

CHAPTER 1

Transitions in the City: Independent Female Migration, 1850–1881

Grace Campbell was fourteen years old when she moved from Campbelltown, Argyllshire to Paisley, Renfrewshire, Scotland, in the late 1830s. She went to work at the Lounsdale bleachworks just outside Paisley and lived there with dozens of other young female migrants in accommodations provided by the bleachworks. Thirty years later and across the Atlantic another young woman, Mattie Weymouth, was the first of her friends to move from Readfield, Maine, to Lowell, Massachusetts. Mattie went to work for one of Lowell's textile manufacturers, living in a private boardinghouse close to the mill with many other mill workers. Both of these women left rural homes in favor of industrial employment, knowing exactly what type of jobs they would find. In Paisley and in Lowell they joined communities of fellow female migrants, some from their home towns, some from even farther afield. In Preston, England, Esther Jackson was attracted by a different sort of opportunity. Probably born in rural Lancashire, Esther came to Preston around 1845 and found work as a domestic servant. Preston-born women preferred employment in the city's textile mills, which left a demand for servants in the homes of the middle class. Esther had traded her own country family for the chores of an urban one, but in Preston her wages were her own. Between 1845 and 1851 she was able to put away £47 8s.3d. in her savings account.¹

None of these young women came from wealthy homes; all of them were probably economic contributors to their parents' families before migration. In moving, however, they were leaving the protection of their families. They also potentially incurred suspicion from the middle classes, many of whom believed that young women of all classes needed adult supervision to protect them from moral corruption.² Grace, Mattie, and Esther took advantage of systems of residential labor that by providing such supervision permitted

them to migrate while still having some protection from the dangers of urban industrialization.

These three women and thousands like them were part of an often overlooked group in the story of British and American industrialization: independent female migrants. Migration was a central feature in the creation of the great textile centers of the nineteenth century. Workers flooded from the countryside into textile factories, bleachfields, and bourgeois kitchens. Understanding the migrants who constituted that flood is crucial to grasping the dynamic of the textile cities themselves.

The largest portion of the migrants in Britain, the United States, and much of Europe in the nineteenth century were young, unmarried people, including women.³ Examining these single female migrants reveals a crucial segment of women's life course, the transition from their parents' families and to adult roles of their own. Independent migration was one of the most important ways women might accomplish this transition. It is important to note that these migrants also offer the opportunity to study women *without* reference to their familial roles—in the historical record single female migrants take on individual identities as workers or friends rather than relational identities as wife, mother, or daughter. Yet women living outside family relationships, especially in cities, were viewed with suspicion. Single women were perceived to need protection and control, whether from their families or other institutions. This social constraint distinguished female migrants' experiences from their male counterparts and necessitates a gendered historical analysis. Studying female migrants in their host communities thus also gives insight to how nineteenth-century urban populations coped with women who were on their own.

Finally, very little is known about migrant women's own experiences, though historians have frequently addressed their role in helping to support rural families. How did potential migrants assert their personal agency within the family to get permission to move? How did migration change a daughter's role in her family? What made one type of job more appealing to female migrants than others? What did the migrants do with their wages and what were their personal goals in migration? What dangers did the single female migrant face in the city, and how could she avoid those dangers? At a basic level, analyzing the experience of single female migrants in textile cities expands our knowledge of the process of migration and contributes to a more complex understanding of the textile cities that transformed the nineteenth-century landscape.

Mill Girls and Strangers is a comparative examination of single women's internal migration to three cities, each a model of the textile industry in its own country: Preston (Lancashire, England); Paisley (Renfrewshire, Scotland); and Lowell (Massachusetts, United States of America).⁴ Each city has different sources extant and thus brings a distinct perspective to single women's migration, highlighting in turn employers' influence, the migrants' own desires, and the unpredictable dangers of city life. This variety of perspectives reveals young women's migration to textile cities to be a far more complex problem than previously acknowledged. Comparing the three cities shows both a surprising degree of overall uniformity and tremendous complexity in the details of the migration experience. Young women in each country were affected by the same general factors, but those influences fluctuated in importance to produce a wide variety of individual experiences.

Historians have most often described single women's migration into textile cities in the context of the family economy, usually focusing on the young women's occupational choices to the exclusion of other elements. The most common historical model of single women's migration into textile cities in the second half of the nineteenth century was summarized by Leslie Page Moch in her excellent survey of European migration, *Moving Europeans*. Drawing on research in Roubaix, France, and Verviers, Belgium, the model described the wide variety of female migrants into those cities in the nineteenth century. Those who moved in family groups were more likely to remain in the cities, and more likely to work in the cities' textile mills. Young single women without their parents, on the other hand, were highly mobile, likely to stay in the city for only a few years, and worked almost exclusively as domestic servants. Many of these women migrated after the death of their parents; they chose domestic service because it provided them with food, shelter, and a surrogate family setting.⁵

While this model is generally accurate, it has notable shortcomings. First, it implies uniformity in single migrant women's employment from city to city and country to country. In fact, young migrant women entered a wide range of situations, which varied from one location to another. It analyzes female migrants almost wholly in economic terms, concentrating on choice of occupation as their primary difference from nonmigrant young women. In doing so, it fails to address the purpose migration served in the development of young women's lives and their progress from girlhood dependence to adult responsibilities. Finally, because it does not address questions

of why migrants might be desirable employees, this model does not consider the social functions single migrant women filled in the textile cities.

There was a need in textile cities for a specifically female, specifically migrant workforce, and not only in domestic service. Preston's middle classes compensated for the high factory employment of local women by recruiting "country girls" to work in their homes. In Paisley and Lowell, industrial textile employers needed migrants to supplement the native-born labor force. Both of these cities actively recruited young women from rural areas up to several days' travel away. They persuaded parents and ministers of the suitability of industrial labor for their daughters, and enticed the young women with promises of good wages and a chance to see the city. Thus urban employers' needs drew single women to the cities while their beliefs about respectability demanded they control the migrants' behavior.

Migration also served the needs of the young women. Between their late teens and mid twenties, young women were in transition between their parents' families and their own adult families. For working-class women these years were marked by active, unpaid participation in a family endeavor (most commonly farming) or wage earning and, for some women, migration. Those women who left their parents' homes went most often to protected accommodations provided by the employers who needed migrant workers: middle-class homes or corporate-sponsored boarding houses. All too often, historians have addressed nineteenth-century single women only within the context of the nuclear family.⁶ The study of industrial family structures generally integrates daughters into a family economy, where every member contributed to a common goal, even in the cases when those daughters lived away from the family.⁷ A family-based analysis, though crucial, denies individuals their own desires and frustrations within the family milieu. Evidence from Preston, Lowell, and Paisley suggests that migrant women were in fact economically as well as physically separate from their families.

Family studies also tend to acknowledge only young women's economic roles, giving an artificially flat portrait of lives that included friends, dreams, and disappointments as well as work. In addition to wages, young women sought intangibles like friendship and adventure in the cities. After a period as a migrant, a young woman was more likely to marry and form her own family than to return permanently to her parents' home. Thus, migration could serve more to facilitate the creation of the migrants' adult families

than to sustain their parents'. Migrants used employment opportunities in the cities for their own ends, enabling their transition to independent adulthood.

In a society in which the family was the primary supportive framework, young women away from their families were vulnerable in spite of the supervised positions to which they migrated. So long as there was work and they were healthy, independent female migrants stood a good chance of successfully making the transition between their parents' families and their adult families. Adversity in the shape of unemployment, disease, or an unwanted child could shatter a migrant's independence, sending her back to her parents' home, to a poorhouse, to prison, or worse. The process and success of an individual's migration was dramatically influenced by factors beyond either a migrant's or her employer's control such as social mores, homesickness, and communicable disease.

Clearly, single women's migration was not a simple equation of economic need and available employment. As Moch concluded, "The role played by migrants in the textile cities of the industrial age . . . was more complex, and perhaps more interesting, than we have imagined."⁸ Given the intricacy of the process, comparative history is particularly useful in studying independent female migration. Young women in general left comparatively few sources, and their migration, looked at in any single nation, appears to be nearly nonexistent, unremarkable, or (in the case of Lowell), absolutely extraordinary. Comparison across national borders gives a broader perspective, revealing complexity and commonalities where single cases produce a deceptively simple or overly rigid model. Comparison also facilitates using a combination of sources and methodologies. A quantitative methodology provides the statistical groundwork for this project, after which qualitative sources illuminate individual women's experiences from different perspectives, including insight into their goals and feelings regarding migration. In tandem, the qualitative and quantitative sources reveal a picture of single female migrants with multiple dimensions, revealing their hopes and failures as well as their economic roles.

Beyond the censuses that give a uniform base to the study, vastly different sources survive for the three groups of migrant women. Primary documents referring to single female migrants in Preston were decidedly scarce, while those in Paisley were plentiful but generated wholly by middle-class observers and authorities, not the migrants themselves. The City of Lowell, in contrast, preserved a plethora of personal letters and corporate records that cast light on

the daily lives and thoughts of the migrant workforce. Based on the qualitative sources available I have devoted one chapter to each city, each building on the one before and each contributing a different perspective on single women's migration. In Preston the sources that have survived point to the importance of employers' needs in the choices migrants made. Therefore, the focus of chapter 2 is the influence of employers in determining women's migration patterns. The highly detailed sources from Lowell, on the other hand, provided intimate details of the lives and motivations of individual migrants. Chapter 3 thereby adds to information on employers' influence with an exploration of how the migrants' personal situations, desires, and contacts contributed to their decisions to migrate and their experiences as migrants. In Paisley official records and reports illustrate the ways in which migrants interacted with their host community and the dangers they faced as women outside families. After examining the migration to Paisley from the perspectives of employers' needs and migrants' personal situations and desires, chapter 4 investigates how migration was influenced by factors beyond the control of either the migrants or their employers. Finally, the conclusion directly compares the three cities, analyzing the variations but finding an overall similarity. Comparative analysis presents a three-dimensional description of single women's independent migration to textile cities with a previously unavailable degree of nuance and complexity.

Although I have avoided jargon as much as possible, it is necessary for me to provide definitions of some terms. Technically, any person who makes a change of residence is a migrant, making *migration* a potentially troublesome term that requires a strict definition to be useful.⁹ I defined *migration* in this study based on boundaries crossed, rather than on actual distance traveled. The migrants I am concerned with were internal migrants who crossed county or state, but not national, boundaries. The term *migrant* will always refer to such internal migrants. Immigrants who came to a city from outside the country will be specifically identified as such. The United States' census recorded only the state in which an individual was born, and state of birth has been used to identify migrants in Lowell. To obtain a degree of detail similar to the United States, county of birth was used to define migrants to Paisley and Preston. Due to the geographic location of the cities in relation to state and county borders "migrants" from adjacent regions might actually have moved shorter distances than "nonmigrants" from elsewhere in the same region (see maps in chapters 2, 3, and 4). Nevertheless it is the moving that

defines a migrant, not the distance that is moved. Using this method to identify migrants will tend to *underidentify*, not *misidentify* them. Thus the numbers presented here should be taken as a minimum.

Identifying migrants by place of birth alone is effective, but it does not distinguish between recent migrants, who came to the city in the few years preceding a census, and those who had been in residence for many years. Although anyone might migrate at any time, especially in periods of economic distress, throughout the nineteenth century unmarried young adults were the most mobile segment of the population in Britain and the United States.¹⁰ In order to describe the experiences and volume of relatively recent arrivals to the city, I used migrants between fifteen and thirty years old as the cohort of “recent” or “current” migrants, those most likely to have migrated independently in the ten years between censuses. An “independent migrant” was defined as one who moved without her parents, and “migration experience” included all her experiences during the time she was most likely to migrate, that is, from the time of her first migration, through her search for work and accommodation, integration into a host community and possible remigration, until she married or aged outside the current migrant cohort.¹¹ To be practical, I identified independent migrants in the census by their residence in a household that had no one else with the same surname who was of an age to be the migrant’s parent.

Migration itself takes place between two points: the point of origin and the destination.¹² In many cases a discernible migration stream develops between points as new migrants follow paths they know by acquaintance with old migrants rather than striking out to wholly unknown territory. There are often fruitful avenues for the historian in both origin and destination points, and full understanding of where and why migration streams exist and how they change is best achieved by examining the whole migration pattern in a region, mapping migrants in both their homes and the host environment. This work, however, is primarily a destination-point study which, except for a very few cases, does not trace the careers of individual migrants. It was possible to place women at the time of each census, but the short-term nature of most single women’s migration, the scanty survival of records from origin points and the frequency with which certain surnames appeared (particularly in Scotland) made it impractical to either link individual migrants to their families or follow them through consecutive censuses.

Thus, this study is limited to questions that could be answered with sources generated after migration. These included the migrants’

place of birth and in some cases previous migration history, their choices of occupation and housing, the communities they formed after the move and the problems they could face, the use of their wages and—so far as possible—their general reasons for migration. Some of these questions, notably those about migrants' communities and reasons for migration, are necessarily answered through inferences made from evidence of the young women's behavior at the destination, for example, living close to other migrants or placing the bulk of her wages in a savings account. These inferences are educated, but they are ultimately guesses at the migrants' motives. There are also important questions to which destination-point sources cannot even infer answers. There is no definitive information on the birth families of female migrants, such as economic status, religious affiliation, composition, or size. Exact age at first migration, immediate catalysts to migration, and parental reaction can only be guessed at unless explicitly mentioned in letters or official records. Nevertheless the sheer bulk of data available from the censuses and destination-point sources gave a more accurate picture of single migrant women's experience in the cities than would chance-surviving individual histories that could more precisely integrate origin and destination.

Comparison of these data is a vital component of this research. Simultaneously examining the three cities of Preston, Lowell, and Paisley gives a breadth to the study of single women's migration that could not be achieved in any one city. Addressing all three cities with the same set of questions reveals general similarities about influences on women's migration to textile cities in the third quarter of the nineteenth century and their experiences there, but it also shows clear differences in circumstances and hence the patterns of women's migration to each city. My use of comparative analysis as an integral part of this study is informed by others' theoretical and practical work in comparative history, which has long intrigued historians and other social scientists.

There has been considerable discussion about how comparison is explicitly used by historians, but in truth all history is implicitly comparative, in that it relates the past to the present or indicates what distinguishes one country or region from all others.¹³ Histories in which the comparison is implicit often suffer from setting the case against a poorly defined standard or a set of assumptions that are not grounded in reality. Explicitly comparative history, on the other hand, develops two or more distinct, well-defined cases which when compared to one another give a much clearer presentation of

both generalities and divergences within the phenomenon under study. Comparison allows analysis to become more than the sum of its parts, providing large-scale context, possibly revealing general patterns of causation or truly unique developments. As William Sewell, Jr., concluded in 1967, “The adoption of a comparative framework enables [the historian] to detect errors or inadequacies in hypothetical explanations which would seem unimpeachable if viewed in one single historical or geographical setting.”¹⁴

Historians of the United States have been particularly prone to exceptionalist histories, even when placing the United States in comparative perspective. In recent years, however, comparative history has emphasized that most comparable nations are neither identical nor truly exceptional. Thus “cross-national comparative history can undermine two contrary but equally damaging presuppositions—the illusion of total regularity and that of absolute uniqueness.”¹⁵ Part of comparison’s role in this study is to test the exceptionalism of the case of the Lowell Mill Girls. Comparing Lowell with Preston and Paisley locates it historically as one of many cities that attracted single female migration, not a peculiarly American phenomenon.

Recent theorists of comparative history have largely ignored Marc Bloch’s proposal of “the possibility of filling in certain gaps in documentation by means of hypotheses based upon analogy.”¹⁶ In my statistical data I have a large, eminently comparable body of evidence from each of my subject cities—identical questions were asked of samples drawn in an identical manner from nearly identical sources. Qualitative information, however, varies widely in content and quality from city to city. In constructing my analysis, where the statistical evidence in each of the three cities is similar but qualitative data from one or more is missing, I use the qualitative material that I do have to fill in patterns where documentation does not survive. Similar behaviors do not mandate similar motivations, but in the absence of complete qualitative data from every case, suppositions based on data from a quantitatively comparable case has more basis in fact than suppositions based on no data at all. While such a “transitive property” cannot work as neatly in history as it does in algebra, it is a sound method to hypothesize answers where none are available in the historical record. In this way comparison produces a more complete description of single women’s migration experiences than is attainable through individual case studies.

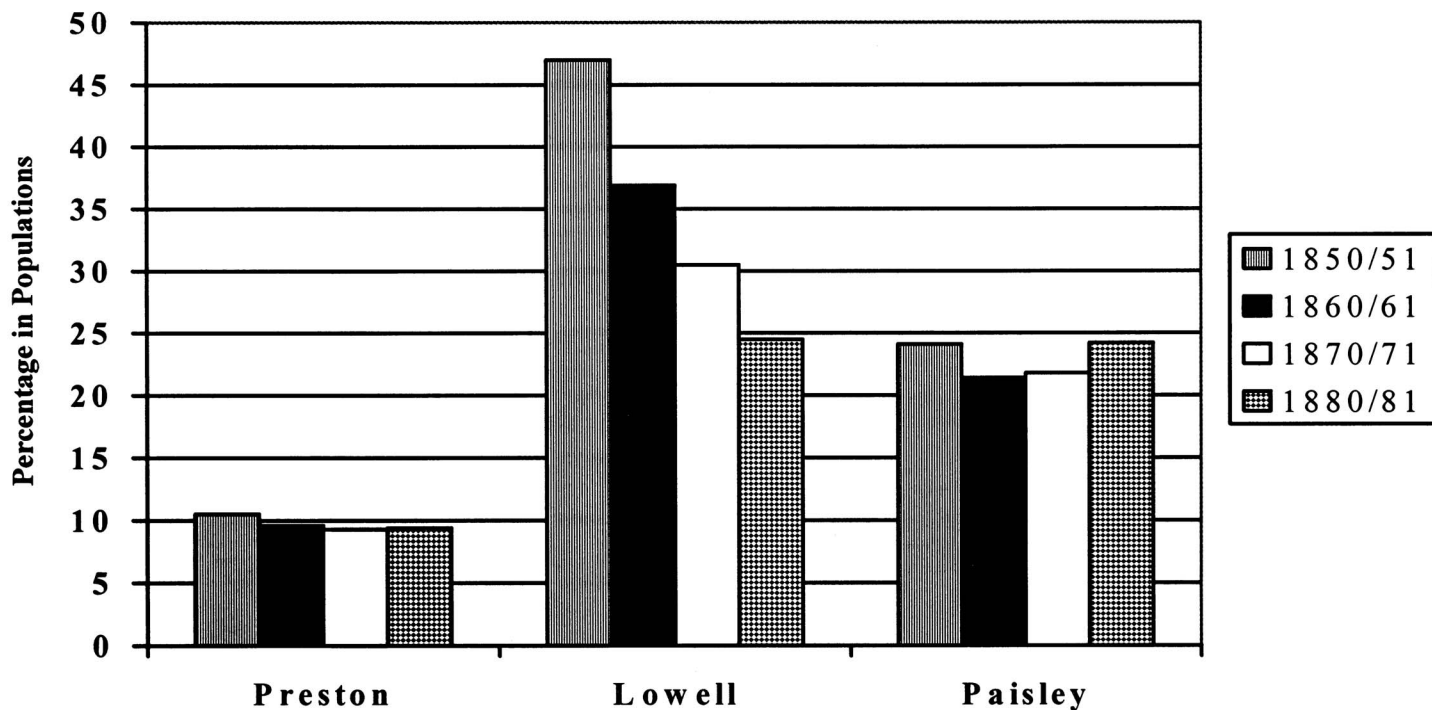
I chose the United States, Scotland, and England for this comparison because they were nations with their own economic and

social peculiarities yet with close historic, cultural, and economic ties. In the nineteenth century England, Scotland, and New England were all in the throes of industrialization, all Protestant communities with a strong work ethic (at least among the employing class). By midcentury all three also had a substantial and growing Roman Catholic Irish population, which formed strong subcultures in the communities. Although similar, the countries were far from identical. New England society developed from English Puritans transplanted to American soil in the seventeenth century, but it changed over the centuries through repeated waves of immigration and the introduction of republican democracy. Scotland and England since 1707 were joined in a political union, but Scotland industrialized later than England and was generally less urban and less affluent. Once begun, industrialization and urban growth occurred much more rapidly in Scotland, which amplified the inherent stresses to population and infrastructure.¹⁷

Preston, Paisley, and Lowell are comparable as representative textile cities of their respective nations, although they varied considerably in size.¹⁸ All three cities were built around variations of the cotton industry. Preston and Paisley developed textile industries in the late eighteenth century, Preston producing plain goods while Paisley specialized in thread and patterned shawls. Lowell, built with the explicit intention of bringing rural values to a factory setting (in contrast to the “English” system in which industrialization begot immoral urban squalor), was not established until 1826, but thanks to industrial espionage all three cities were at an approximately equal level of industrialization by 1850.¹⁹ Each had several major textile corporations that participated in the worldwide cotton market and used roughly similar technology.²⁰ The industrial communities fostered by the textile mills were similar in all three cities. The mills were the cities’ largest employers, especially of young people. There was a smaller sector of shops and craftspeople, and a still smaller group of middle-class employers. Preston, as a port city, was notably larger than the other two and also supported a substantial mercantile class, which affected migrant women’s employment opportunities.

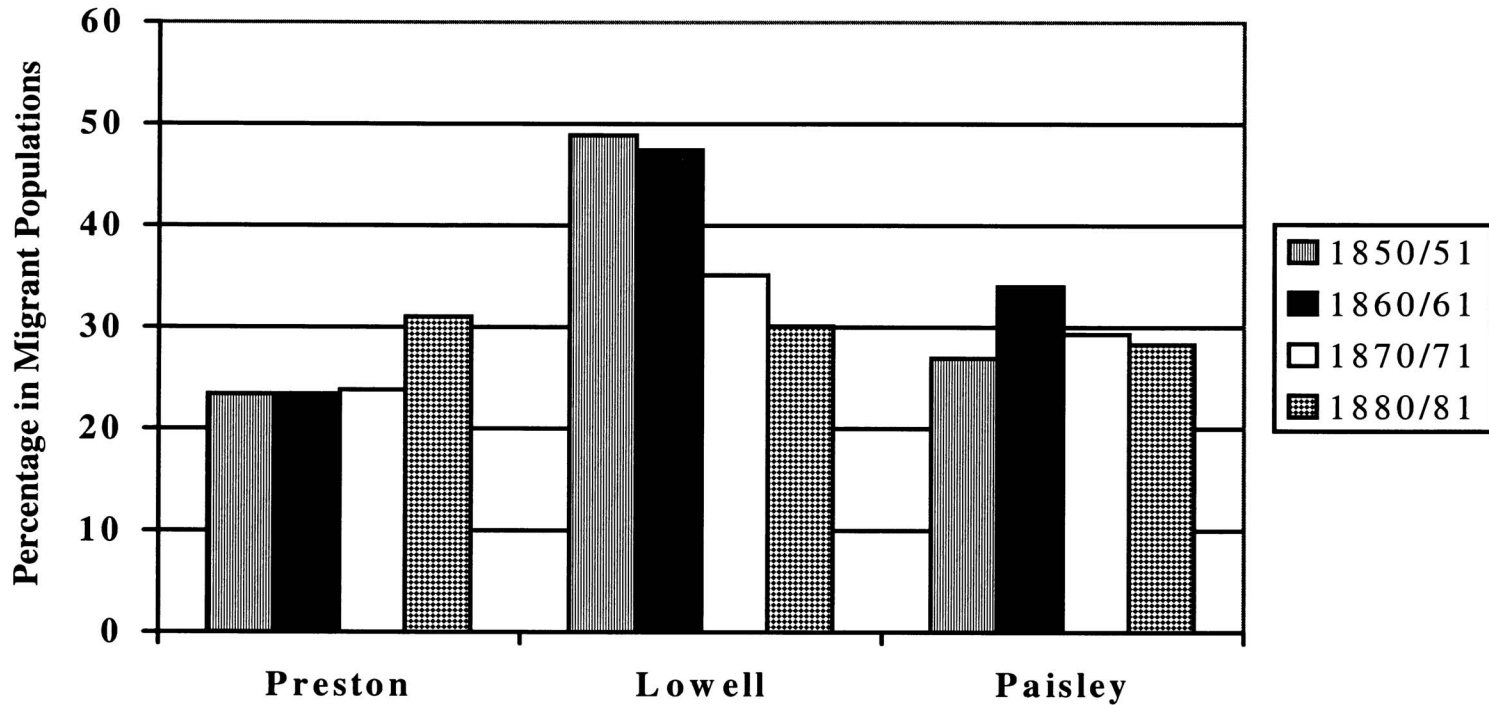
Independent female migrants made up from 8.6 to 12.5 percent of the entire migrant population in Preston and Paisley from 1851 to 1881, and throughout those years comprised approximately one quarter of those who migrated in the past ten years in those cities (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). In Lowell young single women were an even more important component of the migrant population. Unmarried

Figure 1.1
Percentage of migrants in total populations.
Preston, Lowell, and Paisley, 1850–1881.



Source: Data derived from *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, *Census of England and Wales, 1861–1881*, Preston Borough; *Census of Scotland, 1861–1881*, Paisley Burgh, both microfilm; Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; and *Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Census of the United States*, Lowell, Mass., microfilm, National Archives.

Figure 1.2
Percentage of independent female migrants in recent migrant populations.
Preston, Lowell, and Paisley, 1850–1881.



Source: Data derived from *Census of Great Britain, 1851*, *Census of England and Wales, 1861–1881*, Preston Borough; *Census of Scotland, 1861–1881*, Paisley Burgh, both microfilm; Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; and *Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, and Tenth Census of the United States*, Lowell, Mass., microfilm, National Archives.

women were 32 percent of Lowell's whole migrant population in 1850, and nearly half of the recent migrants. Their proportion in the population fell in the ensuing decades, but in 1880 they still made up more than 12 percent of the whole migrant population, and 30 percent of the recent American-born migrants.

Migration to all three cities between 1850 and 1881 was affected by two major historical events, the Potato Famine in Britain and the American Civil War. Beginning in 1845 and continuing for nearly a decade, Ireland and parts of the Scottish Highlands were struck by a blight that partially or wholly ruined potato crops, subjecting millions of people to the danger of starvation. In Scotland the menace was less severe than in Ireland, and was less subject to bungling by the government and charitable organizations. In both countries the famine exacerbated existing problems and prompted large-scale migration.²¹ In Ireland, where in some regions the peasant class was already on the bare edge of survival, for many the only recourse was emigration. Refugees flooded first into industrial cities in Scotland and England, particularly Glasgow and the cities of western Lancashire. As they were able to save funds for the Atlantic passage hundreds of thousands migrated again, this time to the United States, especially to New England's industrial cities. Desperate for support, the Irish immigrants in Scotland and England competed for industrial work, and also drew on Poor Relief systems where they could.²² In New England the Irish went into the factories, and the single women among them found a niche as domestic servants, a position that was shunned by native-born American migrants.²³ In 1850 Preston, Paisley, and Lowell all had substantial Irish populations, which grew through the next decade and a half, and the immigrants changed the face of the industrial workforce. In doing so they changed internal migration patterns, directly or indirectly filling the labor vacuum that had drawn many rural young women into the cities.

Less than a decade after the end of the Potato Famine, the American Civil War threatened the very existence of the United States. By drawing young men into arms the conflict discouraged young women's migration in New England, since they were required at home to help tend family farms. The Union blockade of Confederate ports also meant that the world's major supplier of raw cotton was unable to export its product, causing a Cotton Famine. Not only American but English and Scottish cotton mills were forced to shut down, depressing the economies of the cities that depended on them.²⁴ The 1860s saw a decline in internal migration to all three

cities as potential employers faltered. Cotton exports resumed in 1865, but economic security did not return until the 1870s.

Comparing textile cities of three industrial nations lends strength to answering questions about migration to textile cities in general. For example, under what circumstances did employers' needs exercise more influence on single women's migration, and when were the women's own needs and desires a stronger factor? What experiences were common to all textile cities, and which were specific to the city or region in which they occurred?

Comparison also benefits the historiography of the individual cities in ways single case studies could not. Perhaps most important, placing Lowell in the study tests its rarity as a case of large-scale independent female migration. The thorough (and well-deserved) research on Lowell has to this point resulted in a perception of the mill girls' experiences as unique in the history of industrialization. Comparison with other textile cities puts Lowell's unusual features into a more realistic context. Preston, unlike Lowell, has little surviving information about single female migrants, although the census reveals without doubt that they existed. The comparative method allows meaningful conjecture to be made about those migrants' experiences, by drawing on surviving sources from cities with similar data. The least-studied city in this work is Paisley, and an individual case study of that city alone would indeed be a meaningful contribution to the historiography. However, by carrying out the study in a comparative context there is added breadth and significance to the information, since it is clear how the Scottish migrants' experiences fit into a more general pattern of single women's industrial migration.

Single Female Migrants in Historical Perspectives

This is primarily a work of migration history and has its strongest roots in that historiography. E. G. Ravenstein's analysis of the 1881 census established him as the father of migration history, and in it he set a pattern that to some extent still defines the discipline.²⁵ More than the experience of migration—how individual migrants chose when and where to migrate, how they found jobs, how they interacted with their host community—Ravenstein and those who followed him were interested in the gross motion of people, how

population was moving in Britain and what rules governed that movement. Such analysis of migration patterns on a very large scale is essential in describing how migration is related to other factors and it emphasizes the importance of migration in international relations and development. The drawback to such a macroanalysis is the loss of detail. Aggregate statistics reveal important patterns, but they also obscure variation at regional and personal levels. In macroanalyses of migration, individuals often disappear entirely.

Even in a community with strong economic or social pressures toward migration a decision to move was made at the level of the individual, who had her own reasons for choosing to go or not to go based on such things as family circumstances, communication with previous migrants, and personal preferences for adventure or security. Analysis of individual experience is as crucial as economic analysis in understanding why and how migration occurs. A “micro” study concentrates on the experience of individuals or specific communities without necessarily tying them into the larger picture of national or world history. Microanalyses cast light on the personal inner workings of migration and so illuminate larger patterns. In Oscar Handlin’s words, “The origins of a social process of any importance must be sought ‘in the internal constitution of the social *milieu*.’ . . . Only by considering immigrant adjustment on the local scale can the influence of the *milieu* be given full weight.”²⁶

In *Mill Girls and Strangers*, comparison provides an alternative to the macro-micro dilemma in migration history.²⁷ By incorporating research on three different cases into one analytical framework I am better able to support a generally applicable description of single women’s migration than I could with a single case study. The comparative method gives the individual migrants’ experiences context, showing that single women’s migration into all three cities was similar in form and function, though different in detail. Thus I utilize a level of analysis that is not so broad as large-scale economic cycles and political shifts, yet has wider significance than a single community study. Comparison cannot replace the need to connect personal experience with large social and economic patterns, but it does allow analysis of differences in personal experience and gives individuals context on their own scale.

The comparative method also gives broader significance to the study of internal migration, which has received less attention in recent decades than international movement. In great part the focus on internal migration was dictated by my subjects; young white women in the nineteenth century were simply far more likely to

move internally than to emigrate. Yet I chose these subjects because they were able to address questions regarding the effect of migration that are obscured in studying the personal experiences of international migration. For example, internal migrants did not (with the possible exception of Scottish Highlanders) face as large a linguistic or cultural change as did international migrants; questions of assimilation or acculturation have less meaning in discussions of internal migration. With the possibility of ethnic (though not class or gender) bias against the migrants largely removed, patterns of behavior can be more firmly connected to an individual's status as a migrant, rather than to cultural preferences. Comparing the internal migration experience in different countries allows generalizations about what behavioral choices were a product of migration, and which were more likely cultural preferences. With a more complete understanding of internal migration, it may be possible for other scholars to determine which features of immigrant experience are due to cultural differences, and which may be the product of migration itself.

Single women's migration is not only a problem of demographics, but of economics, class, gender, and the family. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in both Britain and the United States patterns of labor and family relationships changed as the primary economic activity for many families shifted from agricultural subsistence to waged industrial labor. During this process young women's economic roles in the family changed as well, generally from assistants in a family enterprise to wage earners in their own right.²⁸

The single female migrants were a distinct labor group in nineteenth-century textile cities, fulfilling particular roles. Although most were working class, employed in factories or as domestic servants, there were social differences among them.²⁹ For example, in Preston some migrants were able to work as boarding-school teachers or in dressmaking shops, both of which required more educational and economic resources than working as a domestic servant. Migrant teachers and skilled workers most likely came from a different social level than did migrants who were servants. In Lowell, most migrants were the daughters of small landowners and were literate, both factors that place them at a different class level than most English and Scottish migrants.³⁰ All female migrants, furthermore, were expected to conform to middle-class moral principles. Domestic servants could be immediately dismissed for violating their employers' standards, and strict standards of behavior were imposed on corporate boardinghouse residents.

In spite of the influence of class on migrant women's lives in the occupations they chose there is little evidence of class conflict among female migrants in the period of this study, at least as expressed through labor activism. The early generations of Lowell workers organized labor protests, but female-headed unions had faded by midcentury, when this study opens.³¹ In Paisley, migrant women showed more regional identification (especially those from the Highlands) than class affiliation, and there is no record of women attending organizational meetings, even when arguments were made on their behalf.³² In both British cities, the majority of migrant women worked in isolation as domestic servants, a profession that was not organized in any sense until the last years of the nineteenth century. Economics, on the other hand, most certainly affected young migrant women's lives, in their need to work at all and in the positions they chose. Some sense of their position in the community was almost certainly present, displaying itself in their occupations, in the clothes they wore and their leisure-time activities. There is no doubt that they knew to what level of society they belonged, but there is no evidence of conflict over that position.

Bound up with the issue of class is the issue of gender.³³ Both were social systems that controlled behavior, the one based on economic status, the other on biological sex. Just as there was little class-based conflict evident in the migrants' lives, I have found no evidence of women's-rights agitation among the migrants.³⁴ There is no surviving evidence that they questioned the validity of the gender structure in which they lived, though they may have seen migration as a means to escape some aspects of rural women's lives. Migrants were in the process of transition between two realms of womanhood, from dependent "girl" to adult, married "woman" who though still dependent on a husband's authority was expected to manage her own household and exercise some control over her children and servants. In the meantime they occupied a third, median position, identified by paid labor, partial independence from all family groups, and hence vulnerability to misfortune. The migrants identified themselves primarily as female, and as such they felt they were bound to certain standards of behavior and appearance to maintain their respectability. Respectability was equated with "proper" behavior, but definitions of respectability varied depending on class status.³⁵ Governed by middle-class employers, migrant women were expected to maintain middle-class standards of working-class respectability in terms of dress, cleanliness, decorum, and choice of companions. When migrants transgressed these boundaries—through flamboyant dress,

unseemly fraternization with men or nonattendance at religious services—they were subject to ridicule, scorn, even censure by their employers. While a domestic servant might expect to have sex with a suitor before they were married, consistent with her rural, working-class background, her middle-class employers would be appalled at such behavior, and the misunderstanding could easily cost the servant her position.³⁶ If the migrants aspired to personal and economic independence, they nearly always did so within the limits set by their gender and class expectations.

Evidence in this study, particularly from Lowell and Paisley, suggests that the limitations of gender encouraged single female migrants to form networks of friends in their destination cities whenever possible. Chain migration, the practice of one migrant sending money, encouragement, or both for others to join her, contributed to the development of such support systems. These networks both made migration more enjoyable, by providing social contacts, and helped young women to negotiate such difficulties as finding jobs or managing through a period of illness or pregnancy. The chance of unmarried motherhood was just one danger faced by independent female migrants, and one reason they were a source of anxiety to the urban middle class. Women alone were suspected of turning to prostitution to supplement meager wages or, conversely, they were seen as vulnerable to corruption from bad company.³⁷

Migrant women *were* vulnerable, but they were not helpless. Within options limited by their social position (mostly working class, female, young) they exercised their own agency, choosing situations that served their individual needs in the transition from past and to future family groups. It is today widely recognized that migration was historically common in young women's lives, but what that meant for the women is little understood in any but the most general terms. My description is one based in the opportunities, desires, and problems of the migrants themselves, showing that a woman did not need to be incorporated in a nuclear family to function successfully in a nineteenth-century textile city. Throughout the third quarter of the nineteenth century, single female migrants did more than respond passively to economic and social forces. They used the opportunities they found to extend the boundaries of their lives, asserting independence from parents and moving toward their own adulthood.