
boarding hse keepers							1							
hotel & restaurant employees				2										
housework								1						1
laundresses, washwomen	2						4	1					3	2
dressmaker							1	2						
milliners							1	1						
nurse														1
seamstresses							2	3					2	4
servants		3		15		9		13						19
teachers													2	1
<b>totals</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>26</b>					<b>7</b>	<b>28</b>

foreign-born in county = 6.4%

foreign-born women workers in city = 5%

free black women in city = 1.3%

free black women workers in city = 0%

white women in city = 90.8%

native-born white women workers in city = 95%

**Parkersburg - 1870 - occupation by birth, race, head (H) & non-head (N)**

	German		Irish		other foreign		white Va./WV		white other native		black VA/WV		other black	
	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N
boarding hse keepers							4	1						
convent				4				3	1	7				
hotel & restaurant employees		3		12		1			6	6		2		
laundresses, washwomen, ironer							1		1			1		
dressmakers							1	8	3	2				
milliners		2			1			3		3				
nurse										1				
seamstresses				1				4		2				
servants		4		30		5		88		33		32		
teachers								6		4				
weavers								1						
works about, works out								1				1		
<b>totals</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>47</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>58</b>		<b>36</b>		

foreign-born in city =14.4%

foreign-born women workers in city =.8%

blacks in city = 8.1%

black women workers in city = 12.4%

native-born whites in city = 77.4%

native-born white women workers in city = 65.7%



nurses		2		3						1				
operatives, operatives- factory, operative-papermill				3				4	4	9				
operatives - cotton factory				1				4		1				
photograph printer								1						
physicians								1		1				
seamstresses	4	11	4	7	3	6	4	22	18	30				
servants, domestics, house servants		134	2	141		10		75		68				
tailoresses				2					1	2				
teachers					1		2	8	2	14				
weavers			1							2				
wet nurse							1							
wool manuf.								1						
totals	16	155	38	162	12	17	22	135	40	142			1	

foreign-born in county = 35.0%

white women in city = 98.5%

free black women = .35%

foreign-born women workers in city = 54.1%  
.13%

native-born white women workers in city = 45.9%

free black women workers =



dressmakers mantua makers					1				2	6	2	1	2	2			1				
milliners									3	8				5	1		1	2			
notion dealer	2		1						2				1	1							
physicians										1											
prostitute										2											
saloon keeper	1																				
seamstresses, sewing girls, sews at home	9		8	2	1		3		8	71	1	10	11	8	2	3		2			
servants		41	2	35		2		19		119		21		36		6		8		25	1
tailoresses, sews for tailor, wks in tailor shop, wks for tailor		2	3		2		1		28						1						
tavern keeper	1																				
teachers			3						4			1		3							
weavers, carpet weavers									1			3									
wks woolen factory		1										1									
totals	37	54	43	59	5	2	11	23	84	222	13	40	21	68	4	10	4	16		26	3

foreign-born in city = 21.5%

foreign-born women workers in city = 31.4%

blacks in city = 2%

black women workers in city = 3.8%

native-born whites in city = 76.4%

native-born white women workers in city = 64.7%

	German		Irish		other foreign		white Va/WV		other native white		black Va/WV		other black	
	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N	H	N
chambermaid on steamboat														
chambermaids														
housekeepers-hotel														
laundresses, washwomen							1							
mantua makers, dressmaker				2						1				
milliners							1	2	2	2	1			
nurses				2				10		1				
servants		3		7		3		45		3	1	87		1
teachers								2		2				
weavers								1						
totals		3		11		3	2	60	2	9	2	87		1

foreign-born in city = 6.8%

foreign-born women workers in city = 7.8%

blacks in city = 24.1%

black women workers in city = 50.0%

native-born whites in city = 69.2%

native-born white women workers in city = 40.6%

	# 10 & up (308,424)	# all classes	agric.	prof. & personal services	trade & transport	manuf., mechanical,mining
Total	154234	8153	233	7063	9	846
Wheeling		732		483	20	229
Martinsburg		215		190	1	24
Parkersburg		293		262		31
Charleston		157		147		10
urban pop. as % of total pop.	10.6%					
immigrant pop. as % of total population	51%					
Urban worker total as % of total worker		1397 (18%)		1082 (16%)	30 (334%)	294 (35%)
immig. worker total as % of worker total		323 (4%)		266 (25%)	13 (44%)	44 (14%)
urban black pop. as % of total pop.	15.2%					
black worker total as % of worker total		230 (2.8%)		228 (3.2%)	0 (0%)	2 (.24%)

Professional and personal service: boarding and lodging house keepers; servants, cooks, nurses; hotel and restaurant employees; laundresses; teachers; convent; saloon keepers; others

Trade and transportation: traders and dealers (storekeepers, except saloons); clerks

Manufacturing and mining: confectioners; operatives; millers, dress and mantua makers; tailoresses, seamstresses