Abstract

Life in late-nineteenth century Canada was characterized by dramatic social and economic change. Fears of American annexation, combined with growing interest in the agricultural potential of the Prairies, contributed to the colonization, settlement, and eventual urbanization and industrialization of the Canadian West. In 1871, the first numbered treaties were signed and the Dominion Lands Act was passed, signalling the resettlement of Indigenous communities onto isolated reserves in Manitoba and the rapid westward migration of European settlers, eager to capitalize on the Canadian government’s promises of free land and good jobs. Such rapid transformations were, of course, accompanied by what the governing middle class would perceive as social discord: the mobilization of the working class, the emergence of women in the public sphere, and Indigenous resistance. While many focused their efforts on the segregation, regulation, and reform of these diverse communities, others identified and exploited opportunities in Canada’s new urban contexts, thus shaping the social and geographic patterns of development therein. This study focuses on the relationship between sex work and urban development in the city of Winnipeg between 1873 and 1912.

By examining a variety of sources, including the final report and minutes of evidence from the Royal Commission on Charges of Social Vice, police court record books, newspapers, and published first-hand accounts, this study argues that Winnipeg’s early sex economy and the spaces it occupied were actively produced and continually reshaped by the city’s sex workers, business interests, and civic elite. Each of these groups recognized that the tacit acceptance of certain types of sex work (and sex workers), combined with the continuous deployment of regulatory middle-class discourses, would play a significant role in the demographic and physical growth of the city, while generating incredible profits for all involved parties. It is thus my contention that Winnipeg’s socio-spatial development depended on this interplay of competing—even contradictory—social, economic, and political interests. Sex workers—and the other historical actors with whom they interacted— influenced the social and geographic patterns of urban development in Winnipeg, transforming it from a fur trade outpost to colonial metropolis over its first forty years.
Preface

This thesis is an original intellectual product of the author, A.C. Wilkinson.
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This work is a reflection of my fascination and frustration with the place I call home. It is dedicated to Winnipeg, to the Anishinaabe and Métis Nations on whose territories it stands, and to all those striving to make it a more just and equitable place to live.
Introduction

The colonization and settlement of the Canadian West in the late-nineteenth century signalled a dramatic transformation in the organization and regulation of social and economic life on the Prairies. The decline of the fur trade, combined with the rapid industrialization of the region’s manufacturing and agricultural sectors, was accompanied by the movement of rural and European migrants into developing urban centers, and the often violent resettlement of Indigenous communities onto reserves. Implicated in these changes were the expansion and mobilization of the working class, the appearance of women in the public sphere, and acts of organized Indigenous resistance, which awoke a range of anxieties among a growing middle class and inspired various attempts to segregate, regulate, and reform increasingly diverse populations of people. At the same time, men and women from a range of social, economic, and cultural positions began to identify and exploit social and economic opportunities in these industrializing urban landscapes within which they found themselves. The social and physical organization of cities in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Western Canada can be understood as an expression of these often-contradictory interests. It is on the urban development of one of these cities—Winnipeg—that this study focuses.

Like other colonial cities, Winnipeg’s development depended on the displacement of Indigenous people from its public spaces, the exploitation of workers in its burgeoning industries, and the eventual settlement of its governing middle class. It was in this particular context that the social and geographic patterns of prostitution in Winnipeg were dramatically altered from the time of its official incorporation in 1873 until the closure of its last red-light district in 1912. While these districts were not officially sanctioned, they
were invariably established under the supervision of municipal officials and members of Winnipeg’s police department, and enmeshed in the city’s formal and informal economic networks. Pressure from reform-minded groups culminated in a series of vice commissions around 1910, after which municipal officials throughout Canada began to call for stricter law enforcement, bringing about the official dissolution of many red-light districts, including Winnipeg’s Point Douglas district.

Located at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, Winnipeg played a prominent role in the fur trade for 150 years before its incorporation as a city (see Appendix A: Map 1, Sketch of the City of Winnipeg, 1874). Its small population was predominantly Métis, much like the rest of the Red River Colony, and later, the province of Manitoba. In fact, when Manitoba joined Confederation as a province in 1870, roughly half of its 12,000 residents were French-speaking Métis; another third was English-speaking Métis. Less than one-sixth of Manitoba’s population was European in origin. These demographic realities can be attributed to unions between European traders and Indigenous women, known as mariages à la façon du pays, out of which Métis families were established and important economic networks forged throughout eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British North America. By the late-nineteenth century, these unions were becoming a source of increasing anxiety for the Canadian government. Fearing continued Indigenous resistance against westward expansion following the events at Red River in 1869, the Canadian government stopped recognizing mariages à la façon du pays and began deploying racist propaganda to discourage marriage between

1 A series of provincial legislative sessions held in the fall of 1873 culminated in the Act of Incorporation, which was given royal assent on 8 November. The Act officially merged a section of the Red River Colony with a fur trade post (also referred to as The Forks). See Alan Artibise, Winnipeg: An Illustrated History (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1977), 20.
Indigenous women and white men. Indigenous women were represented as “dark, sinister, and dangerous” in order to justify their spatial and social isolation in the West.

Around the same time, the Canadian government began negotiating what would come to be known as Treaties One and Two with First Nations in southern Manitoba. Following the terms of the treaties, thousands of First Nations people were relocated on isolated reserves, while the southern parts of the province were opened up to white settlement. These acts of dispossession, coupled with the implementation of an archaic pass system and the disappearance of buffalo, moose, and caribou populations, were to have disastrous effects on both First Nations and Métis people. Unable to maintain traditional economic activities, like hunting, trapping, and trading, and excluded from participation in the new manufacturing and agricultural sectors, Indigenous people began experiencing hunger, sickness, and death in increasing numbers. While some families chose to move west, others stayed in Winnipeg, settling in an area known as the Hudson’s Bay Flats (see Appendix B: Map 2, Location and Identity of Buildings in the Village of Winnipeg, 1872). It was in this context of extreme social and economic marginalization that some Indigenous women turned to prostitution for survival, occupying the most vulnerable positions in the city’s early sex economy.

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5 Gerald Friesen, 44.
It was through these processes of segregation and dispossession that the region was quickly and dramatically re-imagined as a white settler society.\(^7\) While Indigenous populations struggled to adapt to the new colonial order, the Canadian government passed the Dominion Lands Act in 1871, opening up traditional Indigenous territories for agricultural development. White European men were offered free homesteads of 160 acres—a strong inducement for settling the Canadian West—and by 1886, the population of Manitoba had grown to 109,000, only seven percent of which remained Indigenous.\(^8\)

The “rough-hewn metropolis” of Winnipeg offered its own set of incentives for settlement.\(^9\) The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885, coupled with the promotional activities of the Board of Trade and the Winnipeg Development and Industrial Bureau, encouraged migration from Europe and other parts of Canada and made way for other industrial and commercial development. By 1886, its population had grown to 20,000.\(^10\) Manufacturers were promised “cheap power, cheap sites, low taxation, a plentiful supply of raw materials, best of labor conditions, unexcelled railroad facilities and the support of the community.”\(^11\) Flour mills, breweries, saddlaries, slaughterhouses, meat-packing plants, machine shops, concrete companies, saw and grist mills, an iron works, and factories for the manufacture of garments, cigars, carriages, farm implements, and electrical appliances all went up in this period. Economic programs designed to create employment opportunities in transport, industry, commerce, and

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\(^7\) White settler societies are established by Europeans on non-European soil, and require the “dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations by conquering Europeans.” See Sherene H. Razack, “When Place Becomes Race,” in Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society, ed. Sherene H. Razack (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002), 1.

\(^8\) Gerald Friesen, 202.

\(^9\) Ibid., 205.

\(^10\) Ibid., 205.

construction produced a “gendered labour market and economy,” ensuring uneven patterns of migration and an eventual surplus of single men throughout Winnipeg’s early years.\textsuperscript{12} By 1911, the year of the federal census, men outnumbered women by about 10,000 in a city of 136,000.\textsuperscript{13}

Limited opportunities for immigrant women in this expanding labour market, often combined with gendered patterns of migration, and the growth of corresponding leisure cultures, motivated many women from a range of ethnic and class backgrounds to seek remuneration as brothel keepers and “inmates” in Winnipeg’s sex trade.\textsuperscript{14} This group of women settled Winnipeg’s first unofficial red-light district around Colony Creek in the early 1880s, living and working there until their relocation to Thomas Street in the mid 1880s. With two kilometers separating them from other commercial and residential neighbourhoods, they were allowed to carry out their business with virtual impunity until the election of Mayor Thomas Sharpe in 1904, and the subsequent crackdown on all forms of “social vice” in the city. While Sharpe succeeded in closing the city’s red-light district, he failed to eliminate the city’s sex trade. During this period of so-called “scatteration,” women continued to work throughout the city—on its streets, and in its

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[]12 In 1891, there were 1095 men for every 1000 women. In 1901, there were 1075; in 1906, 1271; and in 1911, 1207. See Alan Artibise, \textit{An Illustrated History}, 199; Rhonda Hinther, “The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: the Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909-1912,” originally published in \textit{Manitoba History} 41 (2001), republished online by the Manitoba Historical Society (October 2012), paragraph 5.
\item[]13 By 1911, there were over 400 manufacturing plants in Winnipeg, employing close to 12,000 workers, paying seven and a half million dollars in annual wages and salaries, and generating fifty million dollars of product. Developments in distribution and manufacturing facilitated the emergence of Winnipeg’s commercial sector. Twenty-six companies dealing in grain operated out of the Grain Exchange Building in 1901, and by 1911, twenty-five buildings were used for banking and stock broking. A large number of real-estate agencies, retail stores, and buildings for wholesale trade also went up in this period. These kinds of enterprises employed 15,000 people as managers, clerks, accountants, typists, and secretaries, and office boys by 1912. See Jim Blanchard, 42.
\item[]14 “Inmates” is a historical term used to differentiate prostitutes working in brothels from street prostitutes. It was used in newspapers and printed reports in an effort to keep the issue of prostitution hidden from public view. See James H. Gray, \textit{Red-light on the Prairies} (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971), 14.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
hotels, apartments, and houses. Their growing visibility challenged city police and other officials who, in consultation with the city’s established brothel keepers, eventually decided to return to their previous policy of segregation. In 1909, an unofficial red-light district opened in Point Douglas—a poor, and increasingly racialized neighbourhood in the city’s North End (see Appendix C: Map 3, Point Douglas and its surroundings, 1911). The vast majority of Winnipeg residents supported these efforts to once again segregate and regulate prostitution—so long as it was not taking place in their own neighbourhoods. Once established in Point Douglas, brothel keepers and inmates rebuilt their strong networks with one another, forged important business partnerships, and resisted criminalization—just as they had on Thomas Street and in Colony Creek.

The presence of sex workers in Point Douglas attracted the attention of men and women from around Winnipeg. Residents from nearby streets reported seeing “hundreds of curiosity seekers and sightseers” walking up and down Rachel and Macfarlane Streets every Sunday.\(^\text{15}\) The district also drew the attention of Reverend John Shearer, the Secretary of the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada, during the International American Purity Federation’s tour of western Canada in November 1910. Later that month, in an interview with reporters from the \textit{Toronto Globe}, Shearer posited that Winnipeg had “the rottenest conditions in all of Canada” with respect to prostitution.\(^\text{16}\) Shearer revealed that there were 53 “houses of ill-fame” selling sex and liquor under the

\(^{15}\) Manitoba Legislative Library (hereafter MLL), Thornton Simmons, in Royal Commission on Charges of Social Vice in Winnipeg (Winnipeg, 1910), Minutes of Evidence, Book 5, 30; John Battershill, in Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Book 5, 14; A.E. Loader, in Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Book 5, 34; John Shearer, in Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Book 6, 526; \textit{Manitoba Free Press}, 28 September 1909.

\(^{16}\) MLL, \textit{Toronto Globe} quoted in Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Book 6, 519. During the tour, the Federation preached their gospel of better social and moral conditions, while investigating social vice, the white slave trade, legislation, and law enforcement. See Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Book 6, 520.
watchful eye of the city police’s Morality Office, which made no attempt to suppress their business beyond the routine administration of fines. As a result of these accusations, it was determined that an investigation into these conditions be conducted. At the end of 1910, the Municipal Council of the City of Winnipeg requested that the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council “appoint a Commission to investigate fully into all the charges made by the said J.G. Shearer and others.” Several months after the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission on Charges of Social Vice, police carried raids out in the district, leading to its official closure in April 1912.

The history of Winnipeg’s early sex economy, from the Hudson’s Bay Flats to the Point Douglas district, must be understood in the context of the city’s broader social, economic, political and geographic developments. As other historians have ably demonstrated, these factors significantly influenced the diverse groups of women involved in sex work, as well as the urban spaces they occupied. Winnipeg’s red-light districts were actively produced and continually reshaped by several different sets of actors who were responding to—and attempting to capitalize on—Winnipeg’s breakneck transformation from fur trade outpost to colonial metropolis. Indeed, the active participation and interactions of sex workers, business owners, police, and police magistrates in the development of the city’s red-light districts represented cogent responses to the specific historical context in which they all found themselves. It is my contention that these districts emerged and expanded as a result of their often-competing—even contradictory—economic, political, and social interests. Winnipeg’s

17 MLL, Report of the Royal Commission on Charges of Social Vice (Winnipeg, 1911), 2.
18 Ibid.
19 Winnipeg’s population growth exceeded almost all other Canadian cities between 1871 an 1921. 84% of this growth can be attributed to immigration. See Alan Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1975), 131 and 137.
early urban development depended simultaneously on the tacit and ongoing acceptance of certain types of sex work and on the deployment of middle-class discourses of respectability and decency. Business owners, civic officials, and women themselves recognized the important role prostitution and other informal economies played in the demographic and physical growth of the city and understood the necessity of the regulatory discourses and actions that developed in response to them.20 By producing and reshaping the city’s red-light districts, Winnipeg’s sex workers—and the other historical actors with whom they interacted— influenced the social and geographic patterns of urban development in boomtown, the effects of which can still be felt one hundred years later. Prostitution in Winnipeg was not—as some have argued—an effect of urban development; instead, it was constitutive of it.

This argument represents an important departure in the historiography of prostitution in the Canadian West. Most histories of early Winnipeg focus either exclusively on the city’s commercial elite or the women who worked in Winnipeg’s infamous sex districts. The role these women played in shaping the social and geographic patterns of Winnipeg’s early development remains unexplored. By approaching the study of sex and the city from this perspective, I can demonstrate how spaces of sex work were shaped not by one regulatory or coercive force, but rather by a range of often-competing material interests, including those of the women who worked there, their clientele, their business connections, the city police, and other civic authorities.

In his influential study of Winnipeg, A Social History of Urban Growth, Alan Artibise argues that the city’s rapid growth over its first forty years was propelled by the

20 Here, discourse is understood as “organized systems of knowledge that make possible what can be spoken about, and how one can speak about it.” See Mary Louise Adams, The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 6.
distinctly laissez-faire attitudes of the city’s business and political elite who put growth-producing programs before community life.  

He suggests that this expansionist ethos was reflected in the way the city dealt with the segregation and regulation of prostitution in Point Douglas. While Artibise’s work highlights how the city prioritized property interests and population growth over principals, his analysis fails to place women anywhere in this part of the city’s history. Rather, Artibise places prostitution in the context of leadership conflicts, civic politics, and moral reform—leaving out the motivations and experiences of sex workers, or the impact sex work had on urban life.

Joy Cooper approaches her study of prostitution in Winnipeg in the same way. In her essay, “Red-lights in Winnipeg,” Cooper argues that debates around prostitution influenced municipal politics after 1900, ultimately empowering moral reformers to claim positions of leadership in Winnipeg. While her study offers some interesting insights into the role of the moral reform movement in Winnipeg, it does not address its underlying ideologies or acknowledge how its aims often and unsuccessfully butted up against the interests of other historical actors operating outside City Hall, including business owners, brothel clientele, and sex workers themselves. Cooper consistently characterizes these women as passive victims and fails to explore the range of positions they occupied. As Leslie Erickson attests, “the prairie prostitute remains one of the most elusive historical characters—the ultimate subaltern subject.”

Women involved in sex work were excluded from Winnipeg’s political and economic centers of power. Still, they

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continued to influence the social and spatial development from the margins, making them both important and interesting subjects of historical study.

The women of Winnipeg’s early sex districts are the focus of two studies by Rhonda Hinther and Christine Macfarlane, respectively. These historians do an excellent job describing the lived experiences of prostitutes within the city’s segregated sex districts. In her essay, “The Oldest Profession in Winnipeg: The Culture of Prostitution in the Point Douglas Segregated District, 1909-1912,” Hinther suggests Canadian historians have focused too much attention on the relationship between prostitution and moral reform. Instead, she examines the strategies women employed to shape and control their own lives in Winnipeg’s Point Douglas district. The limitation with this approach is that it ignores the range of other historical interests and motivations keeping Winnipeg’s sex districts in business, thus minimizing the importance of often-fraught interactions that helped shape these spaces and—by extension—the city itself.

Macfarlane takes up many of the same issues in her Master’s thesis, “‘Unfortunate women of my class:’ Prostitution in Winnipeg, 1870-1910.” Her objective is to “understand the great diversity prostitutes faced in their business and the degree to which they used their social dislocation to carve out a meaningful existence for themselves and those around them.” To this end, Macfarlane explores the interplay between the lived experiences of women in the sex trade and the cultural representations of prostitution deployed by the civic elite to justify segregation and regulation, arguing that the city’s sex workers “purchased security with their acceptance of social

24 See Rhonda Hinther, paragraph 5.
exclusion.”26 Like Macfarlane, I am interested in how prostitution—understood both in terms of its social realities and the cultural debates it generated—“influenced the cultural, social, economic and spatial evolution of the city of Winnipeg.”27 However, instead of focusing primarily on the conflicts between civic officials and sex workers—as Macfarlane does—I am exploring how women and other historical actors maintained and benefited materially from the city’s informal sex economy, thus producing and reshaping the districts in which it was situated, and the city as a whole.

This approach to the history of sex work marks an important departure from earlier Canadian and American studies, which have traditionally examined this issue through the framework of moral regulation. Moral regulation refers to a set of social and discursive processes that normalize, encourage and reward certain values and practices, and marginalize, discourage, and discipline others. It does “not entail coercive measures such as the use of direct physical contact or threats, nor the use of authority,” for it operates most effectively through self-governance, and seeks as its object the self-governed individual.28 Historians who approach their studies through this particular conceptual frame are thus able to identify—and critically interrogate—the individuals and groups that wielded regulatory power at any particular historical moment, the processes through which such power was produced, and the often unremarkable and inconspicuous ways in which it was exercised. While prostitution is not the focus of their work, historians Leslie Erickson, Carolyn Strange, and Mariana Valverde examine how

26 Ibid., 7.
27 Ibid., 9.
28 In this framework, power cannot be reduced to the state, or to capitalist structures, for it is diffuse—operating in different ways, and in multiple forms. See Deborah Brock, “Moving Beyond Deviance: Power, Regulation, and Governmentality,” in Making Normal: Social Regulation in Canada, ed. Deborah Brock (Toronto: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2003), xxvi.
specific legal, cultural, and social responses to sex work reflected the anxieties of the white middle class in their respective studies of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Canada. Threatened by changing race, gender and class relations, this group sought to consolidate its social and economic power by defining and policing the social and spatial boundaries between respectability and deviance—boundaries clearly influenced by racial, gender, and class biases.29

American historians present similar arguments in several excellent studies of prostitution in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. In his essay, “Tacit Acceptance: Respectable Americans and Segregated Prostitution, 1870-1910,” Neil Larry Shumsky argues that the regulation of sexual deviance was closely linked with the regulation of working-class and immigrant men. The red-light district, he posits, provided “an arena for the deployment and control” of their “violent” and “ill-regulated” sexualities, simultaneously alleviating middle-class anxieties about the seduction and rape of “respectable women” and increasing their awareness of the marginalized sexual “Other.”30 It was through this process of differentiation, Shumsky suggests, that members of the middle class were able to redefine themselves according to late-nineteenth century precepts of social respectability.31 In a period characterized by the “resacralization”32 of

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31 Citing a number of European and American scholars like Michel Foucault, Keith Thomas, Jeffrey Weeks, Michael Mitterauer, and Reinhard Sieder, as well as Americanists like Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Ellen K. Rothman, and Robert Griswol, Neil Larry Shumsky suggests that by the late-nineteenth century, the sexual double standard was eliminated, pre- and extramarital relations were discouraged in middle-class marriages, and men were held to same standards of marital fidelity as women. See Neil Larry Shumsky, 672.
middle-class sexuality, the presence of the segregated district “helped disclose clearly and unmistakably the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behavior.”³³

Ann Garbert constructs a similar argument in her article, “Prostitution and Moral Reform in the Borderlands: El Paso, 1890-1920,” published in 2003. Drawing on the work of sociologist Kai Erikson, Garbert demonstrates that sexual deviance is a subjective and carefully constructed concept that is conferred on certain behaviours at certain historical moments. In the late-nineteenth century, prostitution was categorized as an unnatural and non-reproductive sexual behaviour. The red-light district made visible the difference between deviant and normative sexual behaviours.³⁴ Although both authors see the transformation of middle-class sexual mores as being instrumental in the emergence of districts of prostitution, Garbert suggests that segregated districts produced a much larger range of subjectivities and social relations than Shumsky has perhaps acknowledged. In this analysis, red-light districts represented a pragmatic (and often unpopular) response to—rather than a rejection of—the sexual double standard. Segregation accommodated the presumed sexual needs of both middle-class and working-class men, and protected the “purity” of middle-class women.³⁵

Studies by Neil Larry Shumsky and Larry M. Springer, Timothy Gilfoyle, and Jeffrey Adler are less focused on the social function of red-light districts and more concerned with the relationship between moral regulation and urban geography. In their essay, “San Francisco’s Zone of Prostitution, 1880-1934,” Shumsky and Springer suggest that the anti-vice movement did not end prostitution in American cities, but rather

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³³ Neil Larry Shumsky, 671.
³⁵ Ann R. Garbert, 581.
brought about changes in law and law enforcement patterns which, in turn, led to the redistribution of sex workers in city spaces. Looking at the redistribution of prostitutes over a fifty-year period, they argue that increasingly restrictive laws and selective law enforcement changed prostitution’s spatiality, but did not eliminate it from the city. The social reform movement did not bring about a social transformation, then, but rather a geographic one. Gilfoyle reiterates many of these points in both his article and book on prostitution in New York. In these, he argues, “the way prostitutes used and controlled urban space [was influenced by] the state and the law enforcement power of the municipality.” Adler offers perhaps the most nuanced of these arguments in his essay, “Streetwalkers, Degraded Outcasts, and Good-For-Nothing Huzzies: Women and the Dangerous Class in Antebellum St. Louis.” Here, he suggests that community leaders and law enforcers were “principally concerned with morality only to the extent that immoral behaviour might produce instability, social disorder, or uncertainty.” Unwilling and unable to fully dismantle St. Louis’s sex trade, police—along with judges and prosecutors—selectively applied the law to maintain social and spatial boundaries between sex workers and the city’s middle class.39

The significance of these studies in expanding our understanding of segregated prostitution cannot be over-emphasized. In their attempts to explain the emergence and persistence of red-light districts, historians like Erickson, Strange, Valverde, Shumsky, and Garbert challenge arguments like those presented by Artibise and Cooper. Instead of

39 Ibid., 747.
accepting the information presented in court records, vice commission reports and social reform pamphlets at face value, they evaluate these sources as types of social and political discourse from which important inferences about late nineteenth-century sexuality can be drawn. Shumsky and Springer, Gilfoyle, and Adler build on these analyses by showing how attitudes towards sexuality influenced municipal politics and patterns of law enforcement, thus effecting “locational patterns” of prostitution. Their studies are especially helpful, insofar as they reveal that prostitution is geographical as well as historical.

The problem with these studies is that they do not adequately address the presence or positionalities of the women living and working in the districts. As an analytical framework, moral regulation—in its attempt to relocate and problematize power—focuses more on experts and the regulatory discourses espoused than the social groups most directly impacted by them, specifically sex workers. These studies do not investigate women’s motivations or experiences, or how they were shaped by the material and social realities of life in the cities they worked. They do not explore women’s often direct and violent confrontations with the law, or effectively account for expressions of agency and resistance. They also ignore the other material interests at stake in these sex districts—those of male clientele, businessmen, and civic officials who each expressed (however contradictory) their own motivations for maintaining a red-light district—and in so doing, powerfully shaped Winnipeg’s early urban geography. While this framework is incredibly useful in highlighting once unexplored relations and

41 By focusing on the construction of discourses around women—instead of women themselves—we learn more about the people constructing narratives than we do about people they were about. See Deborah Brock.
operations of power and demonstrating how regulatory processes are shaped by the racial, class, and gender biases of so-called experts, it does not help us to explain how these spaces of sex work persisted in their semi-regulated state for so long or to understand the roles prostitution—and the regulation of prostitution—played in the process of urban development.

To better understand this relationship, I am situating sex workers at the centre of Winnipeg’s history, and examining how prostitution shaped its early socio-spatial development. Historians have long acknowledged the scant attention paid women in urban history. That women often occupied the peripheries of early urban economies meant that their roles in the development of urban life were overlooked. Much work has been done to address this absence in histories of major urban centres, beginning with Christine Stansell’s 1986 seminal study. In *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860*, Stansell demonstrates that working-class women created a city within a city—a community of women with its own separate set of economic relations and cultural forms. She argues that working-class women’s decisions and actions reshaped patterns of work, family, and politics in the city, and by extension, the geography of the city itself. Sarah Deutsch constructs a similar argument in *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940*. She shows how different groups of women demonstrated “active agency in shaping the city,” acknowledging that women were not always empowered in or by these spaces—that there were, in fact, limits on

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their autonomy. Whether they worked as prostitutes in brothels or convened as women of leisure in other social spaces, they were always subject to surveillance. Still, she asserts that by claiming parts of the public sphere as their own, women transformed Boston’s urban landscape.

Less attention has been devoted to women in the urban West. In Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-90, Anne M. Butler examines the “material experience of prostitutes, their relationships with the surrounding institutions, and their relationships with each other,” positing that prostitutes played an integral role in the development of urban life in the American West. Even though Butler places women at the centre of her analysis, she ascribes to them almost no agency, assuming instead that these relationships served the interests of civic officials only, either through personal financial gain or civic promotion, while consistently reinforcing women’s marginal status. While it is important to recognize the ways in which civic officials and business owners exploited sex workers’ social and economic marginality for their own ends, many historians have ably demonstrated how women in the sex trade exercised varying degrees of agency in their daily lives. It is on the interplay between these various interests—and the impact it had on Winnipeg’s urban development—that this study focuses.

As in other historical contexts, Winnipeg’s segregated zones were the subjects of frequent debate, which public officials, journalists, reformers, and sex workers

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47 Ibid., 76.
themselves dutifully documented in a variety of texts. Each of these texts provides valuable insights into the attitudes and experiences of the individuals and groups involved in the formation, expansion, regulation, and eventual closure of Winnipeg’s sex districts, informing—and sometimes challenging—my understanding of their histories. The minutes of evidence from the Royal Commission on Charges of Social Vice in Winnipeg, completed in 1910 and published alongside the final report in 1911, are perhaps the most valuable, in terms of their depth and breadth. Totalling almost 1000 pages, contained in eight separate books, these transcripts contain the distinct voices of brothel keepers, business owners, real estate agents, Point Douglas residents, moral reformers, police, and police magistrates. Their testimonies reveal how sex work came to be segregated and regulated throughout Winnipeg’s early history and, perhaps more importantly, who stood to benefit financially, socially, and politically from these processes. While the final report attempts to minimize the role public officials played in the formation and regulation of Winnipeg’s red-light districts, the minutes of evidence show how a range of competing and even contradictory interests shaped and reshaped the city’s sex districts over this forty-year period.

Similar revelations are found in Madeleine: An Autobiography. Written under the pseudonym “Madeleine Blair,” and published in 1919, this invaluable book provides a detailed first-hand account of life as a prostitute and brothel owner in Western Canada. “Madeleine,” as she came to be known by clientele, spent fifteen years in the sex trade, working as a prostitute in several red-light districts, including Winnipeg’s Thomas Street district, before establishing her own brothel just outside of Edmonton. Through these experiences, Madeleine gained important insight into the precarious relationships that
existed among and between prostitutes, police, clientele, and the larger communities of which they were all a part. That these insights are presented in an autobiography published decades later does pose some methodological issues. As Lindsey McMaster acknowledges in her excellent study, Working Girls in the West: Representations of Wage-Earning Women, working with autobiographies can be difficult because their authors often adjust their stories to justify their own actions, uphold their reputations, or fit their experiences into tighter narratives.⁴⁸ Like McMaster, I have chosen to include it to “redress a certain imbalance in the critical discussion of prostitution,” despite its limitations.⁴⁹ Too often excluded from these historical debates, Madeleine’s voice offers a much-needed antidote to the voices of Prairie politicians, police officers, and moral reformers.

While these sources illuminate the experiences and motivations of many individuals, they do not include everyone involved in the city’s sex economy. Missing from the minutes of evidence and Madeleine’s autobiography are the voices of the city’s most marginalized groups, including Indigenous sex workers and brothel inmates. These groups make an appearance in another set of archival records from this period. While court records do not reveal the motivations and experiences of the defendants, they provide the name of the accused, the charge, the verdict, and the sentence.⁵⁰

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⁴⁹ Ibid., 107.
⁵⁰ An official court system was established in Manitoba in 1872. The Manitoba Court of Queen’s Bench (CQB) constituted the highest court in the province until the Court of Appeal was created in 1906. Below the CQB were Manitoba’s county criminal courts. Women charged with indictable offences, including keeping or being an inmate of a disorderly house, were sometimes tried before judges in these courts. However, these offences could also be tried as summary offences in police court, which constituted the lowest level of the court system. Women charged with keeping or being an inmate of disorderly house, vagrancy, and liquor-related offences appeared before justices of the peace and police magistrates in police court.
of these women often offer the only evidence we have of their existence, reminding us that there were real people living on the margins of these economies and negotiating their survival therein. Many of these women appear multiple times in these records—sometimes months and sometimes years apart—on charges ranging from drunk and disorderly behaviour to keeping a disorderly house. While we will never know what some of their everyday lives were like, these records reveal just how diverse the experiences of sex workers truly were. They also help to illuminate how women’s interactions with police were shaped by the shifting social and geographic patterns of prostitution in the city. In this study, I have examined a sample of police court records from 1902 until 1913, comparing and contrasting arrests and convictions for vagrancy- and brothel-related charges during periods of segregation and “scatteration.”

To better understand the ideologies underlying the decisions of police and police magistrates and informing the public’s responses to prostitution, I have examined other written records, including newspaper articles, editorials, and letters to the editor published in the Manitoba Free Press, the Winnipeg Daily Times, and the Winnipeg Tribune, as well as Council Communications of the City of Winnipeg and moral reform literature published around this period. These sources helped build my understanding of the debates around gender, sexuality, and respectability that were engaging Winnipeg’s leadership throughout this period of rapid development. While we learn very little about the lives of sex workers from these sources, they help us explain the motivations and

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court. JPs and magistrates were also responsible for hearing complaints, issuing arrest warrants, and taking depositions. For more on Manitoba’s court system, see Leslie Erickson, 33-35.

51 Magistrates heard thousands of cases each year. I looked at complete court records for the months of January, April, July, and October in the years 1902, 1904, 1906, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912, and 1913.
actions of other groups involved in the production and regulation of Winnipeg’s sex districts.52

The city’s red-light districts were defined and reshaped by the women who worked in them, as brothel keepers and inmates, and the other groups with whom they interacted on an everyday basis—including their clientele, business owners, police officers, and police magistrates. Their relationships, interests, and experiences participating in the production of these spaces are examined and explained in four parts. I begin with the exploration of the emergence of prostitution in Western Canada in the context of settler colonialism. Prostitution, I argue, did not appear as a by-product of urbanization or industrialization, as some historians suggest, but rather in response to the economic and social marginalization of Indigenous women. As the Canadian government dispossessed Indigenous people of their lands, white men began migrating West in rapidly growing numbers, often settling in newly incorporated cities like Winnipeg. Their arrival sparked demands for a certain type of leisure culture, in which liquor and sex played important roles. Women from other parts of Canada, the United States, and even Europe soon arrived in the city, expanding and transforming its sex economy. While these women exercised varying degrees of agency, they all participated in the formation and transformation of Winnipeg’s red-light districts. It is on these different sites of sex work that the next chapter focuses. Here, I trace the evolution of Winnipeg’s unofficial red-light districts over an almost forty-year period, from the Hudson’s Bay Flats in the 1870s until the appearance of the Point Douglas district in 1909, exploring how different historical actors participated in the production of these spaces and—by extension—the

52 Christine Macfarlane, 2-3.
development of the city itself. The last two chapters focus on the Point Douglas district. In the third chapter, I demonstrate how the district’s development depended on the (sometimes exploitative) relationships this group of women formed with one another and with real estate agents, liquor distributors, and other business interests throughout the city. I address the relationship between prostitutes, police, and other public officials in the fourth chapter. In it, I argue that it was in the often-contradictory interests of each of these groups to maintain the segregated district, as the city’s brothel keepers and leadership both stood to benefit from it socially, politically, and financially. Before exploring these relationships, however, I must examine the range of positionalities women involved in prostitution occupied over this forty-year period. It is to them that I now turn.
Working Women in the Prairie West

In her eponymous autobiography, Madeleine Blair observed “the social gulf between the first-class courtesan and those who have become the dregs of prostitution is as great as the gulf between the sheltered woman in her home and the street-walker.”53 As in other historical contexts, the lived experiences of sex workers in Winnipeg were far from homogenous. This chapter explores the transformation of the city’s sex economy, from streetwalking in the 1870s, to mostly residential prostitution in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While sex work represented a critical means of survival for all women who chose to participate in it, their motivations, experiences, and the degree of agency they exercised over their everyday lives differed dramatically. Historians of prostitution must examine and contextualize the social positions of their subjects within the specific set of relations and locations of which they were a part.

Prostitution existed in the Prairies before its cities were built or its industries established. It was not a by-product of urbanization or industrialization, as traditional readings of its Prairie history suggest. Nor did it emerge in the context of trading partnerships between Indigenous communities and European traders, as other historians have posited.54 Rather, the appearance of prostitution on the Prairies must be conceived within the context of settler colonialism, and more specifically, as a response to economic marginalization and racist government policy.

Sylvia Van Kirk was one of the first historians to critically examine the role of First Nations and Métis women in fur trade society. In Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-

54 Sylvia Van Kirk, 34.
Trade Society, 1670-1870, she argues that intermarriage between Indigenous women and European traders was fundamental to the expansion and stability of fur-trade society across the country over this period.\textsuperscript{55} Mariage à la façon du pays, or marriage according to the customs of the country, represented the norm—not prostitution. Marriage was a contact zone between two culturally distinct groups of people, engendering what Gerhard Ens describes as a “mutually dependent economic relationship.”\textsuperscript{56} Indigenous women acted as interpreters and intermediaries in trade negotiations. They made moccasins and snowshoes, repaired canoes, dressed furs, and harvested and preserved fish, berries, and rice, while benefiting from labour-saving tools and more secure supplies of food.\textsuperscript{57} That these relationships were “explicitly gendered” also meant that they produced children; indeed, it was in the context of mariages à la façon du pays that the Métis population emerged and expanded over the next two hundred years.\textsuperscript{58}

By the 1800s, mariage à la façon du pays was the subject of increasing criticism by European observers, who characterized the unions as “degraded,” and attributed their sometimes casual or transient nature to the inherent immorality of First Nations and Métis women.\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, these groups became so profoundly sexualized in both church and government literature that they were—by default—conceived as prostitutes or

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{57} Jean Barman, 218.
\textsuperscript{58} Adele Perry, On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 44.
“potential concubines.” Racist discourses were increasingly deployed in courtrooms, advice books, newspaper articles, sermons, missionary circles and works of fiction, discouraging intermarriage between Indigenous women and white men. In *Urban Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in Nineteenth-Century Pacific Rim Cities*, Penelope Edmonds contends that these discourses were powerfully operative in the permanent settlement of white populations across Canada towards the end of the nineteenth century. She argues that white settlement required the construction and maintenance of racial boundaries and white spaces that the mercantilist economy of the fur trade did not. As Renisa Mawani suggests in her study of prostitution in late-nineteenth century British Columbia, it was only “when the state’s interests changed from exploiting the land and resources to permanently acquiring them” that the first conversations around prostitution emerged. First Nations and Métis women were no longer viewed as important intermediaries in the fur trade economy, but rather “proclaimed to be promiscuous and a social danger.” The objectives of these classifications were clear: Indigenous women and children could no longer make legitimate claims to the wealth of their white husbands and fathers, and Canada’s Métis population could no longer challenge claims of racial superiority or the legitimacy of white settler rule. Rather, Indigenous populations would become subject to an

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60 Jean Barman, 233.
increasingly restrictive system of segregation, regulation, and discipline within the context of Canadian state formation.  

While racist discourses about Indigenous women were deployed to discourage mixed-race marriages, a corresponding narrative identified the gender imbalance among the white settler population as a source of social, political, and economic instability across the Canadian West. As permanent white settlements expanded across the Prairies, tensions between Indigenous and white settler populations grew, culminating in organized resistance against the Canadian government in 1869, and again in 1885. While members of both First Nations and Métis communities participated in these events, white settlers attributed responsibility to the children and descendants of mixed-race marriages. It was in this context of social and political instability that white, Christian marriage became part of the national agenda—the primary means through which a new social and economic order could be established in the Canadian West. As McMaster explains, the “shortage” of white women—while real—“was actually a carefully constructed and deliberately promoted way of representing and shaping the West according to ideologies of empire and nation that held specific roles for women and families in white settler society.” White women were thus conceived as a source of future stability for the region, and an integral part of “civilized” society. Colonial promoters undertook efforts as early as the 1850s to promote westward migration of single British women for the purpose of marriage. As Sarah Carter explains, “‘proper’ marriage would help maintain

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64 Sarah Carter, “Categories and Terrains,” 72.
65 Carter, The Importance of Being Monogamous, 8.
66 Lindsey McMaster, 19.
67 Ibid.
the new settlers’ social and sexual distance from the Aboriginal population, and it would forge the new settler identity.\textsuperscript{69} The effects of these discourses and programs were significant. As Mariana Valverde asserts, the so-called “civilizing influence” of white women impacted the social and economic status of Indigenous women in the West.\textsuperscript{70} While Indigenous women and white men continually contested racial boundaries, intermarriage declined throughout the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{71} By the 1870s, mariages à la façon du pays were no longer recognized by the Canadian government, and new unions between Indigenous women and European men were virtually prohibited.\textsuperscript{72} Many white men left their Indigenous families for new unions with white women.\textsuperscript{73}

First Nations women were further restricted by the pass system, which required all men and women living on reserve to get written permission from an Indian agent, stating how long they would be gone and why.\textsuperscript{74} According to Carter, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Philip Vankoughnet implemented the pass system following a tour of the West in 1883. Justifications for these actions were explained in a letter written to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, in which Vankoughnet complained that tents “pitched by Indians near towns and villages are occupied by women of abandoned character who were there for the worst purposes.”\textsuperscript{75} The pass system thus entrenched in government policy the view that all Indigenous women represented a “serious danger to public health,” whose removal from “places and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[69] Sarah Carter, \textit{The Importance of Being Monogamous}, 6.
\item[70] Mariana Valverde, 86.
\item[71] Sarah Carter, \textit{The Importance of Being Monogamous}, 281.
\item[72] \textit{Ibid}, 5.
\item[73] Lindsey McMaster, 19.
\item[74] Sarah Carter, “Categories and Terrains of Exclusion,” 72.
\item[75] Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Philip Vankoughnet quoted by Sarah Carter in \textit{The Importance of Being Monogamous}, 153.
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spaces newly defined as white” would be justified. In so doing, it prevented First Nations women from participating in traditional subsistence practices, and from pursuing new jobs and resources in expanding urban areas. Government officials also discouraged white settlers from hiring First Nations men and women, and from purchasing foodstuffs, arts, and crafts produced on reserves, thus compounding Indigenous people’s economic marginalization. The experience of settlement was equally dislocating for Métis women. As Catherine Cavanaugh explains, “In the European drive to clearly demarcate social categories, these women were caught in an ambiguous—and, to the official mind, socially disruptive—space defined by newcomers as neither white nor Indian.”

Faced with few options, some Indigenous women turned to prostitution for survival in an increasingly hostile social and economic environment. Lacking the resources and connections to which other women involved in sex work were accustomed, Indigenous women often found themselves in the most visible sites of the city’s informal sex economy—the streets. When asked in 1883 if there were “street walkers” in Winnipeg, Chief of Police David Murray stated that there were none, “except half breeds.” Gender and class certainly worked together in Winnipeg in these years to limit opportunities available to many women. Race—specifically Indigeneity—compounded women’s social and economic marginalization. That Indigenous “street walkers” were the most visible sex workers also made them the most vulnerable to street harassment, violence, and arrest. In November 1903, the Manitoba Free Press reported that “poor

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76 Ibid, 68.
77 Sarah Carter, “Categories and Terrains of Exclusion,” 73.
78 Catherine Cavanaugh, “‘No Place for a Woman’: Engendering Western Canadian Settlement,” in *Women and Gender in the American West*, eds. Mary Ann Irwin and James F. Brooks (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 193-194.
80 *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 April 1883. “Half-breed” is recognized today as a derogatory term, used historically, to describe Métis peoples.
half-breed prostitutes were continually being arrested and fined or imprisoned if they could not pay.” 81 Both First Nations and Métis women were a regular presence in Winnipeg’s courtrooms from the time of its incorporation. 82 That early policing efforts focused primarily on public spaces meant Indigenous women were among the most criminalized group in Winnipeg.

Winnipeg did not produce the sex trade—rather it developed from a complex set of social, political, and economic relations of domination, of which the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women was a fundamental part. It was in this context—the context of settler colonialism—that Winnipeg’s informal sex economy was expanded and transformed over several decades. Just as the motivations and experiences of Indigenous women were shaped by the specific time and place in which they lived and worked, so too were those of immigrant women who moved from other parts of Canada and Europe to seek employment in Winnipeg’s sex districts.

Economic programs designed to create employment opportunities in transportation, industry, commerce, and construction produced a gendered labour market and economy in Winnipeg, ensuring uneven patterns of migration and an eventual surplus of single, white men. By 1911, the year of the federal census, men outnumbered women by about 10,000 in a city of 136,000. Still, the decline of subsistence farming, combined with increasing exploitation of labour in urban areas, meant more women were looking for work outside their homes than ever before. 83 Winnipeg had proportionately more

81 Manitoba Free Press, 17 November 1903.
82 Christine Macfarlane, 32.
83 In 1901, 8575 women were employed outside the home, representing just under ten percent of Manitoba’s workforce. By 1921, this number had nearly quadrupled. 31,682 women were employed outside the home in Manitoba. Almost fifteen percent of the workforce was female. See Lindsey McMaster, 11.
women that the province of Manitoba as a whole, which suggests that the city provided them more economic opportunities than the province’s rural areas.\textsuperscript{84} Still, very few women found sufficient remuneration in the city. Some worked as domestics, laundresses, telegraph and telephone operators, stenographers, schoolteachers, and nurses, and as sales clerks in the city’s department stores; others worked as labourers in its light industries.\textsuperscript{85} Around the turn of the twentieth century, Madeleine worked in a factory for five dollars a week, almost half of which went towards a room she shared with two other female factory workers.\textsuperscript{86} Women working as domestics and laundresses reported comparable weekly earnings.\textsuperscript{87}

Relatively limited opportunities in Winnipeg’s labour market, combined with a growing population of working men, made prostitution a viable option for a wide range of women in need of money.\textsuperscript{88} While the city’s Indigenous sex workers continued to work on the street, in tents, or in shacks, other women began moving to Winnipeg to manage or work in brothels as early as the 1880s. Many of them were already involved in the sex trade in other cities, and heard about Winnipeg through the informal networks of

\textsuperscript{84} Alan Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg}, 146.
\textsuperscript{85} 2281 women worked as maids and cooks, and 800 as telegraph and telephone operators. 4600 women classified themselves as professionals, and between 2400 and 3200 worked as sales clerks for the Hudson’s Bay Company, Eaton’s, Jerry Robinson’s, and Carsley and Company. See Jim Blanchard, 42-44.
\textsuperscript{86} Madeleine Blair, Book 1, Chapter 2, paragraph 6.
\textsuperscript{87} In 1913, the \textit{Christian Guardian} reported that the average weekly earnings of the 72,751 wage-earning women in Canada was just five dollars, or 260 dollars a year. See “Wage-Earning Girls and Homeless Men,” published by the \textit{Christian Guardian}, 16 July 1913, reprinted in Alan Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg}, 317. The lowest reported earnings for men were in warehouses, where they made eight and a half dollars a week, or 442 dollars a year. Outdoor tradesman made between 500 and 600 a year; and builders made over 600 annually. See “How Make Both Ends Meet?,” published by the \textit{Christian Guardian}, 12 July 1913, reprinted in Alan Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg}, 314-315.
\textsuperscript{88} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 52-53. These conditions could be found throughout the North American West. As Anne M. Butler writes, “Within the working world, women found that few jobs awaited them, and the existing ones offered less than lucrative pay. These problems enlarged in a frontier environment that catered to masculine workers. Here women desired not only employment but some of the boom profits attached to the burgeoning frontier enterprises. From this combination of elements, a substantial prostitute population emerged on the American frontier.” See Anne M. Butler, 16.
which they were a part. Among them was Madeleine, who contacted the keeper of what she describes as a “leading house” in Winnipeg. Madame von Levin instructed Madeleine to meet her in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she planned to “procure new girls.” Business in Winnipeg was good, von Levin explained, but “girls were scarce.” 89 Many women like Madeleine moved from the United States to Winnipeg in the 1880s and 90s, and by the turn of the twentieth century, an estimated 75 percent of women working in the city’s red-light district were American. 90

Over the next decade, the sex trade became more diverse, according to newspaper reporters, police, and the district’s residents. In July 1909, a police raid in the Point Douglas district produced six Japanese women, including Yuka Taki and Matsu Oyama, and a “number of darkie women.” 91 In its report of the incident, the Winnipeg Tribune claimed that as many as half the district’s new residents were women of African-American or Asian ancestry. While women of colour certainly made up a larger proportion of the red-light district than Winnipeg’s general population, their appearance in court speaks more to racial profiling on the part of city police than the actual demographics of the district. Charles Knox, a Morality Officer, provided a more accurate estimate during his testimony, stating that of the fifty women operating houses in the Point Douglas district, five were African-American, two were Japanese, one was Norwegian, and another ten were French or French-Canadian. 92 Brothel keepers often employed women of the same ethnic or racial background because of cultural and

89 Madeleine Blair, Book 2, Chapter 1, paragraph 14.
90 Manitoba Free Press, 17 November 1903. The red-light district was informally referred to as the “American Colony” because so many of the women working in it were American by birth. See Madeleine Blair, Book 2, Chapter 1, paragraph 21.
91 Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1219; Winnipeg Tribune, 12 July 1909.
92 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 264.
linguistic commonalities. This suggests that of the red-light district’s residents, roughly twenty percent were French-speaking. Another ten percent were of African-American ancestry, four percent were Japanese, and two percent were Norwegian. While the district’s diversity clearly highlights the connection between the social and economic marginalization of minority groups and their participation in informal economies like sex work, it also demonstrates the power and importance of informal networks among these already marginalized groups of women.

Not all women entered Winnipeg’s sex trade with the same degree of agency. From the 1880s on, the city’s papers frequently reported stories of young girls enticed into brothels on promises of a better life—or, at the very least, a steady job. Others were held there against their will. According to a sensationalized story from the local paper, Fanny Getson travelled from London, England to Winnipeg in 1884 to work as a housekeeper for Isaac Brownstein and his wife Etta, who paid her voyage and promised a good salary. Brownstein, who kept a brothel on Main Street, was reported to have wanted a “Hebrew” girl—“the women here being all half-breeds and not to his taste.” One night, shortly after her arrival, Brownstein broke into Getson’s room, and let two men rape her. He took away all of her clothing, except a nightgown, and continued “turning ruffians in to abuse her” until he was indicted on kidnapping and procuring charges.

A year later, in March 1885, fourteen-year old Minnesota-born Bertha Johnson arrived in Winnipeg with her father, who placed her in domestic service while he looked for work. Johnson was discovered by a detective weeks later in one of the city’s most

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93 Rhonda Hinther, paragraph 19.
94 Winnipeg Daily Times, 4 September 1884. The story was sensationalized and much was made of Brownstein’s Jewish heritage—being referred to throughout coverage as the “brutal Hebrew.” Anxieties around new immigration were often projected onto newspapers stories such as this one.
infamous brothels, which operated under the “guise of a restaurant.” Johnson told the
detective “how she had been decoyed into the place by some girls, and since then
detained by the old woman [Mother McKenzie], who had placed her in the refrigerator
and sent men in to outrage her.” Johnson was sent to live in a home in Emerson,
Manitoba but returned to Winnipeg in April 1885, where she was reported to have been
“the companion of the commonest street walkers in the city.” Arraigned on charges of
vagrancy, Johnson was convicted and sent to jail for two months.96

Similar stories appeared in the testimonies of Morality Officers and the Police
Magistrate during the Vice Commission of 1910. Police Magistrate Thomas Mayne Daly
revealed that the closure of the city’s segregated, semi-regulated sex district increased the
“numbers of young girls” appearing in both juvenile and police court after 1904. These
girls were taken from what he described as “immoral surroundings” in houses, blocks and
other places throughout the city and—in his words—“found to be immoral.” Daly
believed that they were being brought into the city and sold into the sex trade by
businessmen, whose cigar stands and candy shops doubled as houses of assignation.
Many were between thirteen and fifteen years of age, and some were diagnosed with
venereal disease. During his testimony, Daly made a critical distinction between women
working in the city’s sex districts, and some of those discovered in “immoral houses”
between 1904 and 1909: “I was not so much concerned about these professional women,”
he explained, “They were not seduced here; but I was concerned and I am still concerned

95 Winnipeg Daily Times, 5 March 1885.
96 Winnipeg Daily Times, 13 April 1885.
97 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Maybe Daly, Book 3, 330-331. During his
testimony, Daly explained that girls under seventeen appeared in juvenile court, while young women
seventeen and older appeared in police court.
about the young girls of this city.” Even in 1911, it was widely understood that while some women were victims of sexual exploitation, many were responding to—and attempting to capitalize on—Winnipeg’s social and economic development for their own personal gain and benefit.

Whether women entered the profession of their own volition or not, they all faced similar occupational hazards. Prostitution was, and continues to be, a dangerous line of work. One doctor in Winnipeg treated over five hundred cases of venereal disease in 1908; indeed, “he did nothing else from morning to night.” According to the American scholarship on prostitution, many women also dealt with addiction, regularly abusing alcohol, morphine, and opium to “immunize themselves against these interactions.” Indeed, alcohol and drugs became a part of daily life for some women involved in sex work. In her study of Winnipeg’s red-light district, Hinther suggests brothel keepers used alcohol to control and exploit women who worked for them. Inmates would run up debt by buying liquor for themselves, which keepers could hold against them when they wanted to leave. Other times, when women “wanted to come away, some of them in charge would jolly them and get them drunk.” These women were also “taught to take opium and morphine,” explained one reformer. When they decided to leave the sex trade, “they were threatened with the taking away of these drugs.” Other women dealt with unwanted pregnancy and abortion. While information about douching, sponges, and other contraceptives likely circulated among women, none was foolproof, and pregnancy

98 Ibid, 336.
99 Ibid., 337.
101 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Adjutant McElheney, Book 5, 2.
102 Ibid., 2.
among sex workers was not uncommon.\textsuperscript{103} Many women chose to terminate their pregnancies, taking medicine or seeking out doctors to perform illegal abortions—dangerous measures that too often resulted in death.\textsuperscript{104} Madeleine’s own story highlights many of its attendant dangers. She experienced venereal disease, alcoholism, pregnancy, abortion, police harassment, and violence—reminding us “that figures like the prostitute or the working girl cannot be reduced to either pathetic victim or invincible heroine, but occupy a range of positions.”\textsuperscript{105}

Violence was perhaps the most common threat to women involved in sex work. As one Portage Avenue brothel owner expressed in 1883, “The world may and no doubt does think that fallen women are fit objects of abuse and scorn.”\textsuperscript{106} That women were unlikely to report assault or rape meant that only the most shocking and violent incidents appeared in the archival record, such as a string of murders that took place in the city’s red-light district in 1912. On 15 April 1912, the \textit{Winnipeg Tribune} reported that “Giselle Roberts, known to her friends as Mignon, and one of the prettiest girls in Winnipeg’s red-light area, is lying cold in death in Thomson’s undertaking rooms while detectives are scouring the city for her murderer.” In a surprisingly sympathetic take on the incident, the reporter concluded: “It was one of the most coldblooded crimes ever committed in Winnipeg; for the poor girl was lying asleep at the time her assailant committed the dastardly deed.”\textsuperscript{107} Roberts’ murder was one of several murders and attempted murders that took place that spring, prompting police to rethink their policy of segregation.

\textsuperscript{103} Rhonda Hinther, paragraph 37.
\textsuperscript{104} Ruth Rosen, 99.
\textsuperscript{105} Lindsey McMaster, 115.
\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Winnipeg Daily Times}, 9 April 1883.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Winnipeg Tribune}, 15 April 1912.
While these stories speak to the often brutal realities of Winnipeg’s sex trade, they also remind us that women in the early twentieth-century urban West had very few options for economic and social survival.\(^{108}\) Brothels could offer women better working environments than the kitchens, laundries, and factories to which many of them were accustomed—representing what one historian describes as “a ghettoized but relatively secure workplace with its own kind of culture.”\(^{109}\) Brothel prostitution could provide a sense of community for some girls and women who found themselves without a network of family support.\(^{110}\) For others who had been seduced and deserted by men, it represented an act of shrewdness. Women involved in the sex trade often worked for fewer hours a week, and for substantially higher wages than other women—earning between eighteen and thirty dollars a week in some Winnipeg brothels after room and board, which represented approximately half their initial earnings.\(^{111}\) As McMaster points out, these women “were treated as individual agents capable of supporting themselves, unlike in the more general economy, where women workers were viewed as dependents, whose wages were not expected to represent a living wage for a self-supporting person.”\(^{112}\)

Perhaps most importantly, residential prostitution in Winnipeg’s unofficial red-light district brought about a dramatic reduction in both procuring and pimping. Describing the conditions of segregation on Rachel Street, in Point Douglas, Daly testified that the men responsible for selling young girls and women into the sex trade

\(^{108}\) Ruth Rosen, xvii  
\(^{109}\) Mariana Valverde, 85.  
\(^{110}\) MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Amy Morris, Book 1 137. A typical brothel housed between two and six women at a time. Charles Knox confirmed this in his own testimony, stating that about four women lived in each house in the district. See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 300.  
\(^{111}\) Lindsey McMaster, 110.  
\(^{112}\) Lindsey McMaster, 104.
had been “driven out of the city,” explaining that so-called “white slavery” was not permitted by police, or tolerated by working women themselves.\textsuperscript{113} Conditions in Winnipeg in 1909 also contributed to a reduction in pimping. According to Daly, Winnipeg was crowded with pimps until 1909. “There were all gamblers of the worst class and a menace to all classes of the community,” he recounted. “It seemed impossible to get at these men until these houses were moved down there to Rachel Street. I cannot tell you... how many of these men were driven out of the city.”\textsuperscript{114} A sense of community, financial security and relatively safe working environments were strong inducements for some women; by 1911, between 200 and 500 women were employed in at least 50 brothels in Winnipeg. It is on this group of women—the women who worked and lived in Winnipeg’s Point Douglas District—that the study mostly focuses. In the following chapters, I explore how their everyday actions shaped the city’s unofficial sex districts and—by extension—the city itself.

\textsuperscript{113} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 4, 345-346.\textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid.}, 344-345.
Early Sites of Sex Work in the City

Women involved in sex work occupied a range of positionalities that influenced their motivations, experiences, and the degree of agency they exercised over their everyday lives. Their age, class, and race also influenced the spaces within which they lived and worked. Here, I begin to trace various sites of sex work in early Winnipeg, and consider how Indigenous and immigrant women were active participants in their production, occupation, and transformation throughout the city’s early years. Their actions should not be understood simply as responses to urbanization and industrialization—but as forces that supported and sustained specific patterns of urban growth, significantly impacting the socio-spatial development of Winnipeg in its early decades.

The Flats

Defining and maintaining the boundary between colonizer and colonized is a fundamental part of the colonial project, according to cultural theorist Stuart Hall.\textsuperscript{115} In late nineteenth-century Canada, government officials, military officers, missionaries, and newspaper reporters participated in the production and deployment of racist discourses and supported continued efforts to segregate and regulate Indigenous people across the Prairies through the construction and maintenance of social and spatial boundaries. As Sherene Razack argues in her study of white settler cities, these processes were important means through which white settlers constituted and expressed their new subjectivities, and through which “racial space” was produced and surveyed.\textsuperscript{116} Despite these efforts, however, the rules and restrictions placed upon the movement and behaviour of

\textsuperscript{115} Leslie Erickson, 13.
\textsuperscript{116} Sherene Razack, 12.
Indigenous populations were routinely defied and resisted. Writing about Winnipeg in 1874, Canadian journalist George Elliott described city streets that “present a curious mixture of civilization and savagery.” With traditional ways of living subject to increasing disruption throughout the 1870s and 80s, many Indigenous communities faced widespread food shortages and turned to newly incorporated cities for survival. It was in this context that some Indigenous women became involved in Winnipeg’s early sex trade, reclaiming certain spaces—now urban—as their own and creating what Edmonds refers to as “fissures in the colonial city-building project.” The Flats was one such space.

Located at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers, the Flats were used by Indigenous groups to host economic, social, and religious gatherings prior to contact with white traders and settlers, and for trade following their arrival in Rupert’s Land in the 1730s. Several trading posts were established there during the fur trade, including Upper Fort Garry, which was reconstructed by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1837. When Manitoba entered Confederation in 1870, the Company retained control of 500 acres of land around the post, which became known as the Hudson’s Bay Flats. Some lots on this reserve were sold privately in 1870 and 1871, but a large triangle of land remained undeveloped (see Appendix B). As Winnipeg quickly grew, from a village of 100 people in 1870, to an incorporated city of 3700 in 1874, many recently arrived

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117 Leslie Erickson, 13.
118 George Elliott, *Winnipeg as it is in 1874; and as it was in 1860* (Winnipeg: Daily Free Press Office, 1874), 23.
119 Gerald Friesen, 156.
120 Penelope Edmonds, 15.
immigrants from Great Britain, Iceland, and parts of Eastern Europe erected tents and
shacks on this land, alongside members of different Indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{124} “It was
here,” writes local historian Randolph Rostecki, “that the beginnings of a shanty-town
was seen in 1872.”\textsuperscript{125} Given its makeshift and disorganized character, early historians of
the area describe this early influx of immigrants as “single men of the roughest kind
[who, given their coarseness]” sought out female companionship.\textsuperscript{126} As in other,
comparable historical contexts, a “shortage of wives and marriageable women, along
with formal prohibitions against adultery, created a demand for commercial sex.”\textsuperscript{127} In
Winnipeg, a shortage of white women, combined with increasingly vitriolic
denunciations of mixed-race marriages, created the same demand. Ignoring carefully
constructed colonial partitions, settlers forged relationships with Indigenous women,
some of which were commercial in nature. It was in this context that the city’s first
“houses of ill-fame” appeared, and the population of the Flats grew.\textsuperscript{128}

Indigenous women, and the other social groups with whom they interacted thus
shaped the Flats. Throughout the mid 1870s, the area attained “an unenviable notoriety in
police circles as the resort of criminals and half-breed prostitutes.”\textsuperscript{129} While very little is
known about the day-to-day experiences of these populations, their presence in the Flats,
combined with flooding of the area in the spring of 1882, significantly impacted the kind
of development that would take place in this southeastern corner of the city’s downtown,

\textsuperscript{124} Alan Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg}, 10.
\textsuperscript{125} Randolph Rostecki, 4.
\textsuperscript{126} W.L. Morton, \textit{Manitoba: A History} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 171.
\textsuperscript{127} Marion S. Goldman, \textit{Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock
\textsuperscript{128} Randolph Rostecki, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Winnipeg Daily Times} quoted by Gerald Friesen, 210-211.
especially east of Main Street. Although a few large buildings were constructed there in the city’s first decades, the area consisted mostly of empty lots and small wooden structures. The Flats clearly provoked a range of anxieties around violence, drug and alcohol usage, and prostitution among Winnipeg’s elite over this period. Common perceptions carried very real consequences for many individuals involved in the district’s informal sex economy. While sex workers and their clientele continued to define both the spatial boundaries and social character of the Flats, the police—under the direction of both civic and business leadership—began to exert coercive force against its visitors and inhabitants. Here, Foucault can help us understand how power operated in this particular setting. Power is—according to Foucault—both situational and relational; it is produced from moment to moment, and although it is not tangible, “it does have material effects.” While residents of the Flats continued to produce this particular space through their everyday actions, they were subject to increased surveillance in these early years. By the late 1870s, police routinely carried out raids in the district, arresting and charging streetwalkers, as well as brothel keepers and inmates, with prostitution-related offences.

Some of the men and women found on the streets or inside these “dens of iniquity” were charged, fined, and then released. Marie Trochie, a Métis woman and

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130 In April 1882, the Flats were flooded with several feet of water as a result of an ice-jam, and the few land sales that had taken place during the building boom of 1881 were cancelled. See Randolph Rostecki, 6-7.


132 Deborah Brock, xxi.


134 Four female inmates and five male clients were arrested and fined. Later, in April, one woman and one man were arrested after another raid and fined. See *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 January 1878 and 27 April 1878.
“well known prostitute of the lowest order,” was often among them. She was routinely charged with vagrancy, having “no place of residence or any [other] visible means of support.” Bella Sutherland, another “disreputable half-breed,” was fined fifteen dollars and costs “for behaving herself in a very unbecoming manner.” Other men and women were dealt with even more severely. In one case, two young Métis men were arrested in the Flats for “masquerading on the streets in female attire,” convicted on prostitution-related charges, and sentenced to three weeks of hard labour. While this particular story speaks to the increasing marginality of Métis men in the new market economy, police attention focused primarily on women. As Macfarlane explains, these groups “played an important part in the cultural process of defining the Flats as both sexually and morally dangerous.”

In May 1878, four women and one man were brought into police court for keeping and frequenting a brothel, and “dismissed on the condition that they le[ave] the Flats today.” This particular tactic was routinely deployed in police court over this period as one means through which racialized bodies would be removed from the city of Winnipeg. In April 1878, the Manitoba Free Press reported that “the population of the Flats is slightly decreasing,” as many residents had left for “parts unknown.” However, it was not until the fall of 1884 that the wholesale demolition of the Flats was initiated. Looking to capitalize on the kind of commercial growth that was taking place to the west and north of Company land, the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Land Commissioner C.J.

135 Manitoba Free Press, 13 October 1882.
136 Manitoba Free Press, 2 July 1879.
137 Manitoba Free Press, 22 March 1878.
138 Christine Macfarlane, 35.
139 Manitoba Free Press, 14 May 1878.
140 Christine Macfarlane, 37.
141 Manitoba Free Press, 27 April 1878.
Brydges wrote a letter to the City Clerk, requesting the removal of seventeen shanties from Hudson’s Bay Company property between Main Street and the Red River. Brydges explained that a number of these dwellings were “occupied by objectionable persons” and suggested that the City begin to “take the necessary steps to clear away the shanties that are upon [its] streets.”\textsuperscript{142} The city responded to his request in the summer of 1885, tearing down twenty-four dwellings in the vicinity of the Flats, and displacing the vast majority of its residents.

This strategy was an integral part of a larger process through which a new socio-spatial order was established in cities along Canada’s Western frontier.\textsuperscript{143} As Mariana Valverde argues, “Prostitution in the West was shaped not only by demographic and municipal particularities, but also by the sharp racial conflicts between Native peoples and white settlers.”\textsuperscript{144} Through this lens, the city’s early sex trade cannot be seen simply as a “side effect” of urbanization or industrialization, but as a response to settler colonialism in which Indigenous individuals transgressed racial boundaries and reclaimed urban space—however temporarily—as their own. Looking at the early sex trade through this lens also helps to explain the city’s own responses to prostitution, which focused more on policing racial boundaries and expanding white settler spaces than disciplining deviant behaviour. In more established cities to the East, anxieties around the sex trade and the spaces its workers occupied reflected larger concerns about heteronormativity and bourgeois stability—but this was just one part of the story in Winnipeg and other parts of Western Canada, where discourses around prostitution were powerfully rooted—

\textsuperscript{142} City of Winnipeg Archives (hereafter CWA), Council Communications of the City of Winnipeg, No. 4132, 1884.
\textsuperscript{143} Leslie Erickson, 13. Here, Erickson defines “discourses of difference” as a set of practices and ideas that determine who is and is not part of a particular community.
\textsuperscript{144} Mariana Valverde, 86.
at least initially—in fears of miscegenation and Indigenous resistance. While the actions of civic leadership had the intended effect of removing Indigenous sex workers from the Flats, they did not address other places and spaces of sex work that already existed in Winnipeg.

The Colony Creek District

It was in this context of racial conflict that a commercial sex trade involving mostly white, propertied women would flourish—so long as it took place within circumscribed spaces. Their presence as sex workers represented what many saw as a temporary necessity—or what Erickson describes as the “dark side of progress.”

Indeed, it would be in the city’s best interests to tacitly accept the production and maintenance of a commercial sex trade, especially in the early years of its incorporation. As Artibise so clearly illustrates, Winnipeg’s City Council “avoided dealing with such crucial issues as social welfare and comprehensive city planning,” a point which was reflected in Winnipeg’s shortage of proper housing, poor education and recreational facilities, and inadequate water and waste services. This frontier-oriented approach to urban growth is significant, insofar as it suggests that for the first forty years of its history, the city emphasized urban expansion over urban planning in almost every way. While many historians acknowledge how the “optimistic, expansionist, and aggressive” ethos of the municipal government influenced urban development over this period, few have explored the specific relationship between this brand of unfettered optimism, urban growth, and prostitution.

145 Leslie Erickson, 79.
146 Ibid., 42 and 134-135.
147 Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 23. Merchants, businessmen, real estate agents, contractors, and manufacturers entered and came to dominate public office “attracted to the role the local government could play in
It was in these boom years that the city came to depend on the migration of men to work in its rapidly expanding industries. Men were drawn to Winnipeg for its earning potential, but also for its leisure culture—which was becoming the topic of stories circulated around Canada. Civic leadership understood that gambling, liquor, and prostitution were as fundamental to the city’s growth as industry and infrastructure, just as the city’s growth encouraged the development of a commercial sex trade. Thus, urban growth and sex work became constitutive of one another in this particular historical context. Women moved to Winnipeg from other parts of North America to work in this informal economy, and were well positioned—by virtue of both race and class—to take advantage of the economic and social realities of the new city. By the early 1880s, a number of sex workers occupied rooms in the city’s hotels and boarding houses. Others worked in brothels inside the city’s first red-light district, around Colony Creek, located on the western edge of Winnipeg, at the corner of Portage Avenue and Colony Street. These women purchased property, met with civic officials and police, and—in so doing—created and expanded the city’s first unofficial sex district and shaped the early development of the city.

Of course, this group of women working in the sex trade fit only marginally into the new cityscape. Officials recognized that the growth of the city was dependent on two contradictory forces: the tacit acceptance of an informal sex economy and heightened surveillance and segregation of its workers. Civic officials understood that if they were to continue to attract investment in the city, they also needed to embrace the ideals of bourgeois respectability embodied by its expanding middle class, and thus remove from

promoting prosperity, building the city, and increasing the value of their property through improvements.” See Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 25.

148Winnipeg Daily Times, 6 April 1883.
view those women whose bodies and whose work did not fit into the new colonial order of things. According to Artibise, the 1881-1882 real estate boom contributed to “the clustering of economic activities, the segregation of classes and ethnic groups, the unequal distribution of municipal services, and different types of residential construction,” creating what he describes as a “series of distinctive environments,” including the city’s growing commercial district, its foreign quarter, and its middle-class suburbs—all of which “distinguished the large city of Winnipeg from its more jumbled predecessor.”

Increased urban settlement and development certainly encouraged the social remapping of the city, specifically the displacement of sex workers from certain urban spaces. As the city’s commercial district expanded west, a crusade to remove the houses at Colony Creek was undertaken in the fall of 1882, and several police raids were carried out. The women were removed sometime between the fall of 1882 and March of 1883, seeking “refuge temporarily in various parts of the city.” This first attempt at what would come to be known as “scatteration” created such a disturbance for residents in other parts of the city that proceedings against the women were dropped and “they returned to their former haunts.”

Having failed in their first attempt to remove the Colony Creek brothels, the city called an official commission for the suppression of vice in the spring of 1883, under the mayoralty of Alexander McMicken. Newspaper reports from this time reveal a great deal of disagreement among city officials, social reformers, and neighbourhood residents about what to do with the city’s sex district. In one interview, Reverend Silcox stated that the city should “drive them right out of the city, and keep them out. We drove the small

149 Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 151.
150 Manitoba Free Press, 15 March 1883.
151 Ibid.
pox out and we can do the same with this plague.”¹⁵² Others were more pragmatic. “It is a necessity, just as much a necessity as air or food,” wrote one reporter, “and the most we can expect to do is to hide its most hideous features and keep them from public gaze.”¹⁵³ Yet all those involved in these debates agreed was that the district could no longer operate so close to the commercial centre of the city. “Property in the vicinity of these houses has depreciated largely,” explained one local resident, “and owners justly have a grievance against the corporation for allowing these places to exist.”¹⁵⁴

Mayor McMicken met with the district’s property owners later that spring, and “tried to put them out.” He soon realized that there was “no object in that;” the district was—quite simply—“too solid.”¹⁵⁵ Instead, the women of Colony Creek were given a June deadline to leave the district which—according to the Chief of Police David Murray—would give them “a chance to build” somewhere else.¹⁵⁶ The women agreed to move away from the “business portion” of the city, so long as they could get a “favourable place” outside of it.¹⁵⁷ By the summer of 1883, most sex workers had relocated to Thomas Street, where they would remain living and working until 1904. As McMicken explained, “Thomas Street was thought advisable to put them on and they were placed there.”¹⁵⁸

Municipal officials often determined the location of red-light districts, and placed restrictions on women’s movement and behaviour therein. In this way, the development and regulation of Winnipeg’s sex districts parallels that of other areas, and “can be

¹⁵² Winnipeg Daily Times, 6 April 1883.
¹⁵³ Ibid.
¹⁵⁴ Ibid.
¹⁵⁵ MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alexander McMicken, Book 4, 403.
¹⁵⁶ Winnipeg Daily Times, 6 April 1883.
¹⁵⁷ MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alexander McMicken, Book 4, 403.
¹⁵⁸ Ibid.
viewed as a part of continuing (but contested) process involving the exclusion of disorderly prostitution from orderly sexuality.”¹⁵⁹ While this process of relocation speaks to the coercive power of Winnipeg’s police, it also reveals the important role this group of women played in the city’s larger transformation. As the city continued to grow, demands for commercial sex were coupled with concerns about commercial development and the safety of Winnipeg’s growing middle and upper classes. It was in this context that women produced, expanded, and profited from the city’s segregated sex district under the watchful eye of city police and contributed to the development of the city itself.

The Thomas Street District

Madeleine arrived in Winnipeg sometime between 1883 and 1904 and found work in one of the Thomas Street brothels. “At this period the bawdy-houses in Winnipeg occupied one short street, which stood alone in the midst of the prairie,” she explained in her autobiography.¹⁶⁰ Separated from the city by almost two miles of unbroken prairie, the district grew over these twenty years, until there were twelve houses, the majority of which were occupied by inmates from south of the border.¹⁶¹ “The unwritten law of the public and the police was that the houses must be far away from residences or other buildings,” Madeleine wrote. “The girls could have the prairies to themselves, and they would not be molested so long as they did not make themselves conspicuous in the town,” she continued, “but no girl should be allowed to remain in Winnipeg who ‘made a show of herself’ on the streets.”¹⁶² As Shumsky and Springer suggest, the conditions of segregation “actually increase[d] the city’s control over the women by instituting a strict

¹⁶⁰ Madeleine Blair, Book 2, Chapter 1, paragraph 17.
¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Book 2, Chapter 1, paragraph 17.
policy of supervision at the hands of the police.”163 Brothel keepers were free to carry on their businesses, so long as their inmates rode in closed carriages, and did not solicit in the city’s residential neighbourhoods.164 As McMicken explained during the commission, brothel owners and inmates “stayed there very quiet, while nobody hardly [sic] knew of it, except those who wanted to go. The general mass of the people in the city did not know anything about Thomas Street.”165 While perhaps few residents of Winnipeg knew about the city’s red-light district, stories of its success spread among informal networks of sex workers, and the district grew over twenty years, as women moved to Thomas Street from around North America. Madeleine herself moved to Winnipeg to work, having heard about the district from another woman involved in the sex trade. One of the women she had worked with in the United States had spent a summer working in a brothel in Winnipeg, and had returned in the fall with many wonderful stories about the Prairies, and—more importantly—“a fat bank account.”166

Women made good money selling their own sexual services, but their largest profits could come from the sale of liquor.167 Drinking was an important pastime for businessmen and labourers alike, especially in the city’s early years, and “their visits to the houses were a part of their playtime.”168 While licensed establishments were required by law to close at ten o’clock at night—and six on Saturdays—Winnipeg’s Thomas Street brothels often remained open until four o’clock in the morning. According to Madeleine, Saturday nights and Sunday afternoons were when the women did their best

163 Neil Larry Shumsky and Larry M. Springer, 82.
164 Alan Artibise, An Illustrated History, 104.
165 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alexander McMicken, Book 4, 403.
166 Madeleine Blair, Book 3, Chapter 1, paragraph 30.
167 Manitoba Free Press, 17 November 1903.
168 Madeleine Blair, Book 2, Chapter 1, paragraph 29.
business. She observed that “the men of this small city spent money with a grace and ease that I had never seen equaled.”\textsuperscript{169} Everything from lemon-soda to Scotch was sold for twenty-five cents a glass. Trays of drinks often included whiskey glasses filled with water, which inmates ordered as gin, further increasing profits.

The Thomas Street district grew, in part, because of the close networks forged between women within and outside Winnipeg, and because of the other amusements it offered its varied clientele. However, it is critical to recognize the role that police and other civic officials played in its expansion. Prostitution was selectively policed in Winnipeg and across the Prairie West. This is not to suggest that it was openly encouraged or supported; but rather, that police and civic officials were discretionary in their responses to sex work—allowing women of a particular class and race to carry out the trade in certain areas, while criminalizing others—specifically Indigenous women. Madeleine acknowledged how her own relationship with police was influenced by her race and class position. In her autobiography, she describes how she came to open a brothel just outside Edmonton’s city limits, under the watchful eye of the Northwest Mounted Police. “The commandant of the Mounted Police had decided to let one house open in the place, if the right woman applied for the privilege,” she explained. “There were many dissolute squaws and half-breed women in this section, and the O.C. [Officer in Charge] had discovered among his own men an alarming increase in venereal diseases, undoubtedly from these sources. He believed that a house which could be put under medical supervision was the lesser of two evils.”\textsuperscript{170} Madeleine was free to carry out her

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., Book 2, Chapter 1, paragraph 22.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 1, paragraph 57.
business so to “protect” white men from Indigenous women, who were constructed as a
gphysical, social, and moral threat to Edmonton’s growing settler population.\textsuperscript{171}

In Winnipeg—as in Edmonton—prostitution-related charges were seldom laid
against women from the district during this period. In 1902, two years prior to its
closure—at what was, presumably, the district’s peak, Winnipeg police did not lay a
single charge against women for inhabiting or operating a house of ill-fame, and only
three women were charged with vagrancy—likely outside the Thomas Street district.\textsuperscript{172}
These figures suggest that while street prostitution was driven further underground as a
result of segregation, residential prostitution was increasingly tolerated by police, so long
as it took place within specific, circumscribed spaces, and so long as those spaces were
owned and inhabited by white women.

\textit{When the Lights Went Out: A New Approach to Prostitution}

The Thomas Street houses flourished until November 1903, when a campaign for
their removal first began. By December, segregation had become the defining issue of the
city’s mayoralty race, which resulted in the election of the city’s first “anti-
segregationist” mayor, Thomas Sharpe. Up until this moment, the houses on Thomas
Street had attracted little outside attention. When asked how many of the city’s “reputable
citizens” wanted to “wipe these house out,” one city alderman simply responded
“none.”\textsuperscript{173} Erickson attributes this shift in thinking to the success of the city’s leading
social reformers, including Reverends Joseph Silcox, John Shearer, and Frederic Du Val,
who used both pulpit and pamphlet to condemn Winnipeg’s municipal government and

\textsuperscript{171} Leslie Erickson, 81.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Ibid.}, 104.
\textsuperscript{173} \textit{Manitoba Free Press}, 17 November 1903.
police force for allowing prostitution to expand, while spreading anxieties about contagion and disease among Winnipeg’s residents.\textsuperscript{174}

It is clear from the historical record, however, that another set of forces was at work. Between 1883 and 1903, new stores and office buildings began to go up along Portage Avenue, stretching from the corner of Colony Street into the city’s West End—closing in on Thomas Street.\textsuperscript{175} This commercial growth was accompanied by residential development to the north and south of Portage Avenue between 1890 and 1895, and from 1900 on.\textsuperscript{176} Over this period, property values along this section of Portage Avenue began to exceed those of Main Street, the city’s other major thoroughfare. It was in this context of westward expansion that property owners and real estate agents began to push for the closure of the Thomas Street district. In an article from November 1903, one reporter explained that complaints about “objectionable” places increased as more people bought up property on the western outskirts of the city.\textsuperscript{177} The city’s real estate agents also put pressure on police to close the Thomas Street district so that more properties in the West could be made available for purchase. According to Daly, their appeals were what prompted the police to change their policy.\textsuperscript{178} It was later noted, in 1905, that the only material benefit brought about by scaterration was that “the reputable house-seeking citizen [was] no longer debarred from building on the western outskirts of the city.”\textsuperscript{179}

While reformers certainly made their demands clear, it is my contention that the decision to break up the Thomas Street district was motivated more by the city’s material interests

\textsuperscript{174} Leslie Erickson, 90-91.
\textsuperscript{175} Alan Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg}, 155.
\textsuperscript{176} Alan Artibise attributes this residential development to population pressure, which was just beginning to force people out of the city’s centre, and to advances in intra-urban transportation, including the appearance of the city’s streetcar system and increased use of the bicycle. See Alan Artibise, \textit{Winnipeg}, 166.
\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Manitoba Free Press}, 17 November 1903.
\textsuperscript{178} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 314.
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Manitoba Free Press}, 14 January 1905.
than by moral arguments. Put another way, City Council and the Board of Police Commissioners only considered prostitution to be a problem when it interfered directly with the economic development of the city.

In January 1904, the Board of Police Commissioners passed a resolution “to take immediate steps to suppress all bawdy houses; houses of ill fame and disorderly houses in the City of Winnipeg, and to rigidly enforce the law respecting the same.” Police raided the district, and on 9 January, 79 women and four men were brought before the Police Magistrate and charged. Twelve pled guilty to keeping a bawdy house and paid a forty-dollar fine, plus court costs. The rest pled guilty to being an inmate of a bawdy house and paid fines of twenty dollars, plus costs. In the months following the district’s closure, only one woman was convicted of keeping a bawdy house, and two others for being inmates. Interestingly, they were not given the option of a fine, and instead served two- and three-month sentences in the Eastern Judicial District Gaol (hereafter EJDG) respectively, highlighting an important—if temporary—shift in the way the justice system dealt with brothel prostitution. Convictions for crimes commonly associated with sexual immorality and street prostitution at the turn of the century, such as vagrancy, drunkenness, and drunk and disorderly behavior—remained low in 1904—averaging just over two convictions per month among women. Two years later, in 1906, brothel-related convictions remained very low, while convictions against women for vagrancy, drunkenness, and drunk and disorderly behavior had increased—averaging approximately

\[^{180}\text{MLL, Report of the Royal Commission, 8. A “bawdy house” refers specifically to a brothel or house of prostitution. A “disorderly house” refers to any house in which illegal activities, including the solicitation of sex, are carried out.}\]

\[^{181}\text{These women were Estelle Belmont, Mamie Gregory, Ruby Bryants, Georgie Daly, Doris Vanette, May Blacke, Ollie Nells, Laura Splau, Minnie Woods, Del Wilson, and Olga Ross.}\]

\[^{182}\text{PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1217.}\]
five convictions per month surveyed.\textsuperscript{183} A newspaper reports from 1907 confirms this trend. While brothel-related arrests and convictions went down between 1904 and 1906, arrests and convictions under the Vagrancy Act went up substantially.\textsuperscript{184} By 1908, both kinds of convictions were on the rise. Just over three people were convicted each month for keeping a brothel, and even fewer were convicted as inmates. However, convictions against women for vagrancy, drunkenness and drunk and disorderly behavior were considerably higher than previous years, averaging almost eleven convictions per month surveyed.\textsuperscript{185}

Newspaper reports suggest that the district’s closure had an almost immediate effect on the city’s streetscape. Less than one week after the Thomas Street raid, one reporter observed: “Main Street has had a different aspect.” He described “women with painted faces…walking up and down the streets for want of something better to do.”\textsuperscript{186} Other observations were less innocuous. One year later, in a letter to the editor, a city resident asserted that the present condition of things is “infinitely worse than it was a year ago,” with more women working “throughout the length and breadth of the city.”\textsuperscript{187} The closure of the Thomas Street district drew more sex workers onto Winnipeg streets, and more brothels into central Winnipeg buildings. In fact, while the number of brothel-related convictions remained very low over this period, the number of brothels operating in the city increased substantially, from twelve houses in January 1904, to 63 in 1905.\textsuperscript{188} By 1909, there were 73 houses operating on over thirty streets in 1909.\textsuperscript{189}

\begin{footnotesize}\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{183}PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1218.
\item \textsuperscript{184}\textit{Manitoba Free Press}, 1 February 1907.
\item \textsuperscript{185}PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1219.
\item \textsuperscript{186}\textit{Winnipeg Tribune}, 14 January 1904
\item \textsuperscript{187}\textit{Manitoba Free Press}, 14 January 1905.
\item \textsuperscript{188}MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 316.
\item \textsuperscript{189}\textit{Ibid.}, 334.
\end{enumerate}\end{footnotesize}
addressed to the Board, Police Magistrate Thomas Mayne Daly wrote that “immorality in the City was largely on the increase,” arguing that the present system of anti-segregation was ineffectual. 190 Later, in 1911, Frederic Cox, an alderman and member of the Police Commission, conceded that the conditions in Winnipeg over this period were “a thousand percent worse.” 191

Despite these conditions, police magistrates had difficulty securing convictions over this period. During the Vice Commission, Daly revealed that women expressed their frustration with the anti-segregation policy by refusing to plead guilty to their charges—forcing police and prosecutors to produce sufficient evidence that the act of prostitution had occurred, prior to obtaining a search warrant for the house. 192 While these women had limited options available to them upon arrest, their decision to plead not guilty can be interpreted as an important act of resistance that challenged both the police and police magistrates, and ultimately created conditions where certain kinds of sex work could spread. In this way, these women’s actions directly altered the landscape of sex work in the city—and by extension, the city itself, as brothel keepers and their employees established or re-established houses on many of the city’s streets. 193 This included a number of African-American women. On 25 June 1908, the Manitoba Free Press reported that seventeen women were arrested following raids downtown; of these, fourteen were identified as “negresses” from St. Paul and Minneapolis. 194 This particular incident speaks to the realities of racial profiling on the part of city police, as well as

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190 Thomas Mayne Daly quoted by Report of the Royal Commission, 7.
192 Christine Macfarlane, 108.
193 The Report of the Royal Commission concluded that “the women occupying disorderly houses [during this period] were evidently some of those who had formerly been on Thomas Street.” See MLL, Report of the Royal Commission, 15.
194 Manitoba Free Press, June 25 1908.
effects of a gendered and racialized labour market in North America. However, it also highlights how an increasingly diverse group of women continued to move into Winnipeg to work in and effectively reshape the city’s sex trade, even as police implemented more repressive policies.

Most city residents blamed police for what was described in 1911 as “a most deplorable state of affairs.”195 From January 1904 to April 1909, the Board of Police Commissioners was in “constant receipt of complaints from citizens of different parts of the city in respect to this social evil.”196 In his testimony, Daly explained that the majority of these complaints centered on safety concerns. Girls and women were routinely insulted and accosted on their way home from church and work, and “there seemed to be throughout the city a condition of affairs that would make one believe that no lone woman could safely walk on the streets of this city.”197 William Henry Smith, a resident of Lizzie Street, explained that many of his neighbours were afraid to leave their houses, “for fear of being accosted or followed in.”198 Deputations of residents continually appeared before City Council; at one meeting, according to one alderman, they “threatened to take the law into their own hands and burn certain houses on Ross and Pacific,” just west of Main Street in the city’s downtown.199

These responses speak to larger social and geographic shifts taking place in Winnipeg over this period. By 1909, programs like the Imperial Home Reunion Movement had begun to oversee the migration of women and children to Winnipeg,

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196 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Maybe Daly, Book 3, 330.
197 Ibid., 332.
198 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Henry Smith, Book 8, 755.
199 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Lendrum McMeans, Book 3, 164.
where they were reunited with their husbands and fathers. These programs, coupled with the continued efforts to settle young, single, white women, were transforming Winnipeg’s social landscape. More adult residents were married and living in families, as rows of downtown rooming houses were slowly abandoned for homes in more residential neighbourhoods. Writing about sex districts in 1860s St. Louis, historian Jeffrey Adler suggests “as the city’s residents became more settled and land use became more specialized, concern about the moral climate of the community and about the social geography of immorality grew.” Similar conclusions can be drawn about Winnipeg in the 1900s. By 1909, conditions had become “unbearable for respectable people,” but also bad for business, as the presence of prostitution threatened property values throughout the city. Civic officials could no longer afford to ignore their residents, and it was in response to their complaints that they decided to revisit earlier conversations about segregation.

The Board of Police Commissioners met in April 1909 to determine a new course of action. Its first step was to rescind all previous resolutions that pertained to

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201 Report of the Expansion Committee, in Gateway City, 155.
202 Jeffrey Adler, 739.
204 In 1884, City Council amended the Municipal Act to appoint a Board of Police Commissioners, consisting of the mayor, the judge of county court and the police magistrate. It gave them the power to supervise police and to make regulations to increase the efficiency of the force. This did not mean “withholding the enforcement of the law in any area in the City, or against any class of offenders,” according to the Report of the Royal Commission. However, in 1909, the Board—then comprised of Mayor William Sanford Mayor Evans, Police Magistrate Thomas Mayne Daly, Frederick Cox and Lendrum McMeans—did meet with Police Chief John McRae to discuss the segregation of prostitution. For more, see Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 249-250; MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 16-17 and Book 2, 54 and 64; MLL, Report of the Royal Commission, 7.
prostitution, including the aforementioned resolution passed in January 1904.\textsuperscript{205} The second step was to “refer the whole matter to the Chief of Police,” who would “act in accordance with his best judgment towards relieving the City of the terrible and growing evil.”\textsuperscript{206} During this meeting, the city’s newly elected Mayor, William Sanford Evans, asked Chief of Police John McRae if it was possible to bring women into one locality, and McRae said it would be.\textsuperscript{207} It was understood that by passing this resolution, the Board granted authority to the Chief of Police to bring about the conditions of segregation.\textsuperscript{208} When this resolution passed, there was no dissent among members of the board.\textsuperscript{209} Their objective was not to eliminate the sex trade, or even convict the city’s sex workers, but rather to “keep them in one place.”\textsuperscript{210}

Later that month, Chief McRae met with Minnie Woods, a well-known brothel keeper, to discuss the possibility of relocating Winnipeg’s sex workers to a new red-light district. According to Woods, Chief McRae asked her if she thought this kind of relocation would be possible, and she told him it would be. Woods “knew quite a few” of the “different landladies in the city” and informed them of her intentions to move to Rachel Street in the Point Douglas neighbourhood, explaining to them that the “district was going to be a regular colony.”\textsuperscript{211} What followed these meetings was the gradual movement of mostly white women from around the city—and continent—onto two city blocks that would become known, in time, as Winnipeg’s new red-light district. Although municipal bodies had a disproportionate amount of power vis-à-vis the streetwalkers,

\textsuperscript{205} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 16.
\textsuperscript{206} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 323.
\textsuperscript{207} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 17.
\textsuperscript{208} John McRae quoted by the Report of the Royal Commission, 8.
\textsuperscript{209} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 19.
\textsuperscript{210} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Frederick Cox, Book 3, 188.
\textsuperscript{211} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Minnie Woods, Book 4, 374.
madams, and inmates, a postmodern approach suggests, “no one is outside power.”\textsuperscript{212} Indigenous women involved in the city’s sex economy continued to occupy the most marginalized spaces of sex work, influencing the ways in which these public spaces were both occupied and imagined throughout the city’s early history. Other women who lived and worked in what was to become the Point Douglas red-light district exercised varying degrees of agency within it. These brothel keepers and inmates forged important—if informal—networks with one another, resisted criminalization, filed lawsuits, bought property, made business connections, and influenced migration into and out of certain neighbourhoods. The district’s emergence and subsequent expansion can thus be understood as the result of significant interplay between the often-contradictory interests of sex workers, businessmen, and city officials. It is to these relationships that I now turn.

Red Lights Revisited: Brothel Keepers Do Business in the Point Douglas District

By the turn of twentieth century, most Canadian cities had contained prostitution in non-residential neighbourhoods or pushed it to outlying areas. In Winnipeg, the location of the red-light district was left to Chief McRae, in consultation with brothel keeper Minnie Woods, and was never discussed by members of City Council or the Board of Police Commissioners. Woods suggested Rachel Street because it was “in a neighbourhood in which many people would not be affected.” There was nothing else there outside of the gas works,” she explained, referring to the Winnipeg Gas Company, which was located on the western side of Rachel Street. “There were no private dwellings or anything,” she concluded during her testimony at the Vice Commission. By the time the Board reconvened, several houses had been purchased on Rachel Street by real estate agents, and already resold to brothel keepers. Since no formal protest was mounted, the commissioners decided that the new location was “as good as any.”

Surrounded by the Red River on three sides, and bisected by the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Point Douglas was set apart from the city’s central business district and its middle-class residential neighbourhoods (see Appendix C). However, the streets surrounding Rachel—McFarlane and Syndicate to the east, Sutherland Avenue to the north, and Higgins Avenue to the south—were all residential. In fact, Point Douglas was the oldest residential district in Winnipeg, and up until the construction of the

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213 Both Police Daly and Mayor Mayor Evans denied having any involvement in the selection of the district, explaining that it had been the responsibility of the police chief to bring about a change in conditions. See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 4, 354 and William Sanford Mayor Evans, Book 2, 107.
214 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 21.
216 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Sanford Mayor Evans, Book 2, 108a.
railroad in the early 1880s, was “one of the most desirable locations in the young community.”217 The construction of the railroad, combined with the development of medium and heavy industry along the Red River, depreciated property values in the 1880s and 1890s, and transformed the physical appearance of the district, although its residents maintained that it remained a “peaceable, very nice place to live.”218 In his testimony, John Battershill claimed, “I always considered it a fairly clean district. I never noticed any serious vice or crime there.”219 Other residents described it as one of the “quietest” and “most respectable” residential areas in the city until the segregation of prostitution in 1909.220

When the red-light district opened, Point Douglas was still “thickly populated” with working-class and foreign-born families.221 Most residents did not own property, and an increasing number were not of British birth, which meant they were unable to participate in municipal elections.222 Lacking representation, much less political clout, these groups would be “least able to combat” the segregation of prostitution on their neighbourhood’s streets.223 Consequently, it was this setting that the city’s new red-light district would emerge and expand over the next three years, as women established important networks with one another, resisted criminalization, filed lawsuits, bought

217 Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 158.
218 Ibid., 162; MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, A.E. Loader, Book 5, 32.
219 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Battershill, Book 5, 13.
221 Manitoba Free Press, 28 September 1909. A survey undertaken by J.S. Woodsworth, the director the All Saint’s Mission in Point Douglas and a member of the Moral and Social Reform Council, showed that in 1909 there were “194 Ruthenian [Ukrainian], 145 English, 92 Hebrew [Jewish], 70 Polish, 43 German, 41 Canadian, 20 Scotch, 12 Assyrian, and 10 Russian” families living in the district.” See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, J.S. Woodsworth, Book 5, 47.
222 Artibise, Winnipeg, 165.
223 Manitoba Free Press, 12 December 1910.
property, and made business connections, all under the watchful eye of the city’s Morality Office.

The segregation of sex work in Winnipeg’s Point Douglas district initially reduced the number of brothels operating in the city. This was, of course, one of the intended aims of the Board in passing the new resolution. It was understood that in bringing about conditions of segregation for a third time “there might be a more effective enforcement of the law.”\(^{224}\) Drawing comparisons to the quarantine of small pox, Daly explained, “The idea here was to minimize the evil. Instead of having these festering sores all over the city, to have one open wound in one locality and then gradually close it up, by degrees.”\(^{225}\) However, as spatial theorist Lawrence Knopp points out, when “difference is constructed [spatially] to facilitate the accumulation of power, difference is also empowered,” even in the most asymmetrical of power relations.\(^{226}\) From this perspective, we can see how the Point Douglas district created spaces within which women became empowered.

As women moved into the Point Douglas district, information about opportunities on Rachel and McFarlane spread quickly around the city—and across the continent—and the district slowly expanded in size. Some reports suggested that by 1911, approximately 200 women were engaged in some form of sex work within the district.\(^{227}\) However, during Lila Anderson’s testimony at the Vice Commission, one of the commissioners revealed that “the number of women here is 490,” more than six times the size of the

\(^{224}\) MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 17.
\(^{225}\) MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 335.
\(^{227}\) MLL, Report of the Royal Commission, 12.
Thomas Street district at the time of its closure.\textsuperscript{228} When asked why she moved into the area, Alice Penchant responded, “Because some girl told me. Every girl moved to this place.”\textsuperscript{229} When asked the same question, Anderson explained, “Well, there was a number moving down there north of the city…. I just had to get a house to move into.”\textsuperscript{230} These testimonies reveal that women passed important information along to one another through the informal social networks they forged from their shared experiences in the city’s sex trade.

These networks extended well beyond the city’s borders. “The connection between the keepers in Saskatoon and Kenora are very close with the keepers in Winnipeg,” Adjutant McElhaney explained during the Commission.\textsuperscript{231} Indeed, many women who operated houses on Thomas Street left Winnipeg in 1904, but remained in touch with others who stayed behind. For example, Doris Vinett operated a house on Thomas Street, and later on Langside Street, before moving to Saskatoon. In 1909, she returned to Winnipeg to settle in the segregated area. Lillian Raymond was employed in a house on Thomas Street until its closure forced her out of town. She returned to Winnipeg in 1909 and was one of the first to start her own business in the segregated area.\textsuperscript{232} Another woman, known to police as “Old Georgie,” worked on Thomas Street, in Brandon, and later in the Dakotas, before moving back to Winnipeg just before the policy of segregation was reintroduced.\textsuperscript{233} As the district grew in size, it became clear to police that women were “coming and going from the city from different places.”\textsuperscript{234} This point

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{228} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Lila Anderson, Book 2, 95.
\item \textsuperscript{229} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alice Penchant, Book 2, 142.
\item \textsuperscript{230} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Lila Anderson, Book 2, 79.
\item \textsuperscript{231} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Adjutant McElhaney, Book 5, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{232} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Leach, Book 8, 781.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Ibid., 783.
\item \textsuperscript{234} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 267.
\end{itemize}
was stressed several times during Chief McRae’s testimony. “There has been quite a lot of advertising from the outside as to the existence of immoral women on Rachel and McFarlane streets,” he explained.235 “Immoral women are attracted here from all over the continent, and I think it might be attributed largely to that.”236

Once established in the city, it was not uncommon for inmates to open up their own houses.237 For example, Catherine Dawson moved from the United States to work in a brothel on McFarlane Street—one year later, she purchased her own house on Rachel Street.238 Similarly, Henrietta Sage was an inmate of one house on McFarlane in 1911; by 1912, she was running her own.239 Brothel keepers and inmates alike exercised a certain degree of geographic and social mobility during this period as they responded to—and in turn reshaped—the social and economic contexts of which they became an integral part.

The rapid expansion of the Point Douglas district was due—in part—to such informal networks that linked Winnipeg to the rest of North America. This fluidity provided workers with anonymity for a time, which in turn helped them to resist criminalization and encouraged the growth of the district. “That offenders of this class are crafty and astute at eluding justice is well known,” explained one Commissioner in 1911, insisting that, “They generally have the money necessary to strongly resist prosecution and take advantage of every technicality.”240 Well-established brothel keepers, like Minnie Woods and Amy Morris, employed lawyers to look after their paperwork and

235 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 33.
236 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 2, 71; restated in the Report of the Royal Commission, 12.
238 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Leach, Book 8, 780-81.
239 Rhonda Hinther, paragraph 9.
represent them in court. Others used different names every time they were arrested to avoid stiffer penalties for repeat offences. “They keep changing the names,” explained McMicken, who served as one of the city’s police magistrates over this period. “There is not one instance where they came up under the same name.” Gladys Williams was convicted of keeping a house on Lorne Street, and served a three-month sentence. She was arrested again, in the Point Douglas district, and brought in under the name Gladys Fannon. While Charles Knox claimed she was “known as a prostitute,” the police were unable to obtain sufficient evidence against her and she was found not guilty. Other women appear to have shared a name in police court. Gertie Koerner was listed in police court records from July 1909, December 1909, May 1910, and November 1910, but was never found guilty of “having committed prior acts,” because a different woman appeared before McMicken in police court under that name each time.

During this era, women hired lawyers to represent them in court and appeared before Police Magistrates under false names. They also resisted criminalization by pleading not guilty in police court—just as women had during the period of scatteration. Without a guilty plea, it was almost impossible for the police magistrate to convict women on these charges because evidence against them was very difficult to secure. Other women living and working in the district rarely came forward with evidence against inmates or keepers, and when they did, their evidence was “unreliable.”

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242 Rhonda Hinther paragraph 48.
243 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alexander McMicken, Book 5, 52.
244 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alexander McMicken, Book 8, 744.
245 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 8, 790-792.
246 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alexander McMicken, Book 8, 744-745.
247 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 35.
248 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 257.
actively avoided testifying against one another in court. According to Chief McRae, women were routinely subpoenaed, but when it came time to appear, “none could be found to give evidence of bawdy houses.” Indeed, when a raid was carried out in the district in October 1909, dozens of women wanted as witnesses left Winnipeg for “more congenial places south of the border.” Mobility was—and for many sex workers, continues to be—an important form of resistance.

Without reliable witnesses, police sometimes searched houses of interest to collect evidence. Warrants were required to enter the houses, but before a warrant was issued, police had to present sworn information pertaining to the house in question. The head of the Morality Office, William Leach, explained in his testimony that the reputation of the houses was not sufficient evidence, nor were witness statements about the numbers of men seen entering or exiting them. The police magistrate did not accept evidence that was collected illegally, either. Police sometimes sent men into these houses to collect information on their behalf, and it was not uncommon for men to engage in illegal acts once inside—ultimately amounting to conspiracy to commit a crime. This situation was described in more detail in a letter written by Crown prosecutor H.W. Whital to the Board of Police Commissioners on 2 November 1909, shortly after the Board voted to more actively enforce the law in Point Douglas. “The difficulty of securing evidence cannot be unduly emphasized,” Whital wrote. “The system of picketing houses pursued during the years following the obliteration of the segregated

249 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 31.
250 Police Daly quoted by the Winnipeg Tribune, 14 October 1909.
251 Philip Hubbard, Sex and the City: Geographies of Prostitution in the Urban West (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 181.
252 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 341.
253 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Leach, Book 3, 212.
254 Ibid., 241.
area on the outskirts of the city is and had been declared illegal.” Therefore, he concluded, “the entry of suspected houses, no matter how efficient a force maintained, is not only difficult but renders the officers liable to action for damages when made against the will of the occupant.”

Women understood how the law worked—and were often able to use it to their advantage. During the Commission, Mayor Evans revealed that two lawsuits had been brought against police officers by Point Douglas brothel owners, who claimed “heavy damages for entering houses in the city.” Indeed, one woman was suing the city for an exaggerated sum of 10,000 dollars—a hefty amount, considering that City Council had made an interim appropriation of just 8,000 dollars to the Board of Police Commissioners the same year. While the case had not yet been settled at the time of the Commission, the Mayor was unsure if the police officers’ actions “could be defended” in court. While there is little evidence to suggest great sensitivity on the part of other Winnipeg police, most recognized women’s property rights. Property ownership ensured the economic survival of certain women and the growth of the district as a whole. “We can’t exterminate them or dynamite them,” Knox testified. After all, “These people own their own property.” Without direct evidence linking them to the crime, brothel owners could carry out their business with impunity. In the event that they were convicted of a prostitution-related crime, keepers were free to return to their house once they paid their fine or—in very few cases—served their time. There was simply “nothing to prevent

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255 CWA, Council Communications of the City of Winnipeg, No. 8750, 1909.
256 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Sanford Mayor Evans, Book 2, 120.
257 Ibid., 120.
258 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 303.
259 Rhonda Hinther, paragraph 9.
260 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 340.
the woman going back to her former resort and beginning again.”

Furthermore, no efforts were made on the part of police to prevent more women from buying property, or to encourage their sale. They were—according to police—virtually “untouchable.”

Women developed strategies that helped them evade the police and expand the district on their own. It is my contention, however, that other profit-minded groups saw opportunities in the Point Douglas district, and helped to facilitate its existence and expansion between 1909 and 1912. Residents of the city were “self-centered and aggressive” from the outset, seeking new ways to fit themselves into the city’s narrative of unbridled growth and prosperity, and sometimes blurring the boundary between legitimate and more informal industries, like the sex trade. Reformers continually accused “professional men” of “obtaining momentary advantage” in the red-light district, and to a certain extent they were correct. As Reverend Shaw observed in 1909, in an open letter to the *Manitoba Free Press*, “there were some large financial interests behind the women and the men directly interested in the deals.”

Unwilling to acknowledge women’s own role in the production and development of the red-light district, Adjutant McElhaney suggested a year later that it was “the rich men of our city who keep up this business.” The conditions of segregation in 1909 certainly created new sources of revenue for real estate agents, telephone companies, detective agencies, and liquor

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261 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Colin Campbell, Book 3, 285
262 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 2, 58 and 71.
263 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 300-303 and Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 348.
266 *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 July 1909.
267 Adjutant McElhaney quoted by the *Winnipeg Tribune*, 31 October 1910.
in distributors.\textsuperscript{268} And while the actions of these third-party agents were often exploitative in nature, they also ensured that prostitution became what Rosen, in her study of prostitution in US cities, describes as “deeply enmeshed in the political, economic, and cultural life of the city.”\textsuperscript{269} It is in this way that the city’s business interests helped build and shape the Point Douglas district.

In her study of the prostitution on the Comstock Lode, Marion Goldman suggests that the clearest forms of exploitation in segregated districts involved land and property ownership. Individuals and groups that invested the capital could share in the profits of prostitution, while avoiding the risks both brothel keepers and inmates faced in their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{270} In Winnipeg, real estate represented the primary means through which third-party agents would profit from segregated prostitution.\textsuperscript{271} During the Vice Commission in 1910, it was established that Chief McRae had contacted real estate agent John Beaman, following his meeting with Minnie Woods in April 1909. “I got a phone from the chief of police asking me if I would like to go into that sort of thing [and] buy up that area there,” he explained. Chief McCrae told him where to “go and get information,” and a curious Beaman contacted Woods.\textsuperscript{272} When they met, Woods explained to Beaman “that they were going to segregate.”\textsuperscript{273} “I just spoke about the place,” she explained in her testimony, “and he said he would take the thing in hand,”

\textsuperscript{268} In her study of nineteenth-century America, Ruth Rosen demonstrates how police, doctors, liquor interests, procurers and madams all siphoned off the majority of women’s earnings. See Ruth Rosen, 6, 71-72.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid, 70.
\textsuperscript{270} Marion S. Goldman, 122.
\textsuperscript{271} The city’s greatest fortunes were also in real estate. In his study, Alan Artibise argues, “despite Winnipeg’s growing importance as a commercial and agricultural centre, it was in real estate that the great fortunes of its leading citizens would be made.” See Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 12.
\textsuperscript{272} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Beaman, Book 4, 386.
\textsuperscript{273} Ibid, 387.
with her assurances that he would be able to resell the properties.\footnote{274} Over the next several months, Beaman purchased twenty-two houses on two city blocks. The houses were valued between 2,500 and 5,000 dollars, and were sold for three or four times that amount to Woods and the other women with whom Beaman had contact.\footnote{275} Several other real estate agents bought up the rest of the property on Rachel and McFarlane, purchasing between one and five houses at a time, and proceeding to either sell or rent them to the city’s brothel keepers at exorbitant rates.\footnote{276} Having examined some of these transactions, Reverend Shearer concluded, “Enormous profits were being made by the men who handled the real estate deals.”\footnote{277} Indeed, between the spring and summer of 1909, Beaman made a profit of 70,000 dollars.\footnote{278}

Women who bought houses in Point Douglas were not without agency. According to Daly, “they were shrewd business women and usually had legal advice.”\footnote{279} They understood that they would be able to run their businesses there “without molestation”—and were thus “willing to pay for the privilege.”\footnote{280} Marjorie Morrison purchased 163 Rachel Street in June 1909 for 8,000 dollars—about 6,000 more than she believed it was worth. When asked why she paid such an inflated amount for her property, she explained, “I paid it because I was asked to pay it. I wanted to get a house…. I just wanted to go

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  \item \footnote{274}{MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Minnie Woods, Book 4, 375.}
  \item \footnote{275}{MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Beaman, Book 4, 390.}
  \item \footnote{276}{John Gaynor was the only other real estate agent who testified in 1912. He read about segregation in the newspaper, and proceeded to buy up five houses on McFarlane Street the summer of 1909. See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Gaynor, Book 4, 406. Less is known about the district’s landlords, as only a passing reference is made to them in Adjutant McElhaney’s testimony.}
  \item \footnote{277}{MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Shearer, Book 6, 542.}
  \item \footnote{278}{A complete list of house prices and purchasers can be found in the Minutes of Evidence. See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Beaman, Book 4, 392.}
  \item \footnote{279}{Daly quoted in the \textit{Winnipeg Tribune}, 15 July 1909.}
  \item \footnote{280}{MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Lila Anderson, Book 2, 81.}
\end{itemize}
Lila Anderson purchased a double house, at 178 and 180 McFarlane Street, with her sister for 12,000 dollars. When asked what she thought the house would be worth in another area, Anderson judged it was worth between 1,500 and 2,000 dollars. The “rest” was what she was willing to pay “for the protection which was expected” from police. This particular statement speaks to how the segregation of prostitution took place in Winnipeg. While motivated by very different sets of interests, it was this interplay between the city’s brothel keepers, police, and real estate agents that helped produce—and expand—the Point Douglas segregated district over this period.

Other business interests were also at work, benefiting from the segregation of sex work, and actively reshaping the district for their own ends. In October 1909, Manitoba Government Telephones, a Crown corporation, installed 43 pay station telephones in houses on Rachel Street, north of Sutherland Avenue, and on the east side of McFarlane. In her testimony, Morrison explained that four months after moving to Rachel Street, her regular telephone was replaced with a pay telephone without any consultation. In fact, pay telephones were the only kind of telephones brothel owners could have “down there.” Like other owners, Morrison had to guarantee revenue of four dollars per month, or make up the difference. Any extra revenue generated was retained as surplus—which, in Morrison’s case, was anywhere from ten to fifteen dollars a month. In October 1909, ten phones generated revenue of 87 dollars. A year later, all

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281 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Marjorie Morrison, Book 2, 103.
282 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Lila Anderson, Book 2, 80.
283 Ibid, 81.
284 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Archer Robert Burton, Book 3, 305.
43 phones generated around 526 dollars.\textsuperscript{287} While the profits made by the telephone company in Point Douglas were significantly less than those in real estate, they were higher than telephone profits made in other parts of the city at the same time. In fact, the company was required to increase its staff and develop its infrastructure “simply on account of this service.”\textsuperscript{288} In his testimony, Archer Robert Burton explained that “before these people went down there, [the company] only had two circuits in there, and small lines, and since that we have put a lot of money into construction.”\textsuperscript{289} While Burton claimed to have not wanted “that class of business,” his testimony reveals a clear relationship between the segregation of prostitution, the exploitation of brothel owners, and the development of the district’s infrastructure.\textsuperscript{290}

Detective agencies provided another service in the district upon which women came to depend. Both Louisa Dupont and Edna Hamilton paid 15 dollars a month to the Central Detective Agency over the three years that they lived in Point Douglas, and confirmed during their testimonies that other brothel keepers did the same.\textsuperscript{291} Dupont explained that detectives were employed “to protect us from annoyance on the street” and to keep “the street in order,” suggesting that their primary function was to keep drunk and disorderly clientele off the streets and out of their houses.\textsuperscript{292} When their services were required, women would simply blow a whistle or call the agency from the pay telephone inside their house. Private detectives also took profits away from pimps. Between 1904

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\item \textsuperscript{287} MLL, Report of the Royal Commission, 13.
\item \textsuperscript{288} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Archer Robert Burton, Book 3, 306-307.
\item \textsuperscript{289} The houses would call up pay station operators who dealt specifically with calls from the district, and did not deal with calls from any other telephone; however, other operators had to deal with calls into the district. See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Archer Robert Burton, Book 3, 308.
\item \textsuperscript{290} \textit{Ibid.}, 307.
\item \textsuperscript{291} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Edna Hamilton, Book 2, 152 and Louisa Dupont, Book 2, 146.
\item \textsuperscript{292} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Louisa Dupont, Book 2, 146.
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and 1909, the number of pimps in the city had increased significantly. “The city was crowded with them,” Daly explained, and it “seemed impossible to get at these men until these houses were moved down there to Rachel Street.” Only when the conditions of segregation were brought about were they “fired out or driven out of the city.” In her study of the Point Douglas district, Hinther explains that women used private detectives “to remain financially independent from pimps and to control negative activity in the area that might draw the attention of the press, reformers, and police.” Here, we see again how different sets of interests intersected in the spaces of the red-light district to ensure its growth and success. While detective agencies profited from the segregation of prostitution, they also made it possible to remove the traditional pimp or middleman who lived on the avails of the sex trade.

These transactions benefited both brothel keepers and the groups with whom they did business. Indeed, it was in the best interests of both brothel keepers and business owners to keep the district open. Nowhere was this more evident than in the distribution of liquor. Liquor sales were key to the success of the district. In fact, the sale of liquor in brothels was as important as the sale of sex and companionship. One city reformer suggested that anywhere from 200 to 600 people could be found in the district in any given evening. “Many are led by curiosity,” Dr. McIntyre explained, but “others are led by drink, and drink is the worst feature of the evil.” He stated “on good authority” that profits from liquor sales could amount to as much as 750 dollars in one evening.

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293 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 344-345.
294 Rhonda Hinther, paragraph 25.
295 Lindsey McMaster, 107.
296 Manitoba Free Press, 4 October 1910.
Simply put, a brothel “could not run the place without the whiskey.” One resident described the houses as whiskey dens, where liquor wagons were regularly spotted unloading their wares. “I have seen a great many wagon loads...of liquor, constantly coming down there [and] stopping at these homes,” reported another resident during the commission. Michael Johnston, the province’s chief license inspector, denied having any knowledge of these deliveries and reminded the commission that it was a crime to distribute liquor anywhere it was sold illegally. Others involved in the business were more forthcoming in their testimonies. Benjamin Zimmerman, a justice of the peace in the city, was also in the business of wholesale liquor distribution, revealing just how closely connected civic and provincial officials were to the city’s business interests. During the commission, he was asked if he sold liquor to women in the segregated area, to which he responded, “Not more than any other people…. You would not turn a client down. Why should I?” Zimmerman’s testimony reflected a commonly held attitude towards these kinds of business transactions in the district. So long as large profits could be made in Point Douglas, people would continue to conduct business there—thus supporting and ensuring its existence.

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297 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Adjutant McElhaney, Book 5, 15. All reformers made the same claim. In his own testimony, John Shearer argued, “I don’t think the business of prostitution could be carried on without the sale of liquor.” See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Shearer, Book 6, 570.

298 Point Douglas resident John Mitchell described the situation in his neighbourhood to a deputation at City Council. Part of his speech was quoted by the *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 September 1909.

299 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Tait, Book 5, 27.

300 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Michael Johnston, Book 4, 384-385.

301 During Zimmerman’s testimony, one of the commissioners ran through a list of addresses where Zimmerman had sold liquor, including four houses in the red-light district (152 and 159 Rachel Street and 180 and 182 McFarlane Street, respectively). See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Benjamin Zimmerman, Book 8, 799-801.

302 Comparisons can be drawn here to other cities in the Prairie West. In Edmonton, houses of prostitution were shut down by the Northwest Mounted Police, but reopened two years later, when businessmen “raised an objection to the ‘closed town’ because of the decrease in business.” According to Madeleine, “they attributed this to the fact that the town had no attraction for the hundreds of single men employed in various
These examples illustrate how public order and moral regulation came second to profit in Winnipeg during the boom years. As a result, both brothel keepers and other business interests dictated and influenced the uses of space in the city. Businesses stood to profit from the segregation of prostitution as much as civic officials stood to benefit both politically from the removal of vice in other areas, and pragmatically, from routine fines for prostitution-and liquor-related offences. In larger and smaller ways, the sex trade played an important economic role in Winnipeg in its early decades. Seeing an opportunity to profit personally, businessmen purchased and resold entire city blocks, installed telephone lines, provided detective services, and distributed liquor in the city’s sex district. As McMaster explains, the integration of prostitution with local business interests was “profitable to everyone involved and demonstrates that the sex trade…played an invaluable economic role in opening the West.”

303 It was through their everyday interactions that the city’s sex workers and other business interests created and expanded the city’s red-light district.

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capacities.” Without these attractions, “as soon as the men drew their money, they went to one of the neighbouring towns to spend it.” Prostitution was clearly an important part of economic growth in these early Prairie economies. See Madeleine Blair, Book 3, Chapter 1, paragraph 46.

303 Lindsey McMaster, 107.
Serving the Best Interests of the City: Sex Workers, Winnipeg’s Civic Elite, and the Policy of Segregation

Between 1909 and 1912, police and public officials tolerated the illicit sale of sex and liquor inside the Point Douglas district because they recognized the role a segregated sex trade played in the larger development of the city. Like the district’s brothel keepers, inmates, and business connections, civic authorities benefited in both small and more substantial ways from the segregation of prostitution. Indeed, it was made abundantly clear during the commission that “the best interests of the city were served” in this process.\textsuperscript{304} The period of scatteration between 1904 and 1908 presented a number of problems for the city’s leadership, thus leading them to conclude, “The social evil cannot be suppressed.”\textsuperscript{305} While the sex trade could not be abolished, most of the city’s police and public officials understood it could be more effectively managed. The twentieth century had indeed ushered in new demands for institutions and strategies intended to control the movement and behaviour of women.\textsuperscript{306}

It was in this new regulatory climate that the city’s sex workers were discriminately policed, criminalized, and punished for their participation in the sex trade. Winnipeg police—with the support of City Council, the Board of Police Commissioners, police magistrates, and provincial court judges—subjected prostitutes still living and working outside Point Douglas to harsher surveillance and more frequent penalties, introduced a number of gender-specific regulations inside the district, and implemented a system of routine fines for both prostitution- and liquor-related offences that took place therein. Two concerns motivated their actions: public order and profit. By removing sex

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\item \textsuperscript{304} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 2, 54.
\item \textsuperscript{305} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 333.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Philip Hubbard, \textit{Sex and the City}, 91.
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workers from certain spaces in the city, and regulating their presence in others, police and other officials protected residents and property values in new middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods, provided a sanctioned outlet for men’s “excess sexuality,” and filled both municipal and provincial coffers with profits from fines. Through these interventions, the city’s leadership actively participated in the production of the Point Douglas district, and distinctly white, middle-class spaces outside of it.

From the perspectives of both police and other city officials, the main objective of segregation was to maintain public order outside the district. When the city’s brothels were relocated in Point Douglas, a special division of the Winnipeg Police Service was formed “to exercise authority over these establishments and to ensure that the regulations were enforced.” While the Point Douglas district was the primary jurisdiction of the Morality Office, as it was known, its duties were not confined to it. In fact, during the commission, Robert Dennistoun, one of the Vice Commissioners, revealed that a disproportionate amount of police resources were directed towards prostitutes still living and working in other parts of the city. Of the eight Morality Officers employed by police, only two were assigned to patrol the district at a time. The rest were put to work in other parts of the city. While segregation reduced prostitution in other parts of the city, it did not eliminate it. Between October 1909 and October 1910, police received 82 complaints from concerned residents living in a number of different neighbourhoods. According to one officer, there were between eight and twelve reputed houses still

309 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Robert Dennistoun, Book 8, 667.
310 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Leach, Book 3, 225.
scattered throughout the city, as well as an unknown number of “immoral women” working in them or on the city’s streets. Subject to greater surveillance than the district’s keepers and inmates, and lacking their material supports and social connections, sex workers found outside Point Douglas were arrested with more frequency and “more easily driven out of town or driven to confession and conviction.” Between October 1909 and October 1910, there were twenty-five convictions for keeping a house outside the segregated district, in comparison to twenty-three convictions inside the district, even though there were at least four times more brothels operating inside Point Douglas than anywhere else in the city.

While police continued to target prostitution in brothels, street prostitution represented a more pressing concern. Between October 1909 and October 1910, approximately 170 women from outside the district were brought before the police magistrate and charged with “drunkenness and vagrancy” under the Vagrancy Act. While not all women brought in on these charges worked in the sex trade, their social and sometimes sexual behaviour represented a moral threat to Winnipeg’s increasingly ordered urban landscape, and they were thus subject to some of the harshest penalties. Some women were sent to women’s reformatories, like the Women’s Rescue and Industrial Home and the Home of the Good Shepherd, where they learned domestic skills, like cooking and sewing, specific to both their class and gender. Other women brought before the magistrate on these kinds of vagrancy charges “were placed under a

312 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 303.
313 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Sanford Mayor Evans, Book 2, 113.
315 Philip Hubbard draws similar conclusions about contemporary sex work in “Red-Light Districts and Toleration Zones,” 129. See also MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Robert Dennistoun, Book 8, 667.
316 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Leach, Book 3, 238.
317 PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1219 and 1220.
suspended sentence, to go away from the city for a certain time.” As Mayor Evans explained in his testimony, women who did not live within the Point Douglas district were “more easily driven out of town or driven to confession and conviction.” Prior to segregation, women often returned to their previous haunts after an allotted time. From the spring of 1909 on, many of the women “who have been out on suspended sentences” relocated to Rachel and McFarlane Streets, illustrating—again—how even the most marginalized women effectively expanded and reshaped the district over this period.  

With both brothels and street prostitution mostly hidden from view, City Council concluded on 29 September 1910 “that the work of ridding the City of prostitutes has been effectually carried on throughout the various parts of the City.” Hiding the city’s sex trade from view—while ensuring its continued success inside circumscribed spaces—was a priority for police and other city officials over this period. As in other early twentieth-century cities, Winnipeg police maintained a sense of public order and stability outside the district by “separating respectability from unmitigated immorality.” They achieved this by funnelling a disproportionate amount of municipal resources into police work outside the red-light district. Their actions protected residents and property values in new middle- and upper-class neighbourhoods and ensured the re-election of the city’s municipal government, proving that their primary concern was urban expansion instead of moral reform. The municipal government, together with the police, was reshaping the city for its own ends. The segregation of prostitution played an important role in this process.

318 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Sanford Mayor Evans, Book 2, 113.
319 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 300.
320 Minutes of City Council, 29 September 1910, presented as evidence during the Royal Commission.
321 Jeffrey Adler, 744.
A long period of prosperity in Winnipeg, coupled with the construction of several bridges across the Assiniboine River in the late 1890s, encouraged the geographic expansion of the city, and the migration of its most wealthy residents into new wards and suburbs in the South and West. By 1910, suburbanization represented a “mass movement” among Winnipeg’s most affluent residents, and property values in areas like Wellington Crescent and Armstrong Point rose to an all-time high.  

During the Commission, Dennistoun suggested that the city’s leadership had a responsibility to protect both residents and property values by ensuring prostitution did not spread to certain parts of the city. When asked to clarify what he meant, Dennistoun stated that the city’s leadership wanted prostitution contained “so it is not going to Armstrong Point,” one of the city’s toniest neighbourhoods.

Instead, the sex trade was relocated to Point Douglas. In the late-nineteenth century, the CPR’s main line was routed through the North End, and a variety of industries went up around the railway yards, including Ogilvie Flour Mills, Vulcan Iron and Engineering Works, and a number of saw mills, profoundly impacting the physical appearance of the area, and transforming its class and ethnic character. By the turn of the century, Point Douglas and other parts of the North End were among the poorest and most ethnically diverse areas in the city. Property values continued to depreciate after 1909, further entrenching these social and economic divides. John Battershill estimated that his house was worth between 5,000 to 8,000 dollars prior to segregation; in 1910, he claimed he could not sell it for 2,000.

“I consider that our houses are ruined,” another

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322 Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 166-167.
323 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Robert Dennistoun, Book 8, 691.
324 Alan Artibise, Winnipeg, 159.
325 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Battershill, Book 5, 18.
resident argued. “I don’t think they are worth anything.” Some of the district’s more established residents could afford to leave. Mrs. Morefield and her family moved out in 1910. “I had the property vacant for a while, then I had to rent it to foreigners,” she explained. “No one else would live there.” This was a common pattern according to one resident. “There was quite a few English speaking people living down there” prior to segregation, A.E. Loader explained. “They have moved—their places is filled up with foreigners.” This process ensured only the most socially and economically marginalized groups were directly impacted by the city’s sex trade, and thus protected members of the city’s bourgeoisie from what one moral reform referred to as prostitution’s “pernicious influence.”

By isolating prostitution in one part of the city, police and other public officials were protecting the interests of the city’s middle and upper classes—and by extension, their own. In a deputation to City Council, Reverend J.L. Gordon declared, “whoever was responsible for the segregation on Rachel Street would not have dared to place the segregated community in some richer and more fashionable section of the city.” Keeping prostitution out of these parts of Winnipeg protected the interests of the city’s electorate and thus protected the political power of the city’s elected officials. From the time of incorporation through the first decades of the 1900s, all voters in municipal elections had to meet certain qualifications. They had to be male, twenty-one years of age

327 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Mrs. Morefield, Book 5, 38.
328 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, A.E. Loader, Book 5, 34.
329 Frederic Duval quoted by the Manitoba Free Press, 2 May 1910.
or older, and British citizens. They also had to hold a certain amount of property. In 1890, the city introduced a plural vote system, which allowed a person to elect aldermen and controllers in every ward he held property. In 1895, another special measure was introduced giving women the right to vote, so long as they met the same property qualifications. This doubled the vote for propertied couples.

In 1910, only ten percent of the city could cast a ballot in municipal elections, and 6,000 residents could vote more than once. As Artibise so articulately argues, “the aim of these qualifications was to represent property, not people.” It also ensured that the city’s foreign-born population and its working poor did not have a voice in municipal politics, and had little control over what happened in their own neighbourhoods. When a municipal election was held in 1910, segregation was the central issue and Winnipeg voters took a stand. The outcome of the election reflected the material interests of the voting population. Mayor Evans, who supported the policy of segregation, beat reform-minded Edward Martin in the mayoralty race, and every incumbent alderman and controller who ran in 1910 was re-elected. Mayor Evans even won in Ward 5, where the district was located. While there is no record of the voting activities or patterns of Winnipeg’s propertied brothel owners, one can conclude that these results reflect the interests of the ward’s electorate—and not the foreign-born, working-class tenants to whom they rented their residential properties.

Police and other city officials clearly understood that it was in their best interests to keep prostitution in poor, ethnic areas, and out of the commercial and residential

331 “Freeholders were required to be rated in the city’s assessment role for at least 100 dollars, while leaseholders or tenants of real property required a rating of at least 200 dollars,” according to Alan Artibise, in *Winnipeg*, 38.
spaces occupied by the city’s growing middle and upper classes, as the presence of sex workers impacted concepts and values of urban spaces in Winnipeg.\textsuperscript{334} They were not concerned with the moral salvation or reform of individual sex workers, or the working-class and foreign-born families with whom these women most often crossed paths. Their efforts focused primarily on the preservation of public order for the purposes of urban development and investment, and on the reorganization—rather than the elimination—of social vice.

To that end, two morality officers were put on patrol in Point Douglas to manage disorderly conduct and maintain a level of “public decency” there.\textsuperscript{335} Rather than enforce the laws against bawdy houses, these officers were told to regulate the actions and movements of both brothel keepers and inmates. “I instructed the morality officer that he was to say to them that they were not expected to parade the streets, to solicit on the street, nor to go up town,” explained Chief McRae. Brothel keepers “were not to have any manifestations of disorder [and] all outward manifestations of disorderly conduct would be suppressed,” including bright lights, large numbers, and loud music.\textsuperscript{336} As Lila Anderson explained, “Our houses were supposed to be the same as any private house.”\textsuperscript{337} So long as keepers “kept quiet” they would “not get into trouble,” explained Marjorie Morrison.\textsuperscript{338} However, the officers had instructions to arrest women who created public disturbances in Point Douglas, or who transgressed the boundaries between the district and the rest of the city, reflecting the ways in which women’s presence in—and

\textsuperscript{334} Christine Macfarlane makes similar argument in her thesis.
\textsuperscript{335} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Sanford Mayor Evans, Book 2, 108-109.
\textsuperscript{336} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 13-14, 46.
\textsuperscript{337} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Lila Anderson, Book 2, 83.
\textsuperscript{338} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Marjorie Morrison, Book 2, 98.
movement through—public space was regulated and disciplined.\textsuperscript{339} Brothel keepers were expected to report when their employees “went out and got drunk,” explained one Morality Officer. “If we found them away, we would lock them up.”\textsuperscript{340}

The actions of the Morality Officers appear to have had little effect on women, according to those who lived in Point Douglas. While Daly stated that officers were initially successful in their efforts, he also acknowledged “these women have got defiant.”\textsuperscript{341} During the commission, Point Douglas residents described how women challenged many of the restrictions the Morality Office placed on their actions and movements. “Any person going down there can hardly fail to see that the women living there are not what we would call good, respectable women,” John Tait declared.\textsuperscript{342} “There are the usual sights of naked legs,” Battershill explained. “I saw a couple of girls nearly nude riding horseback one morning about six o’clock...nude from the knee up to the waist, or practically so.”\textsuperscript{343} John Mitchell complained, “I have seen them through the windows on McFarlane Street, they rap on the windows when you pass by, and induce you to come in.”\textsuperscript{344} Others “heard some of the vilest language come from the women down there.”\textsuperscript{345} While the process of segregation was intended to separate sexually deviant subjects from the rest of the city in both social and spatial ways, women clearly contested and resisted these boundaries through their everyday actions.\textsuperscript{346} If the primary function of red-light districts was social control—as Hubbard suggests—then it

\textsuperscript{339} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 14 and 27.
\textsuperscript{340} According to Leach, girls often went uptown and got drunk around restaurants. See MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Leach, Book 3, 226.
\textsuperscript{341} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 346.
\textsuperscript{342} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Tait, Book 5, 26.
\textsuperscript{343} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Battershill, Book 5, 15.
\textsuperscript{344} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Mitchell, Book 5, 6
\textsuperscript{345} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Battershill, Book 5, 16.
\textsuperscript{346} Philip Hubbard, \textit{Sex and the City}, 7.
simultaneously functioned as site of meaningful resistance.\textsuperscript{347} Women’s actions can thus be conceived as meaningful steps “taken to mark out and manage their own space in the face of a dominant moral order that stigmatize[d] and persecute[d] sexual dissidents.”\textsuperscript{348}

While mostly ineffectual, it was the intended aim of the Morality Office to regulate and discipline women’s behaviour both inside and outside the district. However, no such efforts were made to control disruptive male clientele or reform their behaviour. This is because both police and other public officials saw prostitution as a natural and necessary part of gender relations and a means to indirectly manage working-class masculinity. Experts from across Canada agreed that attempts to suppress prostitution would result in greater incidence of insanity among young men and sexual violence against other young women. As Tamara Myers explains in her study of women in Montreal, “Many Victorians viewed prostitution as a necessary evil: a solution to working-class unrest, or a vice that fed the weaknesses of men and prevented rape of innocent women.”\textsuperscript{349} These views were shared across Canada and the United States. In a meeting of the Victoria police commission in 1898, Dr. J.S. Helmcken argued, “There is a necessity for such women.”\textsuperscript{350} He suggested that closing Victoria’s brothels would lead to “lunatic asylums crowded with young men” and would also cause “trouble for the young girls of the city.”\textsuperscript{351} In his study of sex work in St. Louis, Adler argues that civic officials and boosters alike “recognized that brothels provided a valuable service in a

\textsuperscript{347} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid., 192.
\textsuperscript{349} Tamara Myers, “Criminal Women and Bad Girls: Regulation and Punishment in Montreal, 1890-1930” (PhD dissertation, McGill University, 1995): 89-90.
\textsuperscript{350} Dr. J.S. Helmcken quoted by Patrick Dunae, “Geographies of Sexual Commerce in Victoria, British Columbia, 1862-1912,” independently published online by Clio Media (March 2010), 36. Dr. Helmcken believed that without sexual outlets, men would masturbate more. At the time, masturbation was believed to lead to insanity.
\textsuperscript{351} Helmcken quoted by Patrick Dunae, 36-37.
large city…and made no efforts to deny the existence of brothels.” These kinds of concerns were especially pertinent in a place like Winnipeg, where men consistently outnumbered women. As Erickson explains, a large surplus of single, unencumbered, wage-earning men resulted in “a distinct homosocial culture characterized by alcohol abuse, gambling, and prostitution.” It also increased “the difficulty of settling the question of social vice,” according to Chief McRae.

The city’s brothels represented sites of male homosociability, as well as female companionship. As James Gray explains in *Red-lights on the Prairies*, “the bars, brothels, poolrooms were not only the social centres for the unattached males; they were almost the only recreational facilities available to them.” In the city’s North End, these facilities outnumbered churches by six to one; brothels alone outnumbered churches three to one. According to one reformer, 292 men were counted visiting fourteen different houses in two and a half hours. On another occasion, 96 men were counted visiting one house in one hour. When asked during the Commission if it was fair to compare conditions in Winnipeg to those of older, more settled cities, Chief McRae responded: “No, I don’t think it is fair; this is a cosmopolitan city, [with] a great many more public works being carried on from here [and] a very great many young unmarried men,” who—in the words of one commissioner—“add to the difficulty of dealing with this

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352 Jeffrey Adler, 741.
353 In 1906, there were 127 men for every 100 women in Winnipeg, with a surplus of 11,000 single men. This gap shrank slightly in 1911, when there were 121 men for every 100 women, and a similar surplus of single men. The largest population discrepancy was among young people between 20 and 30. For more, see Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg*, 147.
354 Leslie Erickson, 85.
355 James Gray x-xi.
356 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Adjutant McElhaney, Book 5, 10.
Winnipeg was the largest city on the Prairies and the self-described “Gateway” to the Canadian West and North; its development both attracted and depended on “those seeking work and those seeking workers.” As Erickson explains, agricultural and industrial expansion made it necessary to recruit less-desirable settlers. Demands for young, male workers contributed to the tacit acceptance of prostitution, fostered the development of the Point Douglas district, and—in the eyes of police officers—helped keep its clientele out of trouble.

That the sex district was so closely tied to Winnipeg’s economic development meant that the Morality Office was not “in the habit of arresting men found in these houses on Rachel and McFarlane streets.” Court records from this period show men were sometimes charged as inmates or habitual frequenters under the Vagrancy Act. However, no more than one or two men appeared in court over the months surveyed, and almost all of the men received suspended sentences if convicted. In July 1909, police raided nine houses on the east side of McFarlane Street, arrested 32 women, and charged them with prostitution-related offences. Between 30 and 40 men were also found inside the houses. The police recorded their names but did not arrest them. During the commission, it was revealed that the Crown prosecutor, in consultation with the Chief McRae, determined men would not be charged with prostitution-related offences unless officers observed them “round the houses on numerous occasions” and could prove that

357 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 2, 52-53. Here, Winnipeg was contrasted to more-established Toronto, where male customers and female inmates were both arrested. At the turn of the century, Toronto set up a morality division, headed by an Inspector David Archibald, an ardent moral reformer. The squad was effective in keeping number of brothels down, and few people were reported to have resorted to them. Unlike other cities, Toronto never established an unofficial red-light district, although some houses may have appeared on same street. See Mariana Valverde, 82.
358 Gerald Friesen, 275.
359 Leslie Erickson, 38.
360 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 256.
361 Winnipeg Tribune, 12 July 1909.
the houses were, in fact, houses of prostitution.362 Without evidence to demonstrate that men were habitual frequenters, there was—according to Chief McRae, “no law to justify their arrest as vagrants.”363

Conditions in the district suggest that police had ample evidence to arrest men for drunk and disorderly behaviour under the Vagrancy Act or for other, more violent crimes. John Murray, a resident of the district, described having “seen lots of men drunk and showing their person on the street.”364 Many claimed to have “been very much annoyed at our home by drunken men coming there and asking for prostitutes.”365 Women and girls who lived in the area were often accosted by men on the street, or in their homes.366 During the commission, Mrs. Bradley described a terrifying incident where three men broke into her home on Higgins Avenue, and demanded both drinks and “girls” in exchange for seven dollars. When she told them she was not a brothel keeper, one of the men attempted to rape her. Mrs. Bradley managed to escape, and reported the incident to police. However, it was not until a letter about the attack was published in the paper that the police responded.367 “You will notice,” observed one police official, “that all the trouble in that part of the city…is caused by the drunken men who visit there. The women themselves, taken as a whole, are very well behaved, and cause little or no trouble.”368 Despite these observations, the behaviour of both keepers and inmates was subject to greater police surveillance and harsher punishment in court. The city’s

362 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 258 and John McRae, Book 1, 41-43. Officers sometimes recorded men’s names, but Police Chief McRae admitted there was no organized effort on the part of the Morality Office to keep track of habitual frequenters.
363 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 43.
364 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Murray, Book 5, 22.
365 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Battershill, Book 5, 15.
366 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John Murray, Book 5, 23. Residents A.E Loader and Thornton Simmons made similar claims in their testimonies.
367 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Mrs. Bradley, Book 7, 610-611.
368 Winnipeg Tribune, 15 April 1912.
leadership showed little interest in abolishing the segregated district, or arresting its male clientele upon whom the growth of their city depended.

The behaviour of the district’s sex workers and their clientele did not just draw the attention of their neighbours; it also drew the ire of reform-minded groups. In October 1909, the Council of Social and Moral Reform campaigned both City Council and the Board of Police Commissioners to close the district, suggesting that “males should be taken up as well as the females.” Other reform groups demanded more money be invested in law enforcement. Taking up their efforts, Crown prosecutor Whitla wrote a letter to the Board of Police Commissioners in November 1909, recommending it spend an additional 20,000 dollars a year employing more officers. “It would appear absurd that in a City of about 150,000 population proper, control of this evil can be accomplished with only two officers and without a single dollar of an appropriation of such a fund,” he argued. In response to Whitla’s recommendation, City Council ordered an appropriation of 8,000 dollars—less than half the suggested amount—that the Board to Police Commissioners was to use to expand the Morality Office. However, no specific instructions were ever given regarding the suppression of houses in the district and according to alderman Frederic Cox, the Board of Police Commissioners never used the funds to hire more officers. In 1910, another 10,000 dollars was allocated to the Board for “morality purposes” over three months. Over this period, Alderman James Willoughby observed, “the houses on Rachel and McFarlane streets for which the money

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369 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, William Sanford Mayor Evans, Book 2, 128.
370 CWA, Council Communications of the City of Winnipeg, No. 8750.
371 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Frederick Cox, Book 3, 184.
372 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Charles Knox, Book 3, 253 and Frederick Cox, Book 3, 184. Cox was also on the Board of Police Commissioners until December 1909.
373 CWA, Council Communications of the City of Winnipeg, No. 8856 and No. 27, 1910.
was given were not decreased but had increased during the time the money was expended.” Willoughby, who was also a member of the Board of Police Commissioners, estimated that the number of houses had increased from twenty-eight to “somewhere in the neighbourhood of fifty.”

What all this suggests is that there was very little interest—on the part of both City Council and the Board of Police Commissioners—to actively reduce the number of houses operating in Point Douglas or to criminalize its male clientele. Rather, they focused their efforts on the regulation of sex workers outside its boundaries to reduce the incidence of exposure and to protect property values, while imposing a system of routine fines for brothel keepers and inmates already working inside of it.

While sex workers were most often represented as objects of scorn or sympathy in newspapers and reform literature, their experiences in court suggest they represented something very different to police magistrates and provincial court judges: a viable source of public revenue.\textsuperscript{375} As early as 1883, newspapers reported that the city derived “a large revenue from fines imposed on the inmates.”\textsuperscript{376} From the days of the Colony Creek district on, women were intermittently brought into police court, charged with keeping or being an inmate of a bawdy house, and then usually fined and let go. After the segregation of prostitution in Point Douglas, police and liquor inspectors began to charge and fine women for both prostitution- and liquor-related offences with growing frequency. Testimonies from the Commission reveal that women were routinely fined for their involvement in the district, but were never told to stop running their business or

\textsuperscript{374} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, James Willoughby, Book 3, 247.
\textsuperscript{375} Similar conclusions are drawn by Tamara Myers in her study of Montreal. Here, Myers argues, “prostitution may have been accepted as necessary also because it was a source of municipal revenue through fines and bribes. It also spawned a host of other related businesses.” See Tamara Myers, 90.
\textsuperscript{376} Point Douglas resident quoted in the \textit{Winnipeg Daily Times}, 6 April 1883.
issued larger fines. Only after the Commission report was published were women threatened regularly with jail time or expulsion from the city.\textsuperscript{377} As the report concluded in January 1911, “the traffic was no doubt continuous and could not be stopped by penalties which it was not difficult for the offenders to satisfy.”\textsuperscript{378}

Two police raids were carried out in the district in 1909. In July of that year, sixteen women were charged with keeping a house of ill fame. Ten women received suspended sentences or were fined 40 dollars and court costs. Another five were dismissed. Just one keeper was sentenced to four months imprisonment. Twenty-eight other women were brought before the police magistrate and charged as inmates; seven were fined, three received suspended sentences, and the rest were dismissed. Later, in October, another sweep was carried out and twenty-six women were charged with keeping, including Amy Morris, Marie and Louisa Dupont, Marjorie Morrison, and Minnie Woods. All pled not guilty; two of their cases were dismissed, and the rest of the charges were withdrawn, due to lack of sufficient evidence. Just three inmates were brought in the night of the raid, but another 30 were brought before the magistrate that month.\textsuperscript{379} Nineteen cases were dismissed, and six women received suspended sentences. The rest paid fines ranging from ten to twenty dollars.\textsuperscript{380}

Some of the same women appeared before the police magistrate again in 1910. Between three and seven women per month were brought in for keeping, totalling twenty-nine over the four months surveyed. This time, over half were sentenced with fines, ranging from twenty to 100 dollars and costs—signalling a sharp rise in the issuing

\textsuperscript{377} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Thomas Mayne Daly, Book 3, 333.
\textsuperscript{378} MLL, Report of the Royal Commission, 19.
\textsuperscript{379} PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1219.
\textsuperscript{380} Ibid.
of fines from 1909. One woman was sent to the EDJG for three months, while the rest received suspended sentences or had their charges withdrawn. Between one and nine women were charged with being inmates, amounting to twenty-three women over the same four months. Fifteen women were given a choice of a fine or jail time of one or two months, and all chose to pay a fine, ranging from twenty to fifty dollars plus costs—again, signaling a rise in fines from the previous year. One woman was sent to the Grace Hospital, and another was sentenced to one year at the Women’s Industrial Home. The rest received suspended sentences or had their charges withdrawn.\textsuperscript{381} While it was still difficult to secure convictions against women, these statistics suggest that police and police magistrates were becoming increasingly punitive in their dealings with the district.

These trends are reflected in the Commission testimonies of women from the district. Amy Morris told the commission she had appeared before the police magistrate “several times” for running a “house of ill fame.” Although she always employed a lawyer, and pled not guilty to the charges, she was fined 100 dollars each time.\textsuperscript{382} Alice Penchant appeared before Daly twice on the same charges: once in October 1909, and again in March 1910, with several other women from Rachel and McFarlane. Her case was dismissed in 1909, but she was found guilty of keeping in 1910, and fined 100 dollars.\textsuperscript{383} Louisa Dupont was brought before a magistrate twice before moving to McFarlane in 1909, and three times between 1909 and November 1910. During her testimony, Dupont explained that she was fined the same amount each time, and was never told to stop carrying on her business until her last court appearance where she was

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilms1219 and 1220.
\item MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Amy Morris, Book 2, 137-140.
\item MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alice Penchant, Book 2, 141-142.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
sentenced to three months in jail. At the time of the commission, she was contesting her conviction before a higher court.\textsuperscript{384}

Interactions between sex workers, police, and police magistrates changed dramatically after the publication of the Vice Commission report in January 1911. Both the police and the police magistrate appear to have accepted at least some of the report’s recommendations in the months following its publication. Over the four months surveyed, more women were sentenced to time in prison or the Women’s Rescue and Industrial Home than in previous years. Of the eighteen women brought in during this period and charged with keeping, five were sentenced to anywhere from two to six months in jail. Eight keepers paid fines of 100 dollars and costs, and the other five received suspended sentences or had their cases dismissed or withdrawn due to lack of evidence. In the same four months, 60 women appeared before the police magistrate for being inmates of a bawdy house. Thirty-two received sentences of one to three months in jail; five were committed to the Women’s Rescue and Industrial Home or the Home of Good Shepherd; eleven paid fines of twenty or twenty-five dollars and costs; and the rest received suspended sentences or were dismissed.\textsuperscript{385}

In 1912, between one and eleven women were brought in on charges of keeping over the four months surveyed, for a total of twenty-four. Fourteen were sent to jail for six months, six paid fines, and four had their charges dismissed or withdrawn—signalling a dramatic increase in the use—and length—of jail sentences. Between nine and twenty-seven women appeared in the same four months on charges of being an inmate, for a total of 70. The majority of these women were sentenced to one to three months in jail, or

\textsuperscript{384} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Louisa Dupont, Book 2, 148-149.
\textsuperscript{385} PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1220.
committed to the Women’s Rescue and Industrial Home or the Home of the Good Shepherd for anywhere from two months to one year. 386

Between 1909 and 1912, brothel keepers were also charged under the Liquor License Act for selling liquor without a license. While liquor-related infractions were the jurisdiction of the province, municipal constables and peace officers were granted “all the powers, rights and duties of the license officers appointed under this act” in 1908, meaning city police were allowed to enforce provincial liquor laws. 387 However, the police department never heeded the call. As Chief McRae argued, “the administration of the law from which licenses were derived should be undertaken by the party receiving the benefit of them,” suggesting that the city police had little to gain from the regular enforcement of liquor laws. 388 Thus, liquor-related offences were left in the hands of the province’s ten liquor inspectors, as well as several detectives who gathered evidence on their behalf. Of the ten inspectors, only four worked inside the city and came into regular contact with the red-light district. Not surprisingly, the Point Douglas district was never under greater surveillance than other parts of the city, or the sole focus of any one inspector’s investigations. 389 According to the province’s Chief Inspector, Michael Johnston, inspectors gathered evidence of illicit liquor sales in the district over time, and then summoned women to appear before a provincial court judge together, where they were charged and sentenced. 390

The same brothel keepers were brought before the police magistrate once every three or four months on the same liquor-related charges and were almost always fined the

386 PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1221.
387 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Colin Campbell, Book 3, 274.
388 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, John McRae, Book 1, 17.
389 MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Michael Johnston, Book 4, 381.
390 Ibid., 382.
minimum 100 dollars and court costs.\textsuperscript{391} They were never instructed to stop selling liquor illegally, and were never threatened with jail time, even though the law required prison sentences after three or more liquor-related convictions. Minnie Woods explained that her lawyer appeared before McMicken on her behalf three times for selling liquor without a license. She pled guilty, and paid a fine of 100 dollars and court costs each time. She was never given instructions to stop selling liquor or threatened with imprisonment.\textsuperscript{392}

Marjorie Morrison, Amy Morris, Edna Hamilton, and Alice Penchant provided similar testimonies during the commission. They described being summoned before McMicken “three or four times” for selling liquor, pleading guilty to the charges, and paying fines of 100 dollars and costs. They were never threatened with jail or told to stop.\textsuperscript{393} When asked why women were never charged officially with a third liquor-related offence, Johnston stated that inspectors were “not always sure” which women had previous convictions and were never given instructions to charge women as repeat offenders. “I have summoned the same house,” he explained, “but it is a different woman.”\textsuperscript{394} This pattern continued even after the completion of the Commission, and the publication of the report. Throughout 1911, between three and six women were charged with selling liquor without a license in the months surveyed, and fined 100 dollars and costs.\textsuperscript{395} The province had a clearly vested interest in keeping brothels in business.

\textsuperscript{391} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Edna Hamilton, Book 2, 153 and Alice Penchant, Book 2, 144. Their testimonies confirmed that charges were brought once every three or four months.
\textsuperscript{392} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Minnie Woods, Book 4, 376-379.
\textsuperscript{393} MLL, Royal Commission Minutes of Evidence, Alice Penchant, Book 2, 143. Marjorie Morrison, Amy Morris, and Edna Hamilton all made similar claims in their testimonies.
\textsuperscript{394} PAM, Winnipeg Police Court Record Books, Accession GR 651, Microfilm 1220.
recognized the important role the sex trade played in the city’s larger economy. However, they also understood the importance of its isolation and regulation. By constructing both spatial and social boundaries between respectability and deviance, the city could manage bourgeois anxieties around contagion and disease and maintain a sense of public order, while allowing an informal sex economy to flourish. Many women involved in the sex trade understood this contradiction and capitalized on it, making new homes for themselves in Winnipeg’s red-light district under the watchful eye of the Morality Office and Board of Police Commissioners. So long as sex workers regulated their behaviour, limited their movements outside the district, and paid their fines, most were allowed to carry out their business and expand the district with impunity. In this way, the Point Douglas district took its specific shape through the interplay of disparate interests—those of the police and those of prostitutes.
Conclusion

The socio-spatial development of Winnipeg was clearly influenced by its sex workers and the other historical actors with whom they negotiated over these first four decades of the city’s history. While police and police magistrates placed increasingly severe restrictions on their public behaviour and geographic mobility during the period of segregation, they too continued to actively participate in the production of the city’s last red-light district. Their actions clearly demonstrated not a concern for the moral reform of prostitutes, but with eradication of their presence from certain spaces and regulation of it in others. However, the priorities of these officials began to shift in January 1912, when the Manitoba Free Press reported that

The most strenuous campaign that has ever been waged against vice in Winnipeg was opened by the Morality department on Sunday, and as a result 17 women appeared in the police court yesterday on various charges. It is the intention of the police to take into custody all women who live immoral lives outside the segregated area, and who frequent cafes.... *The police also intend to make a general New Year’s house cleaning in the segregated area.* All women who have come to Winnipeg from the United States are under the ban, and as soon as sufficient evidence can be gathered they will be either deported or given a few days to leave the city. 396

By April, members of the Morality Office were joined by other police officers in what would become known as the largest raid in the district’s history. The majority of women brought before the police magistrate pled guilty. Brothel keepers were given one week to leave the city; “inmates” were given just two days. Failure to comply with their sentences automatically resulted in jail time. That women were no longer given the option of fines speaks to a significant change in the way sex work would be treated in the justice system

after 1912. Instead of imposing regulations or fines, the city’s police and police magistrates began to remove prostitutes from the city itself.397

There were several reasons for this sudden shift in the city’s response to prostitution. Winnipeg’s leadership, influenced in part by the emergent fields of urban sociology and urban planning, began to express concerns about poor living conditions and faulty infrastructure in the city, each a result of the city’s breakneck development during its boom years.398 As social reformer J.S. Woodsworth explained in 1913, “it is only in recent years that we are beginning to learn that as the city is not a mere aggregation of individuals, but rather a certain type of social organism, so the physical city must be considered as a whole, and the various parts must be subordinated to the whole.”399 In other words, civic officials were beginning to recognize they were responsible for the health, safety, and social wellbeing of their city’s residents and further, that the city’s reputation would be the sum of its parts, including the more nefarious. While concerns for Winnipeg’s poor and working-class residents were being articulated for the first time, the city’s growth was also coming to a screeching halt. As Alan Artibise explains, “After a long period of persistent and prodigious growth, immigration halted, land sales subsided, and commercial activity contracted. In short, Winnipeg was on the threshold of a new era, one in which the city experienced the first sustained break from its prosperity.”400 Shrinking demand for male labour in the city’s

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397 In 1912, women who owned homes on McFarlane were propositioned by a party to buy property beyond the eastern limits of the city to start new segregated area. According to the Winnipeg Tribune, “the women were led to believe that it is close to a hard road, good at all times of the year and in a district where they would not be interfered with by anyone providing that they use a certain amount of discretion.” There were no residents within a half-mile radius of the area, and women were promised that they were out of jurisdiction of the Morality Office. See Winnipeg Tribune, 25 April 1912.

398 Marian Valverde, 129.

399 J.S. Woodsworth quoted by Mariana Valverde, 130.

400 Alan Artibise, Gateway City, 265.
manufacturing and agricultural sectors may have influenced the way civic authorities thought about segregated prostitution and the importance and urgency ascribed to sex work in the past.\textsuperscript{401} The next phase in development focused more on stability of the heteronormative family. Finally, increasing violence in the district would also impact the way police and police magistrates dealt with its workers and their clientele. Several high-profile cases of murder and attempted murder in the early spring of 1912 prompted officials to rethink their policy of segregation and carry out their final raids.

\begin{quote}
Much can be gleaned from this important period in Winnipeg’s history. Between the 1870s and 1912, the city’s development came to depend on the existence of sex work and its attendant regulation and surveillance in certain urban spaces. A range of historical actors benefited from this sex trade and, more specifically, from its segregation in several different red-light districts, including many women who worked in the city as inmates and brothel keepers. Responding to their exclusion from Winnipeg’s expanding labour market, these women created spaces for themselves and their work throughout the city’s streets and neighbourhoods. While the segregation and subsequent regulation of sex work led to greater surveillance and control of their bodies, sex workers still managed to expand the city’s red-light districts, shape their development, and challenge police regulations through everyday acts of resistance. The Point Douglas district was produced through these daily interactions with police and police magistrates, as well as with real estate agents, liquor distributors, other business interests, and one another. To deny that women had any control over the production of this space is to deny their agency and their rich history as workers in Winnipeg’s burgeoning twentieth-century economy. The labour
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\textsuperscript{401}Patrick Dunae makes a similar argument in his study of sex work in Victoria. See Patrick Dunae, 28-29.
they performed in these districts, and the informal economies to which it was attached, were fundamental to specific social and geographic patterns of development that took place in Winnipeg over this period, the effects of which can still be felt today.
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Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C