



Women's Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario (Social History of Canada)

Marjorie Griffin Cohen

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In this study Marjorie Griffin Cohen argues that in research into Ontario's economic history the emphasis on market activity has obscured the most prevalent type of productive relations in the staple-exporting economy – the patriarchal relations of production within the family economy.

Cohen focuses on the productive relations in the family and the significance of women's labour to the process of capital accumulation in both the capitalist sphere and independent commodity production. She shows that while the family economy was based on the mutual dependence of male and female labour, there was not equality in productive relations. The male ownership of capital in the context of the family economy had significant implications for the control over female labour.

Among countries which experience industrial development, there are common patterns in the impact of change on women's work; there are also significant differences. One of the most important of these is the fact that economic development did not result in women's labour being withdrawn from the social sphere of production. Rather, economic growth has steadily brought women's productive efforts more directly into the market sphere. In exploring the roots of this development Cohen adds a new dimension to the study of women's labour history.

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