

Adelaide Henley

(1841?-?)¹

Adelaide Henley appears on the 1861 census of Canada as a servant in the household of William Joslin. Previous transcriptions of the census recorded her name as “Hindley” but an actual look at the microfiche sees that it is probably “Henley” which is a more common New Brunswick name.² It is there that she seems to disappear from history. She was a live in servant like many young women her age so we can get a glimpse of her life by examining what a young girl experienced working for a farming family in the mid 1800’s.

Children taking off the farm work was important to a family’s economic wellbeing. It was common for young women, who were not needed on the family farm, to go out to work for other families.³ There was a distinction made between women hired as domestic servants to clean the house, nurse and cook and those hired to help out on the farm as farm servants. In most small farms, the female servant mixed her time between the household and the farm. She was expected to milk cows, make butter and cheese, tend to livestock, tend to gardens, preserve the winters food and carry out household chores. She was also expected to help out in the fields at the height of the harvesting.⁴

So, what is Adelaide’s story? She is a bit older than many young women working on farms. Considering that this is an all-male household except for Priscilla and Hannah, the Joslin’s probably preferred someone older. There were no babies to tend or nursing to do. Adelaide stayed over as she was listed in the census but she may not have stayed throughout the whole year. By the 1871 census, she has moved on after Hannah has died, Priscilla married and a daughter in law, Amanda has moved into the household.

¹ Information compiled by Evelyn Fidler, May 22, 2019

² Adelaide Henley, Census of Canada, 1861

³ Peter Dickinson, “Family Life: The Child’s Perspective”. Education Staff Training Session, May 7, 2002.

⁴ Nicola Verdon, “Changing Patterns of Female Employment in Rural England, 1790-1890”, Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy University of Leicester 1999