The Reluctant Cheesemaker: Craft Work and Conflict in Ontario's Nineteenth-Century Cooperative Cheese Industry

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Despite the importance of export-oriented cheese manufacturing in nineteenth-century Ontario, little is known about cheesemakers. These waged workers and small producers consisted of men, and some women, who faced different opportunities and constraints. Their experiences suggest inter- and intraclass conflict was a defining feature of the industry, despite contemporary narratives that characterized it as a period of cooperation between stakeholders. Makers responded to conflicts in ways that highlight their critical role in this industrial craft, the limits of their power, and the sector's instability in a time of food and agricultural industrialization.

Malgré l'importance de la fabrication du fromage destiné à l'exportation dans l'Ontario du XIXe siècle, on sait peu de choses sur les fromagers. Salariés ou petits producteurs, ces travailleurs étaient des hommes, et parfois des femmes, placés devant diverses possibilités ou aux prises avec diverses contraintes. Leur pratique porte à croire que les conflits entre les classes et au sein de celles-ci constituaient une caractéristique déterminante de l'industrie, même si l'on décrivait alors l'époque comme une période de coopération entre les intéressés. Les fromagers ont réagi aux conflits d'une manière qui fait ressortir leur rôle crucial dans cet artisanat industriel, les limites de leur pouvoir et l'instabilité du secteur à une époque où l'alimentation et l'agriculture s'industrialisaient.

"UNCLE SAM WAS A FAILURE," William Fitzgerald confided in his diary from a boarding house in Syracuse, New York, in March of 1892, just days after leaving his home in rural Ontario. The young man's optimism about finding work as an urban shop assistant quickly gave way to "exhaustion" and "disgust" after he was turned away repeatedly due to a "lack of experience." Heeding the advice of an acquaintance, he "somewhat reluctantly" wired a dairy equipment supplier

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and exporter in Kingston, Ontario, to inquire about a job offer he had rejected prior to leaving Canada. Two weeks later, Fitzgerald took up a position as head cheesemaker at Rose Hill Cheese Factory in Pittsburgh, Ontario, no more enthused about cheesemaking than before his attempt to escape the industry by departing for the land of opportunity.[1]

Fitzgerald's half-hearted return to cheesemaking contrasts with the praise many of his contemporaries lavished on this rural, export-oriented sector, calling it a "natural industry of this country" that benefited farmers, manufacturers, and commercial interests alike.[2] In many ways, their optimism was understandable: more than a thousand cheese factories were established between the mid-1860s and early 1900s to manufacture cheese for sale in the United Kingdom. By 1901, dairy products were some of Canada's most valuable manufactured goods.[3] Although export-oriented cheese production declined in the twentieth century, scholars argue that its first 50 years were marked by more economic stability than wheat production,[4] constituted a key stage in the development of a specialized, national dairy sector,[5] and exemplified rural cooperation and mutual aid.[6] Yet there are signs the cheese industry was never as cooperative or lucrative as its champions claimed.[7] It did not take long for tensions to emerge between farmers and commercial interests over

1 Queen's University Archives (hereafter QUA), William Fitzgerald fonds, CA ON00239 F02011, diary entries for March 31, 1892, through April 15, 1892.

2 The quotation is from an address to the Dairymen's Association of Eastern Ontario (hereafter DAEO), *Annual Report of the Dairymen's and Creameries' Association of the Province of Ontario 1893* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1894), p. 6.

3 Dairy products ranked third in terms of dollar value in the statistics of manufactures. Government of Canada, *Fourth Census of Canada 1901, Vol. II Natural Products* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1904), p. xlvii.

4 Robert K. Ankli and Wendy Millar, "Ontario Agriculture in Transition: The Switch from Wheat to Cheese," *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 42, no. 1 (1982), pp. 207–215; Robert E. Ankli, "Ontario's Dairy Industry, 1880–1920," in Donald H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History VIII* (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1992), pp. 261–271; Earl Haslett, "Factors in the Growth and Decline of the Cheese Industry in Ontario, 1864–1924" (PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 1969); J. A. Ruddick et al., *The Dairy Industry in Canada*, Harold Innis, ed. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937); and Tonu Tosine, "Cheese Factories in the Quinte-Upper St. Lawrence Area of Ontario, 1865–1905," (MA thesis, York University, 1974).

5 D. A. Lawr, "The Development of Ontario Farming, 1870–1914: Patterns of Growth and Change," *Ontario History*, vol. 64, no. 3 (1972), pp. 239–251; Veronica McCormick, *A Hundred Years in the Dairy Industry: A History of the Dairy Industry in Canada and the Events That Influenced It, 1867–1967* (Ottawa: Dairy Farmers of Canada, 1968); Ruddick et al., *Dairy Industry in Canada*, pp. 44–68.

6 Heather Menzies, *By the Labour of Their Hands: The Story of Ontario Cheddar Cheese* (Kingston: Quarry Press, 1994); Edward Moore, *When Cheese was King: A History of Cheese Factories in Oxford County* (Norwich, ON: Norwich and District Historical Society, 1987).

7 "Cooperative" had three distinct but interrelated meanings in the context of nineteenth-century cheese manufacturing. The first referred to a particular type of business structure—a cooperatively owned enterprise. This applied to some, but not all cheese factories in the province. "Cooperative" was also used to describe all cheese factories in general, including those not cooperatively owned. Here, cooperation referred to the practice of pooling milk from multiple farms at a single location. Finally, contemporaries used "cooperation" in an even broader sense to describe the inter- and intraclass mutualism of the industry writ large. It is the second and third definitions I am using when I describe the industry as "cooperative." When discussing factories, I identify ownership structure only if it is known and/or necessary for my argument. Mutable and multiple definitions of "cooperation" can also be found in Daryll Crewson and Ralph Matthews, "Class Interests in the Emergence of Fruit-Growing Cooperation in Lincoln County, Ontario, 1880–1914," in Donald H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History V* (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1986), p. 34.

cheese markets and commodity prices.[8] Studies also show that cheese dairying was probably not very profitable for the average Ontario farm family, despite being a more stable source of revenue than wheat.[9]

This article examines the first 50 years of export-oriented cheese manufacturing from the perspective of Ontario's cheesemakers, who have not received much attention in the literature to date.[10] Who were these men and women, and what do their experiences tell us about the nature of the industry and its relationship to the emerging industrial food system in the nineteenth century? Was William Fitzgerald's attempt to leave cheesemaking in 1892 indicative of wider unrest in this cooperative rural industry? Using letters, account books, newspapers, photographs, dairymen's association proceedings, dairy school records, census data, and Fitzgerald's diary, I sketch the contours of this workforce and offer initial answers to these questions.[11]

This group of rural non-farm workers consisted of men, and some women, who faced different opportunities and constraints in an increasingly masculinized sector. Examining the industry from their perspective further challenges the narrative that factory cheesemaking ushered in a period of stable economic growth in the countryside that was characterized by cooperation between numerous stakeholders. Overall, cheesemakers' experiences suggest conflict between and among key groups—especially dairy farmers, makers, and buyer-exporters—was a defining feature of Ontario's cooperative rural cheese manufacturing from its inception in the 1860s. These conflicts were rooted in class tensions, the industry's complex and shifting organizational structure, and the "industrial craft" character of export-oriented cheesemaking. The sector's success hinged on individual firms' ability to consistently produce high quality cheddar for mass consumption overseas, using craft methods and a highly skilled, decentralized workforce. Cheesemakers were a liability if they did not behave as expected or used methods considered inappropriate to this industrial craft. Unrest intensified during the 1880s and 1890s, as dairy farmers and buyer-exporters clashed over declining cheese prices. Makers faced pressure from both sides to continue producing high-quality cheese and maintain Canada's strong position in international markets despite declining wages and more difficult working conditions. They responded in a variety of ways, including manipulating craft to their own ends (a form of everyday resistance), leaving the industry for other employment, as Fitzgerald did briefly, and attempting to organize. As a young man who came of age during the industry's expansion, Fitzgerald's opportunities, challenges, and successes illuminate the complex ways that conflict and instability—as much as cooperation and opportunity—characterized this rural industry's first 50 years.

8 Menzies, *By the Labour of Their Hands,* pp. 86–96.

9 Ankli and Millar, "Switch from Wheat to Cheese," pp. 207–215; Ankli, "Ontario's Dairy Industry," p. 270.

10 An exception is Menzies, *By the Labour of Their Hands*, pp. 69–86, who focuses mostly on twentieth-century cheesemakers.

11 Unfortunately, few primary materials used in this study were produced by cheesemakers themselves. My analysis depends on reading their experiences through sources that were produced and dominated by the voices of their employers, dairy experts, and industry leaders. As much as possible, I have tried to substantiate expert claims using a range of evidence.

Export-Oriented Cheese Manufacturing in Ontario

Cheesemaking was a common activity in rural settler-colonial society before the mid-1860s. In 1861, the census recorded more than 2.5 million pounds of cheese in Upper Canada, which was produced by women in farmstead dairies.[12] However, a series of factors combined to shift cheesemaking from farms to factories at mid-century. Volatility in wheat markets, the end of the Reciprocity Treaty with the United States, and concerns about wheat pests and soil fertility prompted rural families to search for other commodities that could generate reliable cash returns to supplement their diverse subsistence strategies.[13] Ontario was not unique in its shift to factory-based cheese manufacturing in the nineteenth century. In the United States, Quebec, northern Europe, Australia, and New Zealand, many farming communities expanded dairy manufacturing.[14]

Ontario farmers gravitated to cheese dairying on the recommendation of Upper Canada's agricultural and small-town business elite, who believed England's growing population of landless urban workers could absorb an endless supply of cheese.[15] They drew inspiration from rural New York, where farmers had adopted a successful cooperative cheesemaking model in the 1850s. In New York, farmers—called patrons—pooled milk at central locations to produce cheese on a greater scale and spread the risks of production across a number of farmers. Patrons retained ownership over the milk and shared the costs of manufacturing it into cheese; each received the value of the cheese sold based on the volume of milk they supplied.[16] Ontario's cheese industry grew swiftly after the first factory was established in Oxford County in 1864. There were more than 1,200 factories in operation by the early twentieth century, making the local cheese factory a familiar feature in many rural communities in southern Ontario (see Figure 1). Areas of concentration formed around London in the southwest; Peterborough, Northumberland, and Prince Edward Counties in the central part of the province; and the eastern counties along the St. Lawrence River and in the Ottawa Valley.

12 Government of Canada, "General Abstract of Agricultural Produce, &c., of Upper Canada for 1861," *Census of Canadas 1860–61, Vol. II* (Quebec: S. B. Foote, 1864), pp. 90–95. Most of this cheese was made for consumption or sale in small quantities, though some female producers expanded their production capacity in the mid-nineteenth century. See Heather Menzies, "Technology in the Craft of Ontario Cheesemaking: Women in Oxford County circa 1860," *Ontario History*, vol. 87, no. 3 (1995), pp. 293–304.

13 On farm life in central Canada, see R. W. Sandwell, *Canada's Rural Majority: Households, Environments, and Economies, 1870–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 67–103.

14 Ruth Dupré, "Regulating the Quebec Dairy Industry, 1905–1921: Peeling Off the Joseph Label," *Journal of Economic History*, vol. 50, no. 2 (1990), pp. 343–344; Paul S. Kinstedt, *Cheese and Culture: A History of Cheese and Its Place in Western Civilization* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2012), pp. 195–211; Eric E. Lampard, *The Rise of the Dairy Industry in Wisconsin: A Study in Agricultural Change, 1820–1920* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Madison, 1963); Sally McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change, 1820–1885* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Tami Parr, *Pacific Northwest Cheese: A History* (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2013); H. G. Philpott, *History of the New Zealand Dairy Industry, 1840–1935* (Wellington, NZ: Government Printer, 1937); Lena Sommestad and Sally McMurry, "Farm Daughters and Industrialization: A Comparative Analysis of Dairying in New York and Sweden, 1860–1920," *Journal of Women's History*, vol. 10, no. 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 137–138.

15 "Dairy Farming in South Oxford," *Canada Farmer*, February 1, 1864.

16 McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life,* pp. 127–129.

Growth came from building additional factories rather than increasing the scale of existing ones, since they had to be located in close proximity to the farmers who supplied them daily with unrefrigerated milk (Figure 2). Few companies employed more than three or four workers at a time.[17] Many were managed by a single maker who was occasionally supported by an assistant or apprentice. Fitzgerald, for example, employed an assistant for three months during his second season at Rose Hill Cheese Factory in 1893.[18]

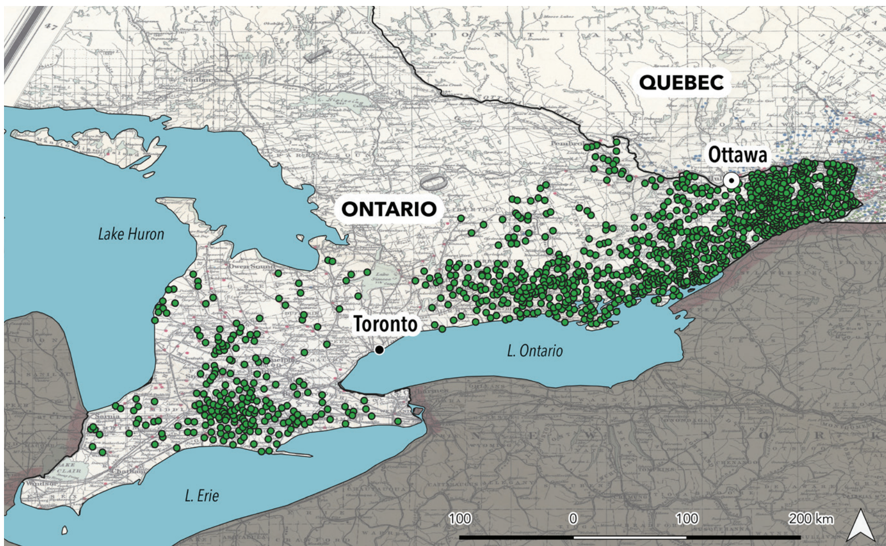

Figure 1. Map of 1,195 factories producing cheese in Ontario in 1907.
Source: Map by author.

Not all cheese factories in Ontario were cooperatively owned even though the industry as a whole was described as cooperative. When they were cooperatively owned, farmers supplied milk, built the factories, and managed their operations collectively, with one vote per member regardless of the number of shares they owned. Other forms of factory ownership outnumbered the true cooperatives. These included proprietary factories owned by a single individual or firm, and joint-stock companies.[19] Regardless of a factory's ownership structure, farmers pooled milk with their neighbours, retained ownership of the milk throughout the manufacturing process, and received the value of the cheese sold based on the volume of milk they supplied, minus the costs of its production.[20] Cheesemakers' relationships to the

17 The 1881 industrial census schedule reported an average of 2.9 employees per factory. Government of Canada, "Table 37–Industrial Establishments 2nd series," *Census of Canada, 1881* (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger & Company, 1885), pp. 404–406.

18 QUA, William Fitzgerald fonds, CA ON00239 F02011, diary entries for May 29, 1893, and August 29, 1893.

19 Ruddick et al., *Dairy Industry in Canada*, pp. 48–49.

20 There were occasional exceptions. In 1899, the Dunchurch Cheese Association entered into an arrangement with a cheesemaker who offered to operate their factory by purchasing "the milk outright, paying 60c. at the factory." See Archives of Ontario, Dunchurch Cheese Association fonds, MU 4551, File #1–Dunchurch

Figure 2. Workers outside a cheese factory with horses and barrels, 1895–1910.
Source: Archives of Ontario, Bartle Brothers fonds, C2-0-0-0-1637 (digitization from glass plate negative).

means of production could take a number of forms as a result of this complexity. In cooperatively owned companies, makers were employed directly by the farmers who supplied them with milk. In joint-stock and proprietary arrangements, makers were employed by the owner(s) of the factory, who, in turn, were contracted by the farmers supplying them with milk. Makers sometimes owned factories themselves, making them small producers rather than waged workers. These maker-owners could double as employers in their own right. As we will see below, the diverse ownership structures and labour patterns within the industry complicated efforts to unite craft cheesemakers during periods of tension in the 1880s and 1890s.

Production was geared toward export from the start. Buyer-exporters in Montréal purchased cheese using a network of local representatives and handled the product's export to the UK. Farmers frequently elected one of their own to serve as a salesman, but the work sometimes fell to makers. In the 1870s, farmers began forming local marketing boards to encourage buyers to compete with one another and increase the prices paid for cheese, at least in theory.[21] In 1874, Canadian cheese represented roughly 15% of all cheese imports into the United Kingdom, exceeded only by the United States (57%) and the Netherlands (27%).[22] Canada's position in the UK market grew steadily over the next three decades, reaching 69% of all UK

Cheese Association, 1898–1900, Edwin Taylor and F. N. Macfie, Directors, to the patrons and shareholders of the association (n.d.).

21 Ruddick et al., *Dairy Industry in Canada,* pp. 158–159; Menzies, *By the Labour of Their Hands*, pp. 86–91.

22 Richard Blundel and Angela Tregear, "From Artisans to 'Factories': The Interpenetration of Craft and Industry in English Cheese-Making, 1650–1950," *Enterprise and Society*, vol. 7, no. 4 (2006), p. 717.

cheese imports between 1901 and 1905.[23] By the early twentieth century, Canada was exporting nearly 200 million pounds of cheese to the UK annually, most of it produced in Ontario and, to a lesser extent, Quebec.[24]

For many contemporaries, Ontario's success confirmed what they already believed—that dairying was a way to achieve stable economic growth that would restore the productivity of agricultural land and encourage widespread cooperation between farmers, industry, and commercial interests. Many of the rural Ontario elite who embraced dairying encouraged what Darren Ferry has identified as nonpartisan liberal cooperation characteristic of many nineteenth-century voluntary associations.[25] In 1888, a speaker at the Dairymen's Association of Western Ontario (DAWO) convention reminded members that all segments of the industry shared the same interests. "When first asked to make a few remarks," he began, "I wondered whether I should address cheese makers, cheese buyers and sellers, or farmers. When I came to think the matter over, I found all these interests were identical."[26] Would cheesemakers have agreed?

Cheesemakers and their "Industrial Craft"

Little is known about the workers who produced millions of pounds of cheddar each year. William Fitzgerald fits the conventional image in a number of ways: he was an English-speaking, rural, White man of European background.[27] For many young men like him, who either could not or did not want to become landowning farmers, cheesemaking was an appealing alternative to other forms of waged rural work. They could save funds to purchase their own land or business, and it was less dangerous than other common seasonal occupations at the time, such as logging. Moreover, cheesemaking did not share the same negative connotations as waged farm labour; it could be pursued as a respectable career in its own right because of its connections to skilled craftwork.

The same cannot be said for women and girls, who were discouraged from working in cheese factories on the basis that the factory system was better suited to men's capacity for rational, scientific thought. George Buckland, professor of agriculture at the University of Toronto, stressed that factory cheddar was not your mother's cheese: "My poor mother," he recalled during a lecture to the Canadian Dairymen's Association in 1871, "used to make pretty good cheese, though sometimes but indifferent, by this system of guessing," while in the factory "a better

23 Haslett, "Factors in the Growth and Decline," p. 42.

24 Ontario produced "85 percent of Canada's factory cheese output in 1880, 74 percent in 1890, 60 percent in 1900, and 68 percent in 1910," according to Ankli and Millar, "Ontario Agriculture in Transition," p. 209.

25 Darren Ferry, *Uniting in Measures of Common Good: The Construction of Liberal Identities in Central Canada, 1830–1900* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

26 W. A. MacDonald, "Testing Milk," in Dairymen's Association of Western Ontario (hereafter DAWO), *Annual Reports of the Dairy Associations of Ontario for the Year 1888* (Toronto: Warwick & Sons, 1888), p. 160.

27 Many cheesemakers were of English, Scottish, Irish, German, Dutch, and, to a lesser extent, French ethnicity, which is unsurprising given the importance of dairying and cheesemaking in those societies. Most of them were likely White.

and cheaper article, far more uniform in quality, is made."[28] The implication was that women's successes in cheesemaking were accidental rather than the product of skilled knowledge born of experience. Moreover, industry boosters argued the work was "too heavy" for women, despite the increased use of technologies like the gang press and steam-powered equipment that minimized some of the heaviest tasks of the job.[29] Hence women who worked in cheese factories were often relegated to the status of assistants, responsible for tasks like scrubbing cheese vats. Only occasionally did women garner acclaim as cheesemakers in their own right. Even then, their skill was explained primarily in terms of gendered assumptions about women's inherent capacity for cleanliness: "You could eat your dinner on the floor of the making house," insisted Stratford Member of Parliament A. F. MacLaren after he awarded the Morrison sisters from Newry Factory first prize at the inaugural meeting of the Cheese and Butter-makers' Association of Western Ontario in 1899.[30] Gendered ideas about women's skills and capacities were used to explain both their success in, and supposed incompatibility with, the cheese factory system. While it is likely that many women were happy to give up cheesemaking in favour of other farm and non-farm pursuits, as Sally McMurry has argued,[31] those who wanted to pursue factory cheesemaking faced barriers on account of their gender.

Despite the overt and implicit connections factory supporters made between masculinity, science, and cheesemaking, women played an important role in cheese factories in the industry's early decades, especially because a large pool of skilled male cheesemaking labour was scarce. However, assessing women's participation is difficult. In 1871, men over 16 years of age represented 57.6% of the industry's 909 waged employees, compared to women over 16 years of age, who represented a significant minority at 33.4%. In 1891, the proportion of women cheesemakers over the age of 16 had fallen to 8.3% of the industry's total workforce of 1,930 waged employees (see Table 1).[32] Female makers were typically young and single, and they were expected to give up employment upon getting married.[33] An analysis of 32 women listed as cheesemakers in the 1881 Census of Canada shows that 23 were unmarried, seven were married, and two were widowed. Their median age was just 25.[34] Women who married male cheesemakers likely helped in the factory, though their contributions are rarely documented.[35] In a 1908 article from

28 Canadian Dairymen's Association, *Report of the Canadian Dairymen's Association…for the Year 1871* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Dairymen's Association, 1871), p. 112.

29 University of Guelph Archives (hereafter UGA), Agricultural History collection, RE1 OAC 10601, Dairy Department Letter Books, Book 2, H. H. Dean to Florence J. McDonald, April 4, 1910. Dean discouraged McDonald from enrolling in the university's factory dairy course.

30 Cheese and Butter-makers' Association of Western Ontario (hereafter CBAWO), *Annual Reports of the Butter and Cheese Associations of the Province of Ontario, 1899* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1900), pp. 155–156.

31 McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life*, p. 234.

32 The trend mirrors that in New York cheese factories. Sommestad and McMurry, "Farm Daughters," p. 138.

33 Similarly, see McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life*, p. 166.

34 The 32 women were identified through a keyword search of the 1881 census using the terms "cheese" and "cheesemaker." This number differs from the number of female factory workers reported in the industrial schedule for 1881 (n=287). Reasons for this discrepancy may be that women workers were listed as labourers, as well as possible transcription errors in the digitized returns.

35 For parallels in New York State, see McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life*, p. 165.

Canadian Dairyman and Farming World, the author noted that "Mrs. Broad gave her husband some assistance in this work" of managing the King Cheese Factory.[36] Overall, the defeminization of craft cheesemaking in Ontario was real, but it was also protracted and complex.[37]

Table 1. Number, Sex, and Age of Ontario's Factory Cheesemakers, 1871–1891

Year	1871		1881		1891		1871–1891
Category	**Number of makers**	**% of total**	**Number of makers**	**% of total**	**Number of makers**	**% of total**	**% change**
Men>16	524	58%	1289	79%	1700	88%	224%
Men<16	53	6%	62	4%	55	3%	4%
Women>16	304	33%	278	17%	161	8%	-47%
Women<16	28	3%	9	<1%	14	<1%	-50%
Totals	909		1638		1930		112%

Sources: "Table 36–Industries–2nd Series," *Census of Canada, 1870–71, Vol. III* (Ottawa: I. B. Taylor, 1875), pp. 368–369; "Table 37–Industrial Establishments–2nd series," *Census of Canada, 1880–81* (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger and Company, 1883), pp. 404–406; "Table 1–Industrial Establishments," *Census of Canada, 1890–91, Vol. III* (Ottawa: S. E. Dawson, 1894), pp. 94–96.
Note: Percentages in the "% total" columns for 1871, 1881, and 1891 do not equal 100 due to rounding.

The masculinizing workforce practised what is best described as an "industrial craft," since makers relied on craft methods to achieve industrial ends—the production of a consistent product for mass consumption overseas. Their task was to produce uniform cheeses that mimicked the style, taste, and texture of traditional English cheddar despite significant ecological and social differences in Ontario, including shorter grazing seasons, more extreme temperatures, different cattle feeds, and the factory system itself, which differed from England's model of small farm dairies (see Figure 3). Their task was all the more challenging given the distance between Ontario producers and their primary market.[38] Cheesemaking remained deeply reliant on craft skill throughout the nineteenth century, despite the attempts by an emerging global network of dairy scientists to make cheddar manufacturing a systematic, industrial science.[39] In practice, makers produced batches of cheese from start to finish instead of working on assembly lines; they adapted their tools, habits, and methods to the characteristics of the milk received on any given day; they learned the trade through (informal) apprenticeships; and few of their tasks

36 "Some Nice Factories," *Canadian Dairyman and Farming World,* December 23, 1908.
37 The defeminization argument is made most forcefully by Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 93–117. For a more nuanced account, see Margaret Derry, "Gender Conflicts in Dairying: Ontario's Butter Industry, 1880–1920," *Ontario History*, vol. 90, no. 1 (1998), pp. 31–47.
38 Oversalting could keep cheese edible long enough for it to reach English markets, but the trade-off was a less desirable texture.
39 See Blundel and Tregear, "From Artisans to 'Factories'," pp. 715–719. The annual meetings of the dairymen's associations in Canada also became important venues for developing scientific dairy knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

were mechanized. If makers applied the same steps the same way each day, their cheeses would vary widely in terms of safety, taste, and texture and garner lower prices for the farmers.[40] Cheesemaking required a combination of artistic and scientific skill that anthropologist Heather Paxson has called "synesthetic reason" in her study of twenty-first-century artisanal cheesemakers in the United States. Synesthetic reason, she has explained, is the combination of subjective evaluation with objective measurement of "the empirical conditions and materials," like temperature. Similar to today's artisans, synesthetic reason allowed nineteenth-century makers to "triangulate on the moving target of a particular batch of milk's transubstantiation into cheese on a particular day," using multiple tools at their disposal, such as steam boilers that moderated the temperature of milk in the vat, thermometers and acidimeters, and microbial tools like starters (see Figure 4).[41] A deskilled, standardized cheesemaking process was not feasible until mechanical refrigeration, pasteurization, and standardized microbial inputs became available

Figure 3. Curing Room, Black Creek Cheese Factory, Thos. Ballantyne and Sons, n.d. Uniformity in size, taste, and texture of cheese was an important part of the industrial craft of nineteenth-century cheddar manufacturing in Ontario.
Source: William James Topley, Library and Archives Canada, PA-026239.

40 Inconsistencies between batches of Canadian cheddar contributed to a lingering reputation that Canadian cheese could not match the quality of English producers. In the 1890s, a speaker at a dairymen's convention congratulated Ontario's cheese producers for the problem they were having with overseas merchants relabelling Canadian cheeses as English in origin, "thus acknowledging that our cheese were better than their own." DAWO, *Annual Reports of the Dairymen's and Creameries' Associations of the Province of Ontario 1891* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1892), p. 112.

41 Heather Paxson, *The Life of Cheese: Crafting Food and Value in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), p. 135.

Figure 4. Taking temperature in cheese factory, n.d. The maker's use of a thermometer reflects the shift toward greater standardization of parts of the cheesemaking process while still depending on craft tools and methods.
Source: William James Topley, Library and Archives Canada, PA-010175.

in the twentieth century. The combination of industrial goals and craft methods makes nineteenth-century cheese manufacturing an industrial craft.

The process of ripening milk for cheesemaking illustrates just how critical skilled craft labour was to mass-producing cheddar for international markets. Ripeness—a term used to describe the readiness of milk for cheesemaking—depends on the presence of lactic acid bacteria in milk, which convert lactose to lactic acid and bring the pH down to a level where coagulation is successful.[42] In the nineteenth century, ripening was achieved by applying a combination of heat, time, and "starters" to milk in the vat.[43] Coagulating the milk when it was underripe (lacking acidity) or overripe (too much acidity) created problems with taste and texture.[44] Seasonality and the bacterial loads in factories and farm stables impacted the rate of ripening, and hence cheesemakers' workdays. In early June 1892, after a hot May, Fitzgerald remarked that the milk worked "the fastest I ever experienced[;] in less than two hours after the milk was heated up, it was salted."[45] By comparison, milk that ripened slowly could extend a maker's work well into the night. Managing ripeness was a craft skill of the highest order.

42 Michael H. Tunick, *The Science of Cheese* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 29–30.
43 Starters were small amounts of liquid whey held over from previous batches of cheese.
44 "As to Cheese," *Canadian Cheese and Butter Maker*, July 1898.
45 QUA, William Fitzgerald fonds, CA ON00239 F02011, diary entry, June 6, 1892.

If high-quality cheese depended on a maker's ability to modify their practices each day, it was equally true they could ruin a batch through carelessness or lack of experience, a point not lost on the industry's experts. In the 1880s, J. B. Harris, a dairy instructor in North America and overseas, published *The Cheese and Buttermakers' Handbook,* in which he complained that many makers "seem to have a vague and imperfect understanding" of the role of ripening, treating it as a stage to be accelerated rather than a critical step in the process.[46] Harris condemned two common practices: adding rennet when milk was underripe and using starters to ripen milk artificially. He believed ignorance on the part of cheesemakers was to blame, but there were a number of reasons why a maker might move forward with underripe milk, such as wanting to avoid using a contaminated starter. Other reasons had more to do with working conditions. Starters, as the name suggests, could shorten the length of time required to make a batch of cheese, a practice that another educator uncharitably described as a "taste to get done for the day."[47] Such tastes are understandable given the length of makers' workdays. In addition to making cheese, makers received and weighed milk, cleaned the factory, inspected cheeses in the curing room, and frequently managed the factory's account books. In the late 1860s, when many factories received milk twice a day and made multiple batches of cheese, one maker resolved to find a way to reduce the work to once a day or "give up the business altogether."[48]

These challenges were compounded by the fact that cheesemaking was highly seasonal and insecure. Until the late nineteenth century, when some factories began producing butter in the winter, most cheesemakers were faced with a long bout of unemployment or had to seek out work in other sectors—sometimes with dire consequences. The *Globe* reported in January 1896 that 21-year-old James Gale, "a cheesemaker by trade," died after being crushed in a train accident in his position as spare brakeman with the Michigan Central Railroad, a job he held for only two weeks.[49] Furthermore, companies frequently changed hands or ceased production altogether, making it difficult to remain at a single factory long-term.[50] Makers also moved in search of better contracts. For example, at the end of his

46 J. B. Harris, *The Cheese and Butter Maker's Handbook: A Practical Treatise on the Arts of Cheese and Butter Making* (Glasgow: Dunn and Wright, 1885), https://archive.org/details/perkins59582018, p. 54.

47 UGA, Agricultural History collection (Ontario Agricultural College), RE1 OAC 10601, Dairy Department Letter Books, Book 1 (1888–1895), Draft of column for *Hoard's Dairyman*, August 24, 1888.

48 Canadian Dairymen's Association, *Report of the Canadian Dairymen's Association for the Year 1869* (Ingersoll, ON: Canadian Dairymen's Association, 1870), p. 113. Most factories adopted one daily milk shipment by the late 1870s.

49 "Crushed to Death: A Brakeman's Horrible Death on a Runaway Engine—Caught Between Engine and Tender," *Globe (1844–1936),* January 6, 1896; "Untitled," *Canadian Dairyman and Farming World*, vol. 27, no. 46 (December 1908), p. 12.

50 At least 57% of the 128 factories profiled in three popular commemorative histories of Ontario cheesemaking changed hands once or more between the 1860s and 1920s. See Gerald Ackerman et al., *The History of Cheesemaking in Prince Edward County* (Milford, ON: Black River Cheese Company, 2001); Iona Joy, *Cheese Factories of Rideau Township* (North Gower, ON: Rideau Township Historical Society, 1990); and Edward Moore, *When Cheese Was King: A History of the Cheese Factories in Oxford County* (Norwich, ON: Norwich and District Historical Society, 1987). Surviving factory account books often show high turnover of makers. For example, Roblin Cheese Factory in Hastings County employed at least 14 cheesemakers between 1872 and 1900. UGA, Roblin Cheese Factory fonds, CA ON00344 XA1 RHC A0386012, Cash book, 1871–1907.

first season at Rose Hill, Fitzgerald "called at Henderson's [Factory] but we made no bargain."[51] In short, Terrence Crowley's suggestion that "rural Ontarians lived in perpetual motion" often held true for head cheesemakers, and even more so for their assistants.[52]

Moreover, cheesemaking was not very lucrative, although wages are difficult to assess because systematic records are scarce and wage arrangements took different forms depending on the type of contract in place. Makers hired through tender, a competitive application process, were paid a negotiated rate per 100 pounds of cheese produced, which was expected to cover the cost of their supplies and the wages of any assistants they hired.[53] Alternatively, makers could be hired on weekly, monthly, or seasonal salaries, in which case they did not usually pay for expenses. An account book from a western Ontario factory in the 1870s shows that men and women were employed at $10 and $8 per month, respectively, less than male farm labourers earned around the same time.[54] Fixed salaries paid less than one could expect in the piece-rate system, but the latter was less predictable because of fluctuations in the cost of supplies and supply of milk. Makers who owned factories set manufacturing rates that covered their fixed costs as well as labour and other operating expenses.

Despite these challenges, many rural people sought work in cheese factories. They did so for a variety of reasons, including a lack of better opportunities, a desire to leave farming life, and a genuine interest in making a career from a highly skilled trade. In fact, some nineteenth-century makers became quite renowned for their skill, which allowed them to secure good contracts over many years.[55] For young rural men of modest means, cheesemaking may have appealed as one of a dwindling number of occupations (other than farming) where it was possible to become a self-employed small producer in the late nineteenth century.[56] Others used cheesemaking as a stepping stone to enter the commercial, government, or research sides of the industry, a path that was easiest for male cheesemakers with prior connections to the Canadian business and political elite.

51 QUA, William Fitzgerald fonds, CA ON00239 F02011, diary entry, December 16, 1892.

52 Terrence Crowley, "Rural Labour," in Paul Craven, ed., *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 18.

53 Submitting a tender was highly strategic. In 1882, an applicant at the Blanshard and Nissouri Cheese and Butter Factory offered to make cheese at a rate of 85¢ per 100 pounds of cheese on the condition that at least 60 tons were made over the season—88¢ for a smaller make. He was not willing to serve as the factory bookkeeper, and did not get the job. UGA, Blanshard and Nissouri Cheese and Butter Factory collection, CA ON00344 XA1 RHC A0386027, box 1, Minute Book 1880–1891, January 19, 1882.

54 Archives of Ontario, James Arthur James fonds, F 4390, item 1, Daybook and Business Register. Crowley, "Rural Labour," p. 46, estimates that "by 1870 male farm labourers averaged a monthly income of $13.50."

55 Makers Thomas Grieve and Adam Bell worked at the widely renowned Black Creek Cheese Factory in Perth County for more than a decade each. Ruddick et al., *Dairy Industry in Canada*, p. 68.

56 On self-employment and occupational mobility in Ontario in the mid-nineteenth century, see David G. Burley, *A Particular Condition in Life: Self-Employment and Social Mobility in Mid-Victorian Brantford, Ontario* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); and Robert B. Kristofferson, *Craft Capitalism: Craftworkers and Early Industrialization in Hamilton, Ontario, 1840–1872* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), esp. chapters 4–6.

Industrial Craft Conflict in the Late Nineteenth Century

In 1892—the same year Fitzgerald took his brief hiatus from cheesemaking—exporter John S. Pearce complained to the DAWO about the standard of cheesemaking in the province. He claimed there were just three kinds of makers: "progressive ones interested in improving their craft, those who make decent products but get left behind in the lurch of agricultural progress, and an immoral, 'shiftless' class who 'have nothing to lose.'"[57] His analysis reflected the dominant liberal attitudes among many industry leaders, namely that good cheesemaking was a matter of individual effort on the part of makers and the farmers who supplied them with milk, rather than the complex realities of producing craft cheese for mass consumption in a distant market.

Pearce's complaints came amid global economic depression and a time of particular tension within the industry. Prices for Canadian cheese had been in decline since 1883. Between 1887 and 1888 alone, the average value of the product of 100 pounds of milk fell from $1 to 87.9¢.[58] To make matters worse, parts of the province sustained multiple late summer droughts in the late 1880s, which reduced the milk supply and increased the incentive for farmers to adulterate milk by adding water to it, already a common problem.[59] Greater competition between rapidly multiplying factories, the emergence of alternative outlets for Ontario milk, such as butter factories (creameries), the ability of buyers and exporters in Montréal to influence price, and growing international competition all intensified the effects of global depression.[60] Overall, the Bureau of Industries' 1888 report confirmed what many felt: "The popularity of cheese factories and creameries was never more severely tested."[61]

Although Canada's relative and absolute position in English cheese markets grew in the 1890s, so too did concerns about the quality of Canadian cheese. Experts believed that improving the quality of cheese was the best way to maintain Canada's position in UK markets. Quebec producers, fairly or otherwise, received much of the blame for poor quality goods,[62] but Ontario producers were not immune from criticism. Cheese buyers blamed farmers and cheesemakers for low prices, claiming it was a problem of milk quality, lack of skill, and the habit of farmers to hold back cheese until markets looked favourable. If factories focused more on quality and shipping cheeses regularly, farmers would have no problems finding

57 DAWO, *Annual Reports of the Dairy and Creamery Associations of the Province of Ontario 1892* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1893), p. 157.

58 Ontario Bureau of Industries, *Annual Report of the Bureau of Industries for the Province of Ontario 1888* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1889), pp. 107–109. The fall in prices corresponds with the downward trend in prices for cheese and other commodities in the UK during the depression. See David Taylor, "Growth and Structural Change in the English Dairy Industry, c1860–1930," *Agricultural History Review*, vol. 35, no. 1 (1987), p. 49.

59 Hayley Goodchild, "The Problem of Milk in the Nineteenth-Century Ontario Cheese Industry: An Envirotechnical Approach to Business History," *Business History*, vol. 59, no. 7 (2017), pp. 1081–1110.

60 Particularly concerning was the spectre of increased competition from New Zealand, although its share of the English market was still modest. By 1928, however, New Zealand was responsible for more than 50% of cheese imports to the UK, with Canada second at nearly 31%. See C. W. Tidsdale and J. Jones, cited in Blundel and Tregear, "From Artisans to 'Factories,'" p. 725.

61 Ontario Bureau of Industries, *Annual Report…1888*, pp. 107–109.

62 Dupré, "Regulating the Quebec Dairy Industry," pp. 343–344.

a market for their goods, explained Edwin Casswell, an Ingersoll merchant and president of the DAWO.[63] Farmers and factory directors, on the other hand, accused buyers of exaggerating complaints about quality in order to buy low and sell high.[64] One factory director argued that "[factory] salesmen have quite as good right to study the signs of the market and hold on for a rise, as others [the buyer-exporters] have to speculate, using refrigerators and cold storage," alluding to the wave of ice-cooled storage houses exporters built in the late 1880s to slow the deterioration of cheeses before their Atlantic journey.[65] Farmers' frustrations were likely galvanized by the growing popularity of the Dominion Grange and Patrons of Industry, agrarian movements popular between the 1870s and 1890s for their defence of agricultural interests against urban commercial and industrial power.[66]

Cheesemakers bore a great deal of the impacts of these tensions. A practice emerged around this time forcing makers to sign contracts that included clauses holding them financially culpable for any losses from cheese deemed not of first-class quality. Those who refused could easily wind up unemployed, since there was an excess of makers seeking employment by this time, especially in eastern Ontario. At Big Springs Cheese Factory in Hastings County, cheesemaker Bert Mason was docked $53.60 for losses in 1899, which amounted to roughly a quarter of his entire season's salary.[67] A contract struck in 1898 between the United Empire Loyalist Cheese and Butter Company and maker John Clute required the latter to provide "Security for $500.00 satisfactory to the Directors against any loss of inferior quality of cheese made by him."[68] In 1890, a dairy instructor employed by the DAWO reported that some makers were forced to pay for so many losses they "w[ound] up the season without any wages for themselves, and a loss to the patrons."[69] In at least one case, a maker took his employer to court for the losses he faced.[70] Others alleged that buyers found "imaginary fault[s]" in cheeses and demanded payments from makers to remain quiet. "In quite a few instances makers are known to have been compelled to pay out the whole year's wages as 'silence' money to the buyer," claimed one article.[71] These complaints are difficult

63 DAWO, *Annual Report…1888*, p. 12.

64 By this time, many dairy farmers had begun local marketing boards in an attempt to curtail buyers' ability to play factories off one another. In practice, many buyers agreed to keep their bids on the boards low and negotiate prices "on the curb" for cheese they thought might get higher prices abroad. Ruddick et al., *Dairy Industry in Canada*, pp. 158–160; Menzies, *By the Labour of Their Hands*, pp. 87–88.

65 DAWO, *Annual Report…1888*, p. 12. See Ruddick et al., *Dairy Industry in Canada*, pp. 62–63, on developments in ice-cooled storage.

66 Darren Ferry, *Uniting in Measures*; Russell Hann, *Farmers Confront Industrialism: Some Historical Perspectives on Ontario Agrarian Movements* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975); and Aubrey Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada* (1924; repr., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), pp. 133–146.

67 Earlier records suggest makers at Big Springs were only making between $100 and $200 a season. Archives of Ontario, Big Springs Cheese Factory fonds, F4348, Account Book, 1893–1900, pp. 109, 123.

68 QUA, United Empire Loyalist Cheese Factory Records, MF 2124, Minute books, with accounts, June 1897–December 1915, Minutes from January 1898, p. 51.

69 DAWO, *Annual Report of the Dairy and Creamery Associations of Ontario 1889* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1890), p. 55.

70 "Assizes at Belleville: A Complicated Cheese Case—Actions to Recover," *Globe (1844–1936)*, March 29, 1892.

71 "A Cheese Maker's Association," *Canadian Cheese and Butter Maker*, vol. 1, no. 1, July 1898.

to substantiate, but the allegations highlight the extent to which makers found themselves caught between farmers, on the one hand, and commercial middlemen, on the other. When wages fell or they were docked pay, some makers attempted to make up losses by purchasing cheaper cheese boxes and stretching other supplies further into the season, modest forms of resistance made possible by their control over the craft production process. However, such actions probably exacerbated problems with cheese quality.[72]

The challenge of retaining "first-class men" in the industry was discussed at length during dairymen's association meetings. "No man can make good cheese if he is paid only a cent a pound," argued dairy instructor Howard Bissell in 1890, referring to the going rate that farmers would pay to have their milk manufactured into cheese, while James W. Robertson complained that "the men who run our cheese factories to-day are not men of the same ambition they were ten years ago."[73] Some, like dairy equipment supplier and local politician Daniel Derbyshire, warned that downward pressure on manufacturing rates—and thus cheesemakers' wages—would push the remaining "progressive" makers out of the business: "What encouragement is it for a man … if he finds that the patrons are running one year to one place and next year to another, willing to go anywhere if they will get one-tenth of a cent off the maker?"[74] In 1895, the DAWO distributed a questionnaire to its members to ascertain the wage situation in western Ontario. They found that wages for makers hired by piece rate and provided their own supplies varied from 70¢ to 92¢ per hundredweight of cheese, the average being 80.64¢. When makers supplied only their labour, the average was 38.75¢ per hundredweight or $43.25 a month if they were paid by salary.[75] Although no equivalent study exists for eastern Ontario, evidence suggests that rates in the east were lower, where factories were smaller and competition between makers was greater. Big Springs Factory in Hastings County, for example, was paying a standard rate of around $16 a month for makers, amounting to just $112 for the entire season—well below the $300 that the average western Ontario maker might expect for similar work.[76] In this context, it is not surprising that Fitzgerald took a chance on finding work in a northern US city one spring.[77]

Although the province's leading dairy experts agreed that retaining skilled makers was a problem, the question of how to fix it was more contentious. Most felt the best way forward was continued education in the form of travelling dairy

72 See examples in DAWO, *Annual Report…1891*, p. 123; and DAEO, *Annual Report…1893*, p. 27.

73 DAEO, *Annual Report of the Dairy and Creamery Associations of the Province of Ontario 1890* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1891), p. 8; DAEO, *Annual Report of the Dairy and Creamery Associations of the Province of Ontario 1888* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1889), p. 109.

74 DAEO, *Annual Report…1888*, p. 50.

75 DAWO, *Annual Report of the Dairymen's and Creameries' Associations of the Province of Ontario 1895* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1896), p. 81. The results were based on 113 survey responses.

76 Archives of Ontario, Big Springs Cheese Factory fonds, F 4348, Accounts 1893–1900, p. 122.

77 This was also a period of general increase in rural to urban migration in North America. See Joy Parr, "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective," *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 15 (1995), p. 100; and Randy William Widdis, *With Scarcely a Ripple: Anglo-Canadian Migration into the United States and Western Canada, 1880–1920* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), pp. 180–254.

instruction and the establishment of permanent dairy schools for makers. Farmers and factory owners, they reasoned, would soon see the wisdom of paying skilled makers adequate wages. Some, like Derbyshire, suggested more radical measures like forming a cheesemakers' union: "We have a carpenters' union and a bricklayers' union, and the men have united to obtain higher wages it need not be at the expense of the employer [*sic*]. "[78] Others lambasted the idea:

> There is not a single cheesemaker here but has a better coat to his back than I have…. We pay the makers all we can afford. I give some of my men $2 a day, and do not like to change any of them, providing they are faithful…. [I]f they only save part of their wages and do not dress quite so fine, and do not spend money quite so freely, I think they can lay up money after paying for their living.[79]

The speaker, presumably a factory owner and perhaps also a farmer, insisted the problem was makers who prioritized extravagance over thrift. But for many, the idea of a union threatened the claim—however tenuous—that the industry was an exemplar of rural liberal cooperation between and among different classes. Robertson, then head of the Dairy Department at the Ontario Agricultural College, welcomed the idea that makers begin their own association, distinct from the DAWO and DAEO, to discuss their challenges and improve cheesemaking standards but was careful to condemn what he considered to be coercive actions like going on strike, a mechanism not fit for a class of respectable tradesmen in a cooperative industry.[80]

Discussion about unionizing continued, culminating in a brief organizing effort in 1898. A maker known only as "R. C. B." published a letter in the *Canadian Cheese and Butter Maker* encouraging his peers to form local dairy manufacturing unions (see Figure 5). He called on fellow workers to organize against the "commercial, financial, [and] political [circumstances]" that "militate against your success" and encouraged men to form groups based on their locality, rather than the precise branch of dairying they pursued (cheese or buttermaking). Together makers could "force circumstances in [their] favor," and if they did not, "the salaries of first-class men will be further reduced … and the manufacture of first-class cheese will gradually become inferior and the dairy industry loose [sic] its high reputation on the English market."[81] There is no indication that eastern Ontario makers heeded R. C. B.'s call to action, but in western Ontario, workers organized a cheesemakers' association in 1898 to "advance the interests of dairying, especially those of the makers."[82] In February 1899, 215 makers came together for the Cheese and Buttermakers' Association of Western Ontario's inaugural convention in Listowel, Ontario. Their president—a cheesemaking instructor at the recently opened Dairy School at the

78 DAWO, *Annual Report…1888*, p. 47.
79 DAWO, *Annual Report…1889*, p. 25.
80 DAWO, *Annual Report of the Dairymen's and Creameries' Association of the Province of Ontario 1890* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Agriculture, 1891), p. 64.
81 "Protection, Important to Makers," *Canadian Cheese and Butter Maker*, vol. 1, no. 2 (August 1898), p. 20, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04006_2.
82 CBAWO, *Annual Report…1899*, p. 141. Whether this group was inspired by R. C. B.'s letter is unknown.

Ontario Agricultural College—explained that their goals for the year included circulating a standardized form of agreement makers could use when drawing up contracts with their employers, and establishing a system for adjudicating disputes about quality. From the start, however, the thrust of this group was more along the lines of a trade association, and by 1900 they had merged with the DAWO.

Protection, Important to Makers.

You are a large body of men, possessing all the qualifications necessary for success in life; some in great, some in small degree.

Circumstances, commercial, financial, political militate against your success, combined. You can force circumstances in your favor; collective action adopted only by a few or portion of a class without even an intelligent programme, without any distinct aim, has demonstrated that such a class would possess enormous power, if entirely united. You would be able, I believe, and stronger than any other class in Canada if you held together. I therefore advise you to start as soon as it is in your power a strong and wide and powerful organization.

Let the first step be to form yourselves in groups of twelve. Let each man who wishes to see the movement attempted find friends of the same mind, enrol them, call them together, and let them elect a group leader. Let the groups be determined, if possible, by the districts in which the members live, and not by the factories or special branch of the industry they work in permit no man of bad character or of inexperience to join. Let social condition, wealth, poverty and learning have no influence in the selection of recognized makers.

We must have men of honesty, ability and strong mindedness, on what must be looked to; let each group of makers assist the formation of other groups.

If some important and absolutely necessary organization is not shortly inaugurated, the salaries of first-class men will be further reduced, and ultimately forced out of the business, and the manufacture of first-class cheese will gradually become inferior and the dairy industry loose its high reputation on the English market, owing to the stuff manufactured by cheap, inferior men.

So we must at once seek adequate and permanent protection. We all see and recognize the pressing need of such an association, and should no longer hesitate to inaugurate immediately.

R. C. B.

Figure 5. An 1898 letter calling on cheesemakers to organize to improve their working conditions.
Source: "Protection, Important to Makers," *Canadian Cheese and Butter Maker*, vol. 1, no. 2 (August 1898), p. 20, https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.8_04006_2.

Why did this fledging effort at organization collapse given the extent of tensions within the industry by the end of the century? Earl Haslett, the only scholar to address this question in the historiography, has argued the western Ontario association folded after makers failed to achieve any significant gains during the

1898 season.[83] Indeed, there is no indication that the group's standardized contracts or conflict resolution strategies were implemented widely, if at all. Haslett's explanation is useful for understanding why the association only lasted one season, but it ignores broader factors that dissuaded the development of collective solidarity among cheesemakers in the first place.

Complex and shifting labour arrangements within the industry created structural differences between makers that were difficult to overcome, despite R. C. B.'s admonition that "social condition, wealth, poverty, and learning" should have no bearing on who could join. The fact that the Cheese and Butter Makers' Association of Western Ontario took shape as a trade association more than a union focused on class struggle reflects the mutability and mobility of many cheesemakers' employment status. Makers occupied competing class positions depending on their relationship to the factories where they worked. Many were waged workers, but makers who owned and operated their factories were technically small producers, and in some cases, employed other cheesemakers. Although both groups had a shared understanding of the challenges of craft cheesemaking for a global market, their control over the means of production and their interests were not the same. Moreover, one's employment status could change quickly since factory closures and changes of ownership were common. Cheesemakers who aspired to operate their own factories as small producers rather than waged workers likely had little interest in aligning themselves with working-class struggle. Gender dynamics may have dissuaded solidarity between makers as well, since masculinity and respectability were deeply intertwined in the rhetoric and actions of artisan culture and craft unions in the nineteenth century.[84] It is unlikely the industry's remaining female cheesemakers would have been equal participants in either a union or trade association. In the same way that material differences among farmers underpinned "ideological conflicts and tensions" within agrarian movements like the Dominion Grange and the Patrons of Industry, as Darren Ferry has argued, class and other inequities between makers likely precluded their cooperation.[85]

Furthermore, makers were geographically isolated from one another. They lived and worked in small, rural places where social inclusion in the local community trumped solidarity with fellow makers. Factories frequently fulfilled multiple social and community functions in addition to manufacturing, such as providing postal services and space for oyster suppers and other celebrations.[86] Interpersonal disputes could have a real impact on the quality of people's lives, which might have discouraged makers from joining a union or trade association. Fitzgerald's diary offers multiple examples of the social connections he forged with the Pittsburgh community, his reliance on them, and his concern when conflicts developed within

83 Haslett, "Factors in the Growth and Decline," p. 106.

84 Kristofferson, *Craft Capitalism*; Bryan Palmer, "Most Uncommon Common Men: Craft and Culture in Historical Perspective," *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 1 (1976), pp. 5–31.

85 Darren Ferry, "'Severing the Connections in a Complex Community': The Grange, the Patrons of Industry and the Construction/Contestation of a Late 19th-Century Agrarian Identity in Ontario," *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 54 (Fall 2004), p. 11.

86 The Sons of Temperance in Perth hosted a picnic near the Tay River and concluded their day by visiting a local cheese factory for a tour. See "Sons of Temperance Picnic," *Perth Courier*, September 3, 1875.

the factory network. In May 1892, early in his first season at Rose Hill, Fitzgerald "had a racket with a patron (Mr. Hay) about the want of his milk," but was relieved to note that Hay "was only Joking." Though it seems Hay simply played a prank on the new maker, it was notable enough for him to mention it. Another entry on August 8, 1893, notes that Fitzgerald, his boss, and a third man spent part of the afternoon "engaged in a little shooting match" at the factory, but "Jas got funny and ended up mad, over his own Fun." It is unclear if and how the disagreement was resolved.[87] Fitzgerald also depended on "old Mrs. Cowan," a neighbour who provided him with food, health care, and invitations to social events, in return for doing odd jobs around her house.[88] These instances of mutual aid and friendship were integral to managing daily life in many rural communities in the nineteenth century, and forming unions likely threatened to antagonize, or at least complicate, those relationships.[89]

Another factor that may have limited labour organizing was the lack of well-developed collective solidarity among cheesemakers. Unlike many other craft occupations, cheesemaking as a masculinized, factory-based craft was only a few decades old. In the absence of a formalized apprenticeship system, regional trade associations like the DAWO, DAEO, and Canadian Dairymen's Associations served some guild-like functions in the nineteenth century. However, these broad organizations were dominated by buyer-exporters, dairy scientists, government representatives, prominent farmers and cheesemakers, and other industry experts, who encouraged cooperation across class lines and an ethic of continuous self-improvement and social mobility among makers that was more individualist than collective in character.[90] Although it is difficult to ascertain what proportion of cheesemakers embraced and cultivated such an identity, quite a few waged makers appear to have entered the ranks of small business ownership or attended the dairy schools that opened in Ontario during the 1890s. Fitzgerald, for example, purchased a cheese factory on Wolfe Island and employed other men as assistants by the 1910s.[91] In August 1893, E. J. Madden of the Dominion Dairy Commissioner's office visited Rose Hill and praised Fitzgerald for his cheesemaking process and the quality of the factory, a point the latter took great pride in despite his earlier misgivings about the industry.[92]

In this context it is understandable that most industry leaders discouraged unionization in favour of resolutions focused on self-improvement and rural

87 QUA, William Fitzgerald fonds, CA ON00239 F02011, diary entry, August 8, 1893.

88 QUA, William Fitzgerald fonds, CA ON00239 F02011, diary entries for May 9, 1892, May 23, 1892, June 18, 1892, June 28, 1892, June 29, 1892, July 11, 1892, November 14, 1892, and December 8, 1892.

89 In Oregon's Tillamook Valley, makers organized a union but changed its name to something less antagonistic in response to objections from local farmers. Walter V. Price, "Cheese Manufacture," *Journal of Dairy Science*, vol. 39, no. 6 (June 1956), p. 824.

90 There are parallels here to the values held by urban craftworkers in mid-nineteenth-century Hamilton, described by Kristofferson in *Craft Capitalism* as a form of evolving craft mutualism. See Menzies, *By the Labour of Their Hands*, pp. 69–86, for a discussion of craft pride in twentieth-century cheesemaking.

91 Library and Archives Canada, RG31, Fifth Census of Canada, 1911, Schedule 1: Population by Name, Personal Description, Etc., Microfilm T-20372, District No. 69, Sub-district 15, Enumeration district 3, Township of Wolfe Island, p. 3.

92 QUA, William Fitzgerald fonds, CA ON00239 F02011, diary entry, August 1, 1893.

cooperation across class lines, such as education. In the early 1890s, Robertson and other industry experts and politicians, including John Dryden, provincial Minister of Agriculture in the Liberal Mowat government, established technical education programs where makers could receive extensive training in cheesemaking. Three programs of this kind were developed in the 1890s: a new program within the Dairy Department at Guelph's Ontario Agricultural College, the Eastern Dairy School in Kingston, and the short-lived Western Dairy School in Strathroy, near London. Promotional materials for the schools sometimes explicitly tackled the issue of wages and conflict in the industry. The Eastern Dairy School's 1899 pamphlet boasted that "a man trained in this manner [of the school's curriculum] will, in the average factory, save more than enough in the loss of valuable milk solids *to pay his wages* as compared with the man lacking the training, to say nothing of the improved quality whether butter or cheese is made."[93] While dairy schools and unionizing were not mutually exclusive strategies, the former became the dominant approach to managing conflict within cheese manufacturing by the start of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

In the second half of the nineteenth century, rural cheese manufacturing was one of the fastest growing and most valuable export industries in Ontario, with more than a thousand factories established in just 50 years. Although many scholars have examined this period of rapid agricultural change, few studies have focused on cheesemakers specifically, even though they numbered in the hundreds and played a pivotal role in the industry's success due to its reliance on highly skilled, decentralized makers to produce consistent cheese for mass consumption overseas.

The first contribution of this article is that it has expanded what is known about Ontario's rural cheesemakers, part of the rural non-farm population in central Canada that merits greater attention by historians.[94] Most factory workers during this period were men, but women constituted a sizeable minority, especially in the 1870s and 1880s. They faced very different opportunities and constraints due to gendered ideas of what qualities were desirable in makers. Women were more likely to assist male cheesemakers with factory work and were expected to leave factory employment upon marrying, although some women became well-known factory cheesemakers in their own right. William Fitzgerald's position as a White, English-speaking young man in a masculinizing industry offered him an opportunity to develop a respectable and successful career as a high-skilled craftsman, which dairy experts implied was within reach of any man who pursued his craft diligently and systematically. In practice, many makers, including Fitzgerald, moved frequently between and among factories and other seasonal occupations, earned middling wages at best, and got caught in the conflicts between dairy farmers and buyer-exporters during periods of declining cheese prices. However, some makers did reach a level of security and respectability as small producers—including Fitzgerald.

93 UGA, Eastern Dairy School collection, XA1 RHC A0386007, box 2, file 11, Kingston Dairy School calendar (1899–1900).

94 Sandwell, *Canada's Rural Majority*, pp. 100–102.

How typical Fitzgerald was in this respect requires further study, as do the ways that interlocking hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, and gender shaped, supported, and limited makers' experiences.[95]

Secondly, this study has shown that inter- and intraclass conflicts were central features of Ontario cheese manufacturing in the second half of the nineteenth century, despite the claims of its supporters to the contrary. As a waged cheesemaker who came of age during this period, Fitzgerald's diary hints at the challenges makers faced, but also the modest power they wielded as craftspeople who worked with little oversight and considerable influence over the quality of the final product. During the 1880s and 1890s, the growing power of cheese buyers and exporters, repeated summer droughts, farmers' political movements, international competition, and falling cheese prices all stoked tensions within the industry, which were shouldered by cheesemakers who were expected to continue producing high-quality cheese. They responded in a variety of ways, including by leaving the industry—as Fitzgerald attempted to do in 1892—and trying to organize unions. These actions highlight the depth of tensions between and among patrons, shareholders, cheese buyers, and dairy experts by the start of the twentieth century. The connections industry leaders made between factory cheesemaking, liberal rural cooperation, and stable economic growth may have been more normative and aspirational than descriptive.

95 Ruth Frager, "Labour History and the Interlocking Hierarchies of Class, Ethnicity, and Gender: A Canadian Perspective," *International Review of Social History*, vol. 44, no. 2 (1999), pp. 217–234. The dominance of cheese manufacturing by White men and women of European ethnicity would be an excellent starting point for analyzing connections between dairying, Whiteness, and settler colonialism in rural Canada.