CHAPTER THREE

Women and the Family Economy

Analyses of the question of the family in Australia have been made in both sociological and historical literature. These sources look at a variety of issues and come from varying points of view. Most include some general discussion of the family economy and consider the role of women in the family from a national point of view. Despite a rigorous search no sources were found which refer specifically to the 1940-1965 period, therefore to relate the existing analyses to regional Queensland during this time frame the thesis relies strongly on statistics' However, a random search was undertaken to locate information at regional levels in local newspapers, and wherever possible these sources are used to substantiate a comprehensive oral history component.[2]

The call for "women power" 'during World War Two broke down some of the barriers placed on women by the division of labour, not only in the workplace, but also in the home. However, male dominance was maintained in most areas of employment until the 1970s and beyond. This is more apparent in regional Queensland where, as will be shown in Chapter Five, work opportunities for

[1] Commonwealth Government Statisticians Reports, 1933, 1947, 1954, 1961 and 1966.
[2] Searches in three local papers were undertaken for this purpose: The Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin,* The Gladstone *Observer,* and the Bundaberg *News-Mail.*

women in manufacturing industry continue to be fewer than in Brisbane and other large cities in Australia. **As** has been asserted in Chapter One, the thesis disputes the assumption that most married women returned to the home as housewives and mothers and relied solely on "the breadwinner" after the end of the war in 1945. It is argued that despite assumptions to the contrary poverty in Queensland during the period was a reality, and women took advantage of the post-war housing shortage and immigration to become landladies. Additionally rising inflation made it difficult to manage the family budget, and women rejoined the work force, many opting to work as domestics while others such as dressmakers worked in their own homes or assisted in the family business.

Reasons why women sought self-employment in spheres, where very often the work involved was just "more of the same" are explored. In this instance self-employed is defined as being in control of their hours of work and payment. In many ways this was a continuum of work performed by women in Queensland prior to 1940, but it was subjected to variations brought about by changes to the management of the family economy wrought by the Second World War, and the change from a national and state war economy to a reconstruction economy. The related questions of poverty[3] and the family budget[4] are also considered. Additionally this chapter looks at women and consumerism, and the effects of the introduction of technology in the home.[5] Social changes and continuities in both national and Queensland spheres, as they affect women's role in the family in

[3] C.P. Harris, "A Survey of Some Aspects of Poverty in Queensland and Brisbane", *Journal of Social Issues,* Vol.5, No. 1, 1970, pp. 1-4.
[4] G. C. Bolton, "1939/51", F. Crowley, (Ed.), *A New History of Australia*, Melbourne, Heinemann, 1988, pp. 501-502,
[5] S. Bedwell, *Suburban Icons: A Celebration of the Every Day,* ABC, 1992, pp.26-39.

regional Queensland during the 1940-1965 period, are reframed in the context of the local economy of the period.

Hargreaves" analysis of women's work in Australia constitutes an historical dissertation at a national level and looks at women's work from the point of view of gender. She maintains that one of the main reasons why women worked was economic necessity. She cites Helen Prendergast, of the Women's Trade Union Commission, who asserted:

> in a talk for International Women's Year in 1975 that the attitude that 'women don't need to work' was discriminatory and false. It ignored the needs of female breadwinners and those for whom one income was not enough.[7]

The thesis claims that, in regional Queensland during the period of the thesis, women's primary reason for seeking employment was also because of the need for them to contribute to the family economy.

Discussion will focus on strategies put in place by women throughout the period to supplement family income. It will include the work of women who mostly fell into a group which Matthews describes as "invisible women".[8] They were invisible, not only because they paid no tax on their earnings, but also because they did not declare themselves on census papers as being in paid employment. This practice was widespread in Brisbane, as well as regional Queensland towns, and was a tactic which made it difficult to estimate how many women were

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[6] K. Hargreaves, *Women at Work,* Ringwood, Penguin, 1982, pp.8-9.
[7] H. Prendergast as cited in K. Hargreaves p.8, ibid.
[8] J. J. Matthews, *Good and Mad Women,* North Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1984, p.162. Matthews' study into the role of landladies is one of the very few secondary sources which looks at the practice of women taking in boarders as a paid occupation in Australia.

involved. However it is a reasonable assumption that those involved constituted a substantial proportion of the female population.

The Depression of the 1930s had forced women into the workforce. Wherever it was possible, employers found it was more profitable to employ women, who could be paid at a lower rate, rather than men.[9] This meant that in some circumstances women became the breadwinners, although there were still many families where neither partner was employed. In these cases women often resorted to taking in boarders, or letting out rooms, although this was not on such a large scale as it was to be in the 1940s and 1950s, when the same procedure was followed due to the acute housing shortage." During the 1930s women also used home work skills to earn money wherever this was possible. Thus, women's contribution to the family economy in the post-war years and beyond was a continuum of women's role pre-World War Two.

The War Period

Young women in Australia pre 1939 had been taught during their childhood and adolescent years to expect that after they completed their school years, they would work at some type of paid work until the time came when they would marry and have a family. Instead they found themselves caught up in the realities of war, and during the first half of the 1940s they spent their lives in an atmosphere of war production and mass mobilisations."

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[9] J. Bremner, "In the Cause of Equality: Muriel Heagney and the Position of Women in the Depression", M. Bevege, et. al., *Worth **Her** Salt,* Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1982 p.288.

[10] W. Prest, "Housing, income and saving in war-time", Typescript, Department of Economics, University of Melbourne, 1952, p. 3.

[11] M. Oppenheimer, "Volunteers in Action: Voluntary Work in Australia 1939-1945, Ph.D. thesis, Macquarie University, 1997, **p.1.**

Although such places as the Railways Workshops in Rockhampton produced shell casings, no large war production works, which might have employed women at high rates of pay, were established because of the proximity of Central Queensland to the war zone. Nevertheless, women were employed in primary production such as the meatworks at higher rates of pay than for those working in domestic or retail jobs. Many enlisted in the armed forces and the Australian Women's Land Army. Women's pay in the armed services was not high in terms of actual money, but all their living costs were met, including clothing.

In Central Queensland, and elsewhere in the State, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, civilian women found employment in canneries at meatworks which pre-war had been the preserve of "men only". Few civilian women could drive, but those who did were sometimes given the job of driving delivery trucks. This occurred in Rockhampton when due to the manpower shortage, Port Curtis Cooperative Dairy Company was unable to fill a vacancy for a truck driver with a male driver, and the job was offered to a Miss Hoddinott. This woman had learned to drive a truck and tractor on her farm at Benaraby.[12] Because of the cessation of rail transport for cattle, women drovers were employed in Central Queensland, north-west of Rockhampton. **A** report in the Rockhampton *Morning* ***Bulletin*** stated that these "women and girls acted in every capacity from cooking upwards."[13] In hindsight it must be agreed with Patricia Ryan and Tim Rowse that although the availability of a range of work opportunities, which in some cases attracted higher

12 Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin,* 1 August, 1942, p.2..
13 Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin,* 13 April, 1943, p.2.

rates of pay, was a concrete advance for women, what was "important for *all* women was the potentially demystifying character of the new labour situation".[14]

The nature of many of the tasks performed by women during the war showed that the concept of male and female jobs was nothing more than a social construct to justify the notion of male supremacy, and define "woman's place" as being in the private domain. **As** maintained by Ryan and Rowse, a sense of being part of the war effort, of ably handling "men's work" and gaining economic independence, must have been exhilarating for women who had previously worked as domestics, before working in munitions. and other similar war production industries which attracted high wages.[15]

Women were not accorded heroic status because of the roles they played during the war, and their roles as "housewife, mother and lowly paid worker" were resumed after the cessation of hostilities. However it is understandable that at war's end women felt they wanted to return to what they saw as normality. Normality meant to most of them a return to the social mores pre 1939. As expressed by one ex-service woman:

> To a certain extent when the war was over there was a feeling that we wanted to forget a bit and we wanted to be women and have a family and stay home for a while...there was also the policy of "give the men back their jobs".[16]

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[14] P. Ryan and T. Rowse, "Women, Arbitration and the Family", Curthoys, **A.,** et.al., *Women at Work,* Canberra, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1975, **p.** 15.

[15] Ibid, **p.25.**

[16] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with B.S. at Birrong, N.S.W., on 10 July 1995 cited in *A Social History of the Australian Women's Army Service during the Second World War,* BA Hons. Thesis, CQU, 1996.

Nevertheless women did start to look to the future.[17] Ex-servicewomen were taking advantage of training offered by the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Training Scheme (CRTS), adult education classes were available to all, skills learned by women in wartime industry and voluntary work were put to use. Women with higher education standards began to enter the professions and the business world, either on their own behalf, or in the higher echelons of business institutions.

Middle class women, who pre-war had remained at home until such time as they married, had been forced into the workforce during wartime by manpower regulations. They too frequently sought training and/or employment in the post-war period. Travel found a place on the agenda of many women. Servicewomen who had experienced postings to other parts of Australia, and in some cases had been posted overseas, now wanted to see some of these places in peacetime. Whenever it was affordable parents and families of women, who had married United States servicemen and made new homes in the United States of America, visited them in their country of adoption in the 1950s and 1960s. E. Runcie-Pinney has stated that the demand for freedom to travel wherever they wanted

[17] **A.** Howard, *Where Do We Go from Here,* Sydney, Tarka Publishing, 1994, Howard cites from oral history interviews about postwar experiences of ex-servicewomen 1945-1948.

resulted in the yearly exodus of female travellers in the 1990s.[18]

These changes, occurring as they did quite rapidly during the post-war period, resulted in more strident demands from women for equal pay. In Queensland more work opportunities became available to women, but as will be demonstrated in Chapter Five, they were mainly restricted to women in Brisbane. In Australia the values of the upper stratum of society, home ownership, a car and better education for their children were adopted by all classes. The means to purchase new consumer items for the home became an important factor in the Queensland family economy, but various factors specific to regional Queensland, such as the lack of secondary industry in which women could be employed, placed constraints on purchasing power.

Poverty

Despite the higher rate of income engendered by the availability of employment there were still many cases of poverty throughout the whole of Australia. This was particularly true in Queensland due to the policies of decentralisation and reliance on primary industry. Additionally, Queensland was home to large numbers of Aborigines who mostly still lived in appalling conditions. Harris signifies that the word "poverty" indicates a state of being in need.[19] He points out that the word "need" may refer to several criteria including, for example, physical, spiritual or moral needs. He goes on to say that "need" is a relative concept, "implying a shortage compared to some standard", and that this criterion varies

[18] E. Runcie-Pinney, "War's End?...What Now?', ***Queensland*** *Review.* Vol. 3, No.1, April, 1996, p.85-86.
[19] C.P. Harris, op. cit., **p.** 1.

with the country concerned and the value judgements of the analyst.[20] Thus when looking at family economies in a specific time period, as this thesis does, it becomes necessary to consider the make-up of the family unit to discover the reasons why an insufficiency of income existed.

Many historians refer to the period reviewed by the thesis as a period of comparative prosperity. However, even when the main provider of the family income was in employment, it was very often necessary to work many hours of overtime, or to hold down two jobs, in order to meet the family commitments. From the point of view of the family economy these families may have become rich in material possessions, but frequently this came at the price of ill health of the provider later in life. Hudson records that notwithstanding the fact that in Australia "vigilant unions of employees" took action to maintain or improve material living for workers, many families relied on the state.[21] Harris lists the age of the head of the family leading to retirement, death or desertion by the husband, illness or invalidity of the main income earner, and incidence of large families where the wages of the head of the family were relatively low, as potential causes of poverty in what he calls the *"social security poverty group.*[22] The following table prepared by Harris shows that the proportion of the population identified as being members of this group was higher in Queensland than elsewhere in Australia, Table **3.1**

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[20] Ibid.
[21] W.J. Hudson, "1951-1972", F. Crowley, *A New History of Australia,* Richmond, Heinemann, 1974, p.543.
[22] C.P. Harris **op.** cit. p.2.

Table 3.1: Estimates of the size of the Social Security Poverty Group - i.e. households whose main. source of income was social security benefits - 1965/66.

Item	Area			
	Queensland	Rest of Australia	Brisbane	Rest of Queensland
No. of households	120 000	600 000	68 000	52 000
No. of persons	160 000	800 000	90 000	70 000
No. of persons as a proportion of area's population	9.6%	8.1%	11.6%	8.0%
Classification of persons according to type including spouse where applicable				
(a) aged	106 000	550 000	60 000	46 000
(b) invalid, sick etc..	27 000	120 000	13 000	14 000
(c) widows and deserted wives	11 000	60 000	7 000	4 000
(d) children	15 000	70 000	10 000	5 000

Source: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Department of Social Services, in C.P. Harris, **"A** survey of some aspects of poverty in Queensland and Brisbane, in *Australian Journal of Social Issues,* Vol.4, No.1, **p.5.**

Harris is of the opinion that for reasons unknown, possibly climatic conditions, old people, invalids, widows and deserted wives tended to congregate in Brisbane more heavily than they did elsewhere in Australia or Queensland. However he does not take into consideration the drift to the cities from the country engendered by the lack of work opportunities, especially for women, in regional Queensland. Another factor in this drift could be the lack of specialist medical facilities. Additionally freight charges on essential commodities added to the expense of living in country areas. A second significant feature alluded to by Harris is that relatively more aged people in Brisbane received the pension than in Australia as a whole, the proportion in 1965-1966 being 63% in Brisbane and 52 % in the remainder of Australia, This again seems to point to the effects of the lack of extensive manufacturing industry, resulting from the policy of

decentralisation and dependence on primary industry which forced working class families to be reliant on one income. Mabel who was interviewed in Gladstone affirmed that after the death of her husband in 1939 when she was left with three sons to raise that:

> One New Year's Eve a lady offered me a job. She had boarders and they all worked in the Cannery, that must have been before I went out there to work [19421. They all had greasy things from the machinery and she had this terrible big washing and I think I got 10/- ($1.00) a week to do this washing and wash out the hallway on Saturdays.[23]

Domestic employment was not the only low paid work for women trying to earn a little extra. Outwork for the textile and clothing industries became known for the outbreaks of "sweating evil" that took place from time to time. Lynzaat states that:

> it also had the wider connotation, expressed by the English definition of, 'grinding the faces of the poor'.[24]

Industrial legislation in Victoria in 1885 and 1903 institutionalised segregation of the female workforce partly due to the feeling that women were a labour force "whose presence was economically necessary but socially and morally regrettable".[25] **A** written questionnaire, albeit answered by the daughter of a woman employed as an outworker in Victoria, evidences the long hours worked for minimal pay. She described how her mother worked for approximately *70180* hours per week making ladies' blouses for which she was paid 2/6 (25c) per dozen. If the employer decided he was not satisfied with her work she was either

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[23] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with P.L. at Gladstone, **28** October, 1997.
[24] A.M. Lynzaat, "Respectability and the Outworker", J.McNolty & H. Radi (Eds.), *In **Pursuit** of Justice*, Marrickville, Hale & Iremonger, 1979, p.86.
[25] Ibid p.87.

not paid, had her pay reduced, or had to take the work back home and undo parts which were deemed unsatisfactory and redo them.[26]

As mentioned another group of badly disadvantaged Australians were the Aborigines. Their plight has been discussed in the above mentioned publications by Harris and Lynzaat. By the 1950s both state and federal governments had adopted policies of assimilation or integration of Aborigines into Australian life. In Queensland officially induced segregation encouraged apartheid in which the distressing circumstances of the Aboriginal population in this State were ignored. According to Patsy who was interviewed for the thesis in Gladstone, "the dark people" used to live where the Gladstone State High School now stands. She testified that:

> and there were some white people named Last. They lived there in shanties and we used to call it Shanty Town. When they found out that **Alumina** had started they shifted them and...the Council built little houses for them...Where Robinson's are, over there on the flat there was an island called Egg Island, and when they first came that's where they lived under the trees. They had a shanty there.[27]

Another group of people living in poverty were those who were either mentally or physically handicapped and either would not or could not work. Still another group which has been largely ignored were those families where the breadwinner spent his wages drinking or gambling. In these cases the woman was forced to take whatever work was available to keep her family fed and clothed. Known in the parlance of the time as the undeserving poor, there was no State Aid for these women. If there was no work available they were largely dependent on charity

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[26] P. Reeves, written questionnaire, dated 9 February, 1999.
[27] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with P.L. at Gladstone, 27 **April,** 1998.

organisations, and if all else failed they would be forced into prostitution. Gwen's replies to questions posed during an interview in Rockhampton starkly emphasised the situation of some of these women:

> Q. Who handled the money in your family?
> **A.** My husband.
> Q. Did he give you a housekeeping allowance?
> **A.** Nothing.
> Q. So you never saw any money?
> **A.** No. I never had a very good husband to tell you the truth. He used to get on the grog. I never had a very good life.
>
> (Here Gwen told how the family moved to another town)
>
> Q. In this place your children used to do the messages?
> **A.** Yes.
> Q. Can you tell me how this worked?
> **A.** Well, my husband used to give them the money to go and get whatever I wanted, and he wanted the change when they came back.
> Q. What about when you wanted to buy clothes?
> **A.** I never bought any clothes for myself to tell you the truth.[28]

Gwen also testified that home for this family was usually a tent, although they lived in a garage once, and twice in houses. During the 1940-1965 period poverty in Australia, as defined by Harris, was part of a continuity which has existed throughout the twentieth century.

Landladies

In Queensland. and throughout Australia, home ownership was the goal of most people. Loss of work, and consequently income, during the 1930s economic depression resulted in the inability of many to consummate that dream. Together, with the building restrictions imposed during the Second World War, the 1930s depression accounted for the severe housing shortage in the following decades. State housing, War Service Homes, building societies and home builders alleviated the situation, but this took time. During the war the situation in

[28] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with G.B. at Rockhampton, 22 February, 1998.

Gladstone was unique in that houses provided by the Meatworks for its employees had been moved into town and made available for purchase. However, during the 1960s, the huge influx of construction workers, followed by the employment of production workers at Queensland Alumina Ltd., created an acute housing shortage. Many people were forced to live in caravans under less than ideal conditions. As this type of accommodation was considered a temporary measure most caravan parks did not provide more than essential hygiene and amenities, and little or no provision was made for play areas for children. Overcrowding and lack of privacy in some instances made life very difficult for women.

In Brisbane housing developments initiated by the Queensland Housing Commission were situated in the outer suburbs. Initially little attention was paid to infrastructure and public transport. For the family this meant that, with a poor public transport system in operation, many men needed their own transport to travel to their work which was situated closer to the inner city areas. During an interview Les and Dot testified that they went to Mt. Gravatt in the 1950s. There was only one bus service and it operated in business hours only. Les had to walk to the old tram service at Mt. Gravatt Central to get transport to his work at Stone's Corner. Dot had to go to Holland Park to shop, taking her three small children with her, while the nearest doctors were at Holland Park and Greenslopes. After they bought a car in 1952, Dot and the children would take the

shopping to a pre-arranged place where Les would pick them up on his way home fi-om work.[29]

There were no supermarkets and women either had to walk long distances or find money for bus or train fares. These expenses constituted a drain on the family income which did not apply to such a degree in regional Queensland. Sharlene testified that in Rockhampton:

> We [Sharlene and her mother] had push bikes. We had two push bikes, one each, a basket in the front and a basket that we put on the back and we used to go and do our shopping.[30]

Distances to the shops, schools, health services and recreation facilities were relatively short, and as many interviewees testified you mostly walked or rode a bicycle. In Gladstone and Rockhampton, employers like the Meatworks which were situated on the outskirts of the town supplied buses for their employees. In this respect the housewife managing the family finances in Central Queensland had an advantage over women living in the outer suburbs of Brisbane.

In Central Queensland interviewees did not see the housing shortage as a serious problem although Mabel did mention that some women took in boarders at Gladstone.[31] Additionally, several newspaper articles reported on the local housing situation. In 1948 the Gladstone *Observer and Port Curtis Advertier*[32] commented on what it termed "the acute shortage" of homes in Gladstone for

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[29] Interview conducted by L.Denoon, with L. D. at Mt. Gravatt on **15,** March, 1993.
[30] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with S.J. at Rockhampton, **15** June, 1998.
[31] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with M.P. at Gladstone, **28** October, 1997.
[32] "Housing Shortage: Efforts to Overcome Problems" in *The Gladstone Observer and Port Curtis Advertiser, 2* October, 1948, **p.**1.

"seasonal workers at the Gladstone meatworks". Notwithstanding these reports, it was in Brisbane, where the housing shortage was most severely felt in Queensland. Finding self employment as landladies by women in Queensland during the period of the thesis was a continuum of the practice prior to 1940. For women, especially widows with a family to care for it was an established form of earning extra money.[33] **As** Kereen Reiger has pointed out, boarders, and sometimes relatives, thus contributed to the "domestic economy financially, or through care of children."[34]

Davidoff s exposition of the role of landladies in Britain reveals her opinion that this type of residential arrangement was particularly suitable to the needs of migrants."' This was also the case in Brisbane after World War Two when the influx of migrants into Australia created a big demand for accommodation for men who had preceded their wives to this country. Most European migrants sought employment in manufacturing industry, and they preferred to settle either in inner city areas or in the new outer suburbs rather than face the uncertainties of rural settlement. This followed the pattern of immigration in early migrations to Queensland as demonstrated by Frank Crowley.[36] It is borne out in an interview conducted in Bundaberg with Pastor J.B. who testified that:

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[33] J.J. Matthews, op.cit, p. 164.
[34] K. Reiger, *Family Economy,* Harmondsworth, McPhee Gribble. 1991, p.39.
[35] L. Davidoff, "The Separation of Home and Work? Landladies and Lodgers in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century England', S. Burman, et. al., *Fit Work for Women,* New York, St. Martin's Press Inc, 1979, p.65.
[36] F. Crowley, "1901-14", F. Crowley (Ed.), op. cit., p.300.

> [German migrants] came [to Bundaberg] around 1955-1956 and the reason was that they were short of cane cutters...We made it clear to the men that they were on very good wages and probably twice the normal height of wages while they were cutting cane but that would only continue until Christmas. After that I think every family, except one, and he was a gardener, moved on.[31]

The Pastor indicated that once the cane season was over there was very little other work available in Bundaberg. This view is confirmed in a report in the Bundaberg ***News*** *Mail* which stated that during discussion at a meeting of the Bundaberg District Employment Exchange Board, it was agreed that without hrther secondary and rural industry there was little room for the absorption of immigrants in the district.[38] This placed a further strain in the housing situation in Brisbane.

As Matthews has asserted, attempts to regulate the practice of taking in boarders by governments and local councils proved fruitless. Official inquiries regarding the occupants of any particular dwelling could easily elicit the response that an occupant was a cousin, or a visitor, and not a lodger. Only in larger establishments was it possible to establish that boarders or lodgers lived in the premises. Advertising for such accommodation was mostly by word of mouth, and the money paid by the lodger described as a contribution to the household expenses. Thus "one or two extras" would pass unnoticed. Matthews points out it was thus impossible to obtain conclusive data on the numbers of women who supplied board and services to non-family lodgers.[39] Despite the fact that her work refers to all Australian States, no evidence has been located which shows

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[37] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with P.B. at Bundaberg, on 12 May, 1998.

[38] Bundaberg ***News*** *Mail*, 16 *October*, 1947, *p.3*. Other discussion at this meeting resulted in agreement that there was a shortage of domestics and nurses.

that there was any appreciable difference in Queensland to her findings in other States.

In 1949 an opinion poll found that in Australian metropolitan areas an extra family, or extra individuals, resided in one house in four. In the homes of the lower socio-economic residents the ratio rose to one in three.[40] In addition to incoming migrants, increased technology in primary production brought about a lowered demand for labour resulting in a population drift to the cities. During an interview Roseanne, the proprietor and licensee of a hotel situated north of Gladstone throughout the post-war period, testified that women as well as men were involved in this population movement in regional Queensland.[41] This drift is implied in the Report of the Commissioner of the Queensland Housing Commission for the year ended 30th June 1952, in which it is stated that the number of houses completed between the financial year 1944-1945 and houses completed at 30 June, 1952 was proportionally less in Central Queensland, Table 3.2

Table 32: Queensland Housing Commission Homes completed 1944/1945 to 1952.

Brisbane	5 744
Bundaberg	83
Gladstone	66
Rockhampton	232

Source: Queensland Parliamentary Papers, 1952.

In regional Queensland, the practice of taking in boarders was more likely to have occurred because of the shortage of work in which women were traditionally

[39] J.J. Matthews, op. cit., p. 163.
[40] T. Dingle & S. O'Hanlon, "Modernism versus Domesticity", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. **8**, No. 109, p. 41.
[41] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with R.C. at Mt. Larcom on 10 August, 1998.

employed, such as the textile and clothing industries, and a lack of manufacturing industry. Census figures for 1954 show numbers of workers employed in the textile and clothing industries in Central Queensland well below those in Brisbane as shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Males and Females Employed in Textile and Clothing Industries

	Brisbane		Rockhampton		Gladstone		Bundaberg	
	Males - Females		Males - Females		Males - Females		Males - Females	
Textiles	124	224	3	8	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Clothing	348	952	58	100	6	4	30	36

Source: Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics, 1954 Census.

As mentioned, taking in boarders was the means by which women, particularly those who were widows with small children, could supplement their income. The numbers of widows in the three Central Queensland towns under review increased between the 1933 and 1954 Censuses. Increases were: Rockhampton, 1 386, Gladstone, 160, and Bundaberg, 626.[42] Taking in boarders would have enabled these women to stay at home and care for children. As shown in Table 3.4, the numbers of women either widowed or divorced in three Central Queensland towns were quite substantial. This leads to the assumption that many may have resorted to this means of increasing their income in regional Queensland

[42] **ABS** Census 1954.

Table 3.4 :Number of Single females in Central Queensland in proportion to total adult female population.

1954	Rockhampton	Gladstone	Bundaberg
Adult Female Population	17 874	2 558	8 173
Widows	1 827	196	799
Divorced	117	14	59
Over 15 years of age and never married	3 918	408	1 623

Source: Commonwealth Bureau of Statistics, 1954 Census.

Rejoining the Workf'orce

For some time after the cessation of hostilities, price fixing, by which prices were pegged for all goods and services on 14 April 1943,[43] remained in place. By 10 June 1961 the only items still under price control in Queensland, were bread, flour, kerosene, fresh cream, milk and petroleum products.[44] In the intervening period prices had become inflated and lower income families had begun to feel the pinch. **As** pointed out by Reiger increasing production of consumer products and labour saving devices led to increased consumerism, thus impacting the market economy on the home economy.[45] Market researchers realised that it was usually women who did the family shopping and usually had the deciding say on household purchases.[46] Thus women were targeted by advertisements.

This undoubtedly contributed to the numbers of women seeking paid work while others put the money they earned towards the purchase of a home for the family.

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[43] "Prices Pegged for all Goods and Services", *The Gladstone Observer & Port Curtis Advertiser,* 13 April, 1943.
[44] "Many Items Lifted from Price Control", Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin.* 9 June, 1961.
[45] K.Reiger, *Family Economy,* Ringwood, McPhee Gribble, 1991, p.45.
[46] G. Reekie, "Market Research and the Post-war Housewife" *Australian Feminist Studies,* Vol.14, Summer 1991, p. 18.

Women who had been employed during war time, but who had subsequently opted to stay at home as housewives and mothers, and who for various reasons did not want to work for wages, became self-employed. Such work as child minding, taking in washing or ironing, or baking and decorating cakes, performed in a woman's own home, was seen as being no different to the work she did for her own family. Women skilled as dressmakers, milliners, hair dressers and music teachers used these skills to run a small business from their own homes. Some became outworkers for the clothing and textile industries.[47] Very often, such work as general house cleaning, and/or baby sitting, in the homes of people who required these services were frequently perceived to be helping someone out, while the women themselves were accepted as part of the family. This was the case with Mabel when she worked as a baby sitter for a Gladstone family:

> When they played bridge they'd take me over to baby sit. I said I'm just the baby-sitter but he said, "No, Mrs. P. is our Australian nanny and she's one of the family"[48]

There were still others who contributed to the family income conjointly with their husbands by their labour in a family business. They were called on to perform a variety of tasks unrelated to women's traditional work. They are included here because, although they did not receive wages, their work complemented that of their husbands and helped to provide the family income. Many women who wanted to earn extra money, for whatever reason, resorted to these types of self-employment.

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[47] M.E.J. Pitt, "The Problem of the Servant Girl", K. Saunders & R. Evans (Eds.), ***Gender Relations in Australia,*** Marrickville, Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1992, p.251. Figures for women employed in textile and clothing industries in Central Queensland see page, 137

[48] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with M.P. at Gladstone, 28 October, 1997.

During the post-war period, the number of married women in the workforce in Queensland increased considerably as shown in Table 3.5.

Table 3.5: Women in the Workforce - Queensland

Sex	1947	1954	1961
Males	2 144 700	2 479 300	3 165 900
Females	717 200	845 400	1 059 200
Single or separated	607 400	*587* 200	653 700
Married	109 800	258 200	405 500

Source: Figures from the Department of Labour and National Service, *Women in the Workforce,* Trends in Employment July 1967, cited in S. Lees and K. Senyard..[49]

While the percentage of married women in the workforce in 1954 comprised 30.5%, females who had never married were in the majority at 57.0%. By 1966 the percentage of females never married had fallen to 42.4% while the percentage of married women had risen to 47.8%.[50] However, the above figures were calculated from the number of women who defined themselves as being in paid work on the census papers for the period shown in the table, and would amount to a considerably higher figure if the so-called "invisible women" were accounted for.

The struggle to meet the payments for their home, together with rising inflation throughout the period, supports the premise that married women did engage in paid work to help raise the finance needed to achieve the aim of home ownership and a reasonable standard of living. There was little male opposition to married

[49] Department of Labour and National Service, *Women in the Workforce: Trends in Employment,* July, 1967, cited in S. Lees & K. Senyard, *The 1950s: How Australia Became a Modern* Society, *and Everyone Got a House and a Car,* South Yarra, Hyland House, 1987, p.75.

[50] Dept. of Labour and National Service, *Women in the Workforce,* No.6, December 1968, cited in S. Lees and K. Senyard, p.26.

women seeking employment if the work was seen as women's work, particularly if it was performed within the home. Additionally many women accepted the current orthodoxy that "a woman's place was in the home". Thelma was a dressmaker who worked from her own home in Gladstone. She said that in the 1950s big full skirts came back into fashion and sequins and beading were used on evening wear:

> There was a lot of work. You didn't get much money for your work then. If I'd got paid for all that work I'd be a millionaire now. You put a lot of work into things and you never really got paid for all that.[51]

When asked if she remembers if married working class women just stayed home and looked after the family, or if they did other things to earn money if they could not get a paid job, Betty answered that many women did something to earn extra money:

> because if you had a dressmaker she always was the woman that stayed at home and a lot of hairdressers worked at home.[52]

She said she got a driving licence when the children started school:

> and then I became the school bus, them and all their friends and then [after school] the yard would be full, and then at five o'clock everyone would have to go home and it was me that took them.[53]

Among the crafts taught to women in organisations such as the Queensland Country Women's Association was the art of cake decorating. In the post-war period, when sugar once again became easily available, women used this skill to decorate cakes for weddings, birthdays and other celebrations. Taking in washing and ironing to do in their own homes was work frequently performed by women

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[51] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with T.E. at Gladstone, 27 March, **1998.**
[52] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with B.J. at Gladstone, 4 May, **1998.**
[53] Ibid.

who had small children at home. This was not a popular job, as the use of washing machines in the 1940s and 1950s was not widespread. This meant that laundry was still often done by boiling clothes in a copper and washing by hand. Betty testified that:

> When I had my fifth child in 1963 I got a washing machine. Up till then I had a big kerosene tin that I used to boil up the clothes in on the stove upstairs, and then I'd take them down stairs and they were washed by hand.[54]

Household work has often been described as a thankless task due mainly to its repetitive nature. An example of this is in the provision of clothes for the family which for many involved many hours of labour at a treadle sewing machine, or even in some cases a hand operated machine. The finished article was an item ranging from a shift like garment to a more elaborate one. The more elaborate it was of course the greater the number of hours spent in its production. The manufacture of these garments certainly involved a certain amount of skill, but could only produce limited results.

When electric sewing machines came on the market it was only a matter of time before women were able not only to make the basic garment, but were able to produce complex styling embroidery patterns. This also required skill, and not only did that skill enhance the garments they made, it was used to make items to improve the decor of their homes. If leisure time is to be defined as time for pleasure and creativity, it cannot be said that time women spent on this sort of domestic activity was work, in the sense that work is the antithesis of leisure time.

[54] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with B.J. at Gladstone, 4 May, 1998.

Additionally those who were really skilled were able to sell their work, thus converting their efforts from a purely domestic skill to a paid source of income.

Employment figures soared in the early 1950s. Not only were married women returning to the workforce as previously mentioned, Hudson has demonstrated that by the mid-1960s most workers earned over award payments from overtime work.[55] This accounted for 15 per cent of the average weekly earnings of adult males in the manufacturing industries. Furthermore 144 000 Australians held second jobs. This indicates that Queensland, especially regional Queensland, with a smaller manufacturing industry base, lagged behind the southern states economically. Without the extra income generated from the sources mentioned by Hudson, the extra income earned by housewives in the region would have been the only source of extra money. This would in part have accounted for more reluctance by families in regional Queensland to purchase new technologies for the home, especially as by 1950 inflation in Australia had caused the cost of living to rise by 12%.[56] The Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* reported on 8 March, 1947 a rise of 6d. (5 cents) in the price of tea, on April, 29, 1947 that there were hints of a further rise, and on 2 March, 1953 an article appeared concerning complaints from housewives to the Sydney *Sunday Sun* that packaging of domestic necessities, previously sold in bulk, had nearly doubled prices. As also demonstrated by Hudson the near defeat of the Federal Coalition government in 1961 was in response to inflation, rising unemployment, a drop in wool income in

[55] W.J. Hudson, op. cit., p.541.
[56] Newspaper report *Country Life* as cited *The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland*, Vol.14, No.6, June 1951, p.10.

1958-9 and drought, all of which would have had some bearing on household expenditure by regional populations.

In 1954 the Union of Australian Women, supported by the Queensland Housewives League, conducted a survey on the cost of living with 300 women.[57] The analysis of the survey showed that of the 300 women surveyed over 90% stated that it was more difficult to manage the household budget than it had been in 1953. Food, clothing, and gas and electricity were the greatest concerns. A high percentage of respondents said they were cutting down on entertainment and the purchase of household goods and adult clothing, while over 50% reported cutting down on meat consumption. Nearly 40% of married women indicated that they supplemented the family income, and over 80% believed that child endowment should be increased. It is assumed that the survey took place in Brisbane, but it is a reasonable assumption that a similar result in regional Queensland would have been obtained, despite some slight variations such as the inclusion of freight costs on transport of goods to regional Queensland. As an offset to this increased cost, fruit and vegetables might be cheaper when produced and sold locally.

In the immediate post-war period agriculture entered a boom period with high production figures, although for Queensland sugar producers there were problems with overseas markets. Since export prices were generally no higher than those for the home market, growers were subsidised by the government. During 1950-51 the price of wool soared, and according to Bolton the unexpected overseas

[51] MSS, Survey conducted by the Union of Australian Women, Held at the Fryer Library, UQFL 193, Box 8.

earnings from this commodity was an important factor in triggering the inflationary spiral between 1948 and 1951.[58] For the worker rising living costs depleted financial benefits gained by Trades Unions activities resulting in higher pay and the contribution to the family economy by married women. Additionally, the recession of 1961 resulted in higher unemployment and a drop in consumerism.

The Family Budget

For many workers and their families, especially those on the basic wage, the purchase of a house and a car, considered essential in the 1950s, made it difficult to make ends meet.[59] In the 1948 basic wage case the Queensland Industrial Court refused to make any increase in the basic wage over and above an increase to cover the rise in the cost of living on the grounds that there was no change in the federal basic wage. In the reconstruction years the only two occasions on which an increase in the basic wage of this nature were made were in 1946 and 1950.[60] Hazel testified that her husband had built their home prior to their marriage so there were no house or rent payments to be met, but it was still necessary to be careful not to overspend:

> People had to be careful during the 1940s and 1950s as people didn't have a lot of money. [My husband] was a very good knitter. He knitted all my babies clothes...he knitted his own socks and...my jumpers...and my little girls' jumpers.[61]

Hazel's statement held true elsewhere in Australia. In a survey conducted by Prest into housing, income and saving, in working class suburbs Melbourne in 1943, it

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[58] G.C. Bolton, "1939-51", F. Crowley (Ed.), op.cit., p.488.
[59] Ibid, **p.45.**
[60] D. Blackmur, "Arbitration, Legislation and Industrial Peace: Queensland in the Reconstruction Years", *Labour History*, No.63, 1992, p.119.
[61] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with H.W. at Gladstone, 16 **April,** 1998.

was obvious that although there was full employment in that year due to the war situation, there was a strong feeling of social insecurity. Reasons for saving as reported to Prest were many and varied, but all had their roots in insecurity about the future. Some saving was specific, as for example the regular saving by one housewife to provide money for a holiday each year. However, in the majority of cases it was for such things as a reserve fund in the case of seasonal workers who earned little in the off seasons, others saved so they had money to pay medical bills in the case of illness, while others planned to have a little income over the aged pension when they retired.[62] As noted by Prest, in some cases women were given a housekeeping allowance, in which case the man of the family would handle the savings and sometimes the women would not even know how much had accumulated. Sometimes though she would manage to save a little herself from her housekeeping allowance. In other instances the husband would take something out of the pay envelope for himself and the woman would then be responsible to make deposits in the saving account.[63]

To manage the household finances many housewives resorted to what can only be called "the bottle system". Betty testified that her husband would keep something back from the pay packet for himself and she had to manage on the balance:

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[62] W. Prest, *Housing, Income and Saving in War-time,* Melbourne, Dept. of economics, UM, 1952, p. 103. Unpublished typescript. Prest states that savings bank accounts were the favoured means through which savings were effected. Accumulated savings could be withdrawn easily if the need arose and there was no pressure to deposit a weekly sum in these accounts, as there would be to meet hire purchase agreements for purchases or to pay insurance premiums.

[63] Ibid, pp 102-109.

> I had money for the food and I had bottles and I would put money in one for the electricity and another for the payments for the appliances and so on and that's how I managed. Without those bottles I would possibly have been in a real muddle. You didn't touch that and then sometimes the account would come and there'd be a little bit left over or sometimes they would come and you'd have to put a bit extra in.[64]

Sandra said she too used the "bottle system".[65]

Interviews conducted for the thesis revealed that it was generally the case in relationships, where the man was paid wages by an employer, that he took the pay packet home to his wife. She was then responsible for ensuring that the accounts were paid and that the needs of the family were met. Discussion usually took place when a larger outlay of money, as for instance for the purchase of a refrigerator, needed to be made. However in marriages where the man was either a businessman or a professional, the woman was given an allowance, albeit usually a generous one, and the male partner attended to the paying of the accounts.

Oral evidence showed that in regional Queensland married women who were not in paid employment in industry or services, would willingly take on whatever work was available to them, to either help with the general household finances, or to provide extras for themselves or the family. Sandra wanted a new sewing machine:

> What I used to do was go round the housing commission area and go from door to door selling pyjamas and simple children's clothes, until I bought my new sewing electric sewing machine. Anything I wanted I did things like that.[66]

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[64] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with B. J. at Gladstone, 4 May, 1998.
[65] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with S.N. at Gladstone, 29 September, 1998.
[66] Ibid.

Being able to play a musical instrument was considered a social accomplishment aligned to middle class values, so for women who had the qualifications to do so, teaching music was often another way of earning extra money in the home. Vi D said when she married and came to Gladstone she had no piano:

> I did a little bit of playing round the town because there was nobody much who would do any. I had no piano because my mother **kept** the piano [when I married]. I managed to get one and took pupils and did what 1 could [to help the family finances].[67]

Before the introduction of a widow's pension Mabel, a widow with three young children, testified that after she left school she was employed doing domestic work in private homes:

> I never even got to scholarship grade. When **I** was sixteen my mother sent me to Mackay. **A** friend of hers was having a baby. **I** didn't get any wages, I just got my keep. [After her husband was killed in 19391 I did any work I could get. You couldn't get any other sort of work, only housework.[68]

To be employed as a domestic was considered to be so far down the social scale that during the interview Mabel was embarrassed to admit she did this type of work. This work was held in such low regard it was usually only accepted by women seeking employment if nothing else was available. Nevertheless in small towns such as Gladstone, in the time frame for the thesis, it was one of the few occupations open to women, especially those who had a poor education. After the accidental death of her husband at work in 1939, domestic work was again all that was available to Mabel, until work became available in the cannery at the Gladstone Meatworks. She was fortunate in as much as she had been able to purchase a home by paying a large deposit from the collection the Australian Meat

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[67] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with Vi.D. at Gladstone, 28 **April,** 1998
[68] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with M.P. at Gladstone, 28 October, 1997

Industry Employees Union had taken up for her.

Many women worked hard alongside their husbands in so-called "family businesses." This implies that they were jointly owned.[69] However, this was not usually the case, nor was it customary at that time for women working with their husbands in business to be paid a wage or salary. Although the work of these women comes into the category of unpaid labour, which will be considered in Chapter Five, it will be included for discussion here as the work they did complemented the work performed by the husband which supplied the family income. Despite the arrangement of work sharing they were not regarded as equal partners. Moreover they were still expected to care for the children and attend to all the household chores. Two interviewees, whose husbands were garage proprietors, at Maryborough and Rockhampton respectively, assisted in their businesses. Both provided a clear picture of male dominance as head of the family, ruling over not only the division of labour, but also the handling of the family finances. Sandra declared:

> I was just given the money for housekeeping . I could say we had a happy marriage...Facetiously my husband said to me, but I think he really meant it, "if you ever leave me you won't get half' and I said I would be entitled to half. He said "well really I have done the work, you helped and you're a good worker but I made the money". That was the attitude. I don't hold that against him.[70]

Jean testified that:

[69] Bundaberg and Gladstone retail firms, Rockhampton firms, Qld. Chamber of Manufactures Year Books, Vol. 2, 1948, & Vo1.9, 1955 Held at the CQU Collection, Rockhampton.
[70] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with S.N. at Gladstone, 29 September, 1998.

> I just got an allowance and that had to go round. I did the books, I served petrol, I put the oil and water in motors, washed the windscreens, I helped him in the workshop. One day we had to fit a spring in a car, a coil spring, and it wouldn't fit in so he had me on the end of a crowbar, a small crowbar!, and he said when I give you the word you press with all your weight. So I did and I went down on the concrete floor in all the grease, but it was just part *of* the job.[71]

Like others helping their husband in the business Sandra had to attend to all the household chores. She also had seven children to care for. She said she had bunk beds at the garage where she could put the younger children down with a bottle to have a sleep. Jean said she usually took her ironing and mending to the garage so she could get this done in any spare time she had, although she had not started work until after their youngest child turned five. Acceptance of the values of the 1950s, which endorsed male dominance, was condoned by the attitude of tacit agreement by Sandra and Jean to the decisions made by their husbands, and by the fact that they did so without rancour

Jean was born in 1924, and like others of her generation she was aware of the financial difficulties faced by people during the 1930s depression. After leaving school at the age of 14 it would not have been easy for her to manage on the wage of seven shillings and sixpence ($1.50) per week for her work as a sales assistant at a drapery store in Rockhampton. Sandra was an English migrant and arrived in Queensland with her parents and older brother in 1949.[72] Her father could not obtain work in his trade and there were financial difficulties. She married in 1954 at the age of 16 years. Like Jean she worked as a shop assistant for a short time prior to her marriage. Additionally, girls growing up at that time

[71] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with J.C. at Rockhampton, 22 April, 1998.

were taught that, as head of the household, their husbands would be responsible to provide for the family, and that it was the wife's job to support him in whatever way was necessary.

The testimony of these two women, suggests that they, and many more like them, were quite happy to help their husbands in their respective businesses under the existing conditions. Their needs were provided for, they were able to educate their children, and make some provision for their future in the belief that they were helping to make that future secure. Acquiescence to their "place" was determined by their acceptance of the social mores of the time. These two examples of the social processes of gender experience in the conservative climate of Central Queensland formed part of a pattern of a sociostructural relationship, which was based on the belief that it was inappropriate for the social standing of men to be encroached upon by such notions as women being equal.[73]

These two families owned their own small businesses and did not employ labour. As blue collar workers they had their origins in the working class. In 1949, when the Liberal Government under Sir Robert Menzies assumed federal power, a "demobilisation" of the working class began. This allowed social mobility and gave rise to "new patterns of division in the working class".[74] The establishment of small family businesses, such as those under discussion, was one. Such patterns also positioned women in the same social class as their husbands. In regional

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[72] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with S.N. at Gladstone, 29 September, 1998.
[73] I. Watson, "Class Memory: An Alternative Approach to Class Identity", *Labour History* No.67, November 1994, p. 27.
[14] R.S. Connell & T.H. Irving, *Class Structure in Australian History,* Melbourne, Longman Cheshire 1992, **pp.** 200-201.

Queensland the social class structure was a hierarchy in which the pastoralists occupied the ruling upper stratum. They quite often thought of themselves as the "creme de la creme". The raison d'etre for this status lay in the fact that they had large landholdings. In the towns business people and professionals followed in the next stratum, During the period of the thesis fragmentation of the working class allowed small business proprietors to expand and become accepted in this stratum. Furthermore throughout the 1950s the Protestant work ethic still found favour, and as stated by Lees and Senyard "manual work had a moral quality", and contributed to this acceptance.[75]

As stated women acquiesced to the ruling social mores, but as has been pointed out by feminist theoreticians, when considered from an historicist viewpoint women were in fact discriminated against by the patriarchal nature of society. However Victorian morality, particularly as it was seen by the evangelical movement, had posited women very firmly in a role in which they were related to home and family by the 1840s, and remained in place until World War One.[76] From that time until the women's liberation movement gained momentum in the late 1960s/1970s, its demise was gradual. Social mores, even during the mid twentieth century, were still governed by Victorian morality to some extent, with the result that most women themselves quite happily accepted the social status quo allotted to them.[77]

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[75] S. Lees & J. Senyard, op. cit. p.52.

[76] C. Hall, "The Early Formation of Victorian Domestic Ideology", S. Burman et.al., *Fit Work for Women*, New York, St. Martin's Press Inc., 1979, pp.15-32.

[77] The question of Victorian morality in the mid 20* century has been covered in depth in the author's **BA** Hons thesis, **"A** Social History of the Australian Women's Army Service during World War Two", CQU, Rockhampton, 1996.

In all three Central Queensland towns in which interviews were conducted the impact of their class position, their social position and their way of life, is evident in women's responses to questions during interviews. This is implicit in the remarks of Gwen's employer's children, that she was "just an orphan girl"; in the attitude of superiority of women working in the retail industry who "looked down on the women who worked at the meatworks", as testified by Betty; and the employers who did not offer the cleaning lady so much as "a glass of water" mentioned by Bonnie.[78] However, in line with the social mores of the time, women of all classes were discriminated against, not only by men but also by other women. Usually men made all the decisions in the public sphere, and if women's presence was included in group discussions on any matter, their opinion was rarely sought. They were there mainly to be asked: "will the ladies please bring a plate?" Nevertheless by joining the workforce, even in a limited fashion and for whatever reason, women contributed towards the later mobilisation which culminated in the second wave of feminism.

By the middle of the twentieth century social values in Central Queensland, as elsewhere in Queensland, were based on people's desires for their own family home and a car and consumer possessions. As stated by Dempsey:

> the values of the higher social strata serve[d] as the values of the whole community.[79]

These values, as asserted by Wild:

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[78] Interviews conducted G. Johansen with G.B., B.J., and B.S. op. cit.
[79] K. Dempsey, *Smalltown*, Melbourne, OUP, 1990, p.155.

> were conservatism, the upholding of alleged English customs, an emphasis on conspicuous consumption... the desire for a private education, and a concern with respectability and reputation.[80]

This statement echoed the political sentiments put forward by Menzies and the Liberal government of the 1950s, which offered a retention of loyalty to the Queen, a better life through material advancement, a middle class education, and the maintenance of social mores based on conservative values.

Looking back on the period from the 1990s, the assumption has been made that the period following World War Two was a time of comparative financial security for all. McCalman aptly describes this assumption as a regressive baby boomer legend:

> 'The suburbia' of the baby boomers sprang to life in the 1950s, sans history, sans class, sans chic. Picture it: it is a place of safety and predictability, and its tropes are 'backyards' (Melbourne), the beach (Sydney), Hill's hoists 'Mum's in the kitchen', 'Dad's in the toolshed', Grandma's still in the inner suburbs (where real life goes on). Mr. Menzies is in Canberra, the Reds have been chased out from under the beds, and all's well etc.[81]

She points out that this was of course a child's view

Although McCalman's remarks apply more to Brisbane and suburbia than regional Queensland' neither place, in the 1940-1965 period could be said to have had an affluent economy. This applied especially to working class families who did not have the support of a male breadwinner, or in cases where the main wage earner was unemployed. The housing shortage alone particularly in the post war period,

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[80] R. Wild cited K. Dempsey, ibid., p.155.

[81] J. McCalman "The Originality of Ordinary Lives", W.Hudson & G.Norton (Eds.), *Creating Australia: ChangingAustralian History*, St. Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1997, p.88.

with a lack of rented property available, demands for key money by landlords, high rents, and the desire by couples to own their own home, raised financial difficulties for many people.

Consumerism

Stringent measures introduced in April 1942 to cope with the war situation, which included pegging of wages and profits, control of interest rates by the Commonwealth Bank, prohibition of absenteeism, enforcement of the manpower regulations, and assumption of power by government to proclaim any area under military control, further controlled consumerism.[82] These restrictions did not come to a halt until the latter half of the 1940s, when shortages of commodities began to subside. Until this occurred women needed to be able to create and improvise.

In the 1950s and 1960s all constraints on spending had been lifted and most consumer items were again on shop shelves. Rigg[83] points out that by the latter half of the 1960s shopping centres had made their way into the suburbs in Australia. She also asserts that for 70 per cent of Australian housewives, who were not working, shopping was a social activity for women. However, in Central Queensland the first shopping centres did not make their appearance until the late 1960s/1970s. Kin Kora was the first to open in Gladstone in 1977, while Sugarland was the first in Bundaberg and opened its doors in 1978. In

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82 "National Control of Economic Life" *The Meat Industry Journal of Queensland,* Vol.5, No.61, **April** 1942, **p.15.**

83 J. Rigg, "The Loneliness of the Long-distance Housewife: Mrs. Consumer" J. Rigg (Ed.), *In her own right,* Melbourne, Thomas Nelson, 1969, **pp.** 135-150.

Rockhampton the first shopping centre to open its doors was the Northside Plaza in 1968.[84] These developments were established on a similar time scale in other regional Queensland centres. Until then women in these towns, like those in the suburbs of Brisbane, had to walk from shop to shop in the "main" street to do their shopping. (Illustration 3.1)

Illustration 3.1: Goondoon St., Gladstone, *c.* 1948.

Source: Courtesy Gladstone City Council

Geoffrey Bolton declared consumerism, buoyed by the high rate of employment, low inflation, mass marketing, and hire purchase agreements, was promoted as the means by which material happiness in the form of technological labour saving devices, and eventually entertainment for the whole family in the shape of television, could be attained.[85] John Carroll endorses Bolton's finding and goes further, adding that as a consequence in later years, the pursuit of wealth and easy living brought about a relinquishment of higher spiritual and social ideals.[86] In towns in regional Queensland a more cautious approach was taken by women to

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[84] These dates were confirmed by the shopping centre managements.

[85] G. Bolton, cited in R. Evans and Kay Sauners, **op.** cit. **p.** 191

[86] J. Carroll, "The Australian way of life" in J. Carroll, (Ed.), *Intruders in the bush*, (2nd edition), Melbourne, OUP, 1992, **p.** 236.

consumerism. One oral history interviewee declared she did whatever work she could to earn extra money to purchase the new home technology she wanted,[87] while another commented that the only thing she ever purchased on time payment was a vacuum cleaner.[88]

Women were led to believe by advertisers, that the growing provision of technology for the home would result in the saving of labour. However, given the financial situation of most families in country towns (as discussed earlier in the chapter), their more conservative social attitudes to technology, and the concept of a "woman's place", such commodities as electric stoves and white goods, were slow to make their way into homes in regional Queensland. Most interviewees spoke of still using coppers to boil the washing on wash days in the 1950s and 1960s. Edna testified that:

> I had my family in the 1950s...I had a copper but a lot of the neighbours only had kcroscnc tins...My brother and I bought my mother a washing machine because my mother had to go to work for various reasons and 1 was the one who got to do the washing with the bowl on top of the gas stove that my father would very condescendingly lift over to the sink for me to wash on the scrub board.[89]

Flo said she and her husband both worked in the early years .of their marriage and they paid for their house very quickly. She gave up paid work after the birth of her children, and like most other women in regional Queensland who relied on the one pay envelope each week, the purchase of consumer products came slowly. She said she was given a mix master when her son was born, but it was another three years before she was able to have a washing machine. When her husband died after several years of marriage she had to manage on a small part pension she

[87] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with S.N. at Gladstone, 29 September, 1998.
[88] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with H.W. at Gladstone, 16 **April,** 1998.
[89] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with E.S. at Bundaberg, 11 May, 1998.

received and part time employment in the bar at the Bowls Club. She said she was fortunate that she could sew and was able to make all her own and her children's clothes.[90]

Women in Bundaberg and Rockhampton told similar stories. In Rockhampton B.S. said she had five children before she got her first washing machine. However she did get an electric stove:

> I had a wood stove when I first got married and I got a new electric stove in 1955 and I wouldn't have got that except that the wood stove started to get holes in the top and the wood was getting a bit difficult to get.[91]

Jean, another Rockhampton interviewee, remarked that she did not get a refrigerator until two years after she was married, and did not get her first washing machine until her first son was out of nappies as she preferred to boil them. Additionally she did not get a Hills Hoist until they moved into their own home in 1963.[92]

It is not to be thought however, that Central Queensland women were untouched by consumerism as it applied to dress. Many women, if they could afford it, read the *Women's Weekly* or a similar women's magazine. If they did not, there were always advertisements for the latest fashions in women's clothing in the Brisbane and local newspapers. As Jennifer Craik[93] states, the purchase of clothing is sometimes determined by "pragmatic criteria and situations". This is to say that it has to be appropriate for the purpose for which it will be worn, such as sport,

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[90] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with H.W. and F.S at Gladstone 16 April, 1998.
[91] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with B.S. Rockhampton 15 June, 1998.
[92] Interview conducted by G. Johansen with J.C. Rockhampton, 22 April, 1998.
[93] J. Craik, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion,* London, Routledge, 1994, p.10.

housework, or doing the grocery shopping. On the other hand suitable clothing for such occasions as a wedding, a job interview or a dinner party entails specific calculations as to the suitability of clothes for the occasion. Estimations of what was suitable were generally based on the dictates of fashion. However, the latest changes in styles for each occasion in Brisbane, and in other parts of Australia and overseas, often took some time to be accepted in regional Queensland and other regional centres.[94]

As mentioned previously women were seen by market researchers and advertisers to do most of the buying for the family. With the advent of television in the latter part of the period under review it found a place in most homes. People who purchased a TV set before their neighbours often invited them into their home to watch programmes which might be of mutual interest. The use of this genre by advertisers involved intertextuality between the subject of the television programme, and the subject of the advertisement, extensively. As Rigg has stated:

> The preoccupation of Australian women's programmes and Magazines...Fashion, Beauty, The Home, Child Care, Gardening, Cookery and Interviews with television and film personalities...'Romance' in fiction and non-fiction forms, a standby in the late '40s and throughout the '50s has given way to fiction and non-fiction articles dealing with 'problems in personal relationships'. The same area, seen now in the light of new anxieties.[95]

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[94] An incident which occurred in **1958** was related to the author by an English immigrant. One day she saw a little woman dismount from a large cattle truck outside the hospital. She commented that in Britain by that time, hats and gloves had mostly been discarded, so she was highly amused to see this woman emerge from this large dirty truck complete with hat, gloves, nylon stockings and handbag.

[95] J. Rigg, op. cit. p.147.

Interviews on the above topics would be interspersed with advertisements for commodities related to the subject of the interviews, thus becoming the means by which the marketing techniques impinged on the domestic economy.

During the 1950s consumerism increased rapidly. Reiger has pointed out that high rates of marriage together with what has become known as the "baby boomer" period increased the number of family units from 3.9 million in 1947 to 3.2 million in 1966.[96] Expectations fostered by advertising dictated consumer spending, with cars and domestic appliances heading the list of commodities purchased. Reiger goes on to assert that by 1960 nine tenths of Australian householders owned refrigerators, 60 per cent owned washing machines, and between 1956 when television was first available in Australia and 1960, it was to be found in 50 per cent of homes in this country, It was in Melbourne that the first television programmes were telecast in time for the 1956 Olympic games held in that city.

It is reasonable to make the assumption that like working class people in Brisbane, people in the lower socio-economic group in Central Queensland, who had grown up during the Depression years and had known the hardships of the war years, were uncertain about the soundness of the economy in the 1950s. **As** Peel has pointed out, for working class people the 1950s was a period for the struggle for something better in life and for security:

> in a world you knew could not be trusted, **a** world where 'people like us' would never have it easy.[97]

[96] K. Reiger, **op** cit., p.47.
[97] M. Peel, op. cit., **p.** 149.

Nevertheless the relative prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s made it possible for the family to exist on the single income of the male breadwinner until the children reached school leaving age. This provided women with the choice of remaining at home to devote their time to the care of their families if they so desired. This was important for them as there were no facilities such as creches or day nurseries in which children could be cared for, either in the city or in regional Queensland during this period. Interviewees in Central Queensland spoke with pride of their children and grandchildren.

Effects of household technology

The 1940s to 1960s could be described as a transitional period of rapid change in the development of technology in the twentieth century. The first forty years of the century saw the development of technologies such as the connection of electricity, the introduction of septic systems, and the connection of running water supplies which had a marked effect on housework and eliminated some of the drudgery associated with it. With the outbreak of World War Two manufacturing energy was devoted to war time industries, and it was not until the cessation of hostilities that industries were converted to the production of consumer goods. After 1945 new items for use within the home, and for the maintenance of the garden proliferated. Many, as stated by Steve Bedwell became "household icons". Small appliances such as the Mixmaster (1948), and the Hoover upright vacuum cleaner, "it beats, as it sweeps, as it cleans" (1956),[98] came on to the market and introduced new words to the Australian language. Notwithstanding the use of technology in the home, male autocracy very often still maintained that there was

[98] S. Bedwell, *Suburban Icons: A Celebration of the Every Day,* Sydney, ABC, 1992, pp.26-39.

no place for married women in the workplace. Rex Pilbeam, long standing mayor of Rockhampton, refused the employment of married women by the City Council. His one exception was the employment of a qualified librarian when the new Municipal Library was opened in 1952.

After years of putting up with the "ice-man" walking over the freshly washed and polished floor in the kitchen in his dirty boots to deposit a new block of ice in the ice-box, dripping water over the floor in the process, housewives gave their new refrigerators pride of place in their kitchens. Wherever electricity was available in regional Queensland housewives purchased these items for their homes. In smaller settlements even ice-boxes had no place in the kitchen as ice was unavailable. Housewives in these areas had to make do with water cooled Coolgardie safes. Without refrigeration, especially during the summer months, there was extra work for the housewife in rural areas of regional Queensland as she was often the one who was responsible for the work of curing and salting meat so that it would remain sweet.

Broome argues that the cleaning and repair of the new household technology negated any time saved in hours of work through its use.[99] The cleaning of course had to be done, but the amount of time this took depended on the device. However there is no comparison between the efficiency of the copper and wash tubs, compared to washing machines in the work time needed to complete the

[99] D. Broome, "Out of the Frying Pan: Technological Change and Domestic Work", *Proceedings of the Women and Technological Change Conference*, Melbourne, UNAA, August 1982, p.99.

family wash, and the cleaning of the machine was neither an arduous nor time consuming task. Certainly the cleaning of the gas or electric stove also took time, but then so did the cleaning of the wood fired stoves in Central Queensland which were in common use at this period in time. Additionally, the fire had to be lit each morning. This required the gathering of kindling, and chopping and storing firewood. The areas in which it could be said women's unpaid work hours increased were in giving more time to the needs of the family. Children were encouraged to join sporting organisations, and mothers spent a great deal of time ferrying them backwards and forwards to take part in these activities.

It was realised in the immediate post-war period that the changes that occurred during the war were not going to go away. Nevertheless with the demystifying of men's work, and the awareness that the notion of male and female work was a myth designed to justify male superiority, women had gained confidence in their abilities."' Although advances in the public sphere were slow to appear in the immediate post-war period, women's opinions began to be more widely accepted in the public sphere of decision making, and frequently they initiated the decision making process. Notwithstanding this many preferred to remain as housewives and mothers. Additionally, in many cases at that time and even now in the 1990s, as has been pointed out by Mark Peel, "many women fashioned their adult lives and identities outside the field of paid work".[101]

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[100] P. Ryan and T. Rowse, op. cit., p. 15.

[101] M.Peel, "Making a place: Women in the 'Workers' City", *Australian Historical Studies,* Vol.26, No. 102, April, 1994, p.29.

This chapter has looked at aspects of the family economy during the 1940-1965 period in some detail in the belief that women's social roles were frequently dependent on the economic standing of the household. It has also pointed to ways in which the market economy impinged on the domestic economy through consumerism. Even though wages were boosted as men worked overtime or held down two jobs, the benefit of this extra income was often eroded by inflation. Thus women, who had opted to return in the home as housewife and mother, at the end of the war, frequently found it necessary to get paid work of some kind to balance the family budget. The chapter has examined the question of home ownership and its impact on the social structure. Many women in Brisbane, particularly those who were married, subscribed to the notion of a home in the suburbs and a "Holden", a concept related to middle class values in the 1950s. In rural Queensland this notion did not constitute a status difference, as due to the nature of the primary economy class mobility was not so pronounced as in the Brisbane metropolitan area.