CHAPTER 13

Skirting the Boundaries: Businesswomen in Colonial British Columbia, 1858–1914

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Marital status is an important part of the story of female entrepreneurship. This chapter uses British Columbia, Canada, to investigate how marriage, motherhood and widowhood affected the business behaviours of white settler women from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of World War I. Looking at census records, newspaper articles, advertisements and business directories demonstrates the importance of marital status on women's work opportunities in British Columbia. The colony-turned-province provides a good case study for exploring the work worlds of women who ran their own businesses as sole supporters of families or as contributors to family incomes.

This chapter argues that the gender imbalance and resulting high rates of marriage (which also made the presence of children more likely) did not stop women from working but influenced the likelihood they would work on their own account rather than as employees. My research also confirms what other contributors to this collection suggest: any residual notion that men and women operated in separate spheres is inconsequential and need

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not be central to the study of female entrepreneurship. Nineteenth-century women and men in British Columbia did not seem to take notice of a separation of private and public, and historians of businesswomen need not, either.[1] Just like men, self-employed women lived and worked in and out of their homes, in public trade and in domestic settings, in small and large businesses and in all kinds of work, although their businesses were occupationally segregated along gendered notions of what constituted women's work. Family and marriage are, however, important aspects of female entrepreneurship. Women running businesses were much more likely to be married or once-married (living without a husband due to death, divorce, separation or desertion) than women who were employees; they also often had children to support. Some women worked in small businesses outside the home, while others operated businesses in their houses, with children underfoot. The desire or need to earn an income motivated women with dependent family members to work. Limited wage-earning opportunities for women, the likelihood that available wage-earning roles were held by young single women and expanded commercial opportunities in a newly expanding colony with a need for services that women could provide led many married women to turn to self-employment.[2]

I use the terms self-employed women, entrepreneurial women and businesswomen interchangeably. Most dictionaries define an entrepreneur as someone who organises, owns or manages a business, assumes associated risks and attempts to profit from the business: someone who is self-employed is 'earning income directly from one's own business, trade, or profession rather than as a specified salary or wages from an employer'.[3]

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[1] For a longer discussion of the limited value of separate spheres ideology for businesswomen, see Chap. 1, Bishop and Aston, this volume. See also Melanie Buddle, 'The Business of Women: Gender, Family, and Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901–1971' (PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2003). See also Peter Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution? Gender and Wealth in English Canada, 1860–1930* (Montreal: Mc-Gill Queen's University Press, 2008), pp. 8–9: he discusses the interconnectedness of public and private and suggests that a continuum may be a better term.

[2] The author gratefully acknowledges funding support for this chapter provided by the Symons Trust Fund at Trent University. Some of the arguments and analysis presented in this chapter were previously published in Melanie Buddle, *The Business of Women: Marriage, Family, and Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901–51 (Vancouver: UBC Press 2010).*

[3] See, for example, common definitions: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/self-employed and https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entrepeneur and https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/entrepreneur Accessed 20 April 2019.

The women I study are both. The census term 'on own account' is also useful terminology to differentiate between wage-earning and self-employed women. The term businesswoman can refer much more broadly to a woman who works in a business or in a white-collar or executive role, but who may not own the business: however, for this chapter, I use the term businesswoman to indicate self-employment.

I concur with other scholars in this volume that, regardless of the size or longevity of their businesses, entrepreneurial women took risks and earned a living; their self-employment opportunities were often constrained by age, gender, location, marital status or the local economy, but they made a choice and hoped to profit.[4] Women operated a wide variety of businesses in the province of British Columbia. In urban settings, directories show women running grocery, tobacco and confectionery stores, bakeries, tearooms, laundries, women's clothing stores and millinery stores. These were very common businesses for women in nineteenth-century North America.[5] In rural or more isolated areas, while directories were less useful and often non-existent due to very small populations, census data and newspaper advertisements show women running farms, boarding houses, hotels and restaurants. Census data also provides valuable information about the marital status of women, their households and their rates and types of self-employment. Marriage, motherhood and widowhood aligned well with entrepreneurial endeavours. Compared to their counterparts in the rest of Canada, women in the newly forming province had higher rates of marriage as well as higher rates of entrepreneurship.

Other scholars have noted these characteristics in similar gold rush settlement zones and eras. In the 1890s Klondike Gold Fields, where white women were also scarce, historian Charlene Porsild noted a corresponding demand for restaurants, saloons and laundries—types of services that women were ideally placed to provide.[6] Elizabeth Herr observed similar patterns in the late 1800s in Colorado, where, she suggests, women had a variety of enterprising opportunities.[7] Edith Sparks found high rates of female proprietorship by women with 'capital intentions' in mid-nineteenth-century San Francisco, California, the site of, like British Columbia, a gold rush and a gender imbalance. In San Francisco, women opened businesses that filled an economic niche in what Sparks calls 'cultural domesticity' marketing skills associated with women's work to a population of males in need of food, accommodation and clean laundry.[8] Women pursued opportunities 'where their skills and resources could be leveraged to meet an economic need'.[9] Gender imbalances also inflated the market for domestic services and created 'unusually high opportunity for women proprietors'.[10]

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[4] See Chap. 12 by van Lieshout, Smith and Bennett, this volume.

[5] See Chap. 10 by Lewis, this volume: the US women in her study are in remarkably similar businesses. Carry van Lieshout et al. find similar concentrations of women in the same occupational sectors in England, 1851–1911.

[6] Charlene Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), pp. 63–64.

American scholars have also noted the relationship of women's proprietorship to marriage and motherhood. Porsild found low numbers of women, but high rates of marriage and high rates of entrepreneurship among those women, in the Klondike; Sparks observed the same in San Francisco. Angel Kwolek-Folland argues that women's involvement in business often occurred 'in the context of their families' needs'.[11] Lucy Elserveld Murphy illustrates a similar pattern in the American Midwest in the mid-nineteenth century: 'a proprietor could set her own hours and, when necessary, locate the work most advantageously relative to her children'.[12] Women in the Canadian west had a similar experience: they married in higher-than-average numbers, opened businesses in higher-than-average numbers, and opened those businesses in areas where they could shrewdly capitalise on domestic skills and in sex-segregated trades.

The crown colony of Vancouver Island was created in 1849. In 1851, Governor James Douglas established colonial institutions in Victoria, then a small white settler society of mostly Hudson's Bay Company men and the main centre of commerce and settlement on Vancouver Island. In 1858, gold was discovered on the Fraser River. The region, at the time sparsely settled by white fur traders but with a large Indigenous population, changed quickly as thousands of excited miners headed first to Victoria and then to the mainland. The British Colonial office established the mainland as the colony of British Columbia in 1858. A second gold rush in the Cariboo region (central interior) of the colony, also on the mainland, began in 1861, peaking in 1863. In 1866, the colony of Vancouver Island united with the mainland colony of British Columbia, and in 1871, the colony became a province of Canada.[13]

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[7] Elizabeth Herr, 'Women, Marital Status, and Work Opportunities in 1880 Colorado', *Journal of Economic History* 55, no. 2 (June 1995): pp. 339–366, p. 341.

[8] Edith Sparks, *Capital Intentions: Female Proprietors in San Francisco, 1850–1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 10.

[9] Sparks, p. 11.

[10] Sparks, p. 16.

[11] Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Twayne, 1998), p. 45.

[12] Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, 'Business Ladies: Midwestern Women and Enterprise, 1850–1880', *Journal of Women's History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): pp. 65–89, p. 71.

In the 1860s, British Columbia was, like other nineteenth-century gold rush societies, characterised by an influx of single white males (first for gold and eventually for jobs in primary resource extraction, road and railway building), a perceived culture of rowdy and undisciplined masculinity and a perception among the white settler population that the province was on the outskirts of civilisation.[14] It was also a contact zone, where white settlers met local Indigenous populations (sometimes in violence, and usually with misunderstandings and population decline for Indigenous communities). The pre-contact Indigenous population and its subsequent decline relies on 'impressionistic guestimates'.[15] Imperfect census taking and differing understandings of whether marginal laundry businesses, farming, hunting and fishing were entrepreneurial have distorted the ways women's business stories have been told and, in particular, have hidden the experiences of Indigenous women. Sources used for this study did not yield rich examples of entrepreneurial Indigenous women.[16] My work focuses on white settler women, themselves barely visible in sources, as a first step in expanding our understanding of women's work in British Columbia.

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[13] For a very brief summary of colonial British Columbia's history (the gold rush era, and the road from colony to province), see http://www.canadahistoryproject.ca/1871/1871-02-early-history-bc.html and http://www.canadahistoryproject.ca/1871/1871-03-political-evol-bc.html Accessed 18 November 2018.

[14] I have dealt with the archetypal elements of British Columbian gold rush society and characteristics of rapid white settlement on culture and society elsewhere. See Melanie Buddle, '"All the Elements of a Permanent Community": A History of Society, Culture and Entertainment in the Cariboo' (master's thesis, University of Northern British Columbia, 1997). See also Barry M. Gough, 'The Character of the British Columbia Frontier', *BC Studies* 32 (Winter 1976–77): pp. 28–40; and S.D. Clark, *The Developing Canadian Community*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 82.

[15] John Douglas Belshaw, 'The West We Have Lost: British Columbia's Demographic Past and an Agenda for Population History', *Western Historical Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1998): pp. 25–47, p. 40.

[16] For a well-researched article that nicely corrects some of this lack of data, see Mica Jorgenson, 'Into That Country to Work': Aboriginal Economic Activities during Barkerville's Gold Rush, *BC Studies* 185 (Spring 2015): pp. 109–137.

In British Columbia, there were jobs for men in a resource-oriented economy initially dominated by mining but also by the lumber industry, road building and agriculture.[17] The emerging middle class was composed of merchants, government officials and tradespeople. For women, wage-earning work was scarce.[18] Sylvia Van Kirk's examination of women in the Cariboo region of central-interior British Columbia in the mid-nineteenth century documents entrepreneurial services that women provided: food and drink, clean clothing, sewing and accommodations. Van Kirk demonstrates that many businesswomen were also married. They did not choose work over marriage. Many were also respected members of their communities. Janet Morris ran a number of boarding houses and hotels in Barkerville, a prominent gold rush community in the Cariboo region; she arrived with one husband as Mrs Morris and after his death, she married William Allan and continued in business. Allan was a pillar of her community as her obituary in the local newspaper (1870) indicated:

> Miners … stopped work and came to Barkerville to see the last of poor Jeannie. The banks and nearly all the stores in Barkerville were closed during the funeral. Mrs. Allan came to Cariboo in 1862 and acquired the respect of everyone by the numerous acts of kindness she performed … All the flags in Barkerville were hung at half-mast.[19]

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[17] See Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), pp. 102, 142–45, and 159. For more on early British Columbia's resource-based economy and immigration, and the nature of men's work, see Hugh J.M. Johnston, 'Native People, Settlers and Sojourners 1871–1916', pp. 165–204 and Allen Seager, 'The Resource Economy, 1871–1921', pp. 205–250, in Hugh J.M. Johnston (ed.), *The Pacific Province: A History of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996).

[18] Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–187* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 12–16.

[19] Sylvia Van Kirk, 'A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, 1862–1875', in Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag (eds), *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992): pp. 21–37, pp. 23–24. Van Kirk cites the local Barkerville newspaper, the Cariboo *Sentinel*, in detailing Janet Allan's marriages and subsequent death. See: the Cariboo *Sentinel*, 10 September 1870, p. 3.

Van Kirk argues that white women played expanded social and economic roles in gold rush society with an impact 'out of all proportion to their numbers'.[20] And their numbers were small. In 1861 there were 1456 white men living on the mainland of British Columbia and only 192 white women: they made up 11.7 per cent of the white population in the mainland colony.[21] Van Kirk identified 75 white women living in the Cariboo region during the gold rush years (approximately 1862–75).[22] In 1867 the population of white women in the united colony of British Columbia (including the mainland and Vancouver Island) was 1569, or 22.5 per cent of the total white population.[23] Adele Perry quotes census officials who acknowledged that their numbers were a sketchy estimate rather than a true account; nonetheless, there was a significant gender imbalance in the white population.[24] And it continued: the ratio of adult men to women was 2.10 to 1 in the province of British Columbia in 1901.[25] Just 32 per cent of the adult population was female. In 1911, the ratio of adult men to adult women was still 2 to 1. This was not the pattern in the rest of the country in the same period: the ratio of men to women in the rest of Canada was almost even. By the time World War I began, the province was more like the rest of the country; the early settlement characteristics of long distances, very few manufacturing or urban wage-earning jobs and a high ratio of men to women were less apparent. By the 1921 census, the ratio of adult men to women had dropped to 1.34.[26]

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[20] Van Kirk, 'A Vital Presence', pp. 21–22.

[21] Great Britain Colonial Office, British Columbia, 'Blue Books of Statistics, 1861–1870', mflm. 626A and 627A, British Columbia Archives; cited in Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, p. 15.

[22] Van Kirk, 'A Vital Presence', p. 22.

[23] Great Britain, Colonial office, 'Blue Books of Statistics, British Columbia, 1861–1870', British Columbia Archives, CO 64/1, mflm. 626A; cited in Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, p. 15.

[24] British Columbia, 'Blue Books of Statistics – 1867', mflm. 627A, British Columbia Archives, 140–141: cited in Adele Perry, 'Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men: Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality, and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia', *BC Studies* 105/106 (Spring/Summer 1995): pp. 27–43, p. 36.

[25] Data taken from *Census of Canada*, 1901 and 1931. For full employment numbers and marital status of adult and employed adult population, BC and Canada, see also Buddle, 'The Business of Women', Appendices. Note that in all cases in this article, detailed 1901 data uses the Canadian Families Project database. While it reflects lower numbers, the amount of detailed data that it provided this researcher was invaluable. The database is available at http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/cfp/what/index.html

In the height of the gold rush era, single adult women had many marriage prospects, while men lamented the lack of marriageable white women to provide household comforts, companionship and virtuous domesticity to the colony.[27] Colonial promoters in the 1860s, like Protestant preacher, lecturer and writer Matthew Macfie, indicated that 'virtuous unmarried' white women were 'urgently required on social and moral grounds'.[28] The Bishop of Oxford, representing the Anglican Columbia Mission Society, warned settlers that they needed white women's 'healing and elevating society', to limit mixed-race marriages and to elevate the moral tone of the colony.[29]

The first so-called bride ship arrived in 1862 with the local press eagerly describing the 'living freight…destined for the colonial and matrimonial market'.[30] Whether or not they reformed the rowdy male mining culture, women did marry in high numbers in the colony.[31] In 1901, 59.3 per cent of all adult women in the province were married, compared to 45 per cent in the rest of Canada. In 1931, 62.2 per cent of all adult women in British Columbia were married, compared to 57 per cent in the rest of Canada.[32]

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[26] For data on total adult population, gainfully employed adult population and marital status of adult population, see Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Canada 1921,* vol. 2, table 24; *Census of Canada 1931,* vol. 1, table 17B; vol. 7, tables 25–29; *Census of Canada 1941,* vol. 1, tables 20 and 63; vol. 3, table 7; vol. 7, table 5; *Census of Canada 1951,* vol. 2, tables 1 and 2; vol. 4, table 11. Data for 1901 is from the Canadian Families Project database. For my figures, I have taken British Columbia data out of Canadian totals in order to compare the province to the rest of the country. Limited data is available for 1911; it is found in comparative historical statistics in 1931, 1941 and 1951 census volumes and tables listed here.

[27] See Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, Chapter One in particular; she demonstrates that men had many responses to the lack of 'marriageable' women, and not all yearned for marriage, but they did seem to yearn, in varying degrees, for women to fill a number of voids.

[28] Matthew Macfie, F.R.G.S., *Vancouver Island and British Columbia: Their History, Resources, and Prospects* (London, 1865), p. 497. Cited in Perry, 'Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men', p. 33.

[29] Report of the Columbia Mission, 1860 (London, n.d.), pp. 24–26. Cited in Perry, 'Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men', p. 34.

[30] *British Colonist*, September 1862. The arrival is also described in N. de Bertrand Lugrin, *The Pioneer Women of Vancouver Island, 1843–1866* (Victoria: Women's Canadian Club, 1928), pp. 146–49.

[31] See Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, pp. 139, 167, 172.

The imbalance increased women's opportunities for marriage and remarriage and also affected their work. While scholars have often suggested that in the nineteenth century marriage marked a retreat from the labour force overall, women's labour force participation in the province was similar to the rest of the country, suggesting that higher rates of marriage did not lead to lower rates of employment.[33] Instead, married, widowed and divorced women worked in British Columbia in higher rates than in the rest of the country. In 1901, 38.9 per cent of all women in the labour force were married, widowed or divorced, compared to 21.5 per cent in the rest of Canada. This evened out over the next few decades but even so, 22.8 per cent of working women were married, widowed or divorced in British Columbia in 1921, compared to 17.7 per cent in the rest of the country.[34] The following analysis relies heavily on published census data, but it also uses a 5 per cent Public Use Sample of the 1901 Canadian census, created by the Canadian Families Project at the University of Victoria. The sample allows us to see when and how enumerators recorded women and their occupations and to read about individual households, beyond just searching for overall totals.[35]

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[32] There were correspondingly fewer single women recorded in British Columbia than in the rest of the country: in 1901, 47.1 per cent of Canadian women were single compared to just 33.9 per cent in British Columbia; in 1931 the number was still lower in British Columbia (28.7 per cent compared to 34.5 per cent in the rest of the country). Data is taken from *Census of Canada*, 1911–1931 and, for 1901, from the Canadian Families Project database. For more detailed analysis of rates of marriage for women in the province compared to the rest of the country, using Canadian census data, see Buddle, 'The Business of Women', p. 46.

[33] In 1901, 12.2 per cent of all adult women in British Columbia worked for pay, compared to 14.5 per cent in the rest of Canada. In ongoing years, the percentages were as follows: 1911, 15 per cent (BC) and 13.9 per cent (Canada); 1921, 14.2 per cent (BC) and 15.3 per cent (Canada); 1931, 17.2 per cent (BC) and 17 per cent (Canada); 1941, 18.2 per cent (BC) and 20.3 per cent (Canada); 1951, 23 per cent (BC) and 23.7 per cent (Canada). Note that I have removed British Columbia data from the Canadian data, in order to present British Columbia compared to the rest of Canada. Data for 1901 is from the Canadian Families Project database. For labour force characteristics, from 1911 to 1951, see Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Canada 1931,* vol. 1, Table 82, and vol. 7, Tables 1 and 40; *Census of Canada 1941*, vol. 1, Table 58, and vol. 3, Table 1; and *Census of Canada 1951,* vol. 4, Table 1.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Researchers can access the public-use sample of the Canadian Families Project database at: http://web.uvic.ca/hrd/cfp/data/index.html

Table 13.1 Marital status of wage-earning and self-employed adult women, British Columbia and Canada in 1901 (per cent)

	Single (%)	*Married (%)*	*Widowed/divorced (%)*
Wage earners, BC	72.8	18.9	8.3
Wage earners, Canada	88.1	5.6	6.3
Self-employed, BC	26.5	39.7	33.8
Self-employed, Canada	38.8	24.6	36.6

Source: Canadian Families Project public-use sample of the 1901 census. Adult women were defined as 15 years of age and older

A closer look at the differences between wage-earning and self-employed women using 1901 census data shows that marital status had a marked effect on the types of employment women entered. Table 13.1 illustrates that about three-quarters of wage-earning women were single and about three-quarters of self-employed women were married, widowed or divorced. This is evident in the country and in British Columbia: self-employment was a far more common choice for married or once-married women than wage-earning, and this was not a particular trait of British Columbia. Others in this volume also provide qualitative and quantitative evidence of this pattern: self-employed women were more likely to be married, widowed or divorced—and older—than their wage-earning counterparts.[36] With wage-earning jobs often the preserve of young single women, the likely chance of being older and having children kept most widowed or divorced women out of wage-earning jobs.[37] I have included divorced women with widows because there were very few divorced women in the province or in Canada in the period under study. In 1901, 0.2 per cent of adult women in British Columbia were divorced. In 1921, 483 reported that they were divorced—0.3 per cent of all women.[38] It should be noted that age is not dealt with in detail in this chapter, but it is the case that marriage, widowhood/divorce and the presence of children are connected to later stages of the family cycle and to older average ages for self-employed women in British Columbia, when compared to wage earners.[39]

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[36] See Chap. 12 by van Lieshout, Smith and Bennett, this volume and their discussion of the link between marital status and entrepreneurship in England, 1851–1911: their data shows the same pattern.

[37] See Canadian Families Project public-use sample of the 1901 Canadian census.

[38] Data for 1901 is from the Canadian Families Project database. For 1921 data, see *Census of Canada*, Volume 1, 1931, Table 17B; Volume 2, 1921, Table 24; Volume 7, 1931, Tables 26 and 27. In 1901, census enumerators listed those who stated they were separated as 'married', while in 1921, the legally separated were typically documented as 'divorced'—but there were so few divorced women, it seems to have barely affected the data. In published census data from 1931 on, divorced women were listed as married. I find the choice to list them as divorced in 1921 interesting.

High rates of marriage for women in British Columbia meant that more working women were married and, as Table 13.1 shows, more wage-earning women were married or once-married and more self-employed women were also married or once-married in the province compared to the rest of Canada.

Further examination of census data also illustrates that for 1901, 27.4 per cent of working women in British Columbia were self-employed compared to 19.5 per cent in the rest of Canada.[40] Higher rates of marriage corresponded to higher rates of self-employment for women in the young province. This partners nicely with the characteristics of the newly settled region noted earlier: large numbers of single men, many working in primary resource extraction, were in need of services that women could provide for a fee. In urban settings, women ran shops or provided services in areas that had traditionally been women's work (sewing, food provision, teaching, hotels), and in rural areas, women ran hotels, restaurants, laundry operations, boarding houses and family farms—enterprises that they could continue to operate when married or widowed.[41]

The 1901 public use sample of the census indicates that close to one-third of all women at work in 1901 British Columbia were self-employed. That figure, while high, is likely an underestimation of the true number of businesswomen, as census data and other sources do not reflect the full picture for many reasons. Prior to 1871, census data was not very accurate but qualitative sources and the characteristics of gold rush societies certainly demonstrate that there were enterprising women setting up businesses. Entrepreneurial women were under-enumerated well into the twentieth century because census instructions to enumerators indicated that women carrying on 'domestic affairs' in a household, or not working full time in 'regular' occupations, were not to be classified as having occupations. In family-run businesses, only one person was to be recorded as employed or self-employed. Peter Baskerville has argued that this meant a large number of married women running home-based businesses were not enumerated accurately in 1891, 1901 and beyond.[42]

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[39] See Buddle, *The Business of Women*; Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution*, and in this volume, see Chap. 12 by van Lieshout, Smith and Bennet, for more detailed links between age, marital status and female self-employment.

[40] *Census of Canada 1921*, Volume 2, Table 4; *1931*, Volume 7, Table 21; *1941*, Volume 7, Table 5. Some of the data for 1921 is listed in the 1931 data. For more detailed census tables and analysis of marriage, self-employment and gender in census data from 1901 to 1971, see Buddle, 'The Business of Women', Appendices 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4.

[41] See Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution*, for detailed analysis and census data that also shows this connection. He finds very high rates of self-employment and, as he notes, particularly when boarding housekeepers are looked at in more detail; census takers, he suggests, did not accurately identify all boarding housekeepers as self-employed.

The 5 per cent database of the 1901 census shows how women described themselves to census takers. The database provides all household data for the selected 5 per cent of the population and allows selected households to be examined in detail. It indicates that enumerators were sometimes unwilling to see women as entrepreneurial. In 1901, census takers asked people for their occupation and whether they worked as an employee or on their own account. There were many examples in the 1901 census of women reporting occupations as hunters or trappers, lodging housekeepers and laundresses, but who were not recorded as self-employed. The census taker checked off 'employee' for many or simply did not check off the box for type of occupation, as though these jobs were not identified as work. If this continued to happen before and after 1901, when individual census returns were not available to this researcher, then statistics on female self-employment are likely to be under-representing the numbers of women who ran businesses. Did women work in someone else's lodging house? Did they not consider hunting to be a form of self-employment? Or did they have that debate on the doorstep and lose an argument with the census taker? Sex workers probably also did not declare themselves as small business owners to census takers.[43] Ultimately, we may not have an accurate image of the percentage of women who were self-employed, but we know from combining sources such as directories and newspaper advertisements that it was higher than the census indicated.

Women's business ownership from the 1850s to 1870s may also have been under-represented because married women were not legally able to own property before 1873. They could operate their businesses as their husbands' 'agents' without owning buildings or property, but as others have demonstrated, the wave of married women's property acts that began in the 1870s in British Columbia extended property, inheritance and political rights to white women in the name of capitalism, to 'encourage the individualistic pursuit of material gain', thereby boosting the province's economy and supporting family growth.[44] Before the passage of married women's property laws, wives could not own or sell property, keep their own wages and sue or be sued: under common law, husband and wife were one entity.[45]

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[42] Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution*, pp. 196–197.

[43] None were mentioned overtly in the public use sample for the 1901 census, and their services were not listed in official business directories. Baskerville does find women keeping bawdy houses and suggests they posed as boarding houses. See *A Silent Revolution*, p. 179.

Scholars have suggested that married women's property laws did not significantly alter wives' engagement in business: pre-and post-passage of married women's property laws, wives remained actively involved in trade.[46] In Sydney, Australia, in the mid-nineteenth century, prior to the passage of married women's property laws, Catherine Bishop estimated that 15–20 per cent of business owners may have been women.[47] Women advertised in business directories and operated successful (and unsuccessful) businesses in much the same way as men.[48] However, individual ownership of property was, according to Baskerville, strongly associated with being self-employed.[49] An expanded idea of women as owners of capital may have at least ushered in a more open-minded understanding of women's proprietorship in the late 1800s.

Women's marriages and work lives were complex then, as they are today: being married, or not, did not always correlate to living with a spouse or to a legal status. Some women lived alone or changed their stories to suit their needs. One of the advantages of being so far from the metropole of London or even Toronto was that reinvention was possible; a husband could be produced or discarded as required. In Victoria, British Columbia, Fanny and Louis Bendixen opened a hotel in the 1860s. Fanny then travelled to the Cariboo region and opened a saloon in the mid-1860s, listing herself as sole proprietor in the local newspaper. Louis joined her, and in 1869, he was proprietor of the saloon. After 1869, his name did not appear, but Fanny continued to be listed in business directories and advertisements as a saloonkeeper.[50] I did not find Fanny Bendixen listed in a census, and her legal marital status is unclear. Similarly vague was the status of Eliza Ord. She came to the gold rush town of Barkerville in 1867 and opened a hotel; she first appeared as the wife of Isaac Brooks but, after some financial difficulties, severed ties with him. Ord then claimed in a notice published in the local paper that she was the 'whole and entire owner' of the Cariboo Exchange Hotel.[51] Was she still legally married, and ran the business but did not actually own the building? Or was she single and legal owner of the building and business, and the marriage a fiction? A claim of marriage may have been useful for protection in a testosterone-fuelled town but less so for owning property and businesses.

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[44] Chris Clarkson, *Domestic Reforms: Political Visions and Family Regulation in British Columbia, 1862–1940* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), p. 7.

[45] Baskerville, A *Silent Revolution*, p. 5.

[46] Jennifer Aston, *Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century England: Engagement in the Urban Economy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 88–89.

[47] Catherine Bishop, *Minding Her Own Business: Colonial Businesswomen in Sydney* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2015), p. 19.

[48] See Catherine Bishop, 'When Your Money Is Not Your Own: Coverture and Married Women in Business in Colonial New South Wales', *Law and History* Review 33 no. 1 (2015): 181–200.

[49] Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution*, p. 217. Baskerville has a much lengthier analysis of married women's property laws and their importance; rates of female entrepreneurship were high in British Columbia before the laws were passed, and women could own businesses if not the property itself, before the 1870s, but their access to capital and their overall financial situation, he compellingly argues, broadened after the series of laws passed.

Overall, women who ran businesses with or without husbands may have massaged the truth depending on what best suited them (with customers or creditors, business directories or census takers). This prompts historians to remember that the passage of laws is not always relevant to the lived experiences of the subjects we study. What one proclaims in an advertisement, to a census taker or in a legal document may not always be accurate.

I have suggested a link between working after marriage and a propensity for married or once-married women to choose self-employment. This link was particularly strong in jobs with almost total self-employment: in 1901, more than 80 per cent of female farmers and boarding housekeepers were married or once-married, a very different pattern from women in wage-earning jobs. The pattern held: published census data up to and beyond World War I shows 84 per cent of female farmers and 91 per cent of female boarding housekeepers in the province were married, widowed or divorced. Almost 70 per cent of women who were retail store owners were also married, widowed or divorced.[52] Mrs Koenig, listed in the 1905 British Columbia directory as 'widow of George' and 'proprietress' of the Shawnigan Lake Hotel in the small community of Koenig's Station, was one of many who marketed lodgings, an in-demand service in British Columbia's first few decades as a province of Canada.

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[50] Dictionary of Canadian Biography, BENDIXEN, FANNY—Volume XII (1891–1900), http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/bendixen_fanny_12E.html. Accessed 15 December 2018. See also Van Kirk, 'A Vital Presence', p. 25.

[51] Cariboo *Sentinel*, 20 May 1867, p. 2 and 1 July 1867, pp. 2–3. Cited in Van Kirk, 'A Vital Presence', p. 26.

Home-based businesses were the most common type of female enterprises in British Columbia. From the mid-1800s to the early 1900s the most common female-headed business was the boarding house. The next most common types of self-employment for women were farming, sewing and dressmaking, followed by other retail stores (groceries, confectionery and other retail shops).[53] These business types shared some common characteristics: they were home based or allowed women to capitalise on feminine-typed skill sets. Some did both. Marth Frenneth of Rossland, British Columbia, was a typical example: she was listed in the 1901 census as a 43-year-old self-employed restaurant keeper with ten children. Her husband was enumerated as head of the household and as a wage earner.[54] Frenneth combined marriage, motherhood and entrepreneurship. She contributed to her family's income and operated a business that was not unusual for a woman: food preparation. This pattern of commercialisation of women's work and of married or once-married women turning to enterprise is also evident in business directories. According to the 1901 British Columbia Directory, widow Jane George operated a fruit and tobacco store in Nanaimo; Mrs Frith ran a 'select Preparatory school' in Vancouver. Mrs David Matheson ran a ladies' furnishings business in New Denver, and Anne Jane Birck and Alice Daniels ran 'Birck & Daniels Ladies Furnishing'. In Victoria, Mrs F.M. Smith and Mrs W. Hewartson ran grocery and dry good stores; Mrs Vigor ran a fancy goods shop, and there were close to ten hotels listed in Victoria with 'proprietresses'.[55]

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[52] Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Canada 1931*, vol. 7, Tables 50 and 54. For lists of the selected occupations and for data on employment status and marital status of women workers in British Columbia and the rest of Canada, see Buddle, 'The Business of Women', Appendix 2.1–2.4, pp. 360–78.

[53] *Census of Canada 1931*, Vol. 7, Tables 50, 53 and 54. See Buddle, *The Business of Women*, pp. 60–61, for more detailed data on higher-than-average rates of self-employment for women in selected occupations.

[54] See Canadian Families Project database.

These features in British Columbia were not exclusive to the region. Higher-than-average rates of business ownership amongst married women were not only the result of a demand for services; they were also a function of timing and biology. Women who were married or once-married were more likely to have families. They were responsible for their children if their spouses were absent or unreliable, and there were also times when the entrepreneurial energies of husband and wife (and children) were required to sustain the family. Often with childcare responsibilities, occupations that married or once-married women entered were home based. As Julie Matthaei has suggested, 'jobs incompatible with active homemaking were almost exclusively reserved for single women' in the early twentieth century, while occupations that could be viewed as an extension of homemaking but that also happened to be entrepreneurial—such as taking in sewing, laundry, boarders or operating other home-based businesses—were undertaken by married or widowed women.[56]

Far more than for men, who if encumbered with children had wives at home to mind them, the needs of their families dictated when and where women worked and what types of work they undertook. Widowed dressmaker Maria Forester of Vancouver was supporting her eight-year-old son in 1901.[57] Mrs Kemball, a war widow, operated a Kootenay fruit ranch with her two daughters and 'whatever casual help might be available'.[58] Forester was in an urban setting and Kemball, a more rural one. Businesses in rural or remote outposts were almost exclusively farms, hotels, laundries and boarding houses. In business directories for urban locations (Vancouver and Victoria, in this period), women ran groceries, tea rooms, restaurants, clothing and milliners' shops, hotels and girls' schools. While more variety appeared in towns, gender segregation was a feature of most women's business. This was not a limitation, in a capitalist sense, but an awareness that it was shrewd to play to one's perceived strengths.

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[55] *Henderson's British Columbia Gazetteer and Directory and Mining Companies with which is Consolidated the Williams' British Columbia Directory for 1900–1901* (Victoria and Vancouver: Henderson Publishing Company, 1901).

[56] Julie A. Matthaei, *An Economic History of Women in America: Women's Work, the Sexual Division of Labor, and the Development of Capitalism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 224.

[57] Examples here are from individual entries found in the 5 per cent sample of the 1901 census: see Canadian Families Project database.

[58] Joan Lang, *Lost Orchards: Vanishing Fruit Farms of the West Kootenay* (Nelson, BC: Ward Creek Press, 2003), p. 35.

What did being married actually mean in the province, from the 1850s into the early twentieth century? Did a businesswoman who listed herself in city directories as 'Mrs' do so to indicate she was married or to indicate respectability or widowhood? According to a 1918 business directory, Mrs H. Couts operated the Seymour Street Auto Stand in Vancouver.[59] Mrs Couts was running a type of business that was uncommon for women, but we do not know whether her husband was present or active or whether she was a widow. If women advertised themselves as proprietors, it seems to have been deliberate, indicating an independent venture rather than one with a spouse. We might speculate that some married women listed themselves as sole proprietors in business directories because their husbands were dead, absent or not financially helpful, but census information takes some guesswork away. In 1891, 40 per cent of businesswomen in the city of Vancouver did not have a husband in the house.[60] And, the 5 per cent sample of the 1901 census revealed that 53 per cent of women in British Columbia who reported that they were married and self-employed were also listed as head of their households, meaning they also had no husband at home. For the rest of Canada, the percentage was a much lower 19 per cent. These women were not widowed or divorced. According to 1901 census instructions, men who were away temporarily were still to be listed as head of the household if they 'normally' lived there for part of the year.[61] Female-headed households were described that way, we can assume, because there was no male present even for part of the year. Thus, married self-employed women in the province were legally married but, like widows and spinsters, they were self-supporting. Married mother of four, Deana Pike, ran a hotel in Cumberland, British Columbia; in 1901, her hotel housed 13 lodgers. The census listed her as head of her household and her husband was absent. Self-employed housekeeper Maggie Yates of Rossland, British Columbia, married with an eight-year-old daughter, and self-employed washer woman Minnie Mcleod of Slocan, raising two children aged four and seven, were also heading their households. With no husband present, census instructors were almost forced to be more accurate about recording women as self-employed and occupied in these cases.[62] Widowed, divorced or married but without a husband present, the effect was the same: women often ran businesses to secure an income and support children. Self-employment was a good option because their life cycles and the children in their homes limited their access to wage-earning jobs. This prompts us to remember that reasons for self-employment were contextual. Some women were actively choosing self-employment; others were living without a spouse and needed to support their families. Others may have fit both categories.

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[59] *Wrigley's British Columbia Directory, 1918* (Vancouver: Wrigley Directories, 1918).

[60] See Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution*, p. 206, for this census data and for a longer discussion of businesswomen with absent spouses.

[61] Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Canada 1901*, volume I, xviii.

Widows also worked in significant numbers in both British Columbia and in the rest of Canada. In 1901, while overall there were more married than widowed women who declared they were self-employed, isolating only widowed and divorced women reveals a surprisingly high number were self-employed. In British Columbia, 16 per cent of all widowed/divorced women were self-employed. In comparison, 2.2 per cent of all married women in the province declared that they were self-employed.[63] Thus their overall numbers were low but their participation rates were high.

Joining the workforce seems to have been an alternative (through choice or chance) to remarriage. Age, the presence of dependent children and financial vulnerability may have hindered remarriage in some cases. As other scholars have noted in Canadian studies in the same period, widows who did remarry were apt to be under the age of 40 and childless.[64] Others were financially secure enough that they may have been able to attract a new spouse but did not need or want one.[65] In 1889, Alice Elizabeth Jowett left England for Vancouver as a widowed mother of four children. She was at various times a bakery owner, hotelkeeper and prospector. She ran the bakery in Vancouver while her children were young, later moving to hotelkeeping and prospecting in Trout Lake City; she did not remarry.[66] It is possible that this was not for lack of options but, rather, a lack of interest: her motivations are not known, but financially she was clearly managing without a spouse. Annie Gordon, widowed in 1911, found she was 'kept busy with financial affairs', with her children and with an expanding role in social reform and public service. Remarriage was either not wanted or not plausible for a woman like Gordon, in her mid-40s with three children.[67] Perhaps this was the case for 46-year-old newspaper publisher Rena Whitney. In 1901, her 22-year-old son lived in Vancouver with Whitney; he was a printer, likely employed at his mother's newspaper. Whitney was listed in the British Columbia directory in 1901 as 'Mrs Rena Whitney, wid'.[68]

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[62] Baskerville notes that most of the female boarding housekeepers that the 1901 census did not capture (who seemed to run boarding houses based on description and details, but who were enumerated as though they did not work) had husbands in the house, which may explain why they were not listed as employed or as self-employed. See Baskerville, *A Silent Revolution*, p. 206.

[63] It should be noted that their numbers are still higher than in the rest of the country: just 1.4 per cent of all married women in the rest of Canada declared they were self-employed, and just 11.6 per cent of all widowed/divorced women in the rest of Canada declared they were self-employed. This data on marital status and self-employment in 1901 is taken from the Canadian Families Project 5 per cent sample of the 1901 census.

[64] Lorna R. McLean, 'Single Again: Widow's Work in the Urban Family Economy, Ottawa, 1871', *Ontario History* 83, 2 (June 1991): pp. 127–150, p. 131.

[65] McLean, 'Single Again', p. 131.

Proprietorship, like other kinds of work, 'potentially freed women from economic dependence on men'.[69] It was also a necessity when men were not present. The same factors that might have led to a high participation rate of widows and divorcées in the labour force generally—vulnerability or a desire to remain independent—may have also influenced their high rates of self-employment. Furthermore, self-employed widows were, like married women, less likely than young single women to be wage earners. While my research suggests that married and once-married women with no men to support them were not castigated for entering the labour force, they did not enter wage-earning occupations in large numbers, suggesting at least a societal barrier. In British Columbia in 1901, widowed and divorced women represented 36.6 per cent of all self-employed women, and just 6.3 per cent of all wage-earning women. Many women and men saw wage-earning jobs as the domain of men, particularly if they had families to support. Home-based enterprise such as taking in boarders, sewing or laundry was an 'attractive alternative to public sphere employment' for some.[70]

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[66] Rosemary Neering, *Wild West Women: Travellers, Adventurers and Rebels* (Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 2000), pp. 26–30.

[67] Jean Barman, *Sojourning Sisters: The Lives and Letters of Jessie and Annie McQueen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 214–15.

[68] *Henderson's British Columbia Gazetteer and Directory and Mining Companies with Which Is Consolidated the Williams' British Columbia Directory for 1900–1901* (Victoria and Vancouver: Henderson Publishing, 1901).

[69] Wendy Gamber, 'A Precarious Independence: Milliners and Dressmakers in Boston, 1860–1890', *Journal of Women's History* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1992): pp. 60–88, p. 74.

[70] Margaret Hobbs, 'Gendering Work and Welfare: Women's Relationship to Wage-Work and Social Policy in Canada during the Great Depression' (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1995), p. 41.

In the absence of a plethora of diaries, letters and other written remnants, historians must assess what we can. Census data, newspapers and business directories show us that frontier conditions in British Columbia increased women's opportunities for work and increased their likelihood of marrying and running their own businesses. The region provides a good case study for demonstrating the patterns that historians have observed elsewhere. The newly formed colony of British Columbia provided particularly fertile ground for women to commercialise their domestic skills through entrepreneurial forms of work, and marriage did not halt their participation in the labour force. Businesswomen's identities as mothers, wives and widows affected their work in meaningful ways, as did their location in British Columbia. Family and caring responsibilities, limited access to wage-earning (particularly for married or once-married women), along with expanded access to a wider range of entrepreneurial endeavours help explain why women turned to self-employment; the interconnected factors of marital status, age and family clarify the turn to self-employment here and elsewhere in the 'long nineteenth century'.

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