"My own character is thank God above suspicion": Soldier's Wives with The Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment and Social Values in Mid-Nineteenth-Century British North America

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British military records provide an unexpected source of information on the lives of ordinary women of the popular classes in the mid-nineteenth-century. This article focuses on the women of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment, which served in small garrisons across British North America from 1841 to 1870 and included an unusually large number of families. The increasing regulation of the activities and morals of working-class women was characteristic of this era of middle-class reform. Women's residence in open barrack rooms with soldiers was a cause of great concern, and led to close monitoring of their behaviour.

Les archives militaires britanniques constituent une source inattendue de renseignements à propos de la vie de femmes ordinaires des classes populaires au milieu du XIX^e^ siècle. Le présent article porte sur les femmes du Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment, qui a été affecté dans de petites garnisons d'un bout à l'autre de l'Amérique du Nord britannique de 1841 à 1870 et qui comprenait un nombre inhabituellement élevé de familles. La réglementation croissante des activités et de la moralité des femmes de la classe ouvrière était caractéristique de cette époque de réforme de la classe moyenne. Le fait que les femmes résidaient avec les soldats dans des pièces ouvertes de baraques était une source de grande inquiétude; aussi a-t-il mené à une surveillance étroite de leur comportement.

IN 1853, ANN PIGEON unexpectedly found herself a widow with two young children. They had been living in military barracks in Prescott, Upper Canada

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with her husband, a private in the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment (RCRR). According to military regulation, the bereft family was granted three months of food rations and faced an uncertain future, being "noted for passages to England by the first opportunity." Before that could happen, Ann married another soldier of the Regiment, Lance Corporal John Graydon. As a new wife she was forced to go to the bottom of the list and wait her turn before being reinstated on regular food rations, although she was allowed to remain living in military barracks. In her petition asking that her rations be restored, Ann explained the circumstances of her remarriage. "After my poor husband's Pidgeon's [*sic*] death," she wrote, "I was left with two small children.... I could not do better for them than I have done by marrying one of the Canadian Rifles by name John Graydon. He has behaved kind and good to my 2 children and we have got another son making in all 3 children."[1]

We rarely hear the voices of women like Ann Graydon in this early period of Canadian history, especially discussing her reasons for such an important personal life choice. We have this written account only because she was the wife of a soldier in the British army. Her room and board was provided according to the rules and discretion of the military establishment. To gain these benefits, she had not only to comply with regulations, but also to prove that she was worthy of such favour, which at that time meant that she had to conform to a middle-class ideal of female propriety and respectability.

The fact that we find such a revealing anecdote in the records of the British military may seem surprising to us today. However, these documents contain much about women and family life in garrisons in Canada and even about their fates after the retirement of their husbands. The meticulous record-keeping of imperial authorities in the colonial outpost of British North America is a rich source of social and gender history. At home in England, the role of army wives was also much discussed as the military establishment struggled with army reform in the mid-nineteenth century. However, the social history of the British military throughout the empire has paid little attention to the families attached to the army, focusing more on camp followers, wives who were left behind when regiments mobilized, and the prostitutes who serviced garrison towns.[2] Many have also assumed that there were very few women officially allowed with the army, especially after 1840.[3] Notable exceptions are works by Veronica Bamfield and Myna Trustram, who look at the larger historical scope of the role of the army wife over the history of the British military.[4] Janet Padiuk's case study of the garrison at

1 Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], Military C-Series, RG 8I, vol. 775, p. 142, August 19, 1853 and p. 139, August 11, 1853; vol. 777, pp. 70-71, April 30, 1855.

2 See, for example, Phillipa Levine, *Prostitution Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

3 See Barton C. Hacker, "Women and Military Institutions in Early Modern Europe: A Reconnaissance," *Signs*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Summer 1981), pp. 643-647; Derek J. Oddy, "Gone for a Soldier: The Anatomy of a Nineteenth-Century Army Family," *Journal of Family History*, vol. 25, no. 1 (January 2000), pp. 39-62.

4 Veronica Bamfield, *On the Strength: The Story of the British Army Wife* (London and Tunbridge: Charles Knight & Co. Ltd., 1974); Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); also see Linda Grant De Pauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman, OH: University of Ohio Press, 1998);

Gibraltar stands alone in attempting to reconstruct women's lives within particular regiments. However, she complains of a "paucity of records," focusing mainly on local census data and general descriptions of garrison life from previously published work.[5]

Canadian historians have also ignored the presence of military wives. Judith Fingard's rich social history of Halifax documents the impact of the local military and in particular the prostitutes who serviced them, but is silent on military wives or garrison life.[6] Lawrence Ostola's study of the garrison at Quebec notes a significant presence of women and children with the army, but sees them as outside the "purposes of the study."[7] Elinor Senior's work on the garrison at Montreal includes one very brief comment on the subject of army wives.[8] This study, then, aims to make a modest contribution to the existing historical work on family life in British garrisons throughout the empire.

This article also aims to situate the women of the RCRR within the social history of the popular classes in colonial Canada, with a particular focus on Upper Canada. The regiment appears to have integrated well with the communities in which their garrisons were stationed, with many of the wives being local women. As with all official records, British military records must be interpreted with caution, but they can give us a rare glimpse into the lives of women who left behind few records of their own. These not only show how both class and gender regulation worked in the mid-nineteenth century within the highly controlled context of the military garrisons, but also provide insight into what was occurring more generally as the middle class gained social dominance in this period in early Canada.

The urgent necessity of widow Ann Pigeon's practical arrangement to marry John Graydon fortunately led to an advantageous and amicable union. However, it is not what we might expect in an era that, as Peter Ward first argued, "regarded romantic love as the ideal form of relations between men and women."[9] Françoise Noël, has, like many, followed Ward in asserting that early Canadian couples married for love and companionship, which "by the nineteenth century had displaced earlier concepts of marriage choices based primarily on economic motives."[10] It may be, though, that such romantic ideals were more attainable

Jeanine Hurl-Eamon, *Marriage and the British Army in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Colonel N. T. St. John Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady: The Army Wife and Camp Follower Since 1660* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers Ltd., 1988).

5 Janet Padiak, "The 'serious evil of marching regiments': The Families of the British Garrison of Gibraltar," *The History of the Family*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2005), p. 138.

6 Judith Fingard, *The Dark Side of Life in Victorian Halifax* (Porters Lake, NS: Portersfield Press, 1981).

7 Lawrence Ostola, *A Very Public Presence: The British Army Garrison in the Town of Quebec, 1759-1838* (PhD thesis, Laval University, 2007), p. 50.

8 Elinor Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal: An Imperial Garrison, 1832-1854* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981), pp. 148-149.

9 Peter Ward, *Courtship and Social Space in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), p. 172.

10 Françoise Noël, *Family Life and Sociability in Upper and Lower Canada, 1780-1870: A View from Diaries and Family Correspondence* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), p. 19. For the remarriage of widowers, Noël cites (p. 48, n.109) the work of Bettina Bradbury, "Surviving as a Widow in 19th-Century Montreal," *Urban History Review*, vol. 17, no. 3 (February 1989), p. 150. George Sheppard

for the middle class. Most historians agree that by the nineteenth century the dominant point of view in English Canada was characterized by a perspective that drew on reforming Protestantism and celebrated private family life, separate spheres for men and women, and an ideal of "true womanhood" that made the domestic "female" realm the repository of moral and religious virtues and the public sphere of politics and business the domain of men. However, the same scholars also frequently note that these middle-class ideals may not have been uniformly applied across all sectors of society, especially in the earlier part of the nineteenth century.[11] Although there are few sources and consequently less scholarship to give us insight into how the popular classes may have viewed gender roles and the spheres the sexes should occupy, studies of tavern culture and court records have shown that ordinary working women could and did inhabit public spaces traditionally considered the preserve of men.[12] These transgressions of the developing middle-class social world view did not pass without notice or efforts aimed at their regulation. As Keith Johnson has noted, by the 1840s, there was "a stiffening of attitudes" toward minor criminal infractions and behaviour seen to disrupt public order. "In the towns of Upper Canada especially," he has noted, "attention began to be paid ... to enforcing a host of local regulations, including to an extent 'moral' offences, previously largely ignored. Queen Victoria had barely ascended the throne when Upper Canada's leaders began to try to impose the kinds of social values now associated with her reign on a reluctant citizenry."[13] Ann Graydon may have exercised her own practical choice to marry another soldier rather than be shipped to England, but she was forced to justify her action to the military authorities or suffer a permanent loss of livelihood. In exchange for this official recognition and support, soldiers' wives, like all people of the popular

refers to marriages of convenience that took place among the recently widowed spouses of soldiers in "'Wants and Privations': Women and the War of 1812 in Upper Canada," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 28, no. 55 (May 1995), p. 174.

11 See, for example, in addition to Ward (*Courtship and Social Space*) and Noël (*Family Life and Sociability*), Cynthia Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, Schoolmistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790-1840* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Andrew C. Holman, *A Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Katherine M. J. McKenna, *A Life of Propriety: Anne Murray Powell and her Family 1755-1849* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994) and "'The Union Between Faith and Good Works': The Life of Harriet Dobbs Cartwright 1808 1887" in Marilyn Färdig Whiteley and Elizabeth Gillian Muir, eds., *Changing Roles of Women Within the Christian Church in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 284-298; Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

12 Julia Roberts, *In Mixed Company: Taverns and Public Life in Upper Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009); Lori Chambers and John Weaver, "Alimony and Orders of Protection: Escaping Abuse in Hamilton-Wentworth, 1837-1900," *Ontario History*, vol. 95, no. 2 (Autumn 2003), pp. 113-135; Lorna McLean, "'Deserving' Wives and 'Drunken' Husbands: Wife Beating, Marital Conduct, and the Law in Ontario, 1850-1910," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 35, no. 69 (May 2002), pp. 59-81.

13 J. Keith Johnson, *In Duty Bound: Men, Women and the State in Upper Canada, 1783-1841* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), p. 249.

classes in early Canada, were subject to the regulation and control of their social superiors.[14]

Historians of women in the British military have always known that a certain number of wives were allowed to be "on the strength," that is, live in barracks and draw military rations for themselves and their children, normally six wives per company of a hundred men. In 1841, however, when the RCRR was formed in Canada, it uniquely allowed for twice this number. This special regiment was seen as a necessity by military authorities because of the particular problems encountered in defending British North America. The extended frontier between the United States and Canada was extremely difficult to defend, and strung along it was only a scattering of military posts. Their isolation, the difficulty of communicating between them, and their close proximity to the United States made them costly to garrison and ideal for desertion. The solution proposed to resolve this problem was to form a regiment of only the oldest and most trustworthy soldiers already stationed in Canada, who had served long years in the British army. They were given some incentives to enlist such as allotments of government land at a reduced price upon retirement, slightly higher pay, permission to work in their spare time, a guarantee that they would never be posted outside Canada, and, most importantly, the allowance of double the number of wives per company. The heyday of the RCRR was in the 1840s and 1850s, but soldiers continued to be posted in military garrisons across British North America until the regiment was finally disbanded in 1870.[15]

The Canadian Parks Service has recognized the presence of women in Upper Canadian forts in their interpretation of military sites for the mid-nineteenth century, but with only 12 wives allowed per hundred men, they were previously considered to be a minor aspect of what was presented to the public.[16] However, this view changed beginning in the summers of 1990 and 1991 when Parks Canada conducted an archaeological dig at Fort Wellington at Prescott, Ontario. The specific site under investigation was that of the latrine during the time of one of the Fort's busiest periods of military occupation—1843 to 1854. It was no mere single occupant outhouse, but a much larger structure that could accommodate several people and had separate compartments for women, soldiers, and officers, thus allowing archaeological analysis by both gender and class. The latrine was not just used for the obvious purpose—it was also a dumping ground for all kinds

14 See, for example, the struggles for authority and control ultimately won by middle-class authorities in this early period documented in works such as Michael S. Cross, "The Shiner's War: Social Violence in the Ottawa Valley in the 1830's," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 65, no. 1 (March 1973), pp. 1-26; Katherine M. J. McKenna, "Women's Agency in Upper Canada: Prescott's Board of Police Record, 1830-1850," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 36, no. 72 (November 2003), pp. 347-370; Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992).

15 On the history of the RCRR, see Peter Burroughs, "Tackling Army Desertion in British North America," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 61, no. 1 (1980), pp. 28-68; Paul Morgan Couture, "The Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment, 1842-70: A Profile," unpublished manuscript on file at the Ontario Regional Headquarters, Cornwall, ON, Department of Canadian Heritage, 1988; Major Tylden, "The Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment 1840-1870," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 34 (1956), pp. 59-62.

16 Katherine M. J. McKenna, "Women's History, Gender Politics and the Interpretation of Canadian Historic Sites: Some Examples from Ontario," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal*, vol. 30, no.1 (2005), pp. 21-30.

of trash. The tale told by ordinary garbage was remarkable. What was unearthed was an astonishing variety of materials that one would not normally expect to find at a military site. These artifacts told of a rich domestic life, with, among other things, an amazing variety of tableware, glassware, trinkets, children's toys, shoes belonging to women and children as well as to men, brightly painted tea cups and plates in multitudes of different patterns, egg cups, miniature cups and saucers, bottles for condiments and patent medicines, and even writing slates and slate pencils. Upwards of 800 items of ceramics alone were recovered in what was only a partial excavation of the site.[17]

The stereotype of military life and the image that had dominated the displays that interpreted the life of Fort Wellington to visitors had been one of an austere existence, with nothing present that did not conform to a model of army uniformity. Tin plates, not floral patterned tea sets, were seen as the normal tableware.[18] Life at the Fort was not uniform or spartan, but in fact was much more richly textured and domestic than anyone had imagined. Subsequent research showed why. Military inspection returns and the census reveal that for Fort Wellington in 1851-1852, despite the fact 16 military families were permitted to live in rented lodgings in Prescott, in barracks there were 45 men, 38 women, and 70 to 80 children.[19] Clearly the regulation number of 12 women per hundred enlisted men was not adhered to in practice.

The fact that the army permitted so many families suggests not only flexibility in applying regulations, but also practical adaptation to the realities of the difficulties of establishing this special-purpose corps. In fact, after the official formation of the RCRR in 1841, recruitment was at first slow because many married soldiers were loath to join up and lose the rations for their families that they were allowed in their current regiments. Certainly they would not want to put their wives in a desperate situation similar to that of Royal Canadian Rifle (RCR) Private John Figg, who had "been in Hospital since his transfer from the 83rd Regt." and thus unable to provide for his family. Mrs. Figg was "in great distress" with six children to support and forced to beg "for the indulgence of rations." Ann Graydon, like her, had appealed for the restoration of her allowance: "Provisions being so very dear now and the severe winter just passed over, I feel the loss of my rations greatly."[20]

Wives of the rank and file who were without army support were condemned to the most abject poverty. One contemporary observer, Captain Hammond, noted in 1846 that soldiers' wives who had married without permission from the military authorities and were therefore living without army-issued rations or accommodation were in miserable circumstances. "These poor creatures are

17 Lynn Sussman, Charles Bradley, Stephen Davis, Phil Dunning, Gérard Gussert, Catherine Sullivan, Joe Last, and Suzanne Plousos, *Material Culture of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment: Artifacts Found in the Latrine at Fort Wellington, Prescott*, Microfiche Report Series no. 529 (Ottawa: Department of Canadian Heritage, 1994).

18 John Pinkerton, *Fort Wellington: Barracks Furnishing Plan* (Ottawa: Canadian Parks Service, 1988).

19 McKenna, *Family Life*, Table 29, p. 463.

20 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 520, p. 17, March 25, 1845; vol. 770, p. 28, July 25, 1843; vol. 777, pp. 70-71, April 30, 1855.

denied any indulgence in the way of rations or washing [to do for pay for the soldiers], and some of them actually exist on threepence or fourpence a day, out of which they have to pay the rent of the wretched pig-sties in which they live, and perhaps support a child," he observed. "How they do live is to me a marvel."[21] Pressure on military authorities to accommodate the wives of the RCRs continued well into the early years after the regiment's formation. An urgent memorandum sent in November 1847 noted in an alarmed manner that the RCRs stationed at "Old Fort Toronto" faced great danger to their health. The concern was "founded on a Medical Report of Assistant Surgeon Cleland that unless additional Barrack accommodation was granted to shelter the numerous married woman and their children beyond the authorized number, [there is] *extreme danger of Typhus Fever being introduced amongst the Troops*, in consequence of the only places they could afford to pay for in lodgings, being precisely those *where the infected Emigrants sought shelter*."[22]

The reality was that the soldiers most likely to be attracted to a stable and stationary regiment were also most likely to be or want to be married. Having a wife was a great boon to men in military life. As Colonel Thomas Wood observed, single soldiers and "men who marry without leave, whose wives are not admitted into barracks ... live in great wretchedness."[23] Indeed, the RCRs embraced matrimony with enthusiasm. In the regiment as a whole, in 1842, 20 per cent of the men were married, 8 per cent above what regulations allowed. However, military authorities were forced to respond to pressure from the rank and file to increase further the number of wives allowed, as soldiers interacted with the civilian communities near where they were garrisoned. Married men with families "on the strength" grew to 33 per cent of the RCRR in 1846, reaching a high of almost 53 per cent by 1851. By then, the number of children with the regiment was almost exactly equal to the number of men at 839 to 840.[24]

Using Fort Wellington as a case study, what can we determine about who these soldiers' wives were? We know some facts about their husbands. The men of the RCRR were about evenly divided between English and Irish origin, with a small percentage from Scotland. About 60 per cent were Anglican and 30 per cent Catholic,[25] but, unlike in some other contexts in Upper Canada, these religious differences seem to have caused little tension.[26] What of the soldier's occupational origins? Of those who were at Prescott in 1846, pension records show that, upon recruitment to the army, a little more than half were common labourers, about a third artisans such as weavers, shoemakers, bakers, tailors, hairdressers, papermakers, and stockingers, and about 13 per cent "mechanics"

21 E. D. Hammond, ed., *Memoirs of Capt. M. M. Hammond, Rifle Brigade* (London, 1858), p. 99.

22 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 459, p. 169, November 11, 1847.

23 Committee on Barrack Accommodation, *Report from an Official Committee on Barrack Accommodation for the Army; With the Minutes of Evidence* (London: War Department, 1856), p. 28.

24 Public Record Office [hereafter PRO], London, England, War Office [hereafter WO] 27, RCRR Inspection Returns, 1842-1845. There is no information in the official records of whether any of the officers also had wives.

25 McKenna, *Family Life*, Table 24, p. 352; Table 22, p. 453.

26 On religious conflict of the Orange-Green variety in Upper Canada, see Ruth Bleasdale, "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840s," *Labour / Le Travailleur*, vol. 7 (Spring 1981), pp. 9-39.

such as bricklayers, cabinet makers, carpenter/joiners, blacksmiths, and wrights. About 60 per cent of them showed evidence of literacy.[27]

Lack of primary sources makes it difficult to obtain similar information about the soldiers' wives. Local church records and census data can give us some glimpses, however. For the men stationed at Fort Wellington, at least 32 per cent married women of another religion, and almost half had spouses of a different British Isles national origin.[28] The differences may be at least partially attributed to the fact that most of their wives had not come with them from home, but were local women whom they had met in British North America. At least 15 such weddings can be found in local records in Prescott. These brides were generally not Canadian-born, however; like the majority of the civilian community, they were immigrants or the daughters of immigrants with similar origins as their husbands, having emigrated from England, Ireland, or Scotland.[29] We know very little else about them, except that they were likely of working-class origin. Most of them were probably servants by occupation, although at least one, Margaret Conway, was a dressmaker according to the 1851-1852 census. Esther Bannon, for example, was the only servant at the home of tannery mill employee Daniel Coon, his wife Salome, and their eight children.[30] Her marriage to RCR William Robinson must have appeared to offer a reduced workload. Similarly, Mary Cannon was employed as a maid in the home of distiller John Morrow, his wife Ann, and their five children. Hers was a much better situation, with two woman servants to share the household labour, but still not preferable to marriage to RCR Private William Martin in 1852.[31] We do not know much about Johannah McCarthy who married RCR Maurice Ellis around 1847, except that the friend who was a witness at the baptism of her firstborn in 1848 was Mary O'Brien, the wife of a fellow Irish Catholic labourer.[32] It is also possible that the Mary Millar who also witnessed the baptism of one of their children in 1851 was the same person listed in the Prescott census as a 21-year-old Irish Catholic servant. Others present at RCRR marriages and baptisms shared similar backgrounds, such as Mary, wife of labourer James Robertson, who witnessed the baptism of the child of RCR Henry Langley and his wife Elizabeth in 1849. Labourer John Spratt and his wife Jane performed that same service for RCR John and his wife Mary Fish.[33] Another RCR bride, Mary Robinson, may have had a class advantage over her husband since she was the daughter of a skilled tradesman, English joiner William Robinson. Perhaps her parents did not approve of the match, which may be the reason why they eloped to Ogdensberg on May 22, 1854.[34]

27 McKenna, *Family Life*, Table 31, p. 465; p. 12.
28 *Ibid.*, Table 24, p. 352.
29 *Ibid.*, p. 121.
30 LAC, RG 31, Records of Statistics Canada, Prescott, Canada West Census, 1851-1852, p. 41.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 79; St. Mark's Catholic Church Register, Homewood Museum, Prescott, Ontario.
32 St. Mark's Church Register; Canada West Census, 1851-1852, p. 53.
33 Canada West Census, 1851-1852, p. 53; St. John's Anglican Church Register, Prescott, Anglican Diocesan Archives, Kingston, Ontario.
34 St. Mark's Church Register; Canada West Census 1851-1852, pp. 49, 13, 71.

Another identifiable occupational group found in local church registers as witnesses at RCRR weddings and baptisms consisted of tavern, inn, or hotelkeepers such as John Beatty and George Leatch, who stood up for Thomas Johnson and Levina Empey of Prescott when they wed in 1849. Innkeeper Sylvester Duffy similarly was present at the marriage of Michael Keefe and Margaret Hotton in 1849, while his wife Mary Ann was witness at the wedding of Henry McNally and Elizabeth Free.[35] It is possible that these women met their RCR husbands in such local establishments, perhaps while working as barmaids, if not as customers. As Julia Roberts has shown us, the latter would not have been an uncommon occurrence.[36] They might also have courted at church or at community gatherings. Some of the ceramic ornaments found at the Fort Wellington latrine site were identified as typical "fairings," cheap trinkets bought or won at fairs.[37]

How were these wives treated by military authorities? The 1840s was a time of reform in the English army.[38] In particular, soldiers' wives were increasingly more recognized by military officials as a part of army life. Women had always been somewhat useful to the military because they did laundry, sewing, and cleaning and performed other necessary domestic tasks, but they were also viewed as being dangerous. As alleged prostitutes and vendors of various goods, the chief of which was alcohol, they were often seen as distractions from a soldier's life and an incitement to desertion and debauchery. As the army slowly recognized that married men were often more reliable and better behaved soldiers, wives were accepted but regarded with suspicion and treated in a highly regulated manner. As Myna Trustram has observed, the army held "contradictory attitudes about wives. The wives' morality was continually questioned—they were considered dirty and shiftless, a corrupting influence on the brave defenders of the Empire. Yet at the same time the women were useful to do the men's washing and sewing and in their role as wife and mother they were idealized as a steadying, humanizing influence on the licentious, drunken soldiery."[39] The reforming and newly dominant evangelical middle class of England, like its counterpart in Canada, looked to a reform of public institutions that would reflect its moral and social values.[40] The British military establishment did not escape their notice. According to Myna Trustram:

> The army was criticized for the extent to which its policies deviated from proper standards of welfare and sexual morality fitting for the lower classes. It became a focus for Evangelical civilizing missions to promote moral respectability amongst the lower classes. The army's job as defender of the national interest made it an obvious target. How could the nation's defenders and representatives abroad command respect when their own sexual and family life was not worth defending?

35 Canada West Census, 1851-1852, pp. 13, 71, 1; St. Mark's Church Register.
36 Roberts, *In Mixed Company*.
37 Sussman *et al.*, *Material Culture*, p. 231.
38 On this subject, see Hew Strachan, *The Reform of the British Army* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
39 Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, pp. 4-5.
40 The earliest and still classic work on this subject is Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

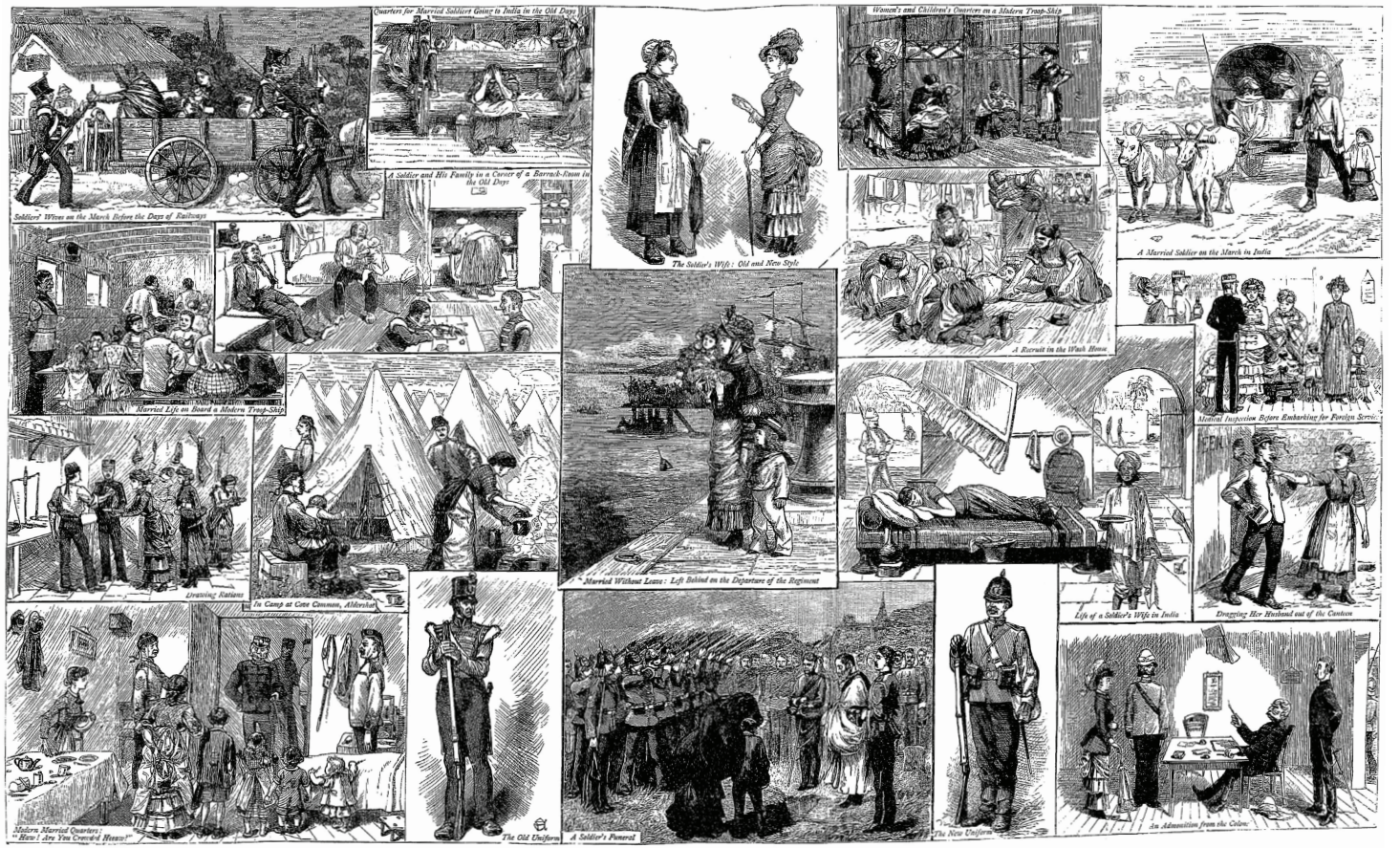


Figure 1: "'Tommy Atkins' Married- Past and Present".
Source: sketches by Colour Sergeant Thomas Lathom, Sergeant-Instructor, 1st Lincolnshire Volunteers, The Graphic (London, England), Saturday, January 12, 1884; Issue 737, p. 45. British Library Newspapers, Part I: 1800-1900. Gale Cengage Learning.

> Just as the effects of factory work on working class life had exercised the minds of middle class Evangelicals in the 1830s and 1840s, so the effects of barracks life became an issue a decade or so later.[41]

At mid-century, prompted by the middle-class drive to reform, a committee was struck by Parliament to report on the living conditions of soldiers and their families throughout the British empire. The committee's *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, published in 1856, was a remarkable document that examined everything from cooking facilities, to recreational activity, to sleeping arrangements. Chief among the concerns addressed was the moral character of military life. For the wives, this attention made them increasingly subject to both a paternalistic control of their daily lives and an unwritten but clearly understood code of conduct.[42]

Military historian Barton Hacker has argued, "The lower-class women who had for centuries followed the army and helped to support it with their labour gave way during the course of the nineteenth-century to middle and upper-class women."[43] An 1884 engraving in a popular publication of the nineteenth century, *The Graphic*, illustrates this transformation. It is entitled *'Tommy Atkins' Married: Past and Present* and contrasts the former lower-class wife to the new ideal middle-class military spouse who was characterized by a refined, idealized feminine domesticity.[44] (See Figure 1.)

On one side is depicted a stereotypically negative view of a "lower-class" woman from the viewpoint of the artist. She is portrayed as a rough and ready, coarse-featured character in a cloth cap, bare-handed, apron-clad, wearing hobnail boots, unadorned, holding an umbrella and with her hand on her hip. On the other side is the new ideal of the genteel army wife, dressed like a proper Victorian lady with gloves, earrings, a stylish hat, dainty shoes, parasol, and elaborate dress complete with bustle. (See Figure 1 Detail A.) The "old style" army wife is depicted as dragging her drunken husband home from the canteen, or as an enabler of his drinking, handing him a liquor bottle in the course of a march. (See Figure 1, Details B and C.) In contrast is the Victorian army wife, meekly lined up to receive her family's rations. (Figure 1 Detail D.) Although these extremes are exaggerated by the illustrator for comic effect, clearly a change had taken place that had dramatically reformed how the army wife was perceived. Rather than either ignore or deplore the women attached to the army, previously often called "camp followers," the army increasingly sought to control and regulate them with the goal of enforcing middle-class ideals of proper Victorian womanhood.

41 Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, pp. 4-5.

42 On military wives, in addition to Trustram (*Women of the Regiment*) and Bamfield (*On the Strength*), see Williams, *Judy O'Grady and the Colonel's Lady*.

43 Barton C. Hacker, "Reformers, Ladies and Nurses in Uniform: The Changing Status of Military Women (c1815-1914)" in Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining, eds., *A Companion to Women's Military History* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2012), p. 137.

44 "'Tommy Atkins' Married—Past and Present," *The Graphic*, January 12, 1884. The name "Tommy Atkins" was a generic name popularly applied to the rank and file soldiers of the British Army.

Figure 1 Detail A

Figure 1 Detail B

Figure 1 Detail C

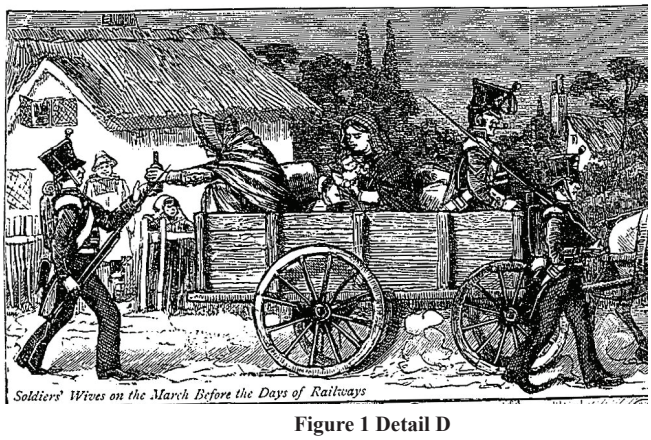


Figure 1 Detail D

In keeping with this concern over the behaviour of military wives, the women with the RCRR were under constant supervision from military authority. When the *Standing Orders* of the regiment were belatedly published in 1861, their activities and duties were clearly detailed. Every woman was required to have her family's sleeping area "scrubbed out with water and soap every morning, summer and winter, Sundays excepted by 9:30 a.m." In addition, every day a different woman was chosen to be orderly woman for her barrack room, "from rouse to lights out. The Barrack utensils are under her particular care." The *Standing Orders* stressed, "She is held responsible for the cleanliness of the stove, that part of the room common to all, and the carrying out of ashes or sweepings." Water carrying was also a duty, and each woman was required to "fetch fresh water for her own use."[45] In the winter if the barracks pump froze, this task could mean walking to the nearest open body of water. Ideally fetching water was not normally as dangerous as it was for the wife of Private Thomas Hows, who in December 1853 slipped and "fell into the Rapids" and "was drowned ... when in the act of drawing water from the river."[46] The women of the RCRR were also expected to wash the bed and table linen for the regiment in addition to their own family's laundry. *The Report on Barrack Accommodation* saw these washing duties as a very desirable thing that "would be of the greatest use possible in every point of view; it would furnish occupation for the women and keep them moral." Hard work presumably generated virtue among the wives of the rank and file as well as getting the laundry done at a cheaper price.[47] The RCRs each paid three-quarters of a pence per day for washing, which went to the women who performed the task in rotation.[48]

Other than the women's side of the latrine, the wash house was probably the only place on a military site that might have been incontestably female territory, as a detail from *The Graphic* illustration shows (Figure 1 Detail E.) A group of "old style" coarse, bare-armed and muscular women are shown initiating a new recruit, whom they have pinned to the floor and are dousing with soapy water while the men watch with obvious glee from the doorway. It is evidence of a lively female camaraderie, but the artist clearly did not approve. In addition to the laundry, women could make a few more pennies by cleaning the "women's wash houses ... [and] privies." According to the *Standing Orders*, each man with a family was charged a sum monthly to pay for this task.[49] Thus it is not surprising that so many artifacts were found on the women's side of the privy in relation to their numbers at Fort Wellington, since women would have been doing most of the garbage duty. (Not surprisingly, the section with the least number of artifacts recovered was the officers' privy.)

45 *Standing Orders of the Royal Canadian Rifles* (Montreal: John Lovell, 1861), pp. 41-42.
46 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 775, p. 178, December 22, 1853.
47 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, p. 156.
48 PRO, WO 27, vol. 351, RCRR Inspection Return, September 3, 1845.
49 *Standing Orders*, p. 42.

Figure 1 Detail E

Women also sewed and cooked for their own families, or even occasionally for pay.[50] Single soldiers ate in a "mess" system together, but, perhaps in keeping with new ideas being introduced about the importance of domestic life, even though it seems impractical, married couples ate their meals in family units.[51] Every day in a single open barracks room, there would be the bustle and commotion of numerous individual breakfasts, noon dinners (the main meal), and evening suppers being prepared. This arrangement goes a long way to explain all of the domestic articles found on site at Fort Wellington. The presence of women in barracks added greatly to the well-being of the men there. Not only did women cook and clean, but they often added to the communal resources from their earnings. For example, the *Report on Barrack Accommodation* noted that women often made up shortages of such essentials as coal. "If a married woman lived in the room with the men, she always contributed her portion," it was noted.[52]

The women did a good job of keeping the barracks tidy, according to the inspection reports for the regiment. In fact, the RCRR was considered to be an exceptionally clean regiment.[53] However, their living conditions would have been extremely crowded. To begin with, even without families, the space allotted to soldiers in barracks seems ridiculously small. It is clear that, throughout most of the British army, the men almost literally slept cheek by jowl and head by foot. The *Report on Barrack Accommodation* cited a width of three feet between beds, along with a length of seven feet for each man as being a luxurious ideal.

50 Margaret, wife of Private James Conway, is listed on the 1851-1852 Prescott census as a dressmaker. It is significant that the Conways were the only military household that was recorded as having a servant, no doubt due to Margaret's extra income (Canada West Census, 1851-1852, p. 41). It was likely more typical for soldiers' wives to be servants themselves. An early source suggests that it was common for the Upper Canadian elite to employ them. See LAC, Jarvis-Peters Fonds, vol. 2, Hannah Jarvis to Rev. Samuel Peters, Niagara, September 25, 1793.

51 LAC, MG 40 F1, Sir James McGrigor Fonds, "Annual Report of the Sick and Wounded of the Detachment of Royal Canadian Rifles Stationed at Kingston C.W. from 1st April 1857 to 31st March 1858," p. 13.

52 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, p. 156.

53 PRO, WO 27, RCRR Inspection Return, vol. 357, March 23, 1846.

In its final recommendations, the Committee on Barrack Accommodation more realistically suggested, as a reform to the current system, "that a space of not less than four feet, including the interval between the beds, should be allowed to each man."[54] In 1845, new regulations increasing the space per man to allow "a bed of 2 ft 2 or 2 ft 3 in width with a foot between each bed" had been introduced.[55] At most sites in British North America, this allocation had not been implemented by as late as 1850, and it was noted with equanimity by military officials that "in a climate like Canada this is certainly not a pressing evil."[56]

As the number of families in the RCRR grew throughout the 1840s, some married couples of the best character were allowed to live with their families in quarters in town, and a small allowance was granted toward their rent.[57] Thus RCRR wives were well integrated with the local community. Still, as we have noted for Fort Wellington, there were still large numbers of women and children living in barracks. One almost feels sorry for the lonely bachelors at British North American military posts, but they surely did not feel isolated in what was obviously a domestic space teeming with family life.

If the women were usefully employed in garrison with domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and washing, what were all of their children doing? Childcare was most likely, as with many other domestic duties, shared by the women and paid for by them. One officer reported to the Committee on Barrack Accommodation that "the mothers who were employed in washing 'at Woolwich paid 6d [pence] to 1s [shilling] 6d for taking care of a child or children'."[58] The school-aged children would have had some structured activity to keep them occupied and out from underfoot. There was a small allowance granted to pay a schoolmistress, probably the wife of a non-commissioned officer, to teach the young ones under the age of seven or eight basic reading skills and the older girls "knitting, reading and writing" and "all kinds of needlework."[59] During that period of British military reform, there was a growing recognition of the importance of education in improving the conduct and morality of both the soldiers and their children. According to army historian Colonel White, Secretary-at War Macaulay was at that time particularly keen on the hiring of schoolmistresses, first proposed to the British parliament in 1840. "The kind of woman he proposed to place on the establishment might be the wife of a sergeant," White observed, "who to the usual school subjects [such as reading, writing and arithmetic] would add needlework 'and the rudiments of common knowledge, with such simple precepts of morality and religion as a good plain woman of that rank might be capable of imparting'."[60]

54 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, pp. 41, iv.
55 LAC, MG 13 WO 55, vol. 883, pp. 239-240.
56 LAC, MG 13 WO 1, vol. 564, "Statement of Distribution of the Troops for the Winter of 1850," p. 129. See also LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 524, p. 167, 1850.
57 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 524, General Orders, Office of Ordnance, p. 15, July 25, 1849, and p. 234, February 15, 1851.
58 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, p. 130.
59 PRO, WO 27, RCRR Inspection Return, February 23, 1847. On the schoolmistress's allowance, see LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 776, p. 142, November 14, 1843; p. 143, December 18, 1843; p. 145, September 23, 1844.
60 Colonel A. C. T. White, *The Story of Army Education 1643-1963* (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd.,

The teaching of correct social values and appropriate gender roles was just as important as more academic training. As another military historian has observed, these schoolmistresses were, according to Macauley, to be "qualified to instruct the Female Children of Our Soldiers as well in reading, writing and the rudiments of arithmetic as well as in needlework and other parts of housewifery, and to train them in habits of diligence, honesty and piety."[61] Ideally, a schoolmaster was also to be retained to educate the older boys in a trade such as tailoring, carpentry, or shoemaking in addition to the basics of reading, writing, grammar, and arithmetic.[62]

In practice in the RCRR, there was simply not the money or the space in barracks to educate all the children adequately. In 1851, the commander of the RCRR, Lt. Colonel Taylor, described the situation at Niagara, where he had been requesting a new schoolroom since "the year 1848, yet at the present date 150 Children are crowded into two very small Rooms, so much so that not only is the health of the pupils & that of their teachers endangered, but it is utterly impossible that such instruction can be conveyed to the Children as their parents are led to expect, from the great progress Education has, during the last few years, made in the class of society from which the soldier is taken." Taylor was quite concerned about this failure to serve the families of his men, and he urged his point forcefully. "I trust that the great moral responsibility which I feel is attached to me as the Officer in Command of a Regiment in which there are *394* Married Men and *746* Children," he wrote to his superiors, "will plead my excuse for strongly pressing for the means of giving such plain education to the youth of the Regt. as may fit them to take their Station in Life, as at least Good Christians and intelligent Members of Society."[63] For middle-class reformers, education was essential to moral improvement. Although plans were made for sweeping improvements to the education of the children of the RCRR, these were not implemented.[64]

Even with some schooling available in barracks, there still would have been a great deal of play and other children's activity both in and out of doors. At Fort Wellington, many children's toys such as small dishes, a whistle, and marbles were found.[65] Clearly, constant non-military activity and domestic noise would have taken place in barracks in the RCRR. The number of people living in these small spaces must have been challenging. Even though beds were folded away

1963), p. 27.

61 Colonel N. T. St. John Williams, *Tommy Atkin's Children: The Story of the Education of the Army's Children 1675-1970* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1971), p. 42.

62 Alan R. Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), p. 103.

63 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 773, pp. 116-117, August 22, 1851. According to the inspection returns, Taylor's estimation of the number of children with the RCRR was low. Perhaps he was referring to school-aged children only.

64 For example, although plans for a new school house at Fort Wellington were drawn up and estimates given, it was never actually built (LAC, MG 13 WO 55, vol. 885, pp. 164-170). On the proposed new system of education in the RCRR, see LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 521, pp. 137-139, c. June-July 1850; vol. 776, pp. 148-151, 1854; vol. 777, pp. 85-89 and 120, May-July 1855.

65 Sussman *et al.*, *Material Culture*, pp. 236-237.

during the day,[66] the storage of all the clothing, personal items, and dishes used by the families must have made the RCRR barracks extremely crowded.

Despite the women's efforts to keep the barracks clean, the number of people living in these small spaces with poor sanitation facilities and little ventilation must have been unsavoury. After lights out, to prevent desertion, no one was normally allowed out until morning unless on sentry duty. Large wooden tubs were placed in the middle of the room to serve as urinals. Every morning these were emptied and then refilled with water for the men to wash up in![67] Archaeological evidence of 15 chamber pots, five ewers and one wash basin at Fort Wellington suggests that, although this number is too small to indicate general use by the soldiers, the women may have been spared having to use the communal urine tub.[68] Nor was the bedding particularly clean. According to military regulations, the straw that stuffed the bed mattresses was changed once every two to three months, the sheets once a month, and the blankets once a year. The *Report on Barrack Accommodation* quoted a sergeant who stated that, when he entered barracks to rouse his men in the morning, he found the smell

> in a very thick and nasty state, especially if I came in out of the air.... Sometimes I could not bear it till I had ordered the windows to be opened to make a draught.... I have often retired to the passage and called to the orderly man to open the windows. The air was offensive both from the men's breath and from the urine-tubs in the room; and of course, some soldiers do not keep their feet very clean, especially in summer time. There should be some kind of urinal that is not made of wood, it would not retain the smell so much.[69]

According to J. W. Fortesque in his *History of the British Army*, "The sanitary arrangements" in general use in barracks at this time period were "unspeakable": "Scanty provision, if any, was made for ventilation; but any aperture that existed, unless out of reach, was immediately sealed up by the men. The result was that the air became so foul as to be positively unbearable by anyone entering the room from without, and that pulmonary disease found riotous living in every barrack."[70] The soldiers and their families suffered frequent illnesses. For the men, separate hospitals and medical care were provided. However, when women and children fell ill and pregnant women gave birth, the army provided no medical care, so they remained in barracks.[71]

66 LAC, Thomas Wily Fonds, MG 29 E1, "Bush Life and Frontier Service Forty-Seven Years Ago," p. 19.
67 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22, 11.
68 Sussman *et al.*, *Material Culture*, pp. 226-227.
69 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, pp. 91, 94.
70 Sir John William Fortescue, *A History of the British Army*, vol. XI, 1815-1838 (London: Macmillan, 1923), pp. 10-11.
71 Jacalyn Duffin's insightful study of the hospital records at Fort Wellington note that only soldiers were admitted there. See Duffin, "Soldier's Work; Soldier's Health: Morbidity, Mortality. and their Causes in an 1840s British Garrison in Canada," *Labour / Le Travail*, vol. 37 (Spring 1996), pp. 37-80. Florence Nightingale, in writing about families in barracks in England, complained about the general lack of medical care for wives living with the army; see *Notes on Matters Affecting the Health, Efficiency and Hospital Administration of the British Army, Founded Chiefly on the Experience of the Late War* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1858), pp. 470-474.

Medical Inspection Returns for the RCRR from the 1850s reveal a great deal of concern about the overcrowding and unhealthy conditions at British North American military stations. For example, inspector Dr. Wood deplored the lack of space in barracks and went on to observe that, "when we add the circumstances that Children are frequently not too clean in their habit or persons as grown up people, that Married Rooms are difficult to keep clean, & that the meals are all cooked in the quarters, we bring to bear a mass of evidence which shows, that some decided alteration is necessary in providing for the wants and peculiar needs of life of these people."[72] As late as 1860 a very unsavoury situation was described at Kingston due to the families living in the "bombproof Forts and Towers" at Fort Henry. One military official reported that it was "always difficult to render" these locations "healthy quarters for single men, over whose habits of cleanliness control is practicable, but the very foul exhalations already engendered in some of the casemates at Fort Henry and in the Shoal Tower—buildings of which the future thorough ventilation of is impossible—would seem to point out the danger of allowing the floors & joists of these structures to be saturated with the excrementary solutions which numbers of the soldier's children frequently and naturally void."[73] As if this problem were not enough, it appears that there were also animals living in barracks. One Regimental order commanded that dogs should be tied when in barracks—it is important to note that dogs *per se* were not banned, only unleashed ones.[74] We know that some dogs as well as cats were kept either in or out of doors at Fort Wellington, because their bones have been found on site.[75] When we remind ourselves that these same barrack rooms were also used for eating, socializing, and often cooking, conditions that led to overcrowding, poor atmosphere, and potential for the spread of illness prevailed at military stations across British North America.

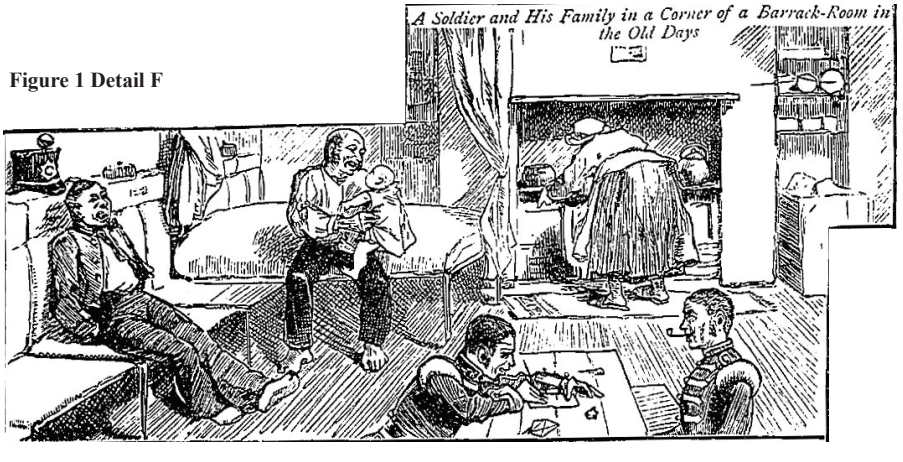
Most contemporary observers of military life were less concerned about the healthiness and comfort of garrison life for families, however, than about its potential for immorality. As Myna Trustram has observed, "The Evangelical ideal of the family prompted the state into an unprecedented ordering of marital and family relations.... One of the groups of people whose lifestyle left them on the edge of this moral code was soldiers. Their overcrowded and communal housing, their high mobility and reputation for promiscuous sexuality were all a manifestation of their potential or actual failure to adhere to the domestic ideology."[76] Although marriage had increasingly been encouraged as a countermeasure to immorality, no special provisions had been made for the introduction of women and children into military quarters. According to the *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, married and single men were usually all housed together in a common barrack room, with at most a curtain separating them at night.[77] An example of how this might have

72 LAC, MG 40 F1, Sir James McGrigor Fonds, "Annual Report of the Sick and Wounded of the Detachment of Royal Canadian Rifles Stationed at Kingston C.W. from 1st April 1857 to 31st March 1858," p. 13.
73 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 1610, pp. 304-305, June 22, 1860.
74 LAC MG 24 F8, Regimental Orderly Book of the Royal Canadian Rifles, p. 291, June 14, 1852.
75 Sussman *et al.*, *Material Culture*, pp. 2-3.
76 Trustram, *Women of the Regiment*, p. 9.
77 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, p. iv.

looked is given by the illustration in *The Graphic*, which shows a corner of a room curtained off for a married couple and their child. (Figure 1 Detail F.) The modesty of women and girls may have been further preserved by the use of chamber pots and wash basins, which, we have seen, were found among the artifacts from Fort Wellington. Still, these measures afforded only a modicum of privacy, which alarmed middle-class critics. As the English reformer Florence Nightingale wrote in 1858, "How is it possible for the morality of the soldier to be raised while the immorality of his domestic relations is thus made inevitable?"[78] In 1866, *The Times* observed, "At present the soldier's wife only shares the accommodation afforded to her husband's comrades: sleeping in the common barrack room amidst whole companies of soldiers, she is forced to dress and undress in public. ... Ere long the bride's shame breaks down: she who was innocent is now a slut."[79] Dr. Thomas Barrington, when reporting on the medical conditions of the RCRR across British North America in 1858, echoed this concern. He described a slippery slope of moral degeneracy caused by "the absence of separate accommodations for married persons.... This I have annually iterated and reiterated," he declared. "For example," he explained,

> a woman humbly born but modestly and religiously educated, becomes the wife of a soldier, is suddenly placed in a Barrack room with 10 or 20 Men ... she becomes frightened and disgusted, next becomes habituated, or in despair has recourse to drunkenness, and not infrequently her husband, a good man, joins with his wife, and he becomes the occupant of a cell in a Military prison, which had a similar room been told off for each married person, they might live with decency and bring up their children in the fear of God, without being taunted with the awful and disgusting language of a Barrack room.[80]

Figure 1 Detail F



78 Nightingale, *Notes on Matters Affecting the Health*, p. 479.
79 Quoted in Williams, *Tommy Atkin's Children*, p. 65.
80 LAC, MG 40 F1, Sir James McGrigor Fonds, "Annual Report of the Sick and Wounded of the Detachment of Royal Canadian Rifles Stationed at Kingston C.W. from 1st April 1857 to 31st March 1858," p.13.

The *Report on Barrack Accommodation* concluded that the cohabitation of married and single men together was "highly objectionable." As Colonel Richard Gilpin, MP, had testified to the Committee, "I saw one unfortunate woman in the barrack with some 50 men, with only the accommodation that between two beds there was a sort of curtain put up.... What a position to place a woman of good character, especially if the husband is away on duty."[81] Another contemporary source, *The Quarterly Review* of 1846, put it even more graphically. "What shall we say of the feelings of the newly married bride," it asked pointedly, "Till she has become utterly hardened, while a dozen men, every night and every morning, are stripping and dressing in her very presence.... Or shall we ask what the husband feels when he is forced to leave his wife alone in such a place."[82] No doubt influenced by this climate of moral disapproval, the Committee on Barrack Accommodation concluded its deliberations by pointing out that barracks throughout the British army were "inadequate both for the comfort and convenience of the soldiers, and for the creation of a higher tone of social habits amongst them." Great weight was given to "demands of a sanitary and moral character, the importance of which is being every day more fully recognized and acted upon in reference to the class of society from which the privates of the army are generally recruited." As one officer observed, "The great object of all who have studied the question is to give sufficient accommodation to secure the decencies of life and due separation between parents and children, and between the sexes. Nothing has a more direct influence in demoralizing the lower classes than their being huddled all together in one common sleeping-room, and in some instances in one bed."[83]

The RCRR medical inspection returns show that similar sleeping arrangements to elsewhere in the British army were used in barracks in British North America. According to Dr. Wood, "at night Curtains are stretched around the beds"[84] to create some privacy for families. There was a very strong middle-class bias in this insistence on privacy as a contributor to superior morality, particularly in the stress on the separation of women from men. The class backgrounds of many of the RCRs would have accustomed them to living in small spaces in the constant presence of others of the opposite sex. As with many settlers in the Canadian bush in this period, they were used to eating, sleeping, and socializing in the same room as the rest of their family. As an 1858 engraving from the *Illustrated Times* shows, such conditions could, especially at festive occasions such as Christmas, create a happy communal atmosphere. (See Figure 2.) As Colonel Thomas Wood had observed to the Committee on Barrack Accommodation, it was, after all, "the habit of the cottagers of this country."[85] Surely the fact that blankets were put up around the beds shows that married couples made an effort to preserve some privacy despite the close quarters.

81 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, p. iv, pp.140-141.
82 *Quarterly Review*, vol. 77 (1846), p. 556, as quoted in Williams, *Tommy Atkin's Children*, p. 65.
83 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, pp. iii, 104.
84 LAC, MG 40 F1, Sir James McGrigor Fonds, vol. 65, pp. 12-13.
85 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, p. 153.

Figure 2: "Christmas Day in Barracks" by W. Smart.
Source: Illustrated Times (London, England), December 24, 1858, p. 424. The British Newspaper Archive, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk, Image © The British Library Board.

In particular, middle-class reformers were concerned about older girls living in barracks. As *The Times* noted with horror, "Soldier's daughters of 17, 18 and 19 are ... found to be sleeping almost side by side with the male inmates" at military posts.[86] The fact that these virginal young women were living with little privacy in the presence of men not related to them was a great concern. It is worth noting that the same lack of seclusion may have also made it difficult for any unacceptable behaviour to take place without the knowledge of others. However, it did not mean that relationships did not develop.

In the RCRR, weddings between very young daughters and their fathers' comrades do not appear to have been unusual. In 1852, an exasperated order from the headquarters of the Regiment had placed a moratorium on approvals for marriage in an attempt to gain some control over the large number of wives. However, an exception was explicitly made "where the female is the daughter of a soldier serving in the Regiment."[87] Among the men stationed at Fort Wellington, for example, five such cases can be positively identified. When Olivia, daughter of Lance Corporal William Robinson, married Sergeant John Wandless in 1851, he was 46 years old.[88] Similarly, in 1849, Margaret, daughter of Private John Hatton, married Private Michael Keefe, who was one year older than her father.[89] The

86 *The Times*, November 22, 1866, quoted in Williams, *Tommy Atkin's Children*, p. 66.
87 RCRR Orderly Book, pp. 302-303, June 21, 1852.
88 *Prescott Telegraph*, p. 3, March 11, 1851.
89 St. Mark's Church Register, 1849.

ages of these brides is not known, but at least one was likely well under 21. Her name was Mary, and her father Private John Baloy was required to give his written permission for her to marry Private James Lane at Prescott in 1846.[90] In at least one case, the baptism of the first child preceded the wedding, as happened when RCR daughter Margaret Johnson married 40-year-old Private Thomas Farrell in 1846.[91] Of the active and retired RCRs who are recorded in the 1851-1852 Prescott census, the average age gap between husband and wife was 11 years. About a quarter of these married couples had age differences ranging from 15 to 24 years.[92] Peter Ward has estimated that the typical gap between first-married men and women in English Canada between 1838 and 1860 was about four years.[93] The atypically large age differences between spouses in the RCRR would have reinforced the fears of contemporary critics of barracks life that the innocence of young girls may have been compromised. However, it is just as likely these marriages may have been, like Ann Graydon's, practical unions rather than either romantic love matches or examples of the exploitation of young women.

Marriage to a comrade of one's father could have been a solution to how an older girl might be supported and kept within the family circle in military life. According to regimental rules, children were only entitled to accommodation and rations until the age of 14, when they were expected to start to "shift for themselves."[94] It does not appear that this rule was rigidly enforced, and there are a number of cases in the RCRR of children older than 14 still living with their parents.[95] Nonetheless, once a daughter approached her late teenage years, some means of support for her had to be found, and marriage was one solution that would keep her close. She would also be married to a man of known character to her and her family.

Many similar family strategies were employed in the RCRR community, especially in the face of misfortune. As we have seen with Ann Graydon, remarriages of widows were not uncommon, since military regulations on the fate of bereaved children and wives were rigid. Women who were widowed were out of luck in terms of getting any support from the army, even if they had served long and faithfully with their husbands. They were entitled to only three months of rations for themselves and their children, until they could obtain passage to England. Some of the wives had not been born in England, or had left a very long time before. The army was unsympathetic. "Families intending to remain in the Colony have no claim to rations for any period," was the final word in the *Standing Orders*.[96] In practice, there is evidence that some women were given

90 *Ibid.*, 1846. On the necessity of parental permission for marriages under the age of 21, see Ward, *Courtship and Social Space*, pp. 35-36. With this consent, Mary Baloy could have married as young as the age of 12, according to British law.

91 St. Mark's Church Register, 1846.

92 McKenna, *Family Life*, Table 32, pp. 466-467.

93 Ward, *Courtship and Social Space*, p. 53.

94 *Standing Orders*, p. 25.

95 See, for example, the petition of John McHugh regarding bringing his 17-year-old daughter from England to live with him (LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 770, p. 191, December 20, 1844). In Prescott, there is evidence of six older children living in town with RCRR families (Census of Canada West, 1851-1852, pp. 2, 43).

96 *Standing Orders*, p. 25.

assistance to travel to destinations in British North America, but, all too often, as in the case of the widow of Private Glynn, widows were driven to "depending on the charity of the men."[97]

The situation was even worse if it was the mother who had died. The *Standing Orders* were emphatic that children without mothers had no place in the Regiment and were given only three months of rations to assist in their transition to new lives elsewhere.[98] Childcare duties were not to be part of a soldier's daily routine. Clearly, there was a very high incentive for a soldier to remarry as soon as possible following a bereavement if families were not to be permanently broken apart. There are a number of examples of such remarriages within the RCRR.[99] Even more difficult, however, were the cases of children who had lost both parents. Rather than allow them to be sent away, it would appear that other RCR families adopted them. In 1849, the commanding officer of the RCRR, Lieutenant-Colonel Meuter, who was not blind to these difficulties, observed

> that owing to the peculiar nature of the Corps, distributed as it is over so many small Detachments, with the immense number of Women and Children belonging to the Regiment.... Cases of distress, such as the death of a Soldier, leaving a Widow with a large family perfectly destitute and helpless often occur and upon these reasons the Men of the Detachment or Company to which the distressed Party belonged are called upon for subscriptions, and invariably give what they can spare to alleviate the case. There have been many instances of both the Father and Mother of a Family dying, leaving several Children, Orphans and completely destitute, but in the most praiseworthy manner, the Orphans have frequently been adopted by Married Comrades of the deceased Soldier, who, from themselves having families, could but ill afford it.[100]

Such circumstances paint a positive picture of family life in barracks, in contrast to the immorality feared by middle-class reformers. Meuter proposed as a solution, not more army support, but rather the establishment of a benevolent fund to which the men and officers would subscribe according to their means. It proved to be very successful, although the records show that, although it was established to aid widows and orphans, in practice more often the men were recipients.[101] Since it was administered by superior officers, those women who were helped had to be of impeccable character. As Ann Graydon had noted in her appeal, "my own character is thank God above suspicion."[102] If it were not so, her case and others like hers would not have been considered for aid. Although officers such as Meuter showed a caring paternalism in their command, it came with a price tag, especially for the women who appealed for assistance.

97 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 771, p. 161, December 28, 1847. See also, for example, the case of the widow Harriet and four children of Private Rueben Mills, who were granted rations and transport from Kingston to Montreal (LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 777, p. 58, March 26, 1855).
98 *Standing Orders*, pp. 25-26. See also LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 778, p. 68, November 17, 1857.
99 McKenna, *Family Life*, pp. 70-72.
100 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 772, pp. 64-66, April 10, 1849.
101 McKenna, *Family Life*, p. 75.
102 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 777, pp. 70-71, April 30, 1855.

This emphasis on women's character is shown most clearly in the petitions for support from women who were married to retired RCRs. Although not prepared to grant a wife anything out of military coffers, the army was more than happy to appropriate part of her husband's pension for her use if her case was deemed deserving of it. The men of the RCRR were experienced and reliable soldiers, but they also had the vices that came with long service in the military. One of the most notorious of these was alcoholism, which was a serious problem in the regiment.[103] These tendencies were often repressed while a man was in the army, but after his discharge would surface. In 1855, Ellen, wife of retired RCR John Francis Keiler, was, according to the Rector at St. John's, New Brunswick, "heartlessly abandoned ... the last pension day & left with one infant a healthy child & with the prospect of giving birth to another & without one penny of the pension that he drew. She has no relatives except [a] more than helpless mother. She gave birth to twins on the 13th day of the present month and I buried the last today." Similarly, Bridget, wife of Edward Halpin, was abandoned by her husband. According to Captain Griffin, he "removed himself to Kingston solely that he might expend the whole of his pension in drink, without let or hindrance from her, either in the way of support or importunity to sobriety." When Halpin was tracked down in Kingston, repeated attempts to get him to justify his behaviour were unsuccessful due to the "great difficulty in finding this man in a sufficiently sober state to make any explanation whatever." Halpin's allegations that he had left Bridget because of her "attempt to poison him," Griffin dismissed as "the hallucination of a brain diseased by the constant use of ardent spirits." In another case, Ann Corbett complained in 1852 that her husband of 26 years "has of late given himself up to dissolute habits & has left her & eight children to live & cohabit with a young girl by which he is about to have a child." Dora Quinn was forced to leave her husband Robert because "the treatment your Memorialist received from her said husband was so very bad and his habits of drunkenness so unbearable." Mental illness could also result in a wife's abandonment. Anne Kennedy's husband was discharged to Yarmouth Asylum, having wandered away from barracks in 1848 and spent the summer in the woods. She was abandoned in Canada with "four children to support." Similarly, when Private William Harrison was sent home to England as a "maniac" and "lunatic," he left behind his wife and four children.[104]

In these and other similar cases in British North America in which the husband was clearly the guilty party, the wife was granted one-half of her husband's pension paid directly to her from the military authorities, but only if she could prove that she was of good character. The question of her worthiness was crucial. In many cases, the wives submitted signed statements written by men of stature in their community who could testify to their good name according to middle-class standards of propriety. Ann Corbett, for example, had her minister write that she

103 PRO, WO 27, RCRR Inspection Returns, vol. 325, August 11, 1842; vol. 385, September 22, 1848. On the health issues of the RCRs, including a tendency to heavy drinking, see Duffin, "Soldier's Work; Soldier's Health."

104 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 521, p. 252, September 21, 1855; vol. 501, pp. 177-179, February 7, 1852; vol. 502, p. 45, October 4, 1852, and p. 207, May 14, 1853; vol. 774, p. 126, June 8, 1852, and pp. 200-201, October 23, 1852; vol. 775, pp. 9-10, January 12, 1853.

"is a steady & industrious person, & bears the reputation of being a good wife and mother." Dora Quinn had Major MacDougall attest, "I know the man is a drunkard, and that the woman is very respectable and hard working." MacDougall also wrote on Anne Kennedy's behalf that she "is a most excellent and deserving person, she has brought up a large family under great disadvantages in an exemplary manner." Isabella Lorimer included in her appeal testimonials from her minister, the local major of militia, and a Justice of the Peace, who all described her as being of "excellent character" and "very respectable." Captain Griffin wrote on behalf of Bridget Halpin that "the woman is quiet, honest sober and industrious," while her husband who had deserted her was "an habitual drunkard." Sobriety was an important asset in a wife of the Regiment. Ellen Keiler, who was married to the alcoholic John Francis, was recommended by the rector of her church, who asserted, "Up to the time of her marriage she was hard working & as far as I could learn, [an] honest & sober girl; she has a mother whom she then supported.... I have never known Ellen to have been under the influence of liquor but once," during childbirth. Drunkenness in a wife of the Regiment was considered such a serious offence that RCR Private William McLoughlin was confined to barracks for six days at Kingston in 1854 "for making a false report ... in accusing the wife of P[riva]te Street of being Drunk."[105]

While their husbands were still on active service, the threat of withdrawal of rations was an extremely effective means of controlling the behaviour of wives, and hence that of their husbands. One testifier to the Committee on Barrack Accommodation, Colonel Thomas Gilpin, asserted, "As Colonel of a regiment it has always been my practice, and I believe it is the practice of the service always, as far as possible, to make enquiries first into the character of a woman before admitting them into the barracks. Unless the women are of good character they are not admitted."[106] Women of "bad" character could lose the right to live in barracks. The stereotype of such a woman was sufficiently well known to be the subject of humorous caricature. In 1843, Sir James Alexander, in Upper Canada on a tour of military duty, drew a sketch of a drunken woman holding a liquor bottle as she advanced with vengeful intent on three officers sleeping in a Brantford inn. She is quoted as saying, "They tell me there's some of the Royals here. I'll fix them! I don't get a chance like this every day—a mean set to turn me out of Barracks! —The officers believe a Sergt before a poor Soldier—if I don't 'pull their chicken' its [*sic*] a caution."[107] Presumably drinking had been the reason for her expulsion. (See Figure 3.)

105 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 502, p. 46, October 4, 1852, and p. 207, May 14, 1853; vol. 772, p. 30, February 15,1849; vol. 503, pp. 42-43, March 28-30, 1854; vol. 501, p. 177, February 7, 1852; vol. 503, pp. 251-252, September 21, 1855; vol. 776, p. 90, March 13, 1854.

106 *Report on Barrack Accommodation*, p. 140.

107 LAC, Neg. # C98753, "Brantford 1843 3 a.m." by Sir James Alexander, Captain 14th Regiment of Foot.

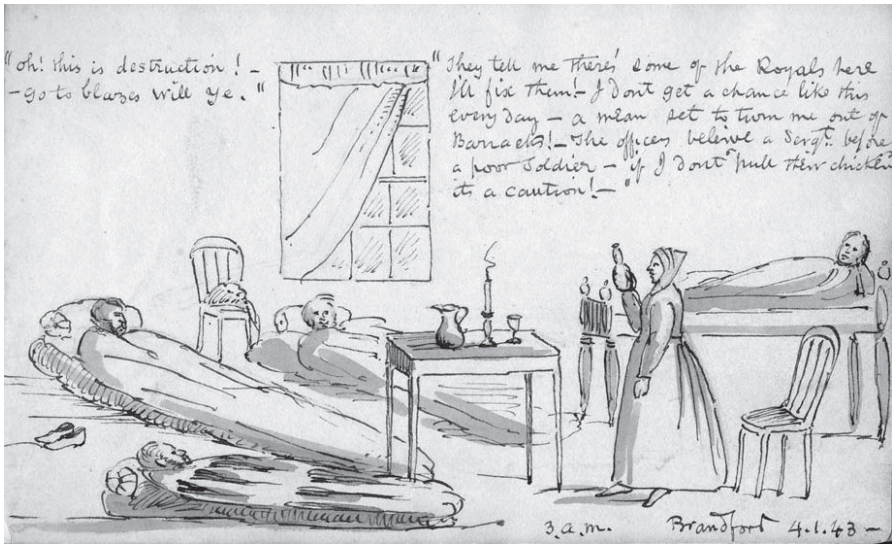


Figure 3: "Brantford, 1843" by Sir James Alexander Captain 14th Regiment of Foot.
Source: Sir James Edward Alexander Sketchbook, Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1977-22-2, C-098753.

Ann Graydon, despite possessing an excellent character, was not granted her request for rations, but had to go to the bottom of a long waiting list.[108] Other women, like the intruder at the Brantford inn, were not so willing to accept the restrictions of military life. In 1848, the *Prescott Herald* printed a story of a woman of "bad" character who had deserted her husband, an RCR bugler from Fort Wellington, taking two other soldiers with her. In the middle of the night, she circumvented the rules about not leaving barracks by pretending that she was ill. The *Herald* reported that

> in the course of the night [she] went out of the barracks several times, each time getting sicker and sicker, but at the same time carrying out some articles which she threw over the pickets into the outer ditch. At last she became very, very, sick, she went out and was seen no more. Shortly it was discovered that two men and a woman were missing; but then it was too late, as the trio had gone beyond all hope. We believe neither the Service nor the bugler has met any serious loss. The lady may rest assured that as she has deserted, she will be deserted in turn.[109]

Although this incident was reported in a light-hearted manner, on another level it reads like a cautionary tale. The moral message delivered at the end was that the consequence of "bad" behaviour in a woman was desertion.

The bugler's wife was not representative of the women resident at Fort Wellington. Although we know that women of the popular classes often exercised

108 LAC, RG 8I C-Series, vol. 775, pp. 70-71, May, 10, 1855.
109 *Prescott Herald*, June 1848, as quoted in Couture, "The Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment," pp. 98-99.

a disruptive agency in the town of Prescott,[110] such was not the case among the army wives. The close connections of the RCRs with their neighbours in Prescott, whether they lived in the Fort or in the town surrounding it, made them a welcome and respected addition to the community. Initially, in 1841, nervousness about the impact of the newly-arrived soldiers caused the middle-class town fathers to enact bylaws that for the first time regulated "bawdy houses" and "vagrant prostitutes."[111] Prostitutes, as I have discussed elsewhere, were a feature of Prescott life, and soldiers from other regiments had been associated with them in the past, such as when "one or two" soldiers had earlier that year aided two unruly local women in disturbing the peace and destroying property.[112] However, the behaviour of the RCRs, whose interaction with local prostitutes must have been within acceptable norms, reassured the local populace, and the bylaws were allowed to lapse. So happy were leading townsmen with the RCRR's family-oriented behaviour and economic benefit to their small community that in 1849, when the regiment's removal from Fort Wellington was rumoured, a petition signed by 111 men was sent to General Rowan requesting that the RCRR "might be allowed to remain here for some time longer." They wrote in glowing terms of the "non-commissioned officers and men [who] have conducted themselves with the utmost propriety" and "the perfect good feeling which exists between the said company and the inhabitants ... many of them being men with families."[113] Most of the signatories were unsurprisingly men with commercial interests such as merchants, shopkeepers, and tavern and hotel owners, but among them were also a Justice of the Peace, a barrister, the census taker, the collector of customs, two physicians, a teacher, and three members of the Board of Police as well as a variety of skilled tradesmen. Clearly, the middle-class leading male citizens of Prescott approved of the soldiers and their wives present in their midst. It is worth noting that at the same time the records of the local Board of Police show that these leading men were also, as Johnson has noted[114] and as I have observed, enforcing an agenda of increasingly stricter public punishments for women's sexual immortality and drunkenness.[115] They approved of the highly regulated military families living in their midst.

Even though their living conditions were challenging and the benefits conferred on them meagre, military wives in Upper Canada submitted to continual control and monitoring of their behaviour. We cannot, of course, be certain whether the regulations published in the RCRR *Standing Orders* were a reflection of reality or an attempt to impose order on chaos. RCRR inspections and other records indicate, however, that these women knew what was required of them and did their best to comply. The military hierarchy was to some extent concerned for their welfare, but in return required adherence to a code of conduct determined by a middle-class ideal of womanhood that was shared by local community leaders.

110 McKenna "Women's Agency."
111 *Ibid.*, p. 361.
112 *Ibid.*, pp. 356-357.
113 McKenna, *Family Life*, pp. 332-335.
114 Johnson, *In Duty Bound*, p. 249.
115 On this subject, see McKenna, "Women's Agency."

This expectation, paradoxically, required most of them to live in a setting that, because of its lack of family privacy and gender segregation, made them morally suspect in the eyes of their social superiors. The onus was on the women of the RCRR to prove that they conformed to this prescriptive middle-class standard of industry, obedience, piety, modesty, and sobriety in exchange for their means of support.