

SERVING EACH OTHER: FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS OF
EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY WAITRESSES

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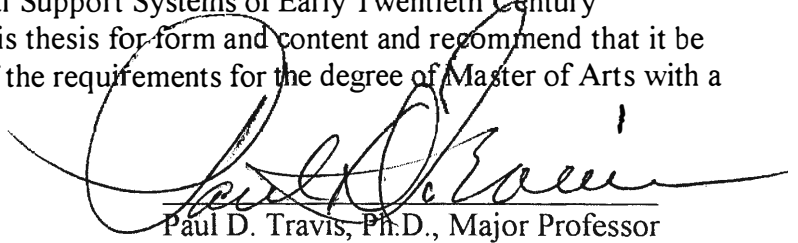
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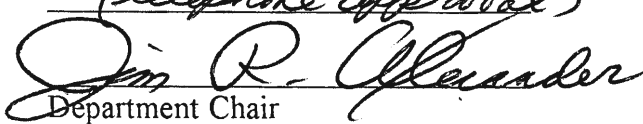
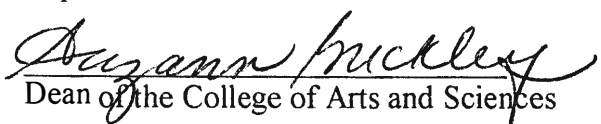
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To the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kimberly Kam Taylor entitled "Serving Each Other: Formal and Informal Support Systems of Early Twentieth Century Waitresses." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in History.


Paul D. Travis, Ph.D., Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:



(Telephone Approval)

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Accepted:


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ABSTRACT
SERVING EACH OTHER: FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORT SYSTEMS
OF EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY WAITRESSES

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Wage-earning women of the early twentieth century challenged the traditional model of womanhood. Many women seeking jobs as wage-laborers found employment opportunities by serving the public as waitresses. To survive urban living conditions, these women allied themselves with each other and middle class women to combat a negative perception of themselves, and to form support networks for living and childcare.

Furthermore, waitresses became a vocal force in labor history; they sought to found unions to meet their professional needs. In March, 1900, waitresses began organizing exclusively female unions. Unionizing goals reflected their condition as women in a society that was openly hostile to women wage earners. This study will utilize an engendered social-cultural perspective model to understand why and how waitresses established formal and informal systems of sisterhood and solidarity.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The American movement toward modernity rapidly increased at the turn of the twentieth-century. Migrants from rural areas moved to urban centers seeking work in the emerging industrial service sector. Consequently, entrepreneurs realized the need and demand for moderately priced restaurants for urban wage earners. The number of restaurants in the United States tripled between 1900 and 1930; so did the employment numbers.

The migration of rural women to urban centers was so great that around 1917 the U.S. Department of Agriculture questioned thousands of farmwomen to determine “what was wrong with the rural life of women.” The returns indicated that farm work was “hard and dull” and they desired urban adventure and excitement. It was presumed that their mothers, whose lives were a constant reminder of what lay in store for them if they stayed in the country, had unwittingly pushed them to the city. Young rural women, not unlike Theodore Drieser’s Carrie Meber, boarded trains and headed into an unknown and rapidly changing world. Women who flocked into the cities en masse seeking jobs as wage-laborers found employment opportunities by serving the public as waitresses. Between 1880-1930, the number of working women increased from 2.6 million to 10.8 million, and showed no signs of dissipating.

Wage-earning women of the early twentieth century challenged the traditional model of womanhood. Since their urban lifestyle was considerably freer than women of generations past, they were stigmatized by society. Waitresses were negatively perceived as prostitutes because they were exposed to mixed gender couples and accepted gratuities for services rendered. Single and married waitresses formed friendships out of necessity, and allied themselves with middle class women to combat a negative perception of themselves and to form support networks for living and childcare.

Furthermore, waitresses became a vocal force in labor history; they sought to found unions to meet their professional needs. In March 1900, waitresses began organizing exclusively female unions. Segregation by sex foreshadowed an emerging feminization trend within the food server profession. Unionizing goals reflected their condition as women in a society that was openly hostile to women wage earners. Unions exclusively for women provided leadership opportunities for them to target issues that most affected their professional and personal lives, such as healthcare and education.

My personal experience as a waitress has greatly influenced my own perception of these tenacious women. Amazingly, their experiences, namely their relationships with each other and their customers, are remarkably similar to my own, although almost a century has passed. Furthermore, I would assert that these similarities have remained constant throughout the century and will continue far into the future.

Yet, despite the similarities, their experiences as women in the labor market are dramatically different from my own. Early twentieth century waitresses challenged appropriate perceived behavior for women and staked their reputations on fighting for

their right to be a valued part of the labor force. I am, therefore, a product of their accomplishments. As this paper examines the sisterhood and solidarity that occurred during the early part of the century, readers should be aware that sisterhood did not end as the times and culture changed, nor did it cease in the 1970's when the entire culinary industry merged into one International Union. The sisterhood relationship continues today in restaurants across the country as waitresses support each other both personally and professionally.

CHAPTER 2

“I’VE WORKED IN LOTS OF PLACES BUT THIS IS HELL”

The working conditions of early twentieth century waitresses was harsh in nature. Because the restaurant industry was legally considered a domestic industry, it was not subject to the regulatory laws of mercantiles and factories. Therefore, hours, wages and hiring and firing practices were mandated by employers who often placed their interest first at the expense of their employees. The working conditions of waitresses were the impetus for the formation of formal waitress trade unions and informal sisterhood networks, this chapter seeks to exemplify these working conditions.

Although historically waitresses’ trade unions claimed waitressing to be a skilled trade and modeled their organizations after craft unions, in reality restaurants hired inexperienced women on the spot and put them to work immediately. Applicants could expect to be hired before noon; in urban areas, women walked city streets and found help wanted signs posted for jobs. Some sought employment through agencies. At the turn of the century, Francis Donovan's first application experience consisted of three questions posed to her: was she experienced (she was not); could she "step lively"; and what was her size?¹ Upon answering these questions successfully, she was hired, given a uniform, and shown to a dressing room to change and meet the other waitresses.

Early twentieth century waitresses’ uniforms resembled apparel for any domestic service. These consisted of white or black skirts and shirtwaists with aprons that bore lace caps and cuffs. Management sometimes provided the uniforms, or the girls purchased

them for around \$2.50.² An Atlantic City, New Jersey, hotel waitress arrived at work expecting to purchase her uniform at wholesale prices. To her dismay, she learned that the want ad provided outdated information; few uniforms were still in stock. The hotel had discontinued a former style because waitresses did not wish to wear skirts “forty-four inches long and . . . more than six yards around the bottom.” Nevertheless, the aspiring waitress purchased the outdated uniform for more than three times what it would have cost in New York and subsequently altered it to fit her.³

Waitresses needed at least two clean uniforms per week, but the cost of work apparel was minimal compared to laundering. For example, around 1916, the United States Department of Labor estimated one paid sixty-three cents to launder only an apron. The New York Consumers’ League suggested the entire uniform cost three dollars and fifty cents per week to launder. Both examples represent exorbitant costs in proportion to waitresses’ wages. Since most restaurants did not provide laundering services (the few that did so laundered poorly) waitresses often lengthened their working days by laundering their work clothes. Paying for commercial laundry was a luxury most could ill afford.⁴

In many restaurants, training was minimal. One simply learned on the job during the lunch hour rush. New girls were thrust into the chaos untrained. They had little choice but to rely upon the kindness of co-workers to aid them. In 1907, undercover waitress, Maud Younger openly admitted her inexperience to a co-worker who then “showed me what to do and how to do it.” Similarly, undercover Chicago waitress Francis Donovan also noted gratefully that, “My fellow waiters and waitresses were very

considerate and helped me in every way.” Restaurants that offered formal training often placed the novice under the care of an experienced waitress for a trial period. The pay flowed into pockets when they waited on customers “on their own.” While in training, Younger worked for free and learned many “tricks of the trade.” Experienced hands taught her to carry armloads of dishes--third finger to forearm. Within a few weeks, she flushed with pride learning to balance seven pie plates from her lower arm to her elbow. As she was learning, kind words flowed from her co-workers: “‘You’re doing very well dear’ or ‘You’ll learn quick’ or ‘I was new, myself, once.’” Her rigorous training failed to get her employment at this particular restaurant. But the other girls complimented her, nevertheless, on mastering necessary skills quickly and exhorted her to find another restaurant.⁵

Writing orders appears to have been one of the most arduous tasks to learn. The standard number of chairs per section was eight and girls had to be able to write and remember orders for each customer, as well as tote heavy dishes of food to and from a distant kitchen. Lunch and dinner rush periods were hectic; customers poured into the restaurant expecting, if not demanding, quick service. The push of the crowd resembled an onslaught of people rushing to a fire sale as they piled in one after another; an inexperienced girl found it could be hell. Younger recalled,

A feeling of helpless desperation came over me, as they all clamored at once for their lunches. The rush hour was indeed fierce. Before I had served my ten men, there were others standing in line waiting for seats. As soon as one man finished another took his place. They shoved back the dishes in front of them and ate on top of the debris. Once, the situation grew desperate, each one waiting to be served first, all giving their orders at once, so that I could not extricate anything from the jumble.

Finding little solution to the chaos, a despondent Younger smiled nervously at tense, demanding unfamiliar faces, while winning her customers' sympathy. Later, she compared the rush period to "a panic in a theater" and concurred with a co-worker who said, "I've worked in lots of places but this is hell."⁶

In 1929, waitress Dagny Hansen, compared the skills needed for waiting tables to playing eight chess games simultaneously, suggesting that multiple games were easier than serving eight customers during a rush. She estimated that each patron ordered at least five menu items--forty items in a twenty-minute time span. An Iowa diner owner in 1916, bragged that his waitresses served twenty to forty people in fifteen minutes, a seemingly impossible task. Younger understood the difficulties: "The hardest thing I have had to learn is how to remember my orders correctly. I do not think a stupid girl could be a waitress."⁷ Each restaurant had its own unique plan of action depending on the type of food served. Orders, therefore, were taken differently in every restaurant. The method of payment by customers was varied--unique to each establishment. Even the most experienced waitress at a new eatery had to rely upon others for guidance; new rules and conditions prevailed. For survival, women formed workplace friendships to make tasks more enjoyable and to mitigate harsh working conditions; their lives as productive workers were at stake.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, waitresses walked an estimated ten miles per shift and carried 1,500 pounds of food and dishes. Strength was an asset if an employer were to consider them for waitressing.⁸ The application contract for the Chalfonte Hotel of Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1914, required a written oath of servers:

“I am strong and well and able and willing to carry a heavy tray.” One’s physical abilities had to be documented through references. “Was her health good with you? Was she an efficient waitress? Was she strong and able and willing to do heavy work?,” were common inquiries.⁹

Sometimes the kitchen or a section of the dining room was located in a basement that required women to ascend and descend stairs, a health hazard for patrons and workers. The Sea Foam Hotel of Atlantic City, New Jersey, paid waitresses on the basis of the location of the dining room. Servers in the main dining area earned thirteen dollars per week, while side hall servers pocketed sixteen dollars. One young applicant at the Sea Foam Hotel in 1921, originally thought the side hall was a piazza or a glassed sunroom. Once hired, she allied herself with experienced girls returning for the season. From them she learned the function of the side hall--it was a basement where hotel employees ate. The steps descending to the side hall were steep, a dangerous challenge for maneuvering heavy trays. A “lame” woman horrifically injured, had a job guaranteed to her for life after she tumbled down these steps with a loaded tray.¹⁰ Her disabilities were such that she spent one year in treatment at a local hospital.

Injuries were constant companions. Dr. Harris, along with the New York Consumers’ League in 1916, investigated physical debilitations servers suffered from carrying and balancing heavy trays. The League expressed concern over restaurant workers’ health because of their exposure to the public and, in turn, the public’s exposure to them. Reportedly, restaurant workers with weakened immune systems increased the risk of spreading contagious diseases among the public. The threat of disease, however,

constituted only one part of the League's health concerns. Typical of Progressives, middle class reformers were concerned about childbearing among women in physically demanding working conditions. Dr. Harris asserted, "There is a definite hazard to the child-bearing capacity of women. This is of vital consequence to society as a whole."¹¹ As such, working women defied acceptable norms in a society that stressed traditional women's roles as mothers and nurturers.

Ironically, the skills attributed to homemaking were the same as those required of waitresses. Serving customers in restaurants was a logical extension of women's roles and the duties performed in their homes and in the homes of others where they toiled as domestics. Although the duties were similar, young women preferred working in restaurants instead of working as domestic servants. Restaurants provided greater opportunity for social interaction with co-workers and customers. Domestic servants worked in isolated environments where the watchful eyes of their employers observed every move. They were monitored so much that even recreational activities were scrutinized. Both environments required long working hours. Physically leaving the workplace after a shift signified a distinction between waitresses' personal time and the time "owned" by the employer.¹² Waitressing was obviously preferred over factory work that consisted of limited social interaction, horrific work conditions, and greater opportunity for injury.

Unlike factory or office positions, waitresses' physical appearance played a prominent role in hiring. Employers tended to employ those women who "conformed to the white American standard of beauty." A 1916 Consumer League report confirmed

employers' preferences for hiring "young and pretty girls." Earlier in 1914, the Chalfonte Hotel of Atlantic City, New Jersey, advertised for women who were, "experienced, intelligent, [and] pleasing in appearance" The Chalfonte application included questions about date of birth, weight, height, eye and hair color, waist and bust measurements, and skirt length. The emphasis upon physical attributes had little to do with uniform fit, but determined the applicant's physical appearance. There at the Chalfonte, waitresses sat at one of the tables in their section as the guests arrived. Management felt that the waitresses helped "dress the room."¹³ This practice lends merit to associating waitresses with prostitutes, or so it appeared. It also reinforced the idea of female servitude toward men. In effect, the hotel provided its male clientele the opportunity to choose their female servant based upon her physical appearance without regard to her capabilities.

Another hotel advertising two years later expressed its requirements in more detail. An applicant had to weigh less than one hundred and twenty pounds, be graceful, and pleasant, and possess a musical voice. In addition, the advertisement specified neither eyeglasses nor jewelry were allowed. Hairstyles were to be neat so that a woman's head would not be "conspicuous in this respect." In 1920, the Filenes Tea-Room of Boston, Massachusetts, "Rules for Waitresses" booklet suggested that waitresses be "irreproachably clean" with their hair worn low.¹⁴ Employers not only sought attractive women but also those who conformed to a class standard of cleanliness and respectability. In this way, they attempted to combat society's negative stereotype of waitresses, as working class people, who were often perceived as low class and immoral.

The reputation of the establishment was enhanced, yet the public's perception of working class women remained mostly negative.

Physical appearance often took precedence over workplace experience. An emphasis on appearance, as opposed to ability, was a "double-edged" sword for many women. Since waitresses were reliant on tips to supplement their income, a young attractive woman could capitalize on her appearance to influence her customers to provide gratuities. Employers replaced women whose appearance was suspect. "When a girl gets to looking bad, they are laid off and someone else is put in their place." In 1917, undercover waitress Francis Donovan observed a similar situation between a Chicago restaurant owner and a single mother of two who was laid off after, "A dashing blond applied for a job in the afternoon and so pleased the eye of the young Greek who ran the place."¹⁵

The strenuous nature of waiting tables aged women beyond their years and created debilitating health problems from long hours of standing, lifting, and serving.¹⁶ Nine to twelve hour days, seven days a week were the norm for waitresses during the first two decades of the twentieth century. After World War I, waitressing hours were somewhat reduced, but national protective legislation for hotel and restaurant employees was nonexistent until 1966. Employers insisted that long hours were necessary to serve the public. Waitresses serving breakfast arrived on the job early while those serving the "after theater crowd" stayed late. Sometimes the same girl worked both shifts. In 1916, a waitress reportedly worked a one hundred and twenty-two-hour week.¹⁷ Although a

unique case, the lack of legislation regulating the work place was a motivating factor for the establishment of waitress trade unions.

It seems that working shifts were determined according to meals served. Employees worked one, two, and sometimes three meal shifts. The one meal shift consisted of either the lunch or dinner shift. The "two or three meal girl" worked a "split trick"--the hours between lunch and dinner shifts were hours in which waitresses occupied their time until the next shift began. Once they returned to work in the late afternoon, they remained until eight or nine p.m. Then work at home began. Waitresses had to perform household chores, including cleaning their uniform for the next day. Women with spouses and children to care for found their days lasting even longer; in essence many women had more than one full-time job.

Lunchrooms and coffee shops increasingly competed with hotel dining rooms for clientele. Industry publications suggested that hotels depart from the American Plan and extend their hours of operation to retain lost customers.¹⁸ Furthermore, they suggested servers "stay on the clock" between meals to *prepare* and serve simple dishes. They simultaneously advocated prolonging serving hours while admitting ironically that, "'Servers have all they can do now without extending the hours.'" ¹⁹ Profit motivation clearly took precedence over employer's concern for their employees' welfare and well-being.

The diary of an Atlantic City, New Jersey, hotel waitress in 1917, accounts for her ten and a half hour day as follows: She reported for the breakfast watch from 5:58 to 6:46 a.m., then ate her breakfast in eleven minutes and returned to work at 6:57, serving the

regular breakfast crowd until 11:32. Before returning for the lunch shift, she ironed and ate lunch and then served seven lunches from 12:57 until 4:15. She had two hours off in the afternoon and then returned for the dinner shift at 6:07, serving eight dinners until 8:56. All told, she worked a sporadic ten and one half hour day that in actuality began around 4:45 a.m. On the days that she was not assigned to the breakfast watch, she rose at 5:45 a.m. to allow herself enough time to report for work duty at 7:00 a.m.²⁰

Hotel waitresses could walk to work from the employee's living quarters between shifts but urban waitresses did not have that luxury. Often there was not enough time between shifts to return home only to rush back to work again. Cab fare to and from work, twice a day, was not a feasible solution for waitresses. Cab fare, even once a day proved prohibitive. Walking home also failed as an option. After standing and serving for three to eight hours, walking appeared to be a type of break they did not need or desire. At their leisure, waitresses often chose to go to dime theaters or to shop in downtown department stores. Reformers claimed that the mid-day break left waitresses on the streets to wander about with few constructive activities to occupy their time.²¹

Progressive reformers also believed that the psychological and physical stress caused by long working hours lowered the moral and ethical standards of waitresses. In 1907, sociologist Amy Tanner went undercover working thirteen-hour days, seven days a week. She argued that dulled senses resulted from aches and pains while outside interests became non-existent. It appeared that waitresses were only concerned with surviving the present workload. Tanner noted that the girls even neglected bathing simply because they were too tired to go through the bath routine.²² Tanner castigated women for failing

to live up to middle class standards seldom realizing cultural and class differences between the two. Tanner's viewpoint is biased toward the middle-class but she nevertheless is more critical of an industry that allows a debilitating work environment to continue unabated. She had little faith in the organizing abilities of these working class women; in fact, ironically, she argued that organization and unionization were the only solution to their hour and wage problem.

In the restaurant and hotel industry, gratuities were everything to the servers; wages were determined in correlation to a "tipping system." Employers insisted that gratuities supplemented wages paid and justified their failing to pay living wages. Employers argued that if they paid their employees a living wage that they would have to raise the cost of meals or charge a service fee to cover the extra expense. With prices increased, fewer customers would thus appear.

The restaurant industry, exempted from minimum wage laws, set wages in accordance with competitors. Organized "union cities" fared better than others with unions setting the standard for wages and the remaining unorganized establishments falling just slightly behind. Reported earnings for waitresses before 1910, averaged between three and five dollars per seven-day working week. Earnings for the following ten years rose only slightly with workdays reduced to six. Wages paid directly from employers failed to reach the "living wage" standard. In 1907, the National Women's Trade Union League of Chicago set the weekly living wage at nine dollars and seventy cents. In 1915, the New York State Factory Investigating Commission established it at nine dollars. Eighty-seven percent failed to meet that standard.²³

Waitresses were trapped in a system that justified pay below the living wage as long as the waitresses were working for tips. Of course, the tipping system was an unreliable source of income. There were good days when gratuities flowed and slow days when tips were sparse. Like gambling, many enjoyed the “game of tips” arguing that they made more from that source than their employers could pay them in wages. Others, like union representative Elizabeth Maloney, advocated abolishing the tipping system. She testified before the U.S. Congress, in 1916, that she did not believe, “the deficiency of the payroll should be made up of the charity of patrons.”²⁴

In a society that condemned working women for taking jobs that many thought belonged to men, negative perceptions of working women prevailed--particularly extending to women who accepted gratuities. Acceptance of tips lowered the status of waitresses in the public eye. Women who accepted money for service were thought to be, in general, little more than prostitutes. The sexual aspect of waitressing as a result of the gratuity system, will be explored in subsequent chapters as part of the “waitress work culture.”

The practice of fining employees for various misdeeds detracted from their lowly wages. Incredibly, waitresses were fined for an assortment of reasons including ordering a meal incorrectly. When this occurred, she paid for the ordered meal, but she was prohibited from eating it. Fines even accrued for spots on aprons, melted ice in butter dishes, sugar bowls devoid of spoons, and, most commonly for broken dishes.²⁵

Restaurant managers determined it was “the class of people . . . shiftless, careless people” who accounted for the loss from broken dishes. If “intelligent, clean people” were hired,

then the problem would lessen. The ability to speak English somehow contributed to less breakage, in the eyes of the employers.²⁶

In one unique instance in 1907, a restaurant had a chapel next to the dressing room. Girls arriving at seven a.m. to work the morning shift were required to attend a prayer service. "They're fined if they don't [go], and they're fined if they're late, and they're fined if they don't pay attention while the manager is reading."²⁷ Damned if they did or did not, a discussion between waitresses about the fining system created the opportunity for a union member to advance the benefits of organization.²⁸ For these reasons, waitress trade unions advocated the abolition of fines, believing it was unfair and arbitrary business practices that lessened weekly wages considerably.

The industry developed a hierarchy of restaurant types that determined the clientele, the type of women they hired, and the amount of money that waitresses could expect to make in gratuities. "Hash houses" existed at the lowest hierarchical level. These generally served meals at counters with few tables. Open twenty-four hours per day, their primary clientele consisted of men. Despite the preponderance of male customers, waitresses failed to earn a sufficient amount in tips at the "hash houses" because of the low income customers who dined there. In addition, turnover frequently occurred; women did not stay for long periods, but quickly moved to new opportunities that offered greater promise.

Tearooms were also unprofitable, although they catered to a higher-class of clientele. Unlike the hash houses, tearooms attracted upper class ladies and businessmen. Food was priced higher and presented by waitresses in a more formal manner. The

waitress in the tea shop "...takes time to visit a little with her patrons, to study their wishes, and to serve the food to them rather than to throw it at them."²⁹ In terms of economic opportunity, however, the tearoom was not much more profitable than the hash house; lack of profits occurred because it was open a few hours during the day and catered primarily to women. Although motives remain ambiguous, women had reputations for failing to tip as well as men.³⁰

Tearooms offered women career opportunities that other types of restaurants failed to do. As a rule, women owned or managed tearooms; extending women's roles from homemaker to tearoom manager suggested that, "tearoom management...is nothing more or less than homemaking on a large scale."³¹ Working oneself up, however, from a server to manager was unlikely.³² Greater opportunities for women to advance occurred within trade union activities; these promoted women's participation in administrative positions.

Women who managed tearooms were usually college trained in domestic science. Tearoom managers claimed they used chemistry and bacteriology, learned in laboratories, to determine nutritional values of food. Women, unfortunately, devoid of formal education, were excluded from management opportunities. "College women are equipped to find it [the right solution] without that waste of energy and time," according to managers, "that hampers women with little or no scientific knowledge and no formal mental training."³³

College women considering going into the field were advised to work in a tearoom initially to gain working knowledge and to differentiate the difference between

“theory and practice.” In 1919, Agnes Gleason, manager of the Parkway Tea Room in Chicago, Illinois, advocated this type of on the job training, but warned young women of the kinds of people they would be working with and serving. In so doing, Gleason implied the inferiority of the working class:

Be open-minded, tolerant and patient. You will come in contact with people of all sorts. They will not know what you are there for, but you will and that should help make you more patient. You can learn a great deal from other employees who may not have had any of the academic advantages you have had, while you, no doubt, are teaching them much, thru the quiet force of personality.³⁴

Undercover Chicago waitress, Francis Donovan observed that in tearooms the “social gulf was wider” between waitress and patron than at popularly priced restaurants. The feeling of superiority was inherent in the attitude of patrons. The managers so instructed their employees. Yet, women found a feeling of community cultivated by the management who chose its employees carefully. Long “family talks” and lectures were given to the workforce along with printed rules for service, behavior, and appearance.³⁵ Waitresses knew what was expected of them; job security for tearoom waitresses was greater than for women working in cafes who were subject to the moods and whims of male employers.³⁶

These “family talks” management offered were sources of amusement among workers. One server admonished Donovan, “Do you not realize, Fannie, that you are a part of a great organization? You are not a hasher.”³⁷ Waitresses recognized team work building strategies. This they weighed and assessed against the superior attitudes exhibited by management. The relationship, complex and ambiguous, between female employers and employees was largely determined by the attitude of the women

managers. The waitresses took the manager's lead and acquiesced in conforming to his or her wishes; they often had little choice but to do so.

Respect initiated by management was reciprocated by waitresses. Tearoom manager, Frances L. Garside of New York City claimed in 1920, "My business is conducted on a mutual trust basis; my girls would do anything for me. I would do anything for them."³⁸ Donovan noted, "Whenever there was a woman who had something to do with the management, the girls were more contented and got along better together."³⁹ Relationships of this sort bonded women across class lines and bettered their working environment.

In cases where mutual respect failed to exist, women took advantage of the situation. The head mistress at Tanner's summer hotel in 1907 was oblivious of the working conditions of those under her care. At the end of a thirteen-hour shift, she would have one of the girls come to her room and massage her because she was "so exhausted." Her actions exhibited that she failed to recognize the hours that waitresses had worked and were, themselves, exhausted. One reaps what one sows and the lack of respect by the head mistress prompted the same attitude among the women workers. To be a head mistress or a head waitress was precarious. Women often worked their way into this stratified position that differentiated them from servers, yet were not fully acknowledged as management. "The average servant, as we saw her, had little feeling that anything is due from her to her mistress." Tanner reported that girls stole hairpins from the head mistress, ordered and then ate desserts for imaginary guests, and quit their jobs without giving notice, taking advantage of the hotel any way possible.⁴⁰

The café and neighborhood restaurant provided the waitresses with the greatest opportunity to earn money. Thriving downtown commercial centers necessitated the need for quick hot meals served in pleasant environments. The café was accessible and catered to the average citizen; it provided decent, well-priced meals in a comfortable atmosphere. As the urban population swelled, male and female dwellers who lived away from their families increased the need for moderately priced restaurants.⁴¹ Waitresses served their working class peers and formed friendly relationships with regular customers and with each other.

Progressives fought for alterations in the number of hours worked but no protective legislation regulating the working hours and conditions for restaurant workers became law. Rather, waitresses were subject to management or restaurant owners' ideas about appropriate working environments. Conditions varied in which some women found an ideal work place with respectful management and customers, decent tips and manageable hours. More often than not, it was the women themselves who attempted to direct a less than ideal setting into one that proved to be a workable situation. Networks formed initially within the restaurant for support that carried over into the waitresses' private lives. This, in turn, helped to form the work culture of waitresses.⁴²

¹ Much of the research utilized in this chapter is drawn from investigative reports published by five women who went undercover as a waitress between 1902 and 1917. These undercover waitresses used the participant-observation method to study and record their findings. Their records are invaluable accounts on the hotel and restaurant industry and the daily working conditions of waitresses during the first two decades of the twentieth century. All of the undercover observers come from a privileged middle class background and therefore researchers must be wary of their class biased reporting. Francis Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1920), 19. Francis Donovan was not a trained sociologist although she was familiar with the Chicago school of sociology and their methods. *The Woman Who Waits* is the most inclusive and detailed account of waitress working conditions available and the only one published as a book. Maud Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress. An Industrial Problem from the Workers Point of View," *McClures*, April 1907. Younger is also known as the "Millionaire Waitress" since her family was wealthy. Younger devoted her life to women's issues and is credited with successfully organizing the San Francisco waitresses and bar maids. Younger's two-part article focuses on the sisterhood and solidarity of working class women. Amy Tanner, "Glimpses at the Mind of a Waitress," *American Journal of Sociology* 13 issue 1 (July 1907). Tanner was a Ph.D., her findings were the only ones published in an academic journal. She and a friend went "into the masses" for a summer working at a restaurant with room and board. Tanner focus much of her research on the morals and ethics of those she worked with, her work provides excellent information on working class culture which is presented as deviant from Tanners position. "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," *Scribner's Magazine*, September 1921, 314-325. The identity of the anonymous author is still unknown, but again a superior attitude is taken from the outset in which she goes "into the underbrush of the greatest jungle of civilization." Her motivation to get information for another novel for her protagonist, Polly Preston, is purely self-serving. She is employed by a high-class hotel in Atlantic City and she exposes the consumption and consumerist mindset of its clientele. She labels the leisure class as "human cooties" and the working class as "human drudges" and ultimately returns to her rightful place in society among the "cooties". Her societal critique is most the useful and the most critical of all the others. "The Story of a Summer Hotel Waitress," *Independent*, June 1905, 1337-1343. Another anonymous author recounts her experience. An editor's note from the *Independent*, informs its readers that all the details are true but that some of the account has been omitted, as it is "too disagreeable for publication". The author is a "refined and educated girl" who makes little attempt to be a neutral reporter. Hers is the earliest undercover account (1902) and is an interesting comparison to hotel accounts published 19 years later. Ultimately, all of the undercover women assert that organization and unionization is needed if improvements are ever to take place. For more information on undercover investigators during the Progressive Era, read Mark Pittenger, "A World of Difference: Constructing the 'underclass' in Progressive America," *American Quarterly* 49.1, (1997): 26-65. Pittenger highlights many, including Donovan and Tanner, who went "down and out" to research the relationship between culture, environment and biology. One of his most interesting and applicable arguments is the notion that these women did not want to believe that working class people were biologically inferior. Therefore, the environment was to blame for their condition in society. If they were to believe this, then what was to prevent them from being sucked into the masses, unable to escape. But alas, in the case of these five women, all successfully returned to their lives, although not unchanged by their experience.

² *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant. A Study of 1017 Women Restaurant Employees* (Consumers League of New York City, 1916), 21; "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," *Scribner's Magazine*, September 1921, 316. "Careful Selection of Waitresses," *The Hotel Monthly* 22 no. 255 (June 1914): 57; "Restaurant - Tea Room in Filene's Sons Co. Store," *The Hotel Monthly* 28 no. 333 (December 1920): 48; "New Ideas in Restaurant Operation in Town of 20,000 Population," *The Hotel Monthly* 27, no. 317 (April 1916): 53; "Waitresses in the Waldorf-Astoria," *The Hotel Monthly* 26 no. 305 (August 1918): 33; Maud Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress. An Industrial Problem from the Workers Point of View," *McClures*, April 1907, 547, 675.

³ "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," *Scribner's Magazine*, 316. The largest skirt the hotel had it stock was a nineteen inch waist. A fact that reinforces the stringent appearance requirements of hotels and restaurants.

⁴ *Behind The Scenes in a Restaurant*, 21; In 1916 the Consumers' League of New York interviewed 1017 women within the restaurant industry. The League's goals were to study the "conditions of labor" and the effects that these conditions had on society. In New York at the time, restaurant workers were excluded from the protective legislation that applied to women in factory and mercantile establishments. *Women's Trade Union League of Illinois* (Chicago: Hillison, McCormack & Co., 1907), 5; "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," 319; Alice Henry, "The Chicago Waitresses. The Henrici Dispute," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 4 (April 1914): 102; "The Story of a Summer Hotel Waitress," *Independent*, June 1905, 1338; Amy Tanner, "Glimpses at the Mind of a Waitress," *American Journal of Sociology* 13 issue 1 (July 1907): 48; Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 549.

⁵ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 20-25; Maud Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 545, 549, 668-669. Younger was never taken on by this particular restaurant, while employed there she lost her pocketbook that had a letter from her lawyer regarding changes in her will. She suspected that the management had gone through it, alerting them of her true identity and class status.

⁶ Younger, *Diary of an Amateur Waitress*, 670-72.

⁷ Dagny Hansen, "Don't Kid the Waitress," *Colliers*, 4 May 1929, 67; "New Ideas in Restaurant Operation," 54; "The Story of a Summer Hotel Waitress," 1339; Younger, "Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 666.

⁸ Olive M. Sullivan, "One League's Gift to the Nation's Service," *Life and Labor* 11 no. 2 (February 1918): 28. These statistics were reported in the NWTUL's monthly magazine. The article states that the information comes from a government investigation, but does not disclose which one.

⁹ "Careful Selection of Waitress," 60.

¹⁰ Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, *Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*, (Hartford: State of Connecticut, 1916), 96; "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," 316.

¹¹ *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 6-7; *Women's Trade Union League of Illinois*, 3

¹² *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 12; "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," 319; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 135; S.M. Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of a Waitress," *Life and Labor* 3 no. 2 (February 1913): 38-39; "The Waitress and Her Work," *The Hotel Monthly* 22 no. 254 (May 1914), 42.

¹³ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 23; "Careful Selection of Waitresses," 57-59; *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 6; "No 'Hashers': Waitresses Now Must Have Tact and Charm and Apply Their Psychology," *Literary Digest*, May 1937, 26.

¹⁴ "Catering in Denver Union Station," *The Hotel Monthly* 29, no. 343 (October 1921), 45; "No 'Hashers': Waitresses must have Tact and Charm and Apply their Psychology," 26 "Restaurant-Tea Room in Filene's Sons Co., Boston," 48; "Qualifications of waitress for a high class hotel," *The Hotel Monthly* 24, no. 279 (June 1916), 39.

¹⁵ *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 6; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 125.

¹⁶ "No Protection from Overwork for Niagara Falls Waitresses," *Life and Labor* 9 no. 7 (July 1919): 183.

¹⁷ *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 13, 26; Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 37.

¹⁸ The American Plan of hotel service incorporated the cost of the room and meals into one inclusive rate. The European Plan of separate rates from rooms and meals became a more profitable alternative as hotels opened coffee shops and cafés, which were available to their guests and to the public.

¹⁹ "Serve Refreshments at All Hours," *The Hotel Monthly* 24 no. 284 (November 1916): 40.

²⁰ "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," 319.

²¹ *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 13-18; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 46.

²² Amy Tanner, "Glimpses at the Mind of a Waitress," 48-51. Tanner worked as an undercover waitress and lived in the employees' accommodations at a hotel restaurant in the northeast. She, like Donovan and Younger, used participant observation methods to study the "mind of a waitress", but her bias towards the working class is evident; she states at one point that, "they seem unable to better themselves." This bias must be acknowledged when using Tanner as a source. She blames long working hours for transforming the waitress into "the typical shiftless servant," and comments on the lack of cleanliness on

the part of her co-workers. She states that they did not realize the restful benefits of bathing and goes on to say that they "had no kimonos to wear." Both the kimono and the option of returning to an academic middle class lifestyle was a luxury most waitresses did not have.

²³ *Women's Trade Union League of Illinois*, 5; *Report of the State Factory Investigating Commission for 1915*, Vol. IV, 1593 as quoted in *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 20.

²⁴ Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1916), 3248, 3254; Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of the Waitress," 40; Leonora O'Reilly, "'Five Dollars a Week and Our Meals'. Waitresses Strike in New York," *Life and Labor* 4, no. 8 (August 1914): 247.

²⁵ *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 21; "The Chicago Waitresses," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 7 (July 1914): 102; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 52; "Restaurant-Tea Room in Filene's Sons Co.," 48-49; Olive M. Sullivan, "One League's Gift to the Nation's Service," 28; *Women's Trade Union League's Statement of Facts Concerning Henrici's on Randolph Street* (Chicago: Women's Trade Union League, 1914), 2; Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 549-550.

²⁶ "A Question of Breakage of Dishes," *The Hotel Monthly* 30 no. 351 (June 1922): 24-25; "All Employees Should Speak English Language," *The Hotel Monthly* 27 no. 312 (March 1919): 35.

²⁷ Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 549.

²⁸ Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3255; Leonora O'Reilly, "'Five Dollars a Week and Our Meals'. Waitresses Strike in New York," 247;

²⁹ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 107-109.

³⁰ Hansen, *Don't Kid the Waitress*, 14; Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, *Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*, (Hartford: State of Connecticut, 1916), 100; Younger, "Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 665.

³¹ Agnes Gleason, "Tea Room Management from the Manager's Point of View," *The Hotel Monthly* 27 no. 316 (July 1919): 55; "Pioneer of the Modern Tea Room," *The Hotel Monthly* 28 no. 327 (June 1920): 55;

³² In 1922, *The Hotel Monthly* ran an article highlighting specific cases of women who had worked their way into the industry. The article, "The Story of a Woman Room Clerk", spoke of a particular waitress who was asked to fill an office position after the management noticed her efficiency. She at first declined the position because the pay was not comparable to the \$150.00 she made monthly in tips. She later accepted the job after the management enticed her with being the one served rather than the one serving, but the article reinforced the idea within the industry that waitresses made enough in tips to support themselves.

³³ "Tea Room Management from the Managers Point of View," 52; "Tea Room Officered with College Trained Women," *The Hotel Monthly* 30 no. 346 (January 1922): 45-46; "University of Nebraska Offers Training Course," *The Hotel Monthly* 29 no. 338 (May, 1922): 68; In a rapidly changing society that valued "professionalization", women used the guise of "nutritionist" to hold on to their position in the home economics and restaurant industries. Educated women used their training to proclaim their status within the culinary industry and pointed out the value of their knowledge. Training courses such as the one at the University of Nebraska, educated women on the management skills needed to run a restaurant. For further information, see Clayton A. Coppin and Jack High, *The Politics of Purity. Harvey Washington Wiley and the Origins of the Federal Food Policy* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 28-29.

³⁴ "Tea Room Management from the Managers Point of View," 52-53.

³⁵ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 73; "Restaurant-Tea Room in Filene's Sons Co.," 48-49; "Tea Room Officered with College Trained Women," 46.

³⁶ Leslie Tentler's work *Wage Earning Women. Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930*, addresses the arbitrary laying off of factory workers according to the mood of the employer. Early twentieth century workingwomen found little security in their positions.

³⁷ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 93.

³⁸ "Pioneer of the Modern Tea Room," 55.

³⁹ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 118-119.

⁴⁰ Tanner, "Glimpses at the Mind of a Waitress," 55.

⁴¹ Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, *Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*, 17; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 111.

CHAPTER 3

WAITRESS CULTURE “IN THE THEATER OF EATING OUT”

Waitresses, like many of their laboring sisters, adapted mainstream values and trends to suit their own needs. In the process, they created their own culture, class-consciousness, and identity. The study of waitress work culture is precarious though, because few, if any, who researched and wrote about their experience, came from a working class background. Their perceptions, therefore, often include a moralistic critique stemming from misunderstanding and class biases. Waitresses were judged according to white middle class values, but within this system they adapted, assimilated, and ultimately created their own collective identity. This chapter seeks to define the culture of waitresses by examining three areas: customer interaction based on waitresses' positions within the social hierarchy; waitresses' consumer participation; and the significance of their workplace support networks.¹

Despite amazing technological changes in the restaurant industry in the past century, the relationship between the waitress and the diner has remained virtually the same. Although the culture and society in which they work has changed, basic human nature still dictates the superior attitude one takes when being served. Examining the manner in which waitresses interacted with different types of customers lends insight into behavior deemed appropriate between men and women at the time. Historian Dorothy Sue Cobble argues that, “In the theater of eating out, the waitress plays multiple parts,

each reflecting a female role. To fulfill the emotional and fantasy needs of the male customer, she quickly learns the all-too-common scripts: scolding wife, doting mother, sexy mistress, or sweet, admiring daughter.”²

Louise Kapp Howe’s 1977 work, Pink Collar Workers, presented a study of the female labor force involved in occupations traditionally labeled women’s work. Howe’s research on contemporary waitresses, serves as an excellent comparison to illustrate the unwavering dynamic that exists between the customer and the waitress.³ This dynamic, often based on the perception of sexual identity and appropriate gender roles, usually has women occupying the “subordinate-service” role. Women, however, were not always passive victims in a system that appeared to exploit them financially and sexually. Waitresses (then and now) successfully negotiated power and control, for monetary rewards, within the established system.⁴

Before further discussing the cultural categories defined by Howe and other waitresses, it is important to examine the primary element that binds all of the following categories together and defines the relationships within. Tipping was by far the most controversial aspect of waitressing. It affected the way in which waitresses were perceived by the public and defined their individual financial status; thus gratuities, operated to reduce waitresses’ status.

Despite tipping becoming increasingly common, a host of individuals and organizations believed that it was morally and economically wrong; many attempted to abolish the tipping system. Ironically, one group among the abolitionists was the waitress

unions. Their participation in the movement stemmed from their fight for fair wages, an aspect which will be explored subsequently in relation to their union activities.⁵

Others wished to ban the practice for strictly moral purposes. The Juvenile Protection Association of Chicago issued this statement in 1912:

The giving of tips should be abolished because of their pernicious effect. A young girl who under any other circumstances would not dream of accepting money from a man will accept it in the guise of a tip. In the hands of a vicious man this tip establishes between him and the girl a relation of subserviency and patronage which may easily be made the beginning of improper attentions. The most conscientious girl, dependent upon tips to eke out her slender wage, finds it difficult to determine just where the line of propriety is crossed. Thus, in addition to the other dangers surrounding the girls employed in hotels and restaurants, they encounter the lack of respect which curiously attaches itself to one who accepts a gratuity.⁶

The Georgia based Anti-Tipping Society of America was established in 1905. It claimed to have over 100,000 members, many of whom were traveling salesmen. The organization attempted to stop tipping by implementing a one-year ban on the practice and encouraged others to do the same. Behind the morality argument and the rhetoric of fair wage legislation, lay the fundamental reasoning on why it was opposed--the practice of tipping implied a status of superiority over an inferior.⁷

The Anti-Tipping League proposed leaving a card in lieu of a tip stating, "We believe that tipping is an undemocratic practice. We don't tip our doctors or our dentist, because we consider them our equals. We consider you the same." Tipping between the server and the served established a position of subserviency. "No man tips his equal" appears to be the standard cliché.⁸

In 1909, Washington state passed legislation providing a misdemeanor for anyone in the service industry accepting a gratuity. Six other states followed suit but ultimately

the laws were either repealed or deemed unconstitutional. By 1926, all anti-tipping legislation had been repealed. Independent groups, however, continued to lobby against it.⁹

Accepting tips, especially from a man, equated the waitress with a prostitute, further relegating her second-class status. This implication was justified in many ways and is worth examining since this equation dominated public perception and treatment of waitresses. Indeed, tipping influenced waitresses' self-concepts and the subculture they formed.

Louise Kapp Howe's informant, Ingrid, was an experienced New York waitress, who categorized the types of customers she encountered in the 1970's. They are useful categories, easily adopted to describe the same relationships occurring fifty to seventy years previously. The male/female relationship model is often used to study and define cultural mores and values. Just as important, however, are the ways in which women interact with each other and the reasons for their behavior.

Women with Women: In 1977, when Ingrid assessed the poor reputation women had for being "the pickiest customers and the lousiest tippers" she echoed an opinion formed by her predecessors sixty years earlier.¹⁰ Donovan concurred in 1917:

The waitresses hated them [the Jewish working girls who came in daily] because they never knew what they wanted, they said they would take this or that and when the waitress brought it, guessed they wouldn't have it after all, but would take this other instead . . . they demanded all sorts of attentions and never left a tip.¹¹

Sometimes women received poor service since waitresses assumed that the tip would be minimal, even if the woman received outstanding service. Waitresses who

passed women customers to their coworkers were sometimes dismayed when that customer left a good tip to another girl. In 1921, an anonymous hotel waitress experienced the inappreciation of a woman who quite obviously had money. She lamented, "I had served them three hundred and seventy-nine elaborate meals, been found fault with, rudely ordered about, grumbled at...[and] My tip was a soiled one dollar bill ungraciously given." Since her identity and social standing were closer to those she served, the anonymous server recalled her behavior some ten years earlier, "I had never realized them [waitresses] as fellow human beings. I had never considered their convenience. I had never considered their feelings."¹²

The reasoning behind women's reluctance to tip well should perhaps be perceived as their financial inability. Their sisters in factories, department stores and offices labored in the same marketplace that devalued women's work and paid them accordingly. Waitresses could sometimes forgive working women because they understood their budgetary constraints, but there was no excuse for affluent women and men.

Waitresses recognized and relied on men as their greatest source of income, acquiescing to disrespectful behavior in hopes of monetary compensation. To effectively play this game, waitresses recognized different types of male customers and adapted themselves to the role required. In 1917, Donovan identified them as,

...the gay old man who always paid the waitress silly compliments; the grouchy, puffy, youngish fellow who clamored impatiently for food, and the pathetic, middle-aged clerk whose salary of fifteen dollars per week condemned him to a hopeless daily struggle to satisfy a man's appetite and still leave a margin for clothes and room rent. Among other familiar figures were the man with a diamond ring who radiated an order of strong tobacco, the boy with the restless shamefaced interest in women as represented by the waitress in her white apron,

and the father of a family who gratified a roving disposition for adventure by coquettish little jokes with the girl who served him.¹³

Ingrid similarly assessed her male clientele and consolidated them in three categories.

Although seemingly gender specific, women also demonstrated these character qualities.

One Man Sitting Alone: These customers expected to be entertained while dining. Elderly persons and young men were particularly susceptible to falling into this category. The waitress, like the bartender, appeared to be willing a listener for customers' problems or random topics of conversation. In 1907, while new on the job, Maud Younger felt torn between listening to a woman talk about her rheumatism and serving her other customers. "She seemed so to long to pour out her soul to someone, that I turned my back on the head waitress and the whole room and said how sorry I was."¹⁴

For young men interested in meeting women, waitresses were easy to talk to as a captive audience. Donovan observed that a boy in the city could, "get acquainted with the waitress probably easier than with any other woman, he can talk to her as soon as he meets her and call her by her first name."¹⁵

I-Want-Service-Now-Or-Else. Demanding customers who frequently qualified as abusive, were occupational hazards. Men, accustomed to female service, regularly disrespected their waitress and they lacked understanding of her work environment. Elizabeth Maloney, long time waitress and union leader observed, "People who are quite pleasing in many other relations of life will frequently exhibit a very obnoxious facet of their character when they come to sit at a public table."¹⁶

Customers such as this augmented the stress levels for waitresses whose nerves were frazzled by normal work place conditions; they often got a dose of their own

medicine. With the multitude of customers and personalities that waitresses faced daily, it is little wonder that they lashed out or ignored their customers as a coping mechanism. The editor of *The Hotel Monthly* commented that the ambivalent attitude of the waitresses would drive the diner from the café to the cafeteria. This particular observation resulted from a waitress being more interested in “a couple of young fellows smoking cigarettes [sic] between courses at a neighboring table.”¹⁷ In an economic environment in which appearance, charm, and personality factored into take home pay, it was not unusual for waitresses to give preferential treatment to those she felt offered greater monetary opportunities.

One employer in 1915, tried to mitigate the antagonism between his customers and employees by enacting rules prohibiting “sarcastic tongues.” He realized that this type of behavior lost him customers but he also admitted, “. . . we cannot expect polished manners of our employees for the wages we can afford to pay . . .”¹⁸ Child’s, a well-known restaurant chain, did expect well-polished manners and management trained waitresses in customer relations, as well as food serving. They were taught “techniques” for handling different kinds of customers, specifically men, but also their wives. Waitresses were instructed to serve the food as quickly as possible. They were never to initiate conversation with their customers. If spoken to, servers could answer by emphasizing the customer’s interests. If they encountered a “cranky” customer who snapped at them, they were to do “nothing to irritate him.” Child’s waitresses were similar to “ideal” wives who served hot food without conversing with husbands about idle female problems. This was in accordance with the mores of the era.¹⁹

Others concerned with customer relations targeted the patrons for instruction. An editorial published in *The Hotel Monthly*, emphasized the quantity of customers that waitresses served per day. "You cannot expect a lady to get excited 100 times a day." The author suggested that good service was the responsibility of both waitress and customer. When each respects the other as a person and respects each other's time, then both will be pleased with the exchange. He advised:

Remember that your order is one of a hundred or more each day . . . If you are really in a hurry, ask for what can be got in a hurry. If a mistake is made, count [to] ten or a thousand, then ask yourself whether you ever made a mistake- then do not say what you were going to say. For it only makes the waitress think you are a worm.²⁰

The Male Customers Who Look You Straight in the Breasts. The sexual aspect of eating and serving is hard to deny given the tipping system. In a society that equated waitresses with prostitutes because of money exchanged for service, waitresses hardly felt compelled to maintain a wholesome reputation never afforded them in the first place. Donovan called it "the sex game," whether or not a waitress chose to play the game was her choice but the sexual atmosphere was ever present, as part of the customer-server relationship.²¹

Experienced waitresses understood how to manipulate and use customers to their advantage. New waitresses in training learned basic serving techniques but they were also taught how to extract the most money from male customers. Conventional wisdom dictated that, "... you must jolly your customers along . . . You've got to build up a little trade for yourself . . . The boss likes us to be fresh with the customers." Men who were regular customers were the best tippers; a certain amount of proficiency in handling them

amounted to much in the waitresses' pocket. A server in 1929 stated, "... we found out that a great many of these gentlemen who want to date us will grow up to be nice regular customers if they are handled with a little tact. Regular customers add quite a little to a waitress' income."²²

Many women tried to foster relationships with her customers and establish regulars. Once someone was an established regular they were off limits to other waitresses. This unwritten rule was occasionally voiced to other waitresses for clarification of who belonged to whom. "She told me laughingly not to wait on her regular customers," one remarked, "'There are some boys I like that sit at the last table; and a lady in black with a gentlemen. You can take anybody else but them.'"²³

Flirting and smiling increased tips. Girls were advised to "jolly" their customers along. "The very first man I waited on there gave me a quarter for serving him a seventy cent luncheon ... I got the quarter in exchange for a smile."²⁴ The potential for tips was also better if one could entertain customers or engage them in conversation; conversations about customers' lives or neutral issues like their golf games often paid dividends.

The relationships between waitresses and customers were formed in an open, casual atmosphere. Topics of conversation considered taboo for most of society, were daily occurrences within restaurant walls. Talk latent with profanity and blatant sexual overtones permeated conversations between the waitress and her customers, as well as between the servers and the male restaurant staff.²⁵

Waitresses found that freely discussing intimate matters with male clientele increased tips. Some took it a step further and initiated a literal "hands on" approach. Donovan's coworker demonstrated her technique and the other girls confirmed her story. She said,

I do this to them under the table . . . Yes, she does, and she gets the money. When she first came here to work, she had nothing and was glad to pick up an old pair of gloves out of the garbage can and wear them . . . Now she has everything, including a thousand dollars' worth of diamonds and a sealskin coat. She didn't earn them hashing at Lane's.²⁶

It was behavior such as this that society utilized to denigrate waitresses. They worked in a labor market that did not pay them a living wage yet society expected them to somehow make ends meet. In many cases, this simply proved to be impossible, especially when uncontrollable events such as sickness necessitated a raid of one's savings. In light of their economic situation, waitresses did what they had to do to survive. Some viewed the disregard for "proper" moral behavior as a result of low wages. In 1921, an anonymous hotel waitress accompanied two coworkers to the Atlantic City, Boardwalk for a bite to eat after work one night and was surprised and concerned by the amount of male attention. "Twenty men, in groups of two or more, invited us to eat with them. It is a question easily settled when a girl has money, but when she has no money and is hungry, what then?"²⁷

In 1907, sociologist Amy Tanner, became an undercover waitress. In this role, she was concerned about the appeal men and marriage held for waitresses whose low wages made them destitute in an atmosphere that condoned friendly male relationships. The hotel's staff living quarters failed to provide a space for entertaining male callers,

therefore, women either went out with them socially or invited them into their own rooms. Either way, Tanner felt they were vulnerable to relationships that might or might not lead to marriage. She described men as, "...their [waitresses] golden bow of promise. He is their only avenue of escape. It is small wonder that they take the first one who comes"²⁸

The opportunities to meet men as possible marriage candidates were quickly pointed out to waitresses by employers. Since employers believed that women were only a temporary part of the labor force, they promoted the accessibility to meet men through waiting tables; "...the waitresses' work is a great aid to matrimony" and "it provides her with as many chances to get married as most girls get," appears to have been the employer's assessment. The large number of married working women in the work force, particularly waitresses, refutes the notion of temporary workers. It was a prevalent misconception for much of the twentieth century. In fact, waitresses tended to have higher rates of marriage than most other occupations.²⁹

Waitresses dated their customers for fun, as a prelude to marriage, and to alleviate financial burdens. Male friends and boyfriends often purchased meals for them, paid for their amusement activities, or bought them items they could not afford. The date and gift system were a form of semi-prostitution; "earning" needed items was simply a part of many waitresses' lives. Girls attached little shame to showing off new "gifts" of shoes, clothing, and accessories in the dressing room. Donovan observed that, "All were talking about their engagements . . . for the evening or for the night and quite frankly saying what

they expected to get from this or that fellow in the line of money, amusement, or clothes.”³⁰

Low wages made it difficult if not impossible for women to fully participate in the urban consumer culture of the early twentieth century. Yet, earning these items or being “treated” was imbued with its own contradictions. Trading “favors” simultaneously posited women as sexually liberated and sexually vulnerable.³¹

Clothing and accessories were outwardly visible signs of status in society. Working women created alternative, independent identities for themselves using clothing and accessories. Although the Consumers' League of New York suggested (1916) that a waitress had “only to take off her apron to be ready for the street,” waitresses like many of their working class sisters were very particular about their public appearance. Before going home or leaving the restaurant on afternoon breaks, waitresses applied makeup and changed into “their stylish street costumes.” Purchasing these items with their own money signified that they were independent wage earners with economic power.³²

The interpretation of culture in relation to women has been an historical quagmire, as it is often viewed through the lens of consumer culture. Historian, Nan Enstad, challenges labor historians’ traditionally ambivalent attention to culture and heralds it as a way to understand the lives of women. She argues that the hierarchy within capitalistic society posits women as consumers and men as producers. The women-as-consumer stereotype equates consumption with femininity and therefore unproductive as it is juxtaposed to the masculine connotation of producer. Because consumer culture has a stigma of irrelevance attached to it, historians of working women have chosen to

marginalize its importance when discussing what they perceive to be more serious topics of inquiry such as political action.³³

Although clothing and other avenues of consumer culture may initially appear to be trivial, waitresses used the items to form a collective identity, which bound them together in the public eye. Within the confines of the dressing room, women discussed clothes, make-up, men, and all the intimate details that tied these subjects' together to waitresses' lives. Relationships between waitresses, that initially appear to be based on trivial materialistic concerns, ultimately contributed to the formation of informal education systems and support networks.

Historian Leslie Woodcock Tentler argues, like Tanner, that for industrial women workers, marriage seemed to be an escape from the working world. As evidence of this theory, she cites factory girls' conversations about the romantic prospects of upwardly mobile marriages. Waitresses on the other hand openly discussed taboo topics with each other such as marriage concerns, problems, and sexual intimacies with husbands and boyfriends. The exchange of information between waitresses while at work functioned as an informal educational system. In this way, older or more experienced women who were participating in the gift exchange or were married, helped to educate younger waitresses on ways to relate to men. The benefits and drawbacks to each type of lifestyle were openly discussed. Waitresses could not accept the myth of marriage-as-escape with the high number of married women working among them; in this sense, the proof appeared to be "in the pudding."³⁴

Friendships formed between waitresses served personal and professional purposes. While at work, women depended on each other for instruction, help while serving, and to share information about customers. Since restaurants were themselves, a form of entertainment and recreation, waitresses worked in places that were breeding grounds for urban culture. Waitresses found it easy to meet new people at work and continue the relationship after working hours. Their work friendships eased the monotony of long hours and casual banter with each other and the customers helped pass the time.

Once away from work, these friendships often continued. Waitresses lived together as roommates, spent leisure time together, shopped, ate at other restaurants, went to movies, and participated in a variety of recreational and amusement activities that were available. The collective identity waitresses formed at work, ultimately transcended the restraints of the restaurant. These informal friendship networks laid the groundwork for the establishment of formal waitress trade unions.

¹ Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America. Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 16. The definition of culture used in this context comes from Sidney W. Mintz, who states that the use of culture, "immediately brings into view the arrangements of persons in societal groups for whom cultural forms confirm, reinforce, maintain, change or deny particular arrangements of status, power, and identity."

² Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 2.

³ Louise Kapp Howe, *Pink Collar Workers. Inside the World of Women's Work* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 93-132. In addition to waitresses, Howe studied beauticians, sales workers, office workers and homemakers.

⁴ The term "subordinate status" and "subordinate-service" are used in Sueellen R. Butler, and William E. Snizek, "The Waitress-Diner Relationship. A Multimethod approach to the Study of Subordinate Influence," *Sociology of Work and Occupations* 3 no. 2 (May 1976): 209-210. The study researched the amount of control waitresses exerted over their tips through "suggestion[s] and recommendation[s]" of menu items to increase the tab; Brenda J. Mann, and James P. Spradley, *The Cocktail Waitress. Woman's Work in a Man's World* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1975), 1-14. In their study, Mann "went native" as a participant in the world of the cocktail waitress. Among other things, they asked and researched two questions, "'What are the social factors and practices that operate to keep women in these subordinate positions?' and 'What are the adaptive strategies used by females from society to society in manipulating their roles and exercising the power available to them?'" For more recent publications see Debra Ginsberg, *Waiting. The True Confessions of a Waitress* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2000) and Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed. On (Not) Getting by in America* (New York: Metropolitan Books Henry Holt and Company, 2001). Both Ginsberg, a twenty year veteran waitress and Ehrenreich, an undercover waitress following in the footsteps of Francis Donovan and Maud Younger, confirm that the server/customer dynamic still has not changed. Both are excellent resources to compare the experiences of twenty-first century waitresses with their historical counterparts over one hundred years ago.

⁵ Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1916), 3254; S.M. Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of a Waitress," *Life and Labor* 3 no. 2 (February 1913): 40;

⁶ *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant. A Study of 1017 Women Restaurant Employees* (Consumers League of New York City, 1916), 24.

⁷ "The Itching Palm," *The Hotel Monthly* 25 no. 286 (January 1917): 39-40; "The Itching Palm," *The Hotel Monthly* 25 no. 287 (March 1917): 35; Rae L. Needleman, "Tipping as a Factor in Wages," *Monthly Labor Review*, (December 1937), 1311. The study included restaurants with table service, hotels, barbershops, beauty shops, beauty parlors, railroad dining rooms and hotels, Pullman porters, station porters, taxicab drivers and bootblacks; "Proposed Anti-Tipping Association," *The Hotel Monthly* 25 no. 289 (April 1917): 67;

⁸ "Banquet Guests Not Expected to Tip," *The Hotel Monthly* 28 no. 328 (July 1920): 47; Leo P. Crespi, "The Implications of Tipping in America," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, (Autumn 11, 1947), 434; Clyde Brion Davis, "Tips," *The Atlantic Monthly*, (September 1946), 126-127; "To Lessen the Tipping Practice," *The Hotel Monthly* 23 no. 272 (November 1915): 87.

⁹ Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 42. The other states were Mississippi, Arkansas, Iowa South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia. Needleman, "Tipping as a Factor in Wages," 1314. Neeldeman states that by the 1920's tipping was "an institution" with little chance of being repealed. "Tips, Tippers and Tippees. Proving that Tipping is Good American Today," *The Hotel Monthly* 29 no. 340 (July 1921): 70-75.

¹⁰ Howe, *Pink Collar Workers*, 93-132. The categories and layout used are taken directly from Howe. Ingrid defined seven different categories, those not used here are A Man and Woman Together, The Pickers and The Customers Who Understand; Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, *Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*, (Hartford: State of Connecticut, 1916), 100.

¹¹ Francis Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1920), 165. Maud Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress. An Industrial Problem from the Workers Point of View," *McClures*, April 1907, 665

¹² "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," *Scribner's Magazine*, September 1921, 318,322.

- ¹³ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 70-71.
- ¹⁴ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 64; Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 667.
- ¹⁵ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 215; Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 546.
- ¹⁶ S.M. Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of a Waitress," 37; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 54, 69, 122.
- ¹⁷ "Slack Restaurant Service Helps Cafeterias," *The Hotel Monthly* 28 no. 322 (January 1920): 25-26; Elizabeth Maloney, "Towards the Eight-Hour Day," *Life and Labor* 1 no. 11 (November 1911): 323.
- ¹⁸ "Curb the Sarcastic Tongue," *The Hotel Monthly* 23 no. 271 (October 1915): 75.
- ¹⁹ "No 'Hashers': Waitresses Now Must Have Tact and Charm and Apply Their Psychology," *Literary Digest*, May 1, 1937, 26-27.
- ²⁰ "Be Considerate of the Waitress," *The Hotel Monthly* 32 no. 375 (June 1924): 58.
- ²¹ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 211.
- ²² Dagny Hansen, "Don't Kid the Waitress," *Collier's*, 4 May 1929, 67; "The Tip and Improved Service," *The Hotel Monthly* 28 no. 331 (October 1921): 56; "Waitress Work in Hotel Dining Room," *The Hotel Monthly* 31 no. 360 (March 1923): 45; Younger, "Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 669.
- ²³ Younger, "Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 545; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 164.
- ²⁴ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 199.
- ²⁵ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 164; Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of the Waitress," 37; Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 545, 551. Spradley labeled these casual conversations "joking relationships" and argues that they "maintain the status inequality of female waitresses and reinforce[s] masculine values", 100.
- ²⁶ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 219.
- ²⁷ "Being a Waitress in a Boardwalk Hotel," *Scribner's Magazine*, September 1921, 318. It was customary for hotels to provide meals for their employees however, the quality of the food was often questionable. Serving the staff rotten meat and vegetables was not unheard of. For more primary information on hotel staff meals see "Summer Hotel Waitress," *Independent*, June 1905, 1338, 1342 and Amy Tanner, "Glimpses at the Mind of a Waitress," *American Journal of Sociology* 13 issue 1 (July 1907): 49.
- ²⁸ Tanner, "Glimpses at the Mind of a Waitress," 52.
- ²⁹ *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant. A Study of 1017 Women Restaurant Employees* (Consumers League of New York City, 1916), 10; Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 30-32, 211; Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of the Waitress," 37; Hansen, "Don't Kid the Waitress," 67; "Occupations for Respectable Women Hotels," *The Hotel Monthly* 28 no. 327 (June 1920): 64; "The Waitress and Her Work," *The Hotel Monthly* 22 no. 254 (May 1914): 42; Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 550, 671; Holloway, *Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*, 15.
- ³⁰ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 55.
- ³¹ For more information on casual prostitution among working women see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements. Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 108-114.
- ³² *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant*, 16; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 27, 55, 135, 158, 204, 209; Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), 10, 60; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 64; Younger, "Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 543.
- ³³ Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*, 6.
- ³⁴ Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women. Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 72, 117, 132. Tentler's strongly argues that young women idealized and romanticized marriage and did not realize the reality of their future. Tentler adheres to the traditional argument that women needed protection from societal ills and sought that protection through marriage. She claims that independent women suffered from "severe poverty" and "cruel and emotionally debilitating social isolation". Her thesis has been widely refuted in recent years by historians who argue that although marriage was romanticized, it could not be realistically seen as an escape from the working world. Furthermore, single women often enjoyed their free independent lives despite economic hardships. Sarah Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread but Give Us Roses* (London: Routledge &

Kegan Paul, 1983), 20-23, 128; Enstad, *Ladies of Labor*, 76; Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift. Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 56, 57, 59, 60.

CHAPTER 4

“ITS OUR DUTY TO GET IN AND ORGANIZE THEM”

Waitresses began to organize unions exclusively for females in March, 1900, in Seattle, Washington. These unions were initially organized with women's male waiter counterparts. The need for totally separate organizations emerged to address women workers' demands. Formed under the Waiters and Bartenders National Union and chartered by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1891, this union later became the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union or HERE. The HERE constitution yielded to waitresses the right to form their unions, separate from the waiters' union; women took advantage of the opportunity. After the chartering of Seattle local 240, others were established in San Francisco, California, Chicago, Illinois, St. Louis, Missouri, New York, New York and Butte, Montana. By World War I, approximately seventeen separate waitress locals existed nationwide.¹

In some instances, waiters felt threatened by the exclusionary tactics of waitresses. Since they worked together side by side, waiters felt they should be united in a common front. "A separate, autonomous female local would create problems," males argued. "... [they] feared conflict over wage scales, work rules, and distribution of jobs; other [men] were reluctant to lose due paying members." In short, waiters wished to maintain control without being bothered by those "pesky little waitresses." Historian, Alice Kessler-Harris maintains that women workers were viewed as competitors in the

labor market, “better controlled from within than allowed to compete from without.”

Waitresses, nevertheless, either successfully broke away from the male local or initiated their local independent of a male branch.²

Unfortunately, the waiters’ opposition to them was indicative of the attitude of the AFL to women workers in general. Although the AFL always paid lip service to organizing women, leaders’ actions were often contradictory; they failed to practice what they preached. The waitress unions’ relationship with the AFL was always delicate. Like their employers, national labor leaders believed women were a temporary element of the workforce who lowered the wage scale and occupied positions that rightfully belonged to men. Women, therefore, were perceived as competition in the male dominated workforce. In 1906, AFL President Samuel Gompers declared, “It is the so-called competition of the unorganized defenseless woman worker, the girl and the wife, that often tends to reduce the wages of the father and the husband.”³ While the AFL called for equal pay for equal work, it established barriers that prevented women from being full participants in the labor movement.

Fees were another matter. Often working women could not afford to pay the required membership dues. Once their dues were paid, attending and participating in union activities was yet another challenge. Parliamentary procedure, record keeping, vocal participation, and the attitude of “the guys” intimidated many women and precluded their participation. Even when they were actively involved in the meeting, there was little assurance that their needs and concerns would be addressed.⁴ Males sought dominance.

Women were further excluded by meeting times and locations. Locals, that held their meetings at neighborhood saloons or late at night, purposefully hindered the waitresses' participation. In 1921, Gertrude Sweet, of Portland, Oregon was instrumental in forming a separate waitress local after calling police officers to meetings several times, "due to the fact that the waiters [were] often unruly at the union meetings . . . they were not sober and were fighting on the floor." Under these circumstances the waitresses decided, "we had enough of that; so we had our own union."⁵

Waitress unions formed under the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International organized themselves using the craft union model, a reflection of their membership in the AFL. As the industrial service sector of the market place increased, the craft model gave way to other organizational forms. Industrial unionism, that represented the easily replaceable unskilled worker, seemed to be a more feasible option for the "unskilled" waitresses. Organizing based on the skilled craftsman model was hard enough for the AFL to maintain in an increasingly mechanized and replaceable work environment, never mind the struggles of female unions in a male dominated labor force. Yet, the waitresses managed to make it work.

Historian Nance Schrom Dye argues that craft organization was not typically effective when applied to working women. She maintains that, "to organize successfully along craft lines required workers [to have] strong personal identification with the work process they perform[ed] and a high level of job skill."⁶ Waitresses met both of these requirements: Although waitressing was a transient occupation, a collective identity was nevertheless formed. In addition, waitresses realized the skill required to serve multiple

patrons, especially during the rush hour, understanding that a restaurant could quickly go down in flames with an inexperienced staff. This served as a means of empowerment.

Given sanction by the AFL and HERE to organize independent, autonomous unions, waitress activists recruited rank and file membership among their coworkers. "By the World War I era, . . . approximately 70% of organized HERE waitresses belonged to separate waitress locals." Unable to openly talk about union activities at the restaurant, waitresses engaged in surreptitious conversations behind the manager's back and emphasized the importance of unions at all possible times. Maud Younger, later called "The Millionaire Waitress" because of her privileged background and her working class activism, experienced her first taste of union recruitment in New York, 1907. At her various places of employment she met union members who encouraged her and others to join the union. In Younger's experience, recruiters focused on improved wages and working conditions. Because "union talk" was forbidden in most restaurants, waitresses watched out for the management and signaled the recruiters to keep quiet when management approached.⁷ To "talk union," one had to be cautious.

Recruiters called upon emotional sentiment, targeting empathy for other waitresses who were not earning a living wage. They also alluded to "human liberty" and patriotism, comparing labor strikes to the American Revolution by asserting, "We all struck in 1776." According to Younger, Katie Martin, a spunky traveling organizer was inspiring and effective in her strategies.

Where there is one who can get to the top, there's thousands [that] must stay below, and I'm working for the thousands – and we can't choose who those thousands are, either. We've got to take them as we find them – sometimes they're

rough – and sometimes they're dull, but it's our duty to get in and organize them and help them along.⁸

Despite Katie Martin's enthusiastic call for inclusive membership, this was hardly the case. Again, following in the footsteps of their AFL brothers, waitresses excluded women based on their race and their ethnic background. Employers preferred to hire attractive Anglo women; women of color were hired in restaurants that served people of color. People of color were not allowed to enter the mainstream restaurant culture, nor were they welcomed into the union.

In an attempt to pacify the situation, HERE suggested that African-Americans form their own unions or apply for "members at large" status, which afforded them membership but excluded them from full rights and benefits. Moreover, Asians were excluded outright until the 1930's. For the most part, organized waitresses were of Northern European descent. But it appears sisterhood failed to cross racial and ethnic lines, reflecting the nation's culture at large. Cobble suggests that, "in the short run, racial exclusionary policies may have solidified the ranks of white waitresses and hence facilitated their organizing."⁹ Such ethnic divisions could hardly have served to strengthen the movement, as Cobble argues.

Myopic as it may seem, waitresses' unions prided themselves on their democratic and egalitarian structure. Gertrude Sweet, charter member of local 305 in Portland, Oregon, recalled the election and decision making process initiated in 1921. Members could nominate anyone they wished from within the union for executive board offices and vote for them by secret ballot. The elected executive board thereafter made

suggestions and recommended decisions to the membership at large who then, "debated . . . acted upon . . . accepted . . . rejected or amended . . ." the resolutions.¹⁰

Chicago union activist Elizabeth Maloney cited a similar process when she testified to the Congressional Commission on Industrial Relations in 1916. Maloney felt this nascent democratic structure facilitated open expression among members. Before strikes were called, they had to be approved by secret ballot. Maloney confirmed to the commission that the process was democratic, "because at all times it expresses the wishes of the rank and file."¹¹ Throughout a testimony that spanned two days, Maloney reiterated her position. As a member, she could not speak on behalf of the union as a whole without issues first being placed before the union for a vote.

But sex-segregated unions provided women with leadership opportunities that they otherwise would not have had, and built privilege of working class white women over men and women of color. Women embarked on more active and vocal leadership roles, because they felt safe within the confines of their union headquarters. Waitresses, furthermore, scheduled their meetings at times conducive to their work and family life. Gertrude Sweet is a shining example of the advancement opportunities waitress unions afforded women; she served as founding member and President of her local. She went on to work for the International union as a traveling recruiter and organizer and ultimately became the first woman International Vice-President.¹²

Women leading women, enhanced their sisterhood and solidarity identity. In addition, women in leadership roles established a comfortable atmosphere in which to address issues that may not have been related directly to work. Most locals had a sick

benefit fund available to ill members since low wages allowed for little, if any, savings to accrue. Waitresses, and working women in general, feared illness because it depleted their savings and placed their lives in danger, physically and monetarily.

In 1914, Seattle local 240 reported it had "paid out over \$3,000 in sick benefits." Funds went to support medical bills, rent, food, childcare, and union dues. According to Elizabeth Maloney of Chicago local 484, "no member can fall into bad standing through inability to pay her dues [75 cents per month] while sick... she can pay her arrears at her leisure when she goes back to work."¹³

In addition to financial support, unions organized committees to check up on sick members and deliver to them what they needed; they literally ran errands for members. In 1917, Francis Donovan, undercover waitress and sociologist, contributed her pennies to the sick fund basket as it was passed around at the weekly union meeting. The money not only covered health care expenses but it also bought sick members flowers to brighten sick days.¹⁴ This type of overture would not have taken place in a male-dominated union; women's needs and concerns took precedence.

Welfare and death benefits were also available to members, all of which were adopted from the AFL craft organizing model. The benefits were transferable, meaning a waitress could change restaurants without losing her benefits. Samuel Gompers insisted that these funds bound members to the union.¹⁵ There is no doubt that during lean times, waitresses were thankful for them.

Not surprisingly, waitresses organized social functions either for pure recreational fun or for fundraising. They threw card parties and formal balls and ensured that they

were respectable events. In Chicago, in 1917, Donovan attended a “quiet party” that she compared to a “small town church social.” It featured dancing, a Bunco game, spaghetti, potato salad, and a cake to eat at midnight. Although some of the members suggested that alcoholic drinks be served, the union secretary would not allow it. “We won’t have no [sic] drinks. People think that waitresses can’t have a respectable party and we will show them.”¹⁶ Press coverage enhanced respectability; a *Chicago Tribune* reporter was invited to write about the event. Clearly, the union was eager to alter its public perception. This demure card party is ironic in light of the other more robust recreational activities waitresses participated in regularly.

Socials created a sense of community and served as fundraisers for union activities. The Seattle local held parties and dances from 1910 – 1914, in efforts to raise money for a “Recreation Home.” Similarly, the Chicago waitresses held a “May Party” in 1905 for funds to send two delegates to the thirteenth International HERE Convention. The May Party featured a beauty contest that wooed union men, “. . . to attend, [to] help make the May Party a success.”¹⁷ Social functions served the dual purposes of entertainment and they also supported activities that reached the heart of the union.

But waitresses never lost sight of their primary union goals of alleviating harsh working conditions and bettering the lives of their members. One way they did so was by controlling the labor supply through organized peer control.¹⁸ Waitresses controlled the labor supply by instituting “hiring halls” that functioned as employment agencies operated by the local. Waitresses “in good standing” in need of a position arrived in the morning and then were sent to various restaurants for the lunch shift. Employers relied on

the halls for reliable help at a moment's notice. Non-union women could join the local at the hiring hall, but they had to be experienced. Both undercover waitresses, Donovan and Younger, were referred to either the hiring hall or union headquarters after they proved themselves to be reliable servers. Having experience was an important element in "the scheme of things." When a waitress was placed by the hiring hall, she went to the job as a union representative and had to behave as such. Irresponsible women who failed to show up or behaved unseemly at work, ran the risk of "losing the house" for others. While she was waiting, Donovan overheard a member admonish another, "Carolina spoiled it for us; she ought to be ashamed of herself."¹⁹

Donovan joined the union by simply showing up at the hiring hall. Before signing up, she witnessed the union secretary delegating jobs to a room full of women until it was emptied of job applicants. Donovan learned about the initial membership fee of two dollars with fifty cents paid monthly thereafter. If she was unable to pay immediately, she could join "on the spot" and pay the dues when she was able. Within minutes she was given a membership card and sent away to a job.²⁰

Hilda McLean, a retired waitress, was the financial secretary and hall manager. Having come from the trade, she understood waitresses' hardships and negotiated frequently for them financially. In the restaurant industry, winter was the slow season. Ms. McLean negotiated an extra dollar for summer lunch shifts to ensure girls could earn and save money for the long winter months. She also bargained a higher wage for women that Donovan described as, "the old, the inexperienced, the ugly and the inefficient." These women were sent out last, if at all, to banquet and cafeteria jobs. The higher wages

helped sustain them through slow months and the days in which they were not sent out at all. Maloney explained a similar solution, where during the slow season the girls rotated their shifts. Unselfishly, each would take off a couple of meals each week so that everyone had an opportunity to work some rather than not at all.²¹

In addition to their own betterment activities, waitresses benefited from other women's organizations that expanded their sisterhood base. By far the majority of outside help was drawn from various branches of the National Women's Trade Union League of America (NWTUL). The League was established in 1903 at an American Federation of Labor meeting in Boston by, "female trade unionist[s], settlement house residents and social reformers."²² For the most part, Progressive women of means comprised the initial membership. Although these women were not workers themselves, their previous reform work made them aware of the plight of urban women workers and they contributed their time and money to various causes. Like the waitresses' relationship with the AFL, the NWTUL also faced support challenges from their union brothers. Again, lip service came easy but genuine commitment and support failed to surface.²³

From the outset, League membership was open to any and all who wished to join--men and women, skilled and unskilled alike. The League called for strength in numbers and the unity that lay in sisterhood. Their stated objectives included "improve[ing] the situation of female workers through organizing . . . ; lobbying for legislation . . . ; and educating female workers, trade union men, and leisure-class women" on the conditions of working women and the benefits of organizing.²⁴

During the League's early days in New York, members patrolled the streets watching for working women with expressions of discontent. Similar tactics were utilized by Chicago members in 1914 after leader Alice Henry suggested they, "...go out, if need be into the highways and by-ways, and make ourselves known to workers" Once they found these women in need, they devoted their time and money to supporting and educating workers about labor laws and negotiating strategies. In this way, trade unions were formed through the WTUL's three-pronged strategy of educating, agitating and organizing.²⁵

The relationship between the waitresses' trade unions and WTUL was unique because many waitresses had established their unions three years before the formation of the WTUL. Waitress locals already participated within the larger International and sent delegates to a yearly convention. If the League's task "ended with the integration of women as equal members into the established labor movement" as historian, Nancy Schrom Dye suggests, then the relationship between the two groups of women was indeed unique. Overall, "financial and moral support for militant activity" predominated the type of assistance the League provided the waitresses.

In each city, the existence or strength of the union or League varied. In Chicago, for instance, Elizabeth Maloney served on the 1907 WTUL of Illinois' Executive Board and actively led Chicago HERE local 484. This close working relationship, however, failed to be evident in New York City. New York was notorious for its under-representation of union members, yet when in need New York waitresses called upon the

WTUL for assistance. Details of the strike assistance provided to New York waitresses will be pursued in chapter five.

Despite the fluxuating membership of both groups, each recognized the need for healthy membership numbers. In part, this was a call for sisterhood and solidarity, or the avowed “helping the thousands” and “strength in unity” plea. On the other hand, it was a sound organizing tactic, an attempt to prevent the unorganized women from diluting the efforts of the union. Without the cohesion of solidarity, gains made through individual bargaining between waitresses and employers could not be sustained.

The use of guilt as an organizing strategy or tool was not beneath the WTUL: “. . . the girl who holds herself aloof” the argument ran, “from the trade union movement because her own skill can command a decent wage is as responsible for the miserable lives of women and children in the sweated trades as is the ‘daughter of privilege’ who refuses to recognize her kinship and obligation with the working poor.” The waitresses utilized similar tactics Beulah Compton recalled in 1978. When she first started working, the other girls “. . . very sweetly said they wouldn’t work with a nonunion girl . . .,” she reminisced nostalgically, “I’ve always loved those spirited girls, giving me the word.”²⁶

Throughout the twentieth century, consistent waitress organizations proved a difficult task to sustain. Membership success that failed to capture momentum caused initial gains to be lost. But union rosters grew again when working conditions became intolerable.²⁷ Once waitresses solidly organized themselves, however, they set about remedying working conditions through collective bargaining, arbitration, and strikes. The following chapter will outline the legislative attempts, protest activities and internal

improvements undertaken by various waitress unions. In these efforts, the unions utilized its organizing strength within HERE and called upon the WTUL and others for assistance in altering their working and living situations.

¹ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 61. Cobble is the definitive source thus far on historical waitresses and their trade unions. Within this work, Cobble provides her readers, and researchers of waitresses, with much needed information. Hers is the only publication to date on the subject and its usefulness cannot be denied. However, Cobble's ambitious attempt to cover the entire twentieth century of waitress trade unionism lacks some of the detailed information on the pioneers that makes the experience of waitresses unique in labor history. Additionally, Cobble's emphasis on the labor movement (she is currently "assistant professor at the Institute of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University") leads her to focus on the unions' activities within the labor market rather than on the sisterhood activities within the union. Again, Cobble is the most useful and comprehensive source to date but subsequent research is sure to shed more light on the subject. One of Cobble's strengths is her nationwide approach, which covers waitress unionism from Seattle to Boston. As for this paper, the most accessible primary sources focused on the activities of waitresses in the east, therefore my writing tends to gravitate to the waitresses of Chicago and New York. However, at all times, I have attempted to include the activities of those waitresses on the western seaboard. For more information on early twentieth century waitresses of the mid-west see Mary Lee Spence, "They Also Serve Who Wait," *Western Historical Journal* 14 (1983): 5-28. Within this work, Spence highlights the unique experience of waitresses such as the Harvey Girls as well as the role of male waiters in the American west. Spence is an excellent source to fill in the geographic gaps. For a comprehensive account of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union see, Matthew Josephson, *Union House Union Bar. The History of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union AFL-CIO*. New York: Random House, 1956. Although the waitress unions are scarcely mentioned, Josephson does treat them with respect and without hostility. When referring to the 1914 Chicago strike he states, "The beginning of the waitresses' movement was no afternoon tea affair!"

² Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 61-61; Alice Kessler-Harris, "'Where are the Organized Women Workers?'" *Feminist Studies* 3 no. ½ (Fall 1975): 98.

³ Samuel Gompers, "Should the Wife Help Support the Family?" *American Federationist* 13 (January 1906): 36, quoted in Kessler-Harris, "'Where are the Organized Women Workers?'" 96, 104; Mollie Ray Carroll, *Women and the Labor Movement in America. Women In Industry Committee of the National League of Women Voters*, (Washington D.C.: Women in Industry Committee of the League of Women Voters, XX): 11.

⁴ Carroll, *Women and the Labor Movement in America*, 11; Kessler-Harris, "'Where are the Organized Women Workers?'" 99. Kessler-Harris asserts that in addition to the male members ignoring the concerns of their female members, that "social propriety hindered them from talking to women in private or about moral or sanitary issues."

⁵ Gertrude Sweet, "New York Times Oral History Program. The Twentieth Century Trade Union Woman: Vehicle for Social Change Oral History Project, Part 1, No. 37, Gertrude Sweet, Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union." interview by Shirley Tanzer (Sanford, North Carolina: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1979), 12; Carroll, *Women and the Labor Movement in America*, 12; Kessler-Harris, "'Where are the Organized Women Workers?'" 99.

⁶ Nancy Schrom Dye, "Feminism or Unionism? The New York Women's Trade Union League and the Labor Movement," *Feminist Studies* 3 no. ½ (Fall 1975): 119.

⁷ Maud Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress. An Industrial Problem from the Workers Point of View," *McClures*, April 1907, 551-552; It is interesting to note that all of the waitresses helped to watch and warn of the management approaching, even those who were decidedly non-union members. Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Organizing the Postindustrial Work Force: Lessons from the History of Waitress Unionism," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 44 no. 3 (April 1991): 421.

⁸ Younger, "Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 552, 677.

⁹ Dye, "Feminism or Unionism?," 113; *Behind the Scenes in a Restaurant. A Study of 1017 Women Restaurant Employees* (Consumers League of New York City, 1916): 8; Ruth Milkman, "New Research in Women's Labor History," review of *Work Engendered: Toward a New Labor History of American Labor*, by Ava Baron, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century*, by Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in the Turn-of-the-Century*

Pittsburgh, by Ileen DeVault, *Community Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945*, by Elizabeth Faue, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870-1930*, by Lisa M. Fine, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975*, by Nancy F. Gabin, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation*, by Susan A. Glenn, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950*, by Darlene Clark Hine, *Fleeting Opportunities: Women Shipyard Workers in Portland and Vancouver during World War II and Reconversion*, by Amy Kesselman, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1890*, by Marjorie Murphy, *Labor's Flaming Youth: Telephone Operators and Worker Militancy, 1878-1923*, by Stephen H. Norwood, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945*, by Phyllis Palmer, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18 no. 2 (1993), 381, Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 77-79.

¹⁰ Sweet, "New York Times Oral History Program," 33.

¹¹ Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1916), 3250.

¹² Sweet, "New York Times Oral History Program," 12; Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 174-191; Dye, "Feminism or Unionism?," 120; Kessler-Harris, "Where are the Organized Women Workers?," 101.

¹³ Francis Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1920): 191-192; Mable Abbott, "The Waitresses of Seattle," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 2 (February 1914): 48; S.M. Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of a Waitress," *Life and Labor* 3 no. 2 (February 1913): 38.

¹⁴ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 191; Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 132-134; Beulah Compton, "New York Times Oral History Program. The Twentieth Century Trade Union Woman: Vehicle for Social Change Oral History Project, Part 1, No. 4, Bulah Compton, Waitresses Union." interview by Elizabeth Case (Sanford, North Carolina: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1979), 38; Franklin, "Elizabeth Maloney and the High Calling of the Waitress," 38. According to Maloney the fund "sav[ed] the girls from the dangers of the nobody-to-know and nobody-to-care feeling."

¹⁵ Cobble, "Organizing the Post Industrial Work Force," 425.

¹⁶ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 190.

¹⁷ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 190; Abbott, "The Waitresses of Seattle," 48; Younger, "Diary of an Amateur Waitress," 671; Elizabeth Maloney, "Waitresses' Union May Party," *Life and Labor* 5 no. 8 (April 1905): 21; "Remember the Waitresses' Ball," *Life and Labor* 5 no. 4 (December 1904): 21; "The Waitresses Union," *Life and Labor* 6 no. 4 (December 1905): 21; Cobble asserts that waitresses continued to have beauty contest fund raisers into the 1960's. For more information on waitresses' use of sexuality to their own ends, see Cobble's section "The Double Edged Sword of Sexuality" in *Dishing It Out*, 127-128.

¹⁸ Cobble, "Organizing the Post Industrial Work Force," 421. Waitresses incorporated their knowledge of the culinary industry into their organizing tenants. In *Dishing It Out* and more succinctly in "Organizing the Postindustrial Work Force," Cobble outlines four "overlapping categories" which characterized the waitresses "occupational unionism." These categories solidified themselves after World War I, therefore their presence is noticeable during the formative years but they were not yet institutionalized. For more information on the following categories' importance in waitress trade unions after World War I see Cobble, "Organizing the Postindustrial Work Force," 419-436. The categories as outlined by Cobble are as follows: "(1) occupational identity, (2) control over the labor supply in the occupation, (3) rights and benefits as a function of occupational membership rather than of worksite affiliation, and (4) peer control over occupational performance standards."

¹⁹ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 186

²⁰ Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 60-61, 127-128, 186-193; Throughout her investigative stint as a waitress, Donovan repeatedly refers to the waitress alliance. Towards the close of her book, Donovan purports to not know anything about the waitresses union but states that as far as she could tell there were "little or no difference" between the two. Deciphering just which Donovan joined on this day is a challenge. Throughout she cites specific examples of events and locations that almost certainly were associated with the HERE union, yet she claims she was never associated with it. It is possible that she was a member of the Chicago Hotel and Restaurant Keepers Association which purposefully mimicked the

actions of the union in order to deflect membership from them (this organization is discussed in detail in chapter four). Under these circumstances I have tried to thoroughly assess the data provided by Donovan, and fact check it with all available sources that might corroborate or denounce her information. On these occasions, I have indicated it in the notes.

²¹ Franklin, "The High Calling of the Waitress", 38; *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3254; Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, 187, 191. The actions taken by McLean's such as bargaining for higher wages does not indicate that she was working for the restaurant owners.

²² Robin Miller Jacoby, "The Women's Trade Union League and American Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 3 no. ½ (Fall 1975): 126.

²³ Kessler-Harris, "'Where are the Organized Women Workers?'" 97; Dye, "Feminism or Unionism?," 113.

²⁴ Alice M. Oliver, "Symposium on Why a Girl Who is Working Should Join a Union," *Life and Labor* 5 no. 8 (April 1905): 24; R.E. Baker, "To Working Girls," *Life and Labor* 1 no. 9 (September 1911): 287; Jacoby, "The Women's Trade Union League and American Feminism," 126.

²⁵ Dye, "Feminism or Unionism?," 114; Agnes Nestor, "A Call For Service," *Life and Labor* 2 no. 3 (March 1912): 67; Francis Squire Potter, "The Educational Value of the Woman's Trade Union," *Life and Labor* 1 no. 2 (February 1911): 36-40; Alice Henry, "Chicago Conference of Women Trade Unionist," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 1 (November 1914): 324; Agnes Aitken, "Teaching English to Our Foreign Friends Part II. Among the Italians," *Life and Labor* 1 no. 9 (October 1911): 309. English lessons and other courses taught by the WTUL were beneficial for immigrant waitresses. Many restaurant owners and managers had racial and ethnic biases toward non-English speaking help. See chapter one for further details.

²⁶ *Women's Trade Union League of Illinois*. Chicago: McCormack & Company, 1907, 6; Beulah Compton, "New York Times Oral History Program." 19.

²⁷ Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 68-72; Franklin, "The High Calling of the Waitress," 36.

CHAPTER 5

“I’M WORKING FOR THE THOUSANDS”

Once organized, waitresses addressed issues that concerned them within the confines of the restaurant; and they continued to better their members’ lives outside of work. Never too proud to accept assistance, waitresses utilized all possible avenues to achieve their goals. At times unsanctioned donations and assistance was offered and graciously accepted; on other occasions, waitresses’ unions sought the financial or manpower support they needed for success.¹ Their call for and acceptance of support should not be perceived as weakness, but rather as strength. This chapter seeks to exemplify the improvements waitresses made or attempted to make during the formative years of union organizing.

One outstanding example of community aid was offered to Seattle local 240 in 1914. The Seattle local had been raising money for a “Waitresses’ Recreation Home” for four years, 1910 - 1914. The waitresses envisioned a sanctuary where women could spend their days off restfully and where those who were ill, yet not in need of a hospital, could recuperate. The ultimate goal was a place, “where the social and home life that girls must have if they are to remain mentally, morally or physically healthy could center.”²

After four years of fund raising, the union purchased land for a building site and then continued its fund raising activities to raise money for construction. Shortly

thereafter, they were informed that the site was not, and could not be, equipped with sewer lines. The news was a “crushing blow” because they had already hired building contractor Fred Keen to construct the facility. Keen, “who had been watching their struggles with a kindly interest,” soon announced that he and his wife would donate a lot with a house to the waitresses. The ecstatic waitresses received the deed to the house on April 8, 1913. Keen’s home was brand new with “fourteen rooms . . . softly tinted walls, polished floors, tiled bathrooms and a sleeping-porch big enough for a whole family.” The waitresses used the money they raised originally, to furnish and decorate the rooms. The women thereafter utilized the house for union meetings, social gatherings, and restful retreats.³

Similarly, the Junior League of Chicago presented a resting room to Chicago waitresses in 1913. The room occupied the lower floor of the waitress union’s headquarters and was intended to serve as a haven for girls who worked downtown. Waitresses now had somewhere to go between shifts. The Junior League “maintained” the two-room rest area that featured six beds with clean linen for naps, sewing machines and reading material.

In 1917, Francis Donovan visited the Chicago “Junior Alliance Rest Room.” Evidence is elusive but it suggests that she utilized the same room donated in 1913. The room Donovan visited was also donated by “society ladies” with two rooms that featured a kitchenette and laundry, as well as cots, showers, and a matron. Donovan was taken to the Alliance room by a co-worker, however they were not joined by other waitresses because to them “Life is too short to spend much of it at the Alliance, . . . You can go

there when there is no other place to go.” Although the Alliance room may not have been the most exciting way to spend an afternoon, it beat walking the streets to pass time. Those in need of rest often appreciated its donation.⁴

In addition to rest rooms that eased their nonworking hours, waitress unions across the nation fought for work improvements. They did so by securing closed shop agreements with hotel and restaurant owners. Beyond this, they altered their working conditions (and those of working women in general). Fighting for protective legislation to regulate working hours and wages was their goal. If neither of these options proved fruitful, out they went on strikes to the picket lines.

As part of the Progressive vision, around 1915, eight-hour workday legislation was proposed in various states across the country. The hotel and restaurant industry fought vehemently against protective legislation regulating the working hours of their employees. A domestic industry, hotels and restaurants had previously been excluded from legislation. But some hotels were considered an “aggregation of homes” and claimed that twenty-four hour days dictated the needs of guests as well as the working hours of employees. Hotel owners argued that they could not ask guests to alter the hours they ate or slept. Guests evidently had to be served ‘round-the-clock.

In 1916, W.W. Davis of Massachusetts addressed the American Congress of Hotel Associations, claiming that overall their employees were “well paid, comfortably housed and well contented.” Most waitresses of the era surely disagreed. Davis added that complaints of “unfair conditions [are] rarely or never heard.” In 1915, hotel man, E.A. Whitney of Peoria, Illinois, voiced similar beliefs when he stated in *The Hotel*

Monthly that the work was “not particularly tiresome,” and maximum hour legislation was not needed.⁵ Perhaps these two men and their colleagues were not listening to servers’ demands or realizing the reality of women’s work conditions.

According to Davis, capital did not oppress labor but, “labor is oppressing capital, and the pendulum is swinging much too far in the latter direction.” He believed, much like John D. Rockefeller at Standard Oil, that hotels’ domestic departments should be “relieved from the oppressive labor laws now in operation and those organized labor intends opposing upon us.” The hotel industry alleged that if working hours were reduced, extra persons were needed to make up the difference in work shift hours. Profits would diminish.

Hotel and restaurant men were notorious for claiming their industry was unprofitable. For example, Davis stated, “In no other business are the returns so small in comparison to capital and time invested.”⁶ Others warned of similar results. In 1917, James Churchill of Churchill’s restaurants in Albany, New York, avowed that he would “have to discharge ten or fifteen women, most of them widows.” Ironically, the women he employed came to work at three a.m. to clean the pantries; the bill under consideration before the New York legislature forbade cleaners to arrive before six a.m.⁷

In 1915, hotel owner Chas B. Hatch wrote to his state representative, supposedly representing his female staff’s opinions. Hatch stated that he gathered his staff in the dining room and explained the proposed eight-hour law to them. Hatch asserted that if this law passed, the result would be the dismissal of all the women on his payroll. Hatch painted a dismal picture for the waitresses’ future, claiming that they would have to leave

the state to get positions. He believed that in this situation, most “would not be able to get positions” and that “the state legislature of Illinois will have something terrible hanging over their heads for all time to come.” Hatch offered to send a notarized petition of his female staff’s signatures as evidence of their “praying this law shall not be passed.”⁸

The American Congress of Hotel Associations encouraged its members to personally visit with their state legislators instead of sending lawyers in their behalf. They observed that representatives who personally appeared were more effective in having the hotel and restaurant exemptions added to the proposed amendments. Hatch suggested, as did Davis, that the law itself be enacted, but that “the proposed laws might be so worded that hotels be eliminated.”⁹

Few entrepreneurs realized the potential benefits that protective legislation would bring. In 1916, Richard Gray, manager of the Chicago Beach Hotel, assessed the positive results that would come from a reduced workday and a six-day week. Gray claimed that although “we must and can have continuous industry . . . we cannot have . . . continuous men and women.” As it stood, the “nomadic disposition” of hotel and restaurant employees was the result of long workweeks, which required one to quit a job in order to have a day of rest. Furthermore, the seven-day week was an unattractive quality to those who sought work and therefore only the lower class of people needed to apply.¹⁰ Under these circumstances, waitresses desired managers such as Gray who was cognizant of their problems and willing to negotiate with labor unions. Women leaders preferred private agreements between employers, rather than striking, for achieving acceptable working conditions.

Cobble argues that waitresses dealt with issues of labor legislation pragmatically, “their position . . . was determined by the economic, political, and social circumstances in which they operated”¹¹ Many female labor leaders wavered on the benefits of protective legislation, arguing that collective bargaining through labor organizations was the way to go. Because female organization was consistently sporadic and weak, protective legislation seemed the most viable alternative.

Although, “spearheaded” by Progressive women reformers such as the WTUL, waitresses became the most vocal and active agitators on behalf of hour legislation from Washington to Illinois. In Seattle, waitresses led by Alice Lord secured an eight-hour workday passed in 1911 after three failed attempts. Before the legislation took effect unionized waitresses worked ten-hour days, seven days a week; unorganized waitresses worked even more. Lord beamed, “It was the waitresses union that started the ball rolling and kept it rolling until its size fairly scared our lawmakers.”¹²

In 1909, Chicago local 484 helped win a ten-hour workday in Illinois, modeling it after an Oregon bill that protected women in factories and mercantiles. Four years later, the Chicago waitresses were at it again, lobbying for an eight-hour workday. During this campaign, Elizabeth Maloney and union president Anna Willard Timmeus, devoted nine weeks without pay to getting the bill passed in the Illinois legislature. Maloney was aware of the fortitude of the opposition, and she implored those working for the bill to “keep at their job and stay on the spot from the beginning of the session till the hour when the law is written on the statute book.”¹³

Their lobbying is even more impressive considering that restaurant workers were not included in the list of protected industries. Maloney's and Timmeus' actions were based on their concern for fellow laboring sisters, not on their self-interests. Because protective legislation had not applied to them, regulated working hours for waitresses occurred through the process of collective bargaining by the unions.¹⁴

In 1912, Elizabeth Maloney of Chicago local 484 testified before the Commission on Industrial Relations, in Washington D.C. When asked how she would remedy the less than ideal conditions of working women, she suggested an appointed commission of employees, employers, and a public representative to assess the industry in question, and make needed changes.¹⁵

As a last resort, but not one that intimidated them, waitresses rallied behind one another and opted to strike. Waitresses with established unions adhered closely to democratic conventions and required that a secret ballot vote pass before the strikes were officially called.¹⁶ For those who did not have a union in place, impromptu or spur-of-the-moment strikes took place. In both scenarios, financial and emotional support was gathered from many sources to help affect a successful outcome.

In 1914, unorganized New York waitresses at Conrad's lunchroom called a "wildcat" strike and sought the help of the Women's Trade Union League of New York when their wages were reduced from \$5.00 a week plus meals to \$4.00 a week without meals. The owner, Mr. Weinstock, reported to the *New York Times* that the waitresses earned \$1 to \$2 a day in tips and "some averaged \$16 a week for three hours' work." Restaurant owners had a habit of claiming that their employees made a sufficient amount

in tips regardless of their actual earnings. In any case, the unorganized New York waitresses earned almost half of what the organized Chicago waitresses were earning.¹⁷

Of the thirteen waitresses employed at Conrad's, seven walked out. Since they were unorganized, they called upon the WTUL for help and received it without complications. The two groups united and began picketing and holding "street meetings" to inform the public of the problem. Their pickets read, "We are striking for \$5 a week and meals. Please help us." Although a valiant effort, the strike disbanded after one week. Even so, it left a lasting impression on New York waitresses and provided the impetus for them to organize.

In 1913, Chicago local 484, led by the formidable Elizabeth Maloney, and supported by other female "powerhouses" such as Jane Addams and Ellen Starr, struck against the Chicago Restaurant Keepers Association. The Association was a reactionary organization formed in 1913 when restaurant owners felt threatened by the concessions they had made to workers, namely a six-day workweek. The most visible clashes occurred between the Knab, Powers and Efting restaurant conglomerate that owned and operated over twenty restaurants and the Phillip Henrici Company.¹⁸

The Henrici strike originated when bakers, cooks, bakery, and milk wagon drivers, and the waitresses' union all asked for a six-day workweek along with a slight raise in pay. The waitresses specifically asked for a six-day workweek of no more than ten hours a day for eight dollars a week. In addition, they asked, "the employer [to] furnish and launder the working linen of the employees." Of the one hundred restaurants petitioned, Henrici's was the only one that refused to sign. They immediately dismissed

all four of their union waitresses and strongly advised the other female staff not to join. In addition, they dismissed six of the eight bakers and two of the four cooks, all union members.¹⁹

In keeping with their democratic ideals, a strike vote was passed. After three weeks of public protest, local 484 asked the WTUL of Chicago for further assistance. The WTUL's executive board called a meeting on February 22, 1913 at Hull House. Mr. Phillip Collins, President of the Phillip Henrici Company, and his attorney attended. Although the men were invited to speak, they chose not to do so. Jane Addams chaired the meeting, and local newspapers sent representatives along with an Associated Press reporter.²⁰

At the meeting, the attendants clarified why the strike occurred and published a "Statement of Facts." The statement lists the "grievances of the waitresses." Women were working seven days a week for a dollar a day. In addition, the fining system significantly detracted from their take home pay, and they were required to pay the restaurant five cents a day for laundering aprons. Their wages were further reduced by the bus boy who removed dirty dishes from their tables: the waitresses paid him an average of thirty cents per day for his labor. Although management did not require this, the waitress who did not "tip out" the bus boy did not receive his help. Without the busy boy, their workload increased. The "bus boy system" angered the waitresses even more because they were required to move "325 chairs and heavy tables" to sweep the floor, a job they felt should have been assigned to the bus boys.²¹

The proceedings of the meeting exemplify the sisterhood and solidarity that took place between local 484 and the WTUL of Chicago. The two groups issued the following statement:

The standardization of hours, wages and working conditions of the entire trade is absolutely necessary to prevent the exploitation of the workers. The reasonable demand for one day rest in seven alone should appeal to all who stand for decent and humane treatment of employees. It is only by organization of the workers and the unionizing of all the restaurants that these conditions can be obtained and the culinary trade standardized.

At the meeting, Elizabeth Maloney of the waitresses union expressed her concern about the brutality and arrests made by policemen on the picket lines. At the time, over one hundred and thirty-six arrests had been made. Women were charged with disorderly conduct and conspiracy to injure a business. Their bail bond amount exceeded \$200,000, yet none had been tried in court except Addams' fellow worker, Ellen Starr, who demanded and received a jury trial and was acquitted. At this meeting, a committee formed to "follow up in court the cases of all arrested girls" and they were to check up on them at home.²²

Although the picketing waitresses and sympathizers did not resist arrests, they were treated as if they had. Union member Ora Duree's arm was dislocated while being arrested; it was questionable if she would have full use of it again. The "Statement of Facts" reported that police officers "used the same methods [as they would] on a strong man resisting arrest." Maloney asserted that the only time they were not harassed was when the picketers draped themselves in American flags for dramatic effect around Washington and Lincoln's birthdays.²³

Possibly being carried away by sisterhood energy emanating from the room that night, the meeting passed a resolution against the police and presented an order to the mayor of Chicago. They exhorted the chief of police to assign policewomen for strike duty. Unfortunately, it did not have the desired effect for the female officers behaved as cruelly as the men and they were soon taken off duty.²⁴

To assist the picketers, League member Dr. Caroline Hedger volunteered to attend to the injured. At the meeting, Dr. Hedger shared a conversation she had with one of the waitresses' husbands on the picket line. The husband stated, "I'm with her. When I married her she had hardly shoes to her feet, she was that hard up, and I'm glad that she's able now to help other girls get better wages."²⁵

Further picketing took place three months later at the Knab restaurants. On January 5, 1914, Knab's signed a closed-shop agreement with the waitresses, that authorized a six-day workweek. Since all the union's contracts expired annually on May first, the Knab agreement was only in effect for four months. During this time, Knab joined the Chicago Restaurant Keepers Association. The Association prohibited any of its members from signing agreements with labor unions unless they met the requirements of the Association.²⁶ The waitresses, bakers, waiters, cooks, and the bakery wagon drivers unions submitted their contract for renewal simultaneously. Of the five contracts submitted, The Restaurant Keepers Association authorized all, except the waitresses' contract.

The waitresses' contract submitted to Knab on May 19, 1914, was similar to the one submitted to Henrici's and the other Chicago restaurants. It called for a ten-hour day

and six-day workweek, with the restaurant furnishing and laundering uniforms. In addition to these working arrangements, the contract stated that, “the Waitresses’ Union shall have the privilege of organizing the waitresses in my establishments, the visits to be made when the help are not overly busy. The help that went on strike shall be taken back as soon as possible.”²⁷

After calling for a vote, the waitresses decided to strike. What made this strike different from the Henrici incident, occurring simultaneously, were the legal injunctions that Knab, Efting and Powers sought. On May 9, 1914, Knab went to court seeking an injunction to prohibit picketing. His request for total elimination was denied, but restrictions allowed only peaceful picketing. The waitresses and their supporters were prohibited from passing out literature. In addition, “silence was golden” for they could not speak to customers.²⁸

Knab reacted to his failed legal strategy in two ways. First, he hired “colored women” to picket alongside the union waitresses. The hired women displayed signs that read, “I’m am one of Knab’s waitresses and am satisfied” and “Gee, I ain’t mad at nobody and nobody ain’t mad at Knab’s.” In addition to “colored waitresses” Knab hired non-union Anglo girls who attempted to “incite violence” by wearing signs with, “Knab has got the waitresses ‘Nanny,’” while squeezing toy nanny goats in the faces of union pickets.²⁹

Despite the agitation, the union girls continued to picket silently with placards that read, “Help us with our strike” and “With your assistance we will win our strike at Knab’s.” When Knab realized that his strike breaking tactics were failing, he placed signs

in all of his restaurant windows that provided detailed information of his version of the strike's origin. After successfully drawing a crowd close to the restaurant, the police were called and the union picketers were arrested while the nonunion girls retreated into the restaurant.

Over one hundred ninety-eight arrests were made. Of these, six cases went to trial; all strikers were found not guilty and the remaining one hundred ninety-two cases were dismissed. In 1916, Maloney testified to the Congressional Commission on Industrial Relations in Washington D.C. that she believed the police behaved badly because of their relationship to Mr. Knab. Over the years, the policemen had eaten for free and were given turkeys each year at Christmas -- "naturally they had a very kindly feeling for anyone who gives them free meals."³⁰ The good old boys network was alive, well, and functioning.

The strike waged on until October 15, 1914 when the Chicago Association of Food Exchange and the Chicago Federation of Labor met to discuss a "preferential shop agreement." The agreement consisted of eight requirements that primarily revolved around the "preferential shop" clause. This clause guaranteed that a union girl would be hired before a non-union girl but no provisions on hours or wages were made.³¹ In the past, a "preferential agreement" was not considered satisfactory by the waitresses' union, but under the circumstances, it was accepted. Although they agreed to sign, signatures are sometimes only ink and the deal failed to materialize. While in negotiation, the Chicago Association of Food Exchange was granted an injunction against the waitresses that

prohibited “striking, picketing, organizing, boycotting, conspiring, resigning [from work] or in any way interfering with their [employers] business.”³²

This ruling was a massive blow to the Chicago waitresses union. Not only had they lost the preferential shop agreement, a concession in the first place, but they had also lost their right to protest after a year and a half of picketing. The restriction against peaceful picketing limited their negotiating tactics to collective bargaining against the now formally organized restaurant owners. Elizabeth Maloney’s assertion in 1911 continued to ring true, waitresses could not afford to “. . .underestimate the forces of organized capital arrayed in opposition against them.”³³

The Chicago Association of Food Exchange and the Chicago Restaurant Keepers Association organized the Chicago Association of Hotel and Restaurant Employees in 1913, and mimicked services provided by unions. All member restaurants required that their employees join the Association. Provisions for separate male and female “departments” were included with dues of fifty cents per month for women and one dollar for men. As an amenity, the Association also provided a hiring hall and recreational clubrooms.³⁴

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, waitresses organized themselves and occasionally struck against their employers with varied success. Although the Chicago strike was the longest, it was not at all successful. Other locals stuck during these years but workers demands were not met. Success cannot be measured, however, by a few battles, the war continued on throughout most of the century; the women persevered. Despite the visibility gained by striking, waitresses preferred to arrange

agreements in a more civilized manner. Women learned from strikes, but sometimes turning the biblical “other cheek” is also effective. Their actions reflect that they did whatever it took, that they were eclectic, using any means necessary to improve the lives of members. More was at stake, however, because the lives of working women as a whole hung in the balance.

¹ Maud Younger, "The Diary of an Amateur Waitress. An Industrial Problem from the Workers Point of View," *McClures*, April 1907, 551. In 1907, Maud Younger was told that in one instance, "customers had paid for the funeral expenses of a waitress who had no relatives." The waitress had died from muscular rheumatism caused from working thirteen hours a day, seven days a week for five years.

² Mabel Abbott, "The Waitresses of Seattle," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 2 (February 1914): microfilm, 48-49; "Home For Waitresses," *Life and Labor* 3 no. 7 (July 1913): microfilm, 218.

³ Abbott, "The Waitresses of Seattle," 48-49; "Home For Waitresses," 218.

⁴ S.M. Franklin, "The High Calling of the Waitress," *Life and Labor* 3 no. 2 (February 1913): microfilm, 38; Francis Donovan, *The Woman Who Waits*, (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1920), microfilm, 47. The Alliance Room Donovan visited could have been a part of the Chicago Restaurant Keepers Association. The address given by Donovan does not match with those provided by the waitresses' union, however the two rooms were remarkable similar in design. The surviving evidence suggests she was visiting the same room that was donated by the Chicago Junior League in 1913 but certainty is elusive. Additionally, the WTUL describes the room as "splendid" and yet there is an air of what can only be described as maternal condescension the when they remark that, "Any member is supplied with clean linen and tucked in like a little girl." While some may have enjoyed this motherly behavior, older women surely did not need nor want to be tucked in. The relationship between the WTUL and the working women they supported was always strained due to their conflicting views of class and women's proper role in society.

⁵ Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1916), 3252; Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 81; W.W. Davis, "Why Hotels Should Be Exempt From Certain Labor Legislation," *The Hotel Monthly* 24 no. 276 (March 1916): 35-39; "A.E. Whitney Who Explained to Illinois Legislators Why Women Hotel Employees Do Not Work Under Factory Conditions," *The Hotel Monthly* 23 no. 266 (May 1915): 70; Susan Lehrer, *Origins of Protective Labor Legislation for Women, 1905-1925*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 241. The issue of protective legislation for women is tricky as various attempts at legislation are occurring simultaneously across the country. In some cases, laws are being passed by western states while the same laws are being repealed by the eastern states. Therefore, protective legislation cannot be linearly traced from beginning to end. Susan Lehrer's book is an excellent resource to navigate this complicated web of legislation. She examines the role of women in the labor market and the role of the state in controlling that labor. What makes her book particularly beneficial is her attention to the efforts made by various women's organizations such as the WTUL and the suffrage movement.

⁶ Davis, "Why Hotels Should Be Exempt," 36-39. In an effort to make the legislation seem ridiculous, owner W.W. Davis of Massachusetts, pointed out that a radical labor leader (who he did not identify) appeared before the Massachusetts legislative committee arguing that legislation be extended to all domestic workers, going so far as to propose that all food, even in private homes, should be prepared on Saturday's.

⁷ Chas B. Hatch, "The Beardsley - Champaign, Ill.," *The Hotel Monthly* 23 no. 263 (February 1915): 55; *New York Times*, 7 March 1917.

⁸ Hatch, "The Beardsley," 55. One of the WTUL's goals was to educate working women on labor laws. They realized that if they did not explain the laws and their benefits, that their employers could exploit them and explain the laws in such a way as to make them seem detrimental to their work situation.

⁹ Davis, "Why Hotels Should Be Exempt," 35-39; "A.E. Whitney," 70; Hatch, "The Beardsley," 55.

¹⁰ Richard M. Gray, "The Six-Day Week For Workers," *The Hotel Monthly* 24 no. 276 (March 1916): 7071.

¹¹ Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 80.

¹² Abbott, "The Waitresses of Seattle," 48.

¹³ Elizabeth Maloney, "Towards the Eight-Hour Day," *Life and Labor* 1 no. 2 (November 1911): microfilm, 323.

¹⁴ NYT, 2 May 1917; In New York, legislation passed in 1917 limiting the waitress working hours to no more than six days and fifty four hours a week. *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by*

the *Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3252, "Franklin, The High Calling of the Waitress," 39; Alice Kessler-Harris, "'Where are the Organized Women Workers?'" *Feminist Studies* 3 no. ½ (Fall 1975): 101. Initially female trade unions, such as waitresses, welcomed and lobbied for protective legislation for maximum hours and minimum wages. Yet, over time, support for exclusively female labor laws waned and gave way to more inclusive labor legislation for all workers. However, as public sentiment shifted, the WTUL did not. The League remained supportive of legislation for women despite obvious contradictions and drawbacks. Lehrer, *Origins of Protective Labor Legislation*, 138-139. Lehrer argues that the WTUL's initial "militant activities" on behalf of women workers eventually shifted to an emphasis on protective legislation. The WTUL remained adamant supports of legislation aimed specifically at women and the nation's attitude shifted to a more inclusive approach. Some felt that protective legislation for women was in actuality more harmful than helpful. The most well known case of this came from skilled women printers in New York. In 1914, the "no-night-work" laws caused them to lose their positions. See Lehrer's chapter "WTUL and Protective Labor Legislation" 115-139.

¹⁵ *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3250.

¹⁶ Charlotte Molyneux Holloway, *Report of the Bureau of Labor on the Conditions of Wage-Earning Women and Girls*, (Hartford: State of Connecticut, 1916), 8; *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3245, 3257. The waitresses received financial support from HERE's defense fund. Locals send money to the international headquarters and they in turn distribute the money to other locals in need.

¹⁷ *NYT*, 14 May 1914; *NYT*, 15 May 1915; Leonora O'Reilly, "'Five Dollars a Week and Our Meals' Waitresses Strike in New York," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 8 (August 1914): microfilm, 246-247.

¹⁸ Alice Henry, "Chicago Conference of Women Trade Unionist," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 1 (November 1914): 328; *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3244-3249; "The Chicago Waitresses," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 7 (July 1914): 222.

¹⁹ *Women's Trade Union League's Statement of Facts Concerning Henrici's on Randolph Street*, by Agnes Nestor, president and Emma Steghagen, secretary (Chicago: 1914), 1.

²⁰ Henry, "The Chicago Waitresses," 101; Allen Davis, *American Heroine: Life and Legend of Jane Addams*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

²¹ *Women's Trade Union League's Statement of Facts*, 1-3; Henry, "The Chicago Waitresses," 102

²² Henry, "The Chicago Waitresses," 100.

²³ *Women's Trade Union League's Statement of Facts*, 3; Henry, "The Chicago Waitresses," 101.

²⁴ Henry, "The Chicago Waitresses," 100; Sweet, "New York Times Oral History Program," 16; In Portland, Oregon the waitresses had more luck working with female police officers. Sweet reported that they had a positive working relationship with Mrs. Baldwin, the head of the "police department for women." At one time, the local newspaper "invariably" listed any female who was arrested as a waitress. The local felt that this was "presenting a bad image" to the public, so they consulted with Mrs. Baldwin and had the practice stopped.

²⁵ Henry, "The Chicago Waitresses," 100; It is interesting to note that although waitresses had a higher marriage rate than most trades, references to or about their husbands are rarely found.

²⁶ *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3245.

²⁷ "Free Speech 'Knabbed' in Chicago. The Waitresses' Struggle for Organization," *Life and Labor* 5 no. 1 (January 1915): microfilm, 10.

²⁸ "Free Speech Knabbed," 11; *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3246; Henry, "Chicago Conference of Women Trade Unionist," *Life and Labor* 4 no. 1 (November 1914): 324. The role of the WTUL in this strike was "largely educational." The WTUL members visited the girls at home for moral support and encouraged other waitresses to join the union.

²⁹ *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3246.

³⁰ *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3247.

³¹ “Free Speech Knabbed,” 11-12. The following is a synopsis of the eight point preferential agreement. If the point is concise, the exact wording is recorded here. 1. Union members have a hiring preference. 2. Non-union members have the option to join the union without penalty. 3. Non-union members shall be laid off first. 4. “All classes restaurant and lunch room employees shall be eligible to membership in the unions.” 5. If a member is employed through the union hiring hall and then is not used, the employer will pay her one hour’s wages and reimburse her carfare if used. 6. “Members must wear their working buttons.” 7. “There shall be no reduction in wages on account of disagreement nor increase in hours.” 8. Business agents shall be allowed to interview members at the restaurant during non-busy times.

³² Cobble, *Dishing It Out*, 67.

³³ Maloney, “Towards the Eight-hour Day,” 323.

³⁴ Henry, “Chicago Conference of Women Trade Unionist,” 328; “Free Speech ‘Knabbed’,” 12; *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, 3244 – 3249; “The Chicago Waitresses,” 222.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

The alteration of waitresses' post World War I work experience can be attributed in part, at least, to the work of their unions at the turn of the century. Some would argue that minimal gains relative to working conditions were made; yet, the experiences of waitresses in 1920 were vastly different from those in 1902. Working hours and conditions were altered. Even though the Chicago strike of 1915 failed to secure the ultimate goal of an eight-hour day and a six-day week, the average ten-hour day was a improvement over the twelve and fourteen hour days common to servers at the turn of the century. The collective identity of waitresses and their strength in numbers are equally significant. By the 1920's, waitresses were a force to be reckoned with; no longer on the defensive, these women were a formidable group. Now they were more than "servants to you all," to borrow from Langston Hughes.

The greatest changes occurred in the public's perception of women workers in general. The notion of waitresses as potential prostitutes that dominated public thinking during the early decades of the century diminished after World War I. It appears that women who participated in the public sphere before 1914 were simply victims of a social ideology held over from the Victorian Era; in essence, they were "products of the time." "The Cult of Domesticity" that perceived women's traditional roles as wives, mothers, and housekeepers was in direct opposition to what working women did. Waitresses, as

we have seen, were castigated publicly for their casual relationships with men and each other within the confines of restaurant environments. Yet, this view became increasingly antiquated as the nation moved into modernity through increased industrialization and urbanization and away from Victorian mores.

On the proverbial timeline of women's history, the 1920's are a watershed. Historians have debated if the 19th amendment altered women's lives and if the image of the "liberated woman" is stereotypical. The "new woman" or the "liberated woman" of the 1920's may be characterized by her freedom to live alone and to participate in the consumer-driven, recreational and urban culture of the era. Again, the validity of this perception within a historical context has been debated. The fact remains that waitresses participated fully in this "revolution" and lived autonomous, independent lives many years before it was conventionally accepted. Waitresses, and working class women at large, preceded what some refer to as "flapper" behavior by women. It was these women who helped prepared their sisters for alterations in lifestyle that they set in motion.

Within the larger historical context of women's history, the significance of the suffrage movement in relation to waitresses and their unions needs consideration. The primary relationship between suffragettes and waitresses occurred because of a mutual affiliation in groups such as the National Women's Trade Union League. In essence, waitresses "rubbed shoulders" with Jane Addams, Ellen Starr and other notable women. Considering the sanctity of a seven-day workweek, it is miraculous waitresses successfully organized. Most activist waitresses became "radicalized" via union activities rather than through the suffrage movement. Numerous primary documents reveal

suffrage as peripheral to issues that meant much--protective legislation.

In the grand scheme of women's labor history, waitresses stand out as an exceptional and unique case. After initially forming in Seattle in 1900, other locals quickly appeared. Their development and growth were not isolated instances, for they were not formed to combat a single issue then disband. Waitresses, despite the odds, sustained their organization. Their membership numbers rose until the 1940's, when "nearly a fourth of the trade nationally" had joined the union ranks. Their sisterhood and solidarity continued into the 1970's when they were legally forced to merge with male waiters and the remainder of the culinary industry.

The similarities between today's restaurants and those of one hundred years ago are remarkable. Students, single mothers, and women of all ages still are drawn to the industry because of its daily cash flow and flexible schedule. One is hard pressed to imagine an exclusively female trade union existing today, yet sisterhood has survived within the restaurant walls and beyond. My awareness of this was brought to the forefront recently, as I began waiting tables at a new restaurant. An overwhelming sense of desperation came over me as I searched blindly for basic items--straws for example, and I realized how difficult it is to relearn "the basics" in a new and different restaurant. As thousands before me, I turned to my co-workers for help. They graciously aided me. I was reminded of Elizabeth Maloney, Francis Donovan, Maud Younger and countless other waitresses over the years who turned to each other for help and received it unselfishly. The legacy of waitress trade union accomplishments surround restaurant workers daily; the most visible and heartfelt expression of it, now and then, is the

sisterhood and solidarity that exists between waitresses. It is a bond that transcends time and place.

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