they distributed among their workforce rather than manufacturing them at home. They imported cloth, stockings, and shoes from the Mother Country, and white seamstresses or tailors were frequently hired to cut out and sew garments. The growth in the textile staff at most plantations, then, proceeded at a leisurely pace until the conflict with Great Britain speeded up the process. In the early 1760s, before he set up a full scale manufactory, George Washington had a spinner and a seamstress at Mount Vernon, and Landon Carter had three spinners and a weaver. To solve the weaver shortage, planters employed female slaves though it was an occupation that in England had become the preserve of white men.

Plantation societies such as the one founded in Colonial Virginia were largely the creation of white men and reflected their priorities. Relatively few indentured servants were female and any planter who wanted a female staff larger than one or two would have to buy slaves. We always knew the black household possessed the barest minimum in the way of amenities. That the black woman’s contribution to white domesticity and housewifery was so thinly spread is more surprising because Virginians used the home in preference to public spaces more extensively than almost any other early modern community. During much of the colonial period white life on the plantations was still totally organized around production of tobacco. Those in the “Great Houses,” the show places of the society, lived in what one observer termed a “tawdry luxury.”

The typical 18th century servant was not a Mammy figure but a young girl. She worked as household drudge out on a quarter or a small plantation, where she tended children, cooked, washed clothes, and milked cows. If she lived at the “Great House” she might be a personal servant or, as became increasingly common in the 18th century progressed, a spinner. When she grew older and married, she might not stay in the house because it seems that only a few positions, mainly cook and washerwoman, regularly were held by adult women in their prime years. Consequently when a slave woman was most likely to be bearing and nursing children, she also was most likely to be assigned to the fields. Women, whether white or black, have shared the similarity when it has come to work. Their occupations have been mainly determined by their stage of life or marital status not their experience or training. The two occupations most identified with the Mammy stereotype, housekeeper and nurse, were actually those jobs the planter family most often sought white women to fill. Nor did “cleaning lady” accurately define many colonial black female house slaves; close attention to home care had only just begun and rural Virginia did not lead the movement.

A major change in the plantation situation I have just described seems to have occurred in the later 18th century with a noticeable rise in housewifery activities. Specific information about slave women’s occupations only exists for the larger plantations. The sources indicate that after 1760 the non-field contingent of the female as well as the male workforce grew until it constituted a third or more of all slave labor. The increases for women came in the housewifery area. Smaller plantations, of course, would probably not have maintained these elaborate craft establishments. Still, if we take into consideration the proliferation of towns and the additions to the free black population, it is conceivable that as early as 1800 an upper South state such as Virginia would have 20–25% of its black women in non-field work.

Women’s Work in Colonial Philadelphia
KARIN WULF

Even in a city as large as Philadelphia, with a transient population and a seaport buzzing with daily arrivals and departures, dense webs of relationships underlay urban neighborhoods. Thus, when John Barker, the constable of Philadelphia’s High Street Ward, set out to enumerate the residents of his district in 1775, he encountered familiar faces and families of long residence. Among the householders he greeted while making these rounds was the widow Rachel Draper, a tavernkeeper. Rachel Draper had lived in High Street Ward for over twenty years by the time Barker came to make his Constable’s Return. Her husband, James, a tailor who had earned a modest living, had died relatively young. Rachel Draper was the sole executor of her husband’s estate, a common phenomenon among Philadelphia’s lower sort. The larger and more complex an estate was, the less likely it was that the widow was named as the sole executor, or even as a co-executor. After administering the settlement of her husband’s estate, Rachel Draper set about making a living for herself and her two young daughters. She held onto the house, but her financial status was precarious. She was considered too poor and too burdened by the costs of supporting her young children to pay any taxes.

Like many others among Philadelphia’s working poor, Draper used a variety of economic strategies to meet her family’s needs. She was granted successive city licenses to operate a “drum shop,” or small tavern, probably right in her home on Chancery Lane. She was a tavernkeeper from at least 1767 through 1773, and perhaps for much longer. To help with the annual rent of £14 on a house and lot that served as both residence and place of business, Draper took in boarders: Jacob Potts was boarding there in 1770, and Thomas Draper, no doubt a relation, was boarding there in 1775.

By 1775 Rachel Draper had lived in her neighborhood for at least two decades, the last twelve years of which she had headed her household. Although clearly economically marginal, Draper was in some ways a success story. She never fell into the transiency that marked the lives of so many among Philadelphia’s laboring population. She not only kept her family fed and clothed, but she also made sure that her two daughters received an education.

Rachel Draper’s circumstances as a working, unmarried woman were far from unique. She lived and worked alongside such women as upholster Elizabeth Lawrence, tavernkeeper Susannah Harditch, and tallow chandler Ann Wishart. Each of these women was a neighbor of Draper’s and a resident of long tenure. Each had extensive ties to the community. These women, and others like them, helped to shape urban community and urban culture in the eighteenth-century city. As independent women, they could act legally and economically in ways that their married sisters, bound by coverture, could not. Although historians have emphasized the importance of all women in creating social networks, unmarried women not only

maintained existing ties of kinship and friendship but also created community ties that facilitated their independence. They exchanged credit and debt, rented property to and from their neighbors, served drinks, bought and sold goods, and engaged in friendly, practical, or even hostile conversation. Neighbors often worshipped together. Some were related by blood or marriage. Unmarried women were central actors in the creation and maintenance of the economic, religious, familial, and broadly political networks of association that defined urban life.

Women's work was vital to Philadelphia's economy, but the extent and range of this work has been particularly hard to uncover. Scholars who study the occupational structure of early American cities have had to rely on sources that mask the work of women and other economically marginal groups, including laboring men, servants, and slaves... The city was dependent on goods and services provided by laboring men and women. But the remaining inventories of merchants' goods, the records of indenture, and even tax records that nominally recorded occupations paid little attention to recording women's work in any systematic way. Thus sources have in some measure "hidden" women's work.

In addition, eighteenth-century culture was ambivalent about the meaning of women's work in general and about the economic contributions of domestic work in particular. Present for an Apprentice: or, A Sure Guide to Gain both Esteem and Estate circulated widely in the Anglo-American world. In Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin printed the fourth edition of this book of advice for young, working men embarking on life's journey in 1749. The author cautioned that young men of the laboring sort should consider marriage an expense, rather than a financial gain... Of the economic benefit of women's labor, there was no mention.

Although some source materials reflect the eighteenth-century elision of the significance of women's economic contributions, it is clear that women's work was both ubiquitous and necessary. A common assumption is that widows, who were the majority of unmarried women, were reliant on their inheritances. A husband's estate formed the bulk of a widow's wealth, and thus her own economic condition was utterly dependent on the state of his estate at his death and then on the provisions of his will. There are two problems with this assumption. First is that it portrays widows as pecuniarily financially dependent. In fact, economic interdependence, not independence, was the rule in this period. Men as well as women relied on inheritance and on transfers of wealth rather than strictly on accumulation through income. If anything, women aided men in this respect; the laws of coverture guaranteed men access to any property their wives possessed at marriage and gave them rights to their wives' earnings during the marriage. Men from George Washington to the famously "self-made" Benjamin Franklin prospered through the legally mandated transfer of wealth. The second problem with assuming that inheritance was widows' sole source of income is that it casts women as only passive recipients of wealth, rather than generators of wealth. A widow's inheritance, after all, was the product of her own as well as her husband's capital and labor. In addition, many widows who inherited subsequently increased their holdings through investment or through income-producing occupations.

The urban economy gave women more options for producing income or supplementing their capital than did strictly agricultural regions. Although widowhood often meant a difficult economic predicament, some female entrepreneurs flowered financially after they were widowed. Their experiences suggest that, as for men, familial, friendship, and economic connections helped them establish small businesses. Born in 1707, Hannah Breinztall was a little like Deborah Franklin. Mrs. Franklin often kept shop and accounts for her husband, but while Benjamin Franklin lived a long life during which Deborah was the distinctly subordinate partner in his ventures, Hannah Breinztall's husband died, leaving her to make her own way financially. She took up the most common occupations for female entrepreneurs: keeping a shop and tavern...

Hannah Breinztall was not unusual. She married, bore children, became widowed, managed businesses and finances, and provided for her family. The typical picture of the colonial entrepreneur and provider assumes his masculine gender. But many women like Hannah Breinztall, some more and some less successfully, acted independently to support themselves and their families. Widows could rarely afford to be passive guardians of their portion of a husband's estate, and many did not remarry. It was clear to many widows that they would have to take on the financial responsibility of their own and their family's care.

Women who never married—even those from middling or wealthy families—often had to generate more wealth than they inherited because fathers most often passed real property to sons but gave cash or other personally, often in the form of marriage settlements, to daughters. Spinster's work was usually directly related to their lack of inherited resources and their need to support themselves...

Women's occupational opportunities were more restricted than men's for several reasons. Women were less likely to get specialized training in a craft or skill than were men. Female servants, for example, usually were trained only in "housewifery." Strictly limited access to capital prevented most women from creating businesses on their own, with the exception of some retail establishments headed by wealthier women. Widows of tradesmen were sometimes able to continue in their husbands' work, but other women had a hard time entering trades. Perhaps most importantly, the close association of domestic labor with women made it difficult for them to do other kinds of work, simply because whatever the size or economic status of their household, they were responsible for child care and housework. This labor, which was so critical to the functioning of the household economy, left women little time and energy to apply to another occupation. Thus, women who needed income—that is, the majority of married women as well as the vast majority of unmarried women—looked to work that could be fitted around other obligations and used their domestic skills.

Women's work in the eighteenth-century city can be divided into two broad categories: gender-specific work, primarily domestic labor, and nongender-specific work that both men and women performed. Shopkeeping and other mercantile activity, trades, and unskilled labor were all primarily male preserves in which some women could find employment. A degree of gender segregation appeared, however, even within such occupations as retailing or artisanal work.

Among gender-segregated occupations, domestic service was the most significant and visible source of employment for women. Cleaning houses; growing, butchering, preserving, and cooking food; making, repairing, and laundering clothes; caring for children—all of these were tasks that kept women moving in and out of
the house and at close quarters with their neighbors. For poorer families, it was deemed both more appropriate and more economical for women to perform such tasks themselves at home. The work required long hours and a strong back. Water for laundry and cooking had to be fetched from a pump. Although urban women did not have to go very far to get water, they still had to haul many gallons a day. Caring for apprentices, servants and slaves, or boarders was also part of women’s domestic labor in families of tradesmen or artisans. Even for merchants or others whose work brought income to the family without requiring extensive household labor, the value and extent of domestic labor was enormous.

Female servants performed a large portion of this work. In colonial American cities, as in Europe, domestic service was an increasingly important part of the changing urban economy and reflected the growth of middling classes. In the American South, where domestic work was performed largely by enslaved women, white servants were rare. In the North, however, particularly in mid-Atlantic cities, a variant of the European pattern prevailed. Domestic household servants were not simply the preserve of the rich and titled but became a critical part of the household economy of the middling classes. Whereas in a merchant’s home servants would perform purely household tasks, in the home of an artisan a “maid of all work” would lend a hand in the workshop, then contribute to the household tasks of cooking, cleaning, and sewing. . . .

Servants could be either indentured or hired for a day, a week, or a year. Female indentured servants came primarily from three groups. The first were adult women who signed indentures before departing Europe or upon arrival in America in order to pay for their passage. . . . The second type of indentured women were poor girls bound out by the city or by their parents. Indentures could provide some training as well as bed and board. . . . A third category of indentures was made privately, apprenticing girls and boys to specific trades. It is not possible to estimate the size and character of this population, although more boys than girls were trained for trades. Families also sent children to relatives’ households in exchange for their care and training in a marketable skill. . . .

Work that was seen as feminine was often linked to domestic skills, specifically to providing care and personal services for others. Chief among these were nursing, midwifery, and mortuary work. Nursing seems to have been a specialized skill, but it also commingled with midwifery and laying out the dead. In an era when doctors were just beginning to acquire formal training, medicine was often administered by lay persons. Nurses were not simply women who happened to care for the sick, however. They were addressed as “Nurse,” and some specialized in infant care, others in infectious diseases. . . . Despite increasing use of schooled physicians, midwives seem to have found regular, constant employment. . . . Even women who, later in the century, chose to have doctors rather than midwives deliver their babies hired nurses for their newborns. Breastfeeding was a matter of choice for elite women. . . . Wet-nursing supplied poorer households with some extra income, perhaps at a critical moment when a woman was prevented from income-earning activities by virtue of recent childbirth. . . .

Women’s responsibility for attending the dead was both social custom and economic opportunity. Women regularly stayed with women friends who were either sick or in labor, and with friends’ children who were sick. Once a person had died, however, professional services were engaged. Some women, like Priscilla Cowley, both nursed the ill and prepared the dead body for burial, while other women provided specialized mortuary and funerary services. . . .

. . . [W]omen and men had differential employment opportunities, with more skilled work available primarily to men, and . . . women were paid from one-quarter to one-half of the wages that men could command for similar work. In urban areas, the greater demand for more specialized skills and trades benefited males more than females, especially because domestic service was women’s primary employment. But it appears that when specialized work was called for, wage differentials shrank so that women earned perhaps one-half to two-thirds of the wages that men commanded. . . .

Unmarried women faced economic pressures particular to their situation. They needed to work, but remunerative employment was scarce. A handful of cases of bawdy house brought before the Philadelphia Mayor’s Court in the 1760s and 1770s attest to the unsurprising existence of prostitution in the seaport, but prostitution must have been a last resort. Reported instances of prostitution among poor women increased sharply only after the Revolution.

Domestic service did have some economic advantages, in particular the security of room and board. Unmarried female domestic servants who lived with their employers were provided with food and sometimes with clothing. A regular annual salary of £10 might have compared favorably, at least in economic terms, with the situation of a mistress of a laboring household.

Retailing goods or food and drink provided the next largest group of occupations for women after domestic service. Women accounted for perhaps as many as half of all retailers in the eighteenth-century city, although women’s retailing was generally conducted on a smaller scale than men’s and was less likely to be combined with wholesaling. . . . Over the eighteenth century, retailing became an increasingly viable economic option for women. Retailing increased in importance as imported consumer goods washed over the colonies, a process that intensified at mid-century. . . . This increase in the availability and variety of consumer goods prompted the elaboration of retail establishments, and of the activity of shopping itself. . . .

Women were well positioned to take advantage of both the retailing and the consumption of goods. Provisioning the household (or “marketing”) was long thought to be a feminine responsibility, but the new dynamics of class and status competition were specifically gendered. . . . Both men and women shopped, but the increasing attention of retail advertisements to their female clientele and to items of female apparel testifies both to women’s importance as consumers and to the importance of feminine attire to class aspirations. As retailers, women could tap the very market they helped comprise. Female shopkeepers among the middling or elite whose customers came from the same networks of association could help determine fashions. . . .

Retailing varied widely. At the lower end of the scale, hucksters purchased cast-off, second-quality, damaged, or otherwise less desirable merchandise, which they then hawked through the streets. Peddlers who moved from the city out into the countryside with imported or finished goods were regulated and licensed, and were almost exclusively male. Hucksters who carried goods through the city were usually female. Hucksters could acquire goods for their baskets from a variety of sources. Fresh food
was brought into the city from the hinterlands on market days, when the city’s famously extensive markets could be overwhelmed with meat, cheese, butter, and produce, along with homespun cloth and other hand-made goods. Any goods left by the end of the day, unsold or of inferior quality, were sold to hucksters, who might make a tiny profit by reselling them. Walking outward from the city center, hucksters might find customers among those who could not get to the market—for example, housewives confined at home who had no servants to make their purchases, and laboring families for whom a trip to the market for first-quality fresh goods were a rare luxury. One step up from hucksters were those women who operated tiny shops within a corner of a room, sometimes buying only small lots of goods to sell at a time.

A handful of elite shopkeepers operating during the third quarter of the eighteenth century, including Mary Coates, Magdalena Devine, Elizabeth Paschall, and Mary and Rebecca Steel, were very prosperous and carried extensive inventory. For these women, as for many successful male entrepreneurs, economic, social, kinship, and religious circles all overlapped; shopkeeping mixed easily with their other social obligations. They shopped in each others’ stores, bought wholesale goods together, and circulated within the same group of friends. Coates, Paschall, and Rebecca Steel bought goods together at vendue for sale in their respective shops. They purchased goods from each other when these items were not available from their own inventories, or when one happened on a better wholesale price.

Opportunities in tavernkeeping also increased as the city grew. A few gathering spots, such as the London Coffee House on Market Street, catered to a new clientele of merchants who wanted not just to exchange business talk but to engage in the whole realm of discussions that were beginning to constitute public discourse. The only women welcomed there were servers. Most taverns, however, remained gathering spots for neighbors or work-fellows, providing modest provisions and drink at a low price. For many women like Rachel Draper, tavernkeeping was a reasonably good prospect. In some areas of the city there were as many or more female as male publicans. Tavernkeeping could also be combined with shopkeeping in a single establishment, which may have made it especially appealing to women.

A few women worked in the specialized trades supported by the urban economy, especially after mid-century. Most probably had husbands or fathers who had worked in these trades and perhaps already established workshops that they could assume. Among those who made their living supplying the many seaport industries, Sarah Jewell continued the ropewalk her husband had founded, making ropes and rigging so necessary for shipbuilding, while Hannah Beales continued her father’s fishnet-making business. No guilds kept women in Philadelphia from pursuing trades, as they did in early modern Europe, but the complications of acquiring apprentices and gaining master status were enough to discourage most women. Informal pressure from loose organizations of artisans may also have had a hand in discouraging women’s participation in such trades.

Almost all urban women worked either within or outside the home, and most probably worked for pay. Economic connections that women made while working could be a critical outgrowth of other relationships, particularly among family members, but the formation of economic networks was also a fundamental opportunity provided by neighborhood. Women, like men, accessed credit and debt networks by exercising familial and economic resources, including personal relationships. Because women had much less access to trans-Atlantic credit, however, wholesale merchant work was an unlikely pursuit, whereas local credit networks such as those employed by small retailers were much more readily available.

By forming economic connections and networks, work also became an important source of personal and community identity. Although not all workers identified with their work, many did, especially those whose work enmeshed them in networks of obligation and association. Contributing to the association of work and identity was the way that work became bound up with the community’s needs and one’s place in the community.

Women’s Work in California’s Spanish Missions

VIRGINIA MARIE BOUVIER

Between 1769 and 1823, Spanish friars established a chain of twenty-one missions, each a day’s journey from the next, along 650 miles of Pacific coastline from San Diego in the south to Sonoma in the north.

Built like a military fortress, the main mission building generally formed a quadrangle with adobe walls six to eight feet thick. Its various compartments could be individually locked from the outside to provide both protection and control of the residents therein. A separate guardhouse with its own kitchen usually housed the five or six soldiers who were required to accompany the priests on their search for potential Indian converts and escapees. A palisade of wall often enclosed the main mission quadrangle, its separate buildings, and sometimes the adjoining rancherias of thatched huts, adobe houses, or long barracks, where the married neophytes and their families lived.

One of the first structures to be built was often the monjerio, the separate dormitory where neophyte girls and single or widowed neophyte women slept under lock and key. Until they reached adolescence, usually sometime after age eleven and sometimes at an earlier age, young Indian girls lived with their Christianized Indian parents in the nearby rancherias. When they reached adolescence (presumably when they began menstruating), the girls were brought to monjerios, ostensibly to “save guard their virginity and help them to prepare for Christian marriage.” The girls left the mission compound only after they were married, when they returned to the rancherias with their husbands. The Indian men at the missions were sometimes housed in separate quarters called jayuntes, where they were only occasionally kept under lock and key.

Roles and experiences at each mission varied over time and were circumscribed by gender, religion, ethnicity, age, and marital status. The missions offered both opportunities and constraints for the women who came to Alta California from Mexico and Baja California. The role of the female newcomers to Alta California was initially an ideological one. Christian women—both Indians and Hispanics—would