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**THE FRONTIER WOMAN AS CITY WORKER:
WOMEN'S OCCUPATIONS IN DALLAS, TEXAS, 1856-1880**

by Elizabeth York Enstam

The frontier has usually been seen as a man's world of mining camps, cattle drives, cavalry expeditions, hunting, trapping and fighting. Frederick Jackson Turner referred to colonists and pioneers with masculine pronouns, and almost a century later David M. Potter stated that "for American women, as individuals, opportunity began pretty much where the frontier left off."¹ While it is true that wild country offered only one life for women, that of the frontier farmwife, scholars have largely ignored the women who lived in the frontier towns, a significant proportion of the population.

Dallas, Texas, like Louisville, Cleveland, and Chicago among others, was the result of "town jobbing." Founded in 1841 by speculator-promoter John Neely Bryan, within forty years Dallas developed from an agricultural village to a country town with an economy built on cotton and wheat, then into a frontier "boom town" with the coming of the railroads. By its very nature town life offered women increased opportunities for earning money. While there were, obviously, limits to the number of dressmaker-milliners, teachers, boardinghouse keepers, and domestic servants that the small town could support before 1870, at every stage of development, early Dallas gave employment to women, ranging from work closely related to women's traditional work in the home, to partnerships in family businesses, then to new kinds of jobs as the railroads brought industrialization and increased business opportunities. Before 1856 the existing sources are too sparse for any kind of systematic study of women's work in Dallas. After 1880 so many new trends appeared that a separate analysis is needed.

Even before 1856 random comments in diaries and memoirs² indicate that Dallas women were teaching private schools and working as partners in family businesses. In 1850 and even in 1860, however, many of the town's population³ still listed their occupations as "farmer" and themselves produced most of their goods. The work of women in those earliest years was the work of farmwives anywhere in Dallas County: tending the garden that provided perhaps half of the family's food supply; gathering, drying, pickling, and preserving foodstuffs, as well as preparing foods for the table; processing meats brought in from the hunt or

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from slaughtered farm animals; raising poultry and often selling dairy products like butter, cream, and milk to Dallas' one hotel or to newer residents not yet established in their own homes. Food, however time-consuming, was only the beginning of the farmwife's work. She also had to gather, gin or card, spin, weave and dye, then cut and sew cotton and wool into clothing for the family,⁴ and she made the featherbeds and sewed the quilts. She made candles from bear tallow and bottle tapers from the wax of wild honey bees.⁵ She grew medicinal herbs with which to nurse the sick,⁶ and she prepared the dead for burial.⁷ Like men in the non-diversified, agricultural economy, women possessed numerous skills to enable them to manufacture their livelihoods from Dallas County's black soil.

Between 1855 and 1870, the years when Dallas developed a real commercial economy, some women worked as partners with their husbands in family businesses, while others established their own shops and schools. In both cases women maintained close ties with the work they had always done in the home. Just as running a farm was a wife-husband venture, so were several of the small businesses that opened in Dallas before the Civil War. Elizabeth B. Thomas and Charles Durgin operated Dallas' second store and post office. Before his marriage Charles Durgin had hung two large cotton bags on the wall of the store and casually dumped the mail into them. In 1846 customers rummaged through the bags whenever they expected a letter or wondered who else might have some mail. It was Mrs. Durgin who first organized the post office and alphabetized the mail in pockets sewn onto a strip of canvas.⁸ Dallas' first unofficial postmistress, who undoubtedly did her share of "minding the store," was followed years later, in 1859, by a second, Frances Crutchfield.⁹ Mrs. Crutchfield was also her husband's partner in operating the Crutchfield House, Dallas' first hotel, which the Crutchfields had built in 1850. Frances Crutchfield supervised the kitchen and dining room at the hotel, where a "solid meal" cost 25¢ and dinner was announced to all of Dallas by the ringing of the bell hung in the hotel yard.¹⁰

Wives, almost automatically it seems, became involved in their husbands' ventures. When James Wellington Latimer, editor and founder of Dallas' first newspaper, the *Dallas Herald*, served a term and a half as Chief Justice of Dallas County,¹¹ his wife Lucy worked with his partner to edit and publish the paper. Remembered for bringing the first piano to Dallas and as the town's first pianist and music teacher, Mrs. Latimer also worked with the newspaper for awhile after she was widowed.¹²

Best known of all Dallas' wife-husband partnerships was that of Sarah and Alexander Cockrell. Shortly after their marriage in 1847, Alexander entered the stock and freight business, driving heavy ox wagons between Dallas, Houston, Shreveport, and Jefferson. Because he was illiterate, Sarah handled all records, correspondence, and finances, and in general worked as her husband's partner and adviser.¹³ After the Cockrells moved into Dallas in 1853, they closed out the freight and stock business and within five years' time entered four additional ventures: a toll ferry across the Trinity River; a saw-grist mill on Mill Creek; a construction firm that also manufactured and delivered bricks; and a wooden toll bridge to replace the ferry. They built a two-story brick building for rental to business firms and had begun construction of a three-story brick hotel when Alexander was killed on April 3, 1858.

Sarah Cockrell took charge of all the family businesses and before her death at the age of 78, earned the designation of "S.H. Cockrell, Capitalist," in the city directories. In 1859 she completed the hotel and opened it with a grand ball attended by guests from all over Texas. In February 1860 the state legislature granted a charter to build an iron toll bridge across the Trinity River to her and whomsoever she chose as her associates.¹⁴ Having practically inherited Dallas upon Alexander's death (in 1853 he had bought the remainder of Neely Bryan's original headright, plus the rights to Bryan's ferry), Sarah proceeded to enlarge her landholdings in Dallas County, as well as purchasing small properties in Houston, Mineral Wells, and Cleburne.¹⁵ Hampered by the Civil War and its aftermath, only in 1870 did Sarah Cockrell find the investors for her Dallas Bridge Company. Two years later the new iron toll bridge opened for traffic.

Immediately after the Civil War, Dallas was a small country town which did not particularly impress visitors. In 1868 one traveller recalled about 1200 inhabitants, one hotel, a small courthouse, a few stores on the public square, and houses built in the sand along the river banks for a few hundred yards beyond the square.¹⁶ In 1872 the railroad first reached Dallas and changed the town quickly. Maintaining a conservative approach to business throughout the subsequent "boom" years, Sarah Cockrell purchased a third interest in Dallas' first commercial flour mill. In 1875, when flour milling was clearly the growth industry in Dallas, she joined her son Robert and her son-in-law Mitchell Gray as the dominant partner in the milling firm of S.H. Cockrell and Company. Her business career was unique, both for its number of successful ventures and for the way it spanned the years of Dallas' development from agricultural village when she and

Alexander first came in 1853, to modern city when she died in 1892.

Other Dallas women of Mrs. Cockrell's generation entered far more traditional occupations, all somehow related to the work of wives and mothers in the home. The most numerous attempts by women to turn traditional "women's work" into money-making ventures involved education. The earliest schools operated in the teachers' homes. By 1850 the log church buildings served as schools during the week, and by 1856 the *Dallas Herald* carried regular advertisements for schools in the town.¹⁷ In the 24-year period between 1856 and 1880, when Dallas' population grew from approximately 400 to over 10,000, there were at least 38 different schools in Dallas and at least six others within a twelve-mile radius. Women ran about half of these early schools, usually "Schools for Young Ladies" that also admitted small boys. Male teachers were as likely to operate coeducational schools or girls' schools as they were to teach schools exclusively for boys. The great majority of these schools lasted less than five years, and some remained open for one year or less. Each was immediately replaced by another, whose teacher frequently moved into the room vacated by the previous school. Thus, opportunities for elementary and secondary education were actually rather dependable in early Dallas, despite the sense of instability given by the frequent turnovers of teachers.

Before 1870 two to four schools existed simultaneously. In 1866, for example, Helena West Winn taught sixty pupils in the Masonic Hall, A. B. Cary had around forty students in the eastern part of Dallas, and Lucinda and Richard Coughanour taught 160 children in a house on Main Street. By 1870 some teachers had begun to offer special courses in hopes of attracting students. Mrs. Roy B. Scott advertised instruction in bookkeeping along with English, Latin, French, and mathematics in her School for Young Ladies. Mrs. Scott's school, however, lasted for only one year.

The most striking observation about teaching in Dallas before 1880 was its insecurity as a profession for both men and women. Long and legendary teaching careers did not occur before the establishment of public schools which remained open for a full year's term. Even those who found jobs in the most successful schools, like W.H. Scales' Dallas Female Institute, rarely kept their jobs for as long as a decade: the Dallas Female Institute itself lasted little more than ten years. Those teachers who stayed in teaching for more than five years moved from school to school, a pattern that dominated teaching careers in Dallas before 1880. Only one person, Lucinda McQuire

Coughanour, taught for as long as twenty years.

Between 1861 and 1881 Lou Coughanour taught in six different Dallas schools. Her last position was that of principal of her own Select School for Young Ladies from 1873 to 1881. In two schools run by men, Lou Coughanour had charge of the "Female School." She taught during her childbearing years, retiring from the classroom in 1881, when her youngest child was eight and her oldest nineteen, to spend the remaining 39 years of her life as a housewife. It is reasonable to speculate that Lou Coughanour taught until her husband established his law practice, for Dallas had more lawyers than a small town needed. Before 1880 Richard Coughanour sold real estate and insurance, in addition to practicing law.

Two other women, Sarah Gray Halsall and Helena West Gillespie, also provide examples of female teaching careers in Dallas. Between 1856 and 1869, when she and her husband left Dallas, Sarah Halsall ran her own School for Young Ladies, taught music in three schools owned by others, and gave private lessons in voice, piano, and guitar. Her association with the schools was at best sporadic. Helena West Gillespie also taught in several Dallas schools over a fifteen-year period. In 1861 she was assistant to a male principal; in 1865 she owned the Female School in Dallas; in 1868 she was assistant for literature in W.H. Scales' Dallas Female Institute; in 1871 she purchased a boarding school, the Cedar Springs Institute, four miles north of Dallas, and hired a male assistant for the 200 students she expected to enroll. Her boarding school lasted less than a decade, for Helena Gillespie died in 1882.

The only secure teachers in Dallas before 1880 were the Ursuline nuns, who opened their boarding and day school with seven students in February, 1874. The Ursulines braved a genuine frontier experience in the years when Dallas exploded from a quiet country town into a "boom town." Expected to maintain their independence from the mother house in Galveston, the Ursulines endured hard winters in a flimsy frame house whose roof let in rain and snow. The blistering summers burned their gardens—and therefore their food supply—despite careful watering. One sick sister could almost cripple the young convent, for the other nuns had to add her work to their own and nurse her as well. Their daily tasks included basic housekeeping chores for themselves and their boarding students, as well as teaching and supervising the children. The Ursuline Academy had fifty students by the end of the first difficult year in Dallas, and by September 1877 the nuns had labored and scrimped and saved enough money to build their own chapel onto the parish church.

Encouraged, indeed, almost ordered by their bishop to abandon their cloistered lifestyle and go out to meet the other residents of Dallas, 31-year-old Mother St. Joseph Holly led the Ursulines in establishing their convent and an increasingly successful school. By 1881 their *Annals* noted more than forty boarding and over 100 day students.¹⁸

There were several reasons for the general insecurity of teaching as a profession before 1880. The coming of the railroads in 1872 and 1873 brought a sudden growth in the adult population, including hundreds of single males looking for jobs during the depression years of the 1870s, and even the family population, which would include school-aged children, remained relatively mobile and unsettled. The small numbers of children could not provide students for all those who wished or needed to teach. As always, the low salaries paid to teachers all over the United States must be considered among the causes for the frequent changes in teachers in Dallas. In 1875 the *Dallas Herald* quoted New England clergyman Edward Everett Hale's complaint that teachers barely earned subsistence wages, making less than cooks and far less than ballet dancers and circus performers.¹⁹ In 1866 in Dallas Helena Winn charged \$2, \$3, and \$4 respectively to first, second, and third class students for four months of instruction. Five years later, Catherine Coit's accounts showed that seventeen pupils altogether owed her \$73.25 for eighteen weeks of school,²⁰ earnings that might supplement her husband's law practice, but could hardly be a living wage. In 1868 the highest paid teacher in Dallas, Lou Coughanour, charged \$10, \$15, and \$20 per student for a twenty-week session, and in 1880 boarding students at the Ursuline Academy paid \$100 tuition for a five-month session which included board, laundry, stationery, drawing, fancy sewing, and normal infirmary expenses. Music lessons and use of the piano were \$25 extra. In 1880 the free public schools, which ran for only five months a year, paid white teachers \$75, \$40, and \$35 per month and "colored" teachers a standard \$60. Thus, the best paid teachers employed by the city earned \$375 a year. Hopefully, they had some additional income.²¹

Still, by 1880 almost every youngster had access to some form of schooling. The seven public schools enrolled 650 of the town's 1218 school-aged children.²² Several hundred others could be traced in twenty-two private institutions, which ranged from two colleges, both of which enrolled very young children in their primary departments, to small private kindergartens and elementary schools taught in the teachers' homes. The Ursuline Academy had 106 students, the Dallas Female College 160, and

the Dallas Male and Female College, 100. The largest private school in Dallas was the coeducational Dallas Institute, which enrolled 165 black students. Except for the Ursuline Academy, women teachers worked under male principals in all these larger schools. Women operated eight of the eleven small schools, which had between eleven and twenty-five pupils. The public schools employed five male principals, two female principals, and eight female teachers. Altogether, counting both private and public schools, by 1880 Dallas had thirty women and thirteen men in teaching, eleven women and eleven men in administration or running their own schools. Thus, the work of women was basic to the establishment of education in frontier Dallas, but neither women nor men could earn a satisfactory living as teachers. Only the sharing, cooperative lifestyle of the Ursuline nuns made teaching a viable means of livelihood.

As a means of earning money, teaching attracted more women, but dressmaking and millinery were the two trades which Dallas women entered first. Young girls who were never taught to read learned to sew at an early age by helping their mothers manufacture the family's clothing. Daughters of wealthier families took fancy sewing as a regular part of the curriculum at exclusive schools for young ladies. Thus, numerous women could sew well enough to sell their skills, and because orders for dresses or shirts could be taken at home, women could earn money as milliners and dressmakers while obeying nineteenth-century notions about domesticity and propriety.

Dallas' first dressmaker, Louise Dusseau, sewed in her home. An original settler of Le Reunion, the utopian colony established some three miles southwest of Dallas, Mlle Dusseau married Dallas merchant Sam Jones and in 1856 moved into Dallas, where she accepted sewing orders.²³ Throughout the years between 1860 and 1880 the home and business addresses of Dallas' dressmakers, seamstresses, and milliners were often the same, but while some women quietly ran shops in their homes, others led very active business careers in millinery-dressmaking. Young unmarried women took jobs in shops owned by older women, daughters often working for their own mothers. Women managed the millinery departments in dry goods stores, and often, two or three women formed a partnership to run a dressmaking shop. Such shopowners sometimes offered additional services in their attempts to increase business. Some gave lessons in cutting clothes, some sold patterns, some had pinking and stamping departments, all to aid home sewing. In October 1876 the editor of the *Dallas Herald* visited sixteen businesses owned and run by women, fifteen of which were

dressmaking and millinery shops. The single exception was a mattress manufacturing shop whose owner employed "some six to ten women" plus her own son.²⁴

Like all Dallas businesses, millinery-dressmaking shops multiplied rapidly after the coming of the railroads in 1872 and 1873. In 1860 the official census report listed two dressmakers, and only one milliner, six seamstresses, and one weaver; by 1873 the city directory showed twelve dressmakers and milliners, whose number now included one tailoress. In 1875 the city directory listed 29 women in Dallas who sewed for a living; by 1880 that number had grown to 35, plus one carpetmaker.

Dallas' leading milliners and dressmakers stressed their familiarity with and their access to the fashion centers. In the spring of 1867 the *Herald* carried a series of advertisements announcing the return of Mrs. Solomon, milliner for Henry E. Perkins and Company, from New York City, where she had acquired the latest styles in millinery.²⁵ In the spring of 1871 the Misses Ida and Anna Long, sisters of Dallas mayor Ben Long, ran a sewing business in their home, selling notions and "fancy goods," making corsets, and doing embroidery and other fine needlework. They advertised their knowledge of the most recent European fashions.²⁶

The most varied and interesting millinery career in Dallas before 1880 was that of Mary Jane Johnson, who first opened her shop in 1865, hardly the most auspicious of times to launch a new business. Mrs. Johnson sometimes accepted payment in kind—in wheat, to be specific—for her hats, bonnets, capes, berthas, mantillas, and head-dresses, all of which she proudly advertised as the latest styles from New Orleans. She also took orders for custom-made garments on short notice and offered lessons in the cutting of dresses.²⁷ In short, Mary Jane Johnson's skills spanned the entire range of the fashion industry of her day.

Two years later, 1867, Mrs. Johnson managed the millinery department of Keaton and Johnson, the dry goods store owned by her husband, a physician named Keaton, and when Keaton and Johnson took over the operation of Dallas' oldest hotel, the Crutchfield House, Mary Jane Johnson opened her millinery shop in the hotel. After her husband's death, she and Keaton agreed to the dissolution of Keaton and Johnson. Mrs. Johnson formed a new partnership with S.E. McIlhenny to continue running the Crutchfield House, and they refurnished, renovated, and built a two-story brick fifteen-room addition onto the old hotel.²⁸ In 1880 the census listed her occupation as "Speculator," evidence of accumulation of at least a modest amount of capital with which to speculate.

Despite the numbers of women involved in millinery and dressmaking, few had a secure business life before 1880. Most shops lasted for about five years and only one, that of Esther Chesnut, for as long as fifteen. After 1880 millinery-dressmaking shops multiplied, became more prosperous, and stayed in business longer.

Millinery-dressmaking and teaching required specific skills, but keeping a boardinghouse could be done by virtually any woman who possessed basic housekeeping and cooking skills and had some extra rooms. Like the "schoolmarm," the women who ran boardinghouses produced a frontier stereotype, for even boardinghouses listed under men's names were clearly run by wives and daughters.³⁰ In addition to the fact that boardinghouses involved keeping house and cooking, kinds of work not usually associated with males, men usually listed their own separate and full time occupations. Specific situations, too, lead to the conclusion that women actually ran the boardinghouses listed under men's names. In 1880, for example, Timothy Daly was 77, and it would seem far more likely that the 58-year-old Johanna Daly did the work of keeping the boardinghouse. Similarly, 57-year-old William P. Barber was described in the census as "feeble." The boardinghouse listed under his name could only have been run by his wife.

Boardinghouses played an interesting social role in frontier Dallas, where the population included approximately three and one-half times as many white men as white women. (The "colored" population was far more evenly balanced.) The practice of boarding meant that a minority of women could literally keep house for a majority of men and especially for the large numbers of single male transients who came West seeking work after the Civil War. Many private families kept at least one boarder, usually a young male employee of the family business, though sometimes a young single woman who was a school-teacher or milliner. Widows living alone also frequently took in one or two boarders.³¹

Some boardinghouses served the function of good restaurants in a new town that offered few amenities for gracious living. When word passed around that a certain woman "set a fine table," people sought her home for Sunday dinner or special occasions. Such elegant boardinghouses were run like small hotels, with porters, maids, and cooks hired by the owners. Rachel J. Coleman, whose background was that of a Southern aristocrat, ran an exclusive boardinghouse in Dallas for more than twenty years. Named for Andrew Jackson's wife, Rachel Brown had married riverboat captain John Hickey Coleman against her

planter father's wishes. Widowed by 1874, she brought her three youngest children to Dallas, and without previous experience in working or running a business, opened her boardinghouse and built a new life for herself and her children.³²

Like hotels, boardinghouses tended to attract consistent clienteles. Professional men like lawyers, teachers, or ministers patronized certain boardinghouses, while others served mostly carpenters, stonemasons, blacksmiths. Young couples often lived in boardinghouses while they built or searched for permanent homes. While some boardinghouses offered maid service and porters, others provided only meals and a room with the most basic furniture. In the latter, the boarders provided themselves with cleaning and any extra comforts or decorative and ornamental furnishings.³³

Dallas' boardinghouses and hotels were a direct result of the town's growth after the coming of the railroads. The census listed one hotel for Dallas in 1850 and two in 1860. Ten years later, in 1870, the count was the same: two hotels, no boardinghouses. Both boardinghouses and hotels proliferated after the railroads arrived in 1872 and 1873. The city directory for 1873 listed a total of 33 boardinghouses. By 1880 the number of boardinghouses had dropped to 25, but there were 21 hotels, many of which were actually large boardinghouses.

The three main categories of female occupations in frontier Dallas, teaching, keeping boardinghouses, and millinery-dressmaking, were directly related to the age-old work of women in the home, as was the fourth and largest, domestic service.³⁴ In fact, in 1880, 70% of the employed women in Dallas were in some form of domestic service, working as cooks, maids, chambermaids, and laundresses. The great majority of these women were black. Of the one-fourth who were white, many had been born in Europe. While the censuses of 1850 and 1860 had, for obvious reasons, listed no domestic servants, in 1870 the census report showed 130, of whom ten were white women, sixteen black men, and 104 black women. By 1880 the number had increased to 527 female domestic servants. Almost every white family, it seems, could afford domestic help, including some of presumably modest income like W. Carson, pastor of the First Methodist Church, policeman M.L. Hodges, bookkeeper R.M. Neely, and R.F. Boals, clerk with Sanger Brothers' store. Most servants in private homes were cooks who sometimes did the laundry and ironing as well. Black men also worked occasionally as cooks, usually in hotels, restaurants, or saloons, and in 1880 the census listed three black men who, along with their wives, took in washing.

Despite their overwhelming representation in domestic jobs, a few black women worked their ways into skilled occupations and independent businesses by 1880. Mary Valentine ran a restaurant, Mary McGraw, a laundry, and each listed two employees, also black. Eunice Smothers taught in the Dallas Institute, the private school for black children, and Mary Carson was a teacher in one of Dallas' two black public schools. Mary and Sanie McDonnell also were teachers. Bettie White was a seamstress, hired to make costumes by Thompson's Theater, and two additional black women worked in the sewing occupations, Delia Jones as a seamstress, Mary Waters as a dressmaker. These few in skilled work, however, must be contrasted with the dozen black women who were listed by the 1880 census simply as laborers.

Black children (and a few white children) went to work at an early age. White children under fourteen were usually, the census noted, "At School," but black children often listed an occupation, girls helping their mothers take in washing, boys working as bootblacks. Black girls as young as seven worked as servants in private families or as chambermaids in hotels, and six little girls, one of whom was only six years old, were listed as "nurse," evidently another servant category. Two white girls also listed occupations in 1880: A. A. Pearson's eight-year-old daughter worked as clerk in her father's millinery shop, and a nine-year-old white girl was listed, along with her father, as a hotel cook.

In 1880 the alternatives to millinery-dressmaking, teaching, boardinghouses, and domestic work were often not acceptable socially. Acting, for example, though a field in which women often succeeded even in the nineteenth century, was not generally considered either appropriate or respectable. Women who worked as actresses in frontier Dallas had very transient, possibly short careers. Of the eighteen actors employed by Thompson's Theater in 1880, only seven were women. The city directory, however, included ten "ballet girls" not listed by the census. Traveling stage troupes hired regular actors to fill the leading roles of the plays they presented, and they relied on local talent for chorus or dance scenes and minor parts. For most young women acting was not very dependable employment, and the city directories of Dallas reflected this insecurity. In the three years surveyed—1873, 1875, 1880—no actress's name appeared twice. The limited number of chances for employment, the public nature of acting in a time when "decent" women were expected to lead very domestic, very private lives, and the general lack of respect for acting as a profession often pushed young actresses into

prostitution. In fact, *Dallas Herald* articles about actresses and "variety girls" usually assumed that they were, in fact, members of "that class."³⁵

Persons on the edges of society have been the most difficult to study. In the censuses for 1850, 1860, and 1870 not one prostitute was noted. The census reports for those years did not even list groups of women living in the same household, yet in 1872, when Ben Long became mayor of Dallas, his administration's ordinance against vice was enforced by an order to close or remove all houses of prostitution.³⁶ In other words, Dallas undoubtedly had prostitutes before 1872; the census takers simply ignored them. In 1880 the official census for Dallas County openly listed 64 Dallas women's occupations as "Ill Fame," and most likely, that number was incomplete. The (presumed) increase in prostitution in Dallas would appear to be directly related to the coming of the railroads in 1872 and 1873. Dallas' population rose from around 1500 to 7063 in a little more than a year, and while the railroads brought the growth in business and prosperity so desired by the town's leaders, they also caused effects neither expected or wanted. By 1880 Dallas, like Tombstone, El Paso, Fort Worth, Albuquerque, and New Orleans, was on the regular circuit of professional gamblers, who were part of the lucrative saloon-gambling hall society uneasily tolerated by the original residents. Known to ordinary cowboys as a "fancy town,"³⁷ Dallas attracted a floating population of transient males. Some were petty crooks, others real criminals, and still others ordinary young men looking for jobs. Altogether, they offered work to the "ladies of the night," who comprised one of the major social problems of the nineteenth century in both England and the United States.

The sparse information available gives a view of the frontier prostitute that is far different from the stereotype of television and films. Of the 64 women whose occupations were listed as "Ill Fame" in the 1880 census, seven were black. Not one was over forty; the youngest were sixteen. Three had been born in Europe; the rest were native Americans. Of those included in the census only about half of Dallas' prostitutes in 1880 lived in brothels, and only one of the listed brothels was part of a saloon.³⁸ The rest lived in independent households, either alone or with other adults who listed different occupations. Twenty-year-old Lorna Smith lived with her seven-year-old daughter, who was enrolled in school, and with 41-year-old Lizzie Wood, who took in washing. Some households containing prostitutes were apparently regular working class families. Three such women boarded in the home of grocer J.L. Downs. On the other hand, Mollie Willis, aged

seventeen, lived with her parents and her year-old son Chuck. Mollie's father ran a livery stable, and her mother kept house. Thirty-six-year-old Kate Murray lived with her fourteen-year-old daughter, who was listed as a "dramatic," and the household also included Bettie White, who took in washing; Tobe Fuller, who was a grocer; and F. Thompson, listed as servant. Mamie Lauden was the only "scarlet lady" in Dallas to give an appearance of prosperity. She lived with an eleven-year-old black girl who was listed as "servant." Despite the aura of independence, flamboyance, and even glamor with which twentieth-century imaginations have invested frontier prostitutes, the few glimpses of their lives in surviving sources give a rather different picture. Notices in the *Dallas Herald* concerned their arrests for vagrancy and sometimes sentences to the poor farm for those who could not pay the fines. News stories of violence and disorder in the known brothels hardly lend themselves to the flippant images of saucy feathers, sequins, velvets, and satins,³⁹ and before the discovery of antibiotics, disease was an expected consequence of this particular means of livelihood.

Along with the sordid and the tragic, the railroads brought positive, constructive effects to women's work in Dallas. The general ferment and increased activity in all kinds of business created unprecedented economic opportunities for women as well as for men and not only in the more traditional occupations of milliner-dressmaker, teacher, boardinghouse keeper, and domestic servant. After 1873, when Dallas developed from a small country town into a real frontier "boom town," numerous new kinds of employment appeared for women. Out-of-state companies advertised for women "agents" to sell various products. Sanger Brothers first hired women for sales positions, then other dry goods stores followed. By 1880 the city directory listed 24 women as salesladies, all of them selling women's clothing, notions, and sewing machines for millinery-dressmaking shops or for the dry goods stores. The large dry goods stores also opened their own fine dressmaking and millinery departments, thereby increasing the number of sewing jobs available to women. In 1873 the city directory listed two women as telegraph operators, two as owners of tobacco and cigar shops, and two others as stamp and register and copying clerks for the post office. The new cigar factory also offered a limited number of jobs to women.

More interesting than the new kinds of salaried jobs available to women, after 1875 a small but growing number of married women listed occupations separate from those of their husbands. In a few of these "two-career" families, wife and husband were

involved in similar or related kinds of work. Caroline and John Higgins ran the Switch-Off Saloon; Nellie Crutchfield and her husband worked as cooks; Mrs. J. A. Pencil and her husband were listed separately as merchants. Rose Sigari was a merchant of fruit and confectionery, and her husband Gaetano was a wholesale fruit dealer.

In most such families, wife and husband did entirely different kinds of work. Mrs. L. A. O'Brien ran a restaurant, while her husband was an upholsterer. Laundress A. King was married to a deputy sheriff. Louisa J. Bath owned a dressmaking shop; her husband was a hairdresser. Ann Bedford ran the Cedar Laundry; James Bedford made boots and shoes. Sally McMurray was proprietor and manager of the National Hotel; William McMurray worked for the railroad. Lucy Walker ran a private school; her husband J. Willard owned a shop for stationery, newspapers, and magazines. Mrs. William A. Harwood was a florist, her husband, Clerk of the District Court.

Single women also ran businesses. Lillie Cain owned the Red Light Saloon for over a decade. Lucy Rutherford was co-editor of the weekly *Christian Preacher*. Fannie Frankel had a shop for fruit and candies, while widows Rosa Schwerer and S. Bruen operated their own restaurants. Ellen P. Bryan was a cotton buyer.

Throughout the period surveyed, 1856 to 1880, the conditions of women's employment and the kinds of work available to women resulted from the needs of a new, rapidly changing economy. From a quiet, surprisingly typical Southern country town whose trade and commerce were based on agricultural produce, Dallas suddenly became a frontier "boom town" with the coming of the railroads in 1872 and 1873. Before 1872 women earned money in work directly or very closely related to the female role in the home—millinery-dressmaking, teaching, and domestic service. After 1872 opportunities for these traditionally female kinds of employment increased, and another, the keeping of boardinghouses, literally proliferated. The general growth of business and trade generated, in addition, new kinds of clerical and factory work for women. More important, in the ferment of growth that was really too rapid and in many ways chaotic, women found new opportunities to open various businesses, sometimes in partnership with their husbands, but more often independently. It is interesting to note that men entered all the categories of employment labeled "female." Dressmaking-millinery shops, schools, domestic service like laundry and cooking, and after 1872, boardinghouse keepers—all these occupations listed at least "token" males in the census

reports and in the city directories. The 1880 census even listed one man as keeping house for himself and his teenaged son.

On the whole, between 1856 and 1880 women's occupations in the frontier town of Dallas, Texas, reflected the Victorian milieu. In 1870 fewer than 150 Dallas women worked outside their homes, and in 1873, right after the coming of the railroads, only around six percent of the adult (that, is, over sixteen years of age) female population were employed. By 1880, 29% of all Dallas women had entered the work force, comprising about 14% of the town's labor force. Most women who worked outside their homes entered businesses and employment directly related to the domestic "sphere," 70% in domestic service alone. There were no women in law, medicine, or town government, and while a few individuals entered careers unusual for women, they did so in response to extraordinary circumstances like widowhood or as their husbands' partners. Frontier women in Dallas did not, for the most part, escape the social restrictions of nineteenth-century America.

NOTES

*This article is a revised and entirely rewritten version of the paper presented at the annual convention of the American Historical Association in Dallas, Texas, December 1977.

¹*The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920), 4. David M. Potter, "American Women and the American Character," *Stetson University Bulletin*, LXII, 1 (January, 1962), 5.

²Isaac Webb, *Diary, 1835-67* (Microfilm), Southern Methodist University. In the spring of 1846 Webb noted that he had attended the examinations at a Miss Webb's school and that the students had done well. Alice West Floyd's "Memories," published in *Elm Fork Echoes*, Volume 2, Number 2 (November 1974, Peters Colony Historical Society of Dallas County, Texas), 25, include Mrs. Floyd's comments about the school her mother ran in their home in 1845.

³The estimates of the official census reports for Dallas in 1860 and 1870 are questionable, partly because they contradict eyewitness reports and partly because they are based on figures which actually came from 1858, not from 1850. In 1858 the Texas Legislature authorized a census of all incorporated towns in the state for purposes of tax assessment and collection. This figure, 430, is the first tabulation of the persons living in the town of Dallas. It is highly unlikely that there were 2000 people in Dallas by 1860, 3000 by 1870. John and Kate Crockett found only 39 persons in Dallas in 1848; James Reed Cole reported 1200 in 1868; John Henry Brown, Dallas' first historian and editor of the first city directory (1873), estimated Dallas' population as 1500 in 1872. Thus, the following figures are fairly realistic:

1848	39
1850	85
1858	430
1860	850
1868	1200
1870	1350

1872	1500
1873	7036 (after both railroads came)
1880	10358

⁴John H. Cochran, *Dallas County: A Record of Its Pioneers and Progress* (Dallas, Texas, 1929), 53-54. Cochran's parents, Nancy Jane Hughes and William Cochran, immigrated to Dallas County in 1843.

⁵Philip Lindsley, *A History of Greater Dallas and Vicinity* (Dallas, 1902), 46-47. Lindsley came to Dallas from Tennessee in 1875.

⁶Floyd, "Memories," 25.

⁷Conversation with Miss Ruth Cooper, direct descendant of Emily Honnicutt and John Beeman, who came to Dallas in 1842. November 11, 1977.

⁸Frank M. Cockrell, *History of Early Dallas* (private edition, bound typescript, Dallas, 1944), 47. Dallas Historical Society.

⁹Cochran, *Dallas County*, 281.

¹⁰John Rogers, *Lusty Texans of Dallas* (New York, 1960), 131.

¹¹This title was changed to County Judge in 1867.

¹²Latimer family records in the possession of Mr. Joseph Latimer, Dallas.

¹³Cockrell, *Early Dallas*, 52.

¹⁴Sarah H. Cockrell Papers, A4340, Dallas Historical Society.

¹⁵Probate Records, Will #1835, Dallas County Records Building.

¹⁶James Reed Cole, *Seven Decades of My Life* (Dallas, Texas, 1913), 80-81. Cole ran a military academy in Dallas in the 1890s.

¹⁷Information about the early schools and teachers in Dallas and Dallas County has come from their advertisements in the *Dallas Herald*. No other records exist for them today. These advertisements usually listed the teaching staffs and often gave the teachers' qualifications, including references to previous schools and colleagues. Since not all schools ran advertisements in the paper and since it would be easy to miss a notice that ran only once, it is safe to assume that there were more than 44 schools between 1856 and 1880.

Just as the women's careers can be traced through newspaper advertisements, so can their husbands' work. Richard D. Coughanour, for example, advertised himself as an attorney just as he advertised the pieces of real estate that he wished to place on the market and the insurance he wished to sell.

¹⁸*The Annals*, 9-38, Ursuline Residence, Dallas.

¹⁹*Dallas Herald*, January 9, 1875.

²⁰Henry C. Coit Papers, A3577 (Folder #75), Dallas Historical Society.

²¹*Dallas Weekly Herald*, February 24, 1881.

²²*Ibid.*

²³Mrs. Joseph (Ruth Cockrell) Wilson, great-granddaughter of Sarah and Alexander Cockrell and granddaughter of Guillimene Jones (Mrs. Robert) Cockrell, daughter of Louise Dusseau and Sam Jones. September 28, 1977.

²⁴*Dallas Herald*, October 14, 1876.

²⁵*Ibid.*, spring issues, 1867.

²⁶*Dallas Herald*, April 1, 1871.

²⁷*Ibid.*, June 24, October 28, November 4, 1865.

²⁸*Ibid.*, April 8 and December 20, 1871, for example.

²⁹*Ibid.*, October 14, 1876.

³⁰Unless otherwise indicated, information came from survey of the census reports and the city directories. Entries in the city directories are alphabetized, and because Dallas' population was small, both directories and census are simple to use.

³¹The city directories indicate the dwellings of people listed, so it is easy to tell who was boarding in whose home.

³²Family archives and personal memories of Mrs. Michael Francis (Kathleen Greer) Reed of Dallas, granddaughter of Rachel J. Coleman. January 29, 1978.

³³Aurelia Cockrell Gray to her mother, Sarah H. Cockrell, June 5, 1871 and June 12, 1871, in Monroe Cockrell, ed., *Sarah Horton Cockrell in Early Dallas* (private edition, bound typescript and photo copies, Dallas, Texas, n. d.), Dallas Public Library.

³⁴Unless otherwise indicated information came from a survey of the census reports and the city directories.

³⁵For example, *Dallas Herald*, June 5, 1875, story of a "variety girl," who had been badly beaten and left for dead. She did not deserve that, the *Herald* moralized, no matter what the faults of her "class."

³⁶Sam Acheson, *Dallas Yesterday* (Dallas, 1977), 158.

³⁷Rogers, *Lusty Texans*, 142.

³⁸Unless otherwise indicated, information about Dallas prostitutes came from analysis of the census for 1880.

³⁹*Dallas Herald*, March 2, 1868; June 14, 1883; December 15, 1881. These news stories were accounts of violence and disorder in the known "houses."