The importance of the family as a social unit is rarely denied. For many, it is the most important of all social institutions, being the place where children are conceived and raised, socialised and given an identity. The ONFs revered and were devoted to the family. It was of primary importance in providing social location and position. In order to be recognised, one needed a family and a family name.

It is necessary before moving to the specificities of the old Natal family to rehearse some of the well-known answers to the question: what makes the family important? For our purposes, one of the first answers should be that it gives men power. Within the family, patriarchy is at its most obvious – the stereotypical image of the father/husband assuming the mantle of patriarch and making decisions, controlling resources and determining destinies is widespread. Even if we find such a representation exaggerated, we are unlikely to deny that it has some truth to it. Especially for people socially well located, the family is important in securing positions in the labour market (Connell 1983:148). In the colonial context, the Comaroffs argue that the newly created family reassured working-class men that they would not slip back into the proletariat. In Britain the proletariat had been regarded as close to African barbarians living in squalor and unreason, in unsettled family conditions. Newly arrived in Africa, settlers of such social origins made strenuous efforts to create families which
aligned them with the resident white gentry and distanced them from Africans and the image of African barbarity (Comaroff 1992:285). They continue: ‘the construction of the “private” domain (in the family, in the home) was fundamental to the propagation of their social order; within it were contained the elemental relations of gender and generation upon which social reproduction depended’ (Comaroff 1992:293). The family, then, was not just important as a functioning social institution, it had symbolic value. In making sense of the world, and legitimating it, the family was frequently used as a metaphor of order. It was a ‘major organizing metaphor of state’ (Corrigan & Sayer 1985:12).

It is necessary to state, to avoid any ambiguity, that the form of the family is not constant. It is obvious that the membership of a family changes – birth and death are the most obvious

A settler family, Pietermaritzburg, c 1900. Leonard Line, a London born stockbroker, is surrounded by his wife (left), Mary (née Thresh) his mother-in-law, Mrs George Thresh (widow of the founder of the capital’s famous Imperial Hotel) and his two sons. Campbell Collections
culprits. But over time as well, the size, shape, role and function of the family change. 'Families are not fixed, mechanical systems. They are fields of relationship … Their configurations often change over time, as alliances form and dissolve and people enter and leave' (Connell 1995:146). State intervention, new technologies and new economic circumstances all shape the family. Relationships within the family change. Over long periods, this change can be very marked (Stone 1977). The relationships which exist within the family (for example between husband and wife, between parents and children, between grandparents and their offspring, between siblings) are unpredictable, and make the family a site of flux. Since the family could not exist without its members, each member could make some impact on its shape and functioning. If one begins from this point, then women within the family need not necessarily be viewed as subordinated and exploited.

In some cases, it is possible to consider the family and the household as one and the same thing. In this study this was frequently the case. Definitionally, however, it is important to distinguish them. Families can be regarded as ‘relationships between persons which are understood by these persons to be in terms of blood or marriage or which are understood to have an equivalent status as these relationships’ (Morgan 1985:66). Michael Gilding offers a political reading of family which is not in conflict with Morgan’s description: ‘The concept of the family represents a sociopolitical ordering of kinship and co-residence in order to affix relations of obligation and dependence’ (Gilding 1991:5). The two definitions have the advantage together of describing the family as a social site and alerting us to its volatile and portentous condition.

What did the family do for a man? It gave him a social place and social power, but it also limited him, constrained him. Philip Corrigan tries to capture this contradiction by describing different masculine relatednesses to women. ‘To be normal is to “have” (in all senses) a or several woman/women and to have them without feeling, with anger and violence, casually – the dream is always endless (hetero) sex. Or is it? For there is also another dream sewn into this masculinity, that of responsibility and being “in place” in the monogamous heterosexual family, to produce those “goods” which are highly valued – “the home”, “the children”, “the family” of respectability, of having made it.’ And this involves having a woman as a partner, and seeing her in a different way from sexual object (Corrigan 1990:282). According to this definition, the family affirmed a man’s masculinity while at the same time giving him an identity, and a place in society. In the nineteenth century it became more important than ever to have a family for reasons that went beyond biological reproduction. To be a normal male meant being functionally heterosexual. Scientists in the late nineteenth century vilified ‘nonreproductive, nonmarital forms of sexuality’, linking these to a threat against the family and the nation (Nye 1993:98).
The family also provided the man with a place to unveil his vulnerability. Philip Corrigan argues that ‘only in private heterosexual space can [men] pour out their hearts and be vulnerable’ (Corrigan 1990:282). I have tried to demonstrate in preceding chapters that men found other places and ways to be vulnerable. Male friendship was not emotionally sterile as implied by Corrigan. But sexual intimacy was most frequently obtained within the conjugal unit, and however complex and contradictory the effect, it is generally considered to have been an important aspect of marriage.

In terms of much feminist literature, to ask the question what did the family do for women would be ridiculous. The answer generally is that the family subordinated women, or at least that within the family women became invisible and open to violence, abuse and exploitation. It will be argued in the next section, however, that ONF women identified closely with family, that it provided them with security and opportunity, and gave them a place (just as it did men). Families could be oppressive environments for women, but it was calamitous for women not to have family location.

Wives and husbands were committed to the perpetuation of family. Women bore the physical discomfort, pain and danger of the burden of reproduction. Many died in childbirth. Beyond their biological roles, both wives and husbands also vested themselves in the reproduction of the family name. For many a father this became his major goal and focus of life. The reproduction of a family is a task quite different from the reproduction of other social institutions, such as clubs or regiments. In those cases, the institution does not die when its members die (or fail to reproduce). Rules, procedures and a social solidity that goes beyond the members which comprise them ensure the perpetuation of these social institutions (Morgan 1985:286–287). Families, on the other hand, can ‘die’ as a result of biological or social misfortune (the failure to conceive a male heir or to see him reach maturity and himself marry a woman and have children). In the Midlands there was little insurance against such mishaps – adoption or other forms of extending the family were not considered appropriate. What one could do was to ensure that the family’s resources were distributed through generations in order to ensure that if an heir or heirs were produced, the social (rather than biological) perpetuation of the family was assured. These were quite separate but equally important. It was of little use to beget heirs and leave them without resources. In such instances the family might as well have died, because it was the family name (and implicitly its influence and status) which patriarchs sought to ensure, rather than just the biological fact of conceiving children. Families do not reproduce themselves automatically: they reproduce themselves in particular forms as a result of conscious action/omission – giving birth to male heirs, leaving property, the family name and farm to particular offspring.
Families were crucial in a process of reproduction that kept class cultures and social identities alive. Older generations were responsible for versions of history which were 'constructed and worked and reworked'. The family, thus, established 'links over time, not simply links between and across family generations, but also links that constitute(d) the continuity of society itself' (Morgan 1985:289). As I have indicated, the ONFs were a class in two senses: organised socially into an apparently cohesive, visible unit and representing itself culturally as something other than it was. In both senses (because they cannot actually be separated as distinct functions or aspects) the role of the family elders was critical. They told the 'family stories', repeating them many times. This storytelling was 'more than chance personal reminiscing'. Although it may begin with memories, 'the main point is that a parent or grandparent wants to pass on that particular information about the past, feels it important that their descendants should know about it'. In this way family stories passed down over several generations become legends (Byng-Hall 1990:216).

Making the settler family

In chapter 2, the centrality of the family was explained in terms of social and economic necessity and of myth (the Old Natal Family). It remains for this section to look in greater depth at the reasons for and the ways in which families could be started, the form which the family took (and the retention of metropolitan links), and the economic relationships within families.

Amongst the features which undeniably signalled the coming of age for a male was having a farm and a wife. To have a farm and a wife meant being a family, having a home. For farmers, it was impossible to distinguish these various estates, and most of men’s lives were devoted to achieving this happy condition. Once this was achieved, a lot of energy was then spent ensuring that marriage was a circumstance which an heir could also enjoy.

Initially, the low density populations of the Midlands made it difficult for men to find marriage partners. Marriage often occurred quite late in life because men needed to be economically independent before getting married (Beall 1982:115). There were economic advantages flowing from marriage, but the social importance of having a wife was initially not pressing. Living rough and single, in remote areas where social exchange was limited, there was no need of a wife who would look good, speak nicely, have good manners and generally amplify the achievements of her spouse. In short, there was no community which verified the importance of marriage and gave it social loading (meaning). As population density rose, villages were formed and a community was built up, so the importance of marriage grew. This was evident in three ways: for men, marriage became a symbolic moment when they passed
unquestionably into adulthood; for emerging family dynasties, marriage spoke of reproductive possibility and the perpetuation of the family line; for demographically limited communities, marriage offered promise of continuity and the prospect of nourishing local institutions and activities with new blood. Settler masculinity demanded that men accept responsibility not just for siring offspring, but for carrying forward the family name.

By 1880, if not long before, marriage became the socially sanctioned place of sexual intercourse. The custom of early settlers to cohabit with Africans was by 1880 publicly considered unacceptable and social proscription against any sexual liaison with Africans grew. White men continued to have sex with black women but mostly in secret. In some rare cases, unions became settled and were formalised. This appears to have been more frequent in the earlier than the later period. The growing social cohesion of the Natal gentry predicated on racial exclusivity and the elaboration of a racist discourse began to stigmatise such unions (Dubow 1989).

For farmers, having land was a prerequisite for establishing a family. Land grants secured the earliest settlers. Those who committed themselves to the land were generally able to expand their holdings (which were initially too small for profitable farming) by buying land cheaply from those who departed for the towns. The Nicholsons (Byrne settlers) were notable in this regard (Nicholson 1986). A second way into land ownership was to make money by non-agricultural means (prospecting and transport-riding were the most lucrative). It should be added that many farms were not worked for lack of capital and it took windfall profits from prospecting, or hard-won profits from transport-riding to begin operations. Amongst the most notable in this category were the McKenzies and Moors. In the same category were the Sinclairs. They were kin of the McKenzies in Scotland: Duncan McKenzie (snr) having married Margaret Sinclair. Donald Sinclair (Margaret’s brother) made the money he needed to buy his Dargle farm by transporting mining equipment to Barberton (Sinclair interview 1993).

Later immigrants often made use of family money in Britain to obtain land. One of the most prominent and enduring cases was that of Sir Henry Kimber, whose great-grandchildren still occupy one of the early family farms. He was a London businessman who became fabulously wealthy, owning land in Oklahoma, Texas, Tasmania, South Africa and Britain. He was a parliamentarian and was created baronet in 1904. In the 1880s he was chairman of the Natal Land and Colonization Company and used this position to buy farms in Natal on which he settled his son, P D Kimber, in 1887 (Kimber interview 1994). P D became a prominent farmer, buying the present family farm, Maritzdaal, from Duncan McKenzie in 1889. Another case was that of Herbert W Cross, who in 1896 came to Natal to farm. His grandfather bought him a 1 500 acre farm at Nottingham Road. In due course, like his neighbours, he sent his son to Michaelhouse (Cross interview 1993). At the turn of the cen-
The Morpews and Solomons came to South Africa. Owen Solomon inherited money from his grandfather and mother and utilised this to set up near Howick (Solomon interview 1992). Jeff Morphew established himself in the Dargle in 1901 with money borrowed from or given by his father. When he died, prematurely at age 41 in 1917, he owned 7,824 acres of prime Midland farming land.

Money obtained through marriage offered another way of acquiring land. This was one of the reasons that marriages were carefully arranged. William James Fly was ‘indentured’ to Charles Smythe in 1881. In 1886 he left his employ and with his wife farmed independently. In 1888 she died in childbirth (Child 1973:131) Fly married again, this time the daughter of a wealthy local family. He was thus able to buy a 2,000-acre farm at Elandskop (Fly interview 1992). Laurie Christie, who farmed at Creighton, was similarly enabled by marriage (Christie interview 1993).

Historically, marriages have been a vehicle (via marriage settlements) for the transfusion of wealth between families (Stone 1981:84). While arranged marriages were uncommon, it was not infrequent for financial concerns to be central to this civil contract. There were few impetuous, love-driven unions in the period, which testifies to the power of family considerations in determining marriage. In the early period, marriages between two brothers and two sisters were common. Among the reasons for this were the shortage of women and the practical difficulty of courting in sparsely settled regions. Some men circumvented these problems by arranging marriages: the Smith brothers, W.K. and John, arranged with a shipping agent to marry two of the Taylor sisters, whom they met as they arrived in Durban and married within a month (Smith interview 1992). More often than not, geography had a lot to do with the phenomenon. In remote areas where there were few families, marriages between families were logical. Familiarity made them feasible and considerations of economy fanned them. In the remote and thinly populated Impendhle district, for example, the Allwright brothers, Laurie and William, married the daughters of Laurens, a farmer near by (Morrell interview 1992). Similarly the Alcock brothers of Bulwer, Fred and Len, married the Barton sisters (Daphne Pennefather interview 1992). In the Richmond area, among the earliest settlers were the Nicholson brothers, John Duggleby and William, who arrived in Natal having recently married the sisters, Harriet and Florence Harrow from Hampshire (Gordon 1988:6). The pattern was followed by another prominent Richmond family, when John and J.W.T. Marwick married the McIntosh sisters (Coulson 1990:200). Apart from geography, the consideration of wealth could lead families to joint marriage. The Mingay brothers, Herbert and Ernest, married the Wilkinson sisters. They had owned land in Edendale next to (or with (this is unclear)) the sisters’ brother, Walter. The Wilkinson sisters were blacksmiths and also traders and they moved into the Polela area at the same time as the Mingay brothers, who bought farms, a hotel and store. Although there is
no definite evidence, the facts suggest that the marriage facilitated accumulation by the Wilkinson and the Mingays. When Agnes MacFarlane of the wealthy Ixopo farming family married William Foster in the early 1870s it brought together the two largest landowners in the Lufafa Road area (Agnes Pennefather interview 1992).

The attachment of the Midland families to ‘home’ (that is, the United Kingdom) was and remains one of their defining features. This was not an unambiguous phenomenon since tensions began to surface ever more powerfully between colonial and metropolitan affiliations (see chapters 4, 6). Yet even as a Natal or local Midlands identity was forged, the attachment for home was scarcely reduced. Patrick McKenzie (grand-nephew of Duncan McKenzie), growing up in Natal in the 1930s and 1940s, was brought up to think that he was half Scottish and half Irish (Pat McKenzie interview 1993). In the 1940s so successful had this practice been that a group photograph taken at Pietermaritzburg’s Royal Show showed that they were ‘still indistinguishable from their counterparts in the home counties’ (Laband & Haswell 1988:70).

The connection with the British Isles was carefully fostered. Those who could afford it continued to send their sons to prestigious public schools rather than the local ones (though this practice seems to have died by 1900). The Greenes went to Lancing, Hathorns to Malvern, Tathams to Marlborough, Davises to Loretto and Wycombe Abbey (Francis interview 1992). Visits to Britain that seemed closer to pilgrimages were common. Architectural styles, interior decoration, the layouts of gardens were all consciously cultivated to evoke the material conditions of metropolitan life (McCracken & McCracken 1990). And of course, the institutions discussed in this study bore the mark of their British counterparts strongly as well.

In some families the attachment to ‘home’ was idiosyncratic, some would say, eccentric. The Sinclair family at Dargle lived together on adjacent farms, spoke only Gaelic to one another, controlled their sheep with collie dogs, and never adopted the standard Natal farmer dress of khaki. As Donald Sinclair put it, ‘Everything was done as it was in Scotland’ (Sinclair interview 1993). Among the McKenzies, Gaelic remained in use for some time. The story told to illustrate this is of an Indian labourer lost in mist at Nottingham Road. Seeing a figure before him, he enquired his way, first in English, then in Zulu. When he received no response, he tried in Gaelic and received an immediate reply! Another family tale to the same effect was narrated to me by Patrick McKenzie: ‘The McKenzies speak to Zulus in Zulu, to Indians in Indian and they make a damned good attempt at English as well’ (Pat McKenzie interview 1993).

Another family of Scottish origin, the Smythes of Nottingham Road, also operated as a clan. As Pat Smythe recalls for the late 1910s and early 1920s, ‘Family ties were tight –
maybe it was a Scottish clan thing, but it was real’ (Smythe interview 1993). Smythe married Margaret King in 1876. Daughter of one of the first Nottingham Road farmers, she was beautiful, but ‘socially below him’ (Reed interview 1993). Smythe himself gave the reasons for marrying her: she would ‘make me an excellent wife, she is so good and cheerful, makes the best of everything, and I know she will be the greatest assistance to me in farming, she knows so much about stock and is a much better judge than most of the farmers about here and certainly far better than I am’ (Child 1973:71). Margaret worked tirelessly on the farm, bore 14, and brought up 12 children. At Christmas, up to fifty members of the extended family would gather at the family farm, ‘Strathearn’. Initially these events were organised by Margaret, but later when she was old enough, the eldest daughter, Euphemia ‘Effie’ Janet took over. Margaret ceased accompanying Charles to public functions and here too Effie took over (Gordon 1988:30). Given that Smythe was a prominent public figure (prime minister in 1905–06) this was a source of gossip. Long before Margaret died (in 1924) Effie was playing the leading role in family affairs. She wrote a news-sheet which included news of the Smythes and district gossip and sent it to family members as far afield as Scotland. She never married, yet became effective head of the family because she was the oldest, clever and powerful. She was impervious to criticism and had ‘a very strong character’. Asked why she never married, she is reputed to have said, ‘I have never found a man good enough to be the father of my children’ (Reed interview 1993).

The development of family identity went hand in hand with close working relationships within families. Large families, particularly those with many sons, were often the site of close economic cooperation. The custom was for each son to have a farm, and in many instances (for example the Smythes, Nicholsons, Moors) these were close to, or bordering on, one another. Depending on the agricultural activity pursued, machinery, labour, collective buying and marketing, financing and technical expertise was shared (Agnes Pennefather interview 1992; Barbara McKenzie interview 1993). Similarly, assistance was provided by fathers to sons and vice versa. More distant family could also be called upon for support. When Otto Solomon was setting up his farm at Otto’s Bluff he hired land from his great-aunt (Solomon interview 1992).

It was exceptionally difficult to operate economically, or to survive socially, without a family (nuclear or extended). To be inserted into the Midland community required family location. Being single was thus frowned upon. Unmarried sons and daughters were not favoured in wills. On the death of a spouse both widow and widower preferred to remarry. When Captain Andrew Green was killed in the First World War, his wife (without a local extended family) found it impossible to survive, and in a short while married the Maritzburg College teacher Oberle (Andrew Green interview 1992). This need could be avoided if one had extended family: when the youngest McKenzie brother, John, died in
1894 while transport-riding in the Transvaal, his two children were taken in by his brother Peter at Himeville. His wife, daughter of prominent Nottingham Road farmer Joseph Raw, either went to live with her parents or her brother-in-law, Duncan. In 1905 she married one of Charles Smythe’s sons, David. Her story is one of being comfortably spliced into three of the largest and most influential families in the Midlands. When husbands lost their wives (frequently in childbirth) the tendency was to remarry soon afterwards. This was the case of W J Fly and of Herbert Mingay.

**Women in the family**

In previous chapters women have been discussed in terms of their loyalty to husband and the family name (chapter 4) and of their participation in public affairs (chapter 7). In this section we see them in their family contexts. In the process issue is taken with some generalised statements about families being institutions of female exploitation.

‘In so far as women’s work and experience has been entered into it (“the universe of ideas”), it has been on terms decided by men and because it has been approved by men’ (Smith 1989:4). It is furthermore frequently argued by some feminists that the family is the location of direct male power over women; her body, her time, her reproductive capacity, her ability to work. Within the family, it is argued, wives are hidden from history, excluded from the public realm and confined to a private prison where their labour is underrated and unpaid, where their lives are lived at the whim of men and in the service of men (cf Delphy & Leonard 1992). Instrumental and conspiratorial views of men in the family deny female agency and ignore class and racial factors. Such representations, furthermore, do not accord with the place and history of women in ONF families which is unfolded below.

Women in the Midlands have not been silent – there are many diaries and books (Gordon 1970; Gordon 1988) which testify to their vocality. This is in accord with trends elsewhere, where educated middle-class women made their worlds, and spoke of them (Le Guin 1990). Their voices were seldom strident or public. It was only in such rare cases as that of the Colenso sisters that women took public positions, spoke out forcefully and refused to fit patriarchal prescriptions of feminine deportment. But even here, shelter was sometimes sought behind a nom de plume (Wylde 1994).

If one approached the women of the Midland families with the intention of finding the subaltern, no doubt one would find evidence of rebellion, protest and subversion. Such popular projects often invoke woman as always dominated by men, always struggling
against the bonds of subjugation. But this is not essential woman. There is no essential woman. Women acquire, protest, are enslaved by, a range of feminine identities in the same way as men display and are located by and in different masculinities. In this section the focus will be on the women of the Midland families, those people who are mentioned in wills, who appear in official documents and minutes of meetings. We will be looking at the audible and visible women of the Midlands. But were these women representative of the wives and daughters of the Midland families, the grandmothers, aunts and nieces? My impression is that by and large they were. An examination of more than one hundred deceased estates reveals that women were not neglected in wills and were active themselves in producing testamentary documents. In some spheres they were treated unequally, but they were not ignored. And in interviews with women I did not get the impression that I was dealing with a downtrodden class. The women I spoke to were proud of being ONF, forceful, opinionated, spunky. As Ruth Pennington (born in 1898) put it, the women and girls of the Midlands were all 'individuals'. 'They had a strong sense of themselves and DID things' (Pennington interview 1992). My informants put this down partly to their attendance at elite schools. Girls were taught to be individuals. Nancy Ogilvie remembers that her education in Pietermaritzburg in the late 1900s and early 1910s emphasised sexual equality. Marching and sports were stressed, and there was a robust and energetic attitude to life (Ogilvie interview 1992).

On only one sad occasion did I hear a different story. Madge Ireland was 96 when, in 1992, I interviewed her in a Pietermaritzburg old age home. She told me she was the second oldest of eight children born to wagon-maker Benjamin Ireland. The family lived in West Street, Pietermaritzburg. Her mother was home-bound, uninvolved in her husband's business and with little role in her children's education. She ran the home and, with the help of an aged African woman who lived with them for many years, ensured that the family unit functioned efficiently. This involved having family lunch every day – Benjamin being able to attend because his business was nearby. Madge went to school at the Convent, but did not enjoy it. 'I wasn't too strong,' she said. She got sick often and didn't enjoy sports. She had a few close friends who visited her at home, but she was solitary in her habits, enjoying needlework, and card games such as patience (solitaire).

After finishing school Madge worked as a governess on farms in Estcourt and Mooi River. She had no formal training, but a sister who worked at Merchiston Boys Preparatory School gave her tips. She hated the life. 'Estcourt was too cold and lonely,' she said. After a few years she returned to Pietermaritzburg 'to help mother' (Ireland interview 1992).

Madge never married. When I interviewed her, she was aware of a brother alive somewhere in Natal, but she had no sense of family place or of family support. Midway through my
prepared list of questions, she said to me, ‘Haven’t I told you enough?’ I left her then, a lonely, sad woman, who felt her story not to be worth telling.

Madge was not a ‘farm girl’, nor was she ONF. And she was single. In effect, she had no family to provide networks or a social base or to give her the identity which could be translated into resources and opportunities. She is not representative of the resourceful women of the Midland farming families who put their families first, who considered it their duty to serve the family, whose joys were obtained in the achievements of family. The version of their history which they want recorded is that which Ruth Gordon found in the diaries of Ellen McLeod, Byrne settler, whose family ‘clung to the soil through almost intolerable hardships, winning through to happiness and eventual prosperity’ (Gordon:1970:1). In this section it is the voices of these women that I shall be listening to, and interpreting.

The basis for the confidence and satisfaction of ONF women lay in their place within the family. Michael Gilding, in his study of the Australian family in a similar period, argues that women had little option other than to marry or go into domestic service. Other options which allowed women independent choices rested on access to independent money which few women enjoyed (Gilding 1991:49). In some respects this was true of Natal, though domestic service was seldom an option, being the domain of black men and women. But many ONF women did have money (even if they did not inherit it or gain access to it until they were well into adulthood). This is evidenced by the fact that many women did not marry (Beall 1982:117). Though most ONF women did marry, this was scarcely an indication of women in thrall to existing marriage customs. Why did women, by and large voluntarily, put themselves into a social institution in which their legal rights would be limited and their status within that institution circumscribed and hierarchically below that of the husband? Let me offer just two answers: Anthony Giddens’s examination of intimacy provides one possible answer. In the nineteenth century, he argues, romantic love succeeded arranged marriages. In Natal arranged marriages (often between pairs of siblings (see section 1)) were quite common. By the 1880s arranged marriages were less common and by the twentieth century very rare. Romantic love began to form the basis of social and sexual engagement (resulting often in marriage).

Romantic or passionate love worked more powerfully as a way of organising their lives and dreams for women than men. It kept them in the ‘home’ (itself a new concept which brought ideas of family, abode, children, sex and security together) where the changing relationship between parents and children affirmed the growing status of motherhood. ‘With the division of spheres (into work and home) ... the fostering of love became predominantly the task of women. Ideas about romantic love were plainly allied to women’s subordination in the home, and her relative separation from the outside world. But the
development of such ideas was also an expression of women’s power, a contradictory assertion of autonomy in the face of deprivation’ (Giddens 1992:42). It was in the context of the family that romantic love was expressed, providing ‘for a long-term life trajectory, oriented to an anticipated yet malleable future; and it creates a ‘shared history’ that helps separate out the marital relationship from other aspects of family organisation and give it a special primacy’ (Giddens 1992:45).

Another reason for women entering marriage and the family was to be found in their position within it. Women were dominant in certain areas of family life that were ceded to them by the husband, sometimes grudgingly, sometimes willingly. In a different context, Sean Field aptly describes this dominance as still being ‘defined and restricted within a patriarchal set of beliefs and practices’ (Field 1991:61). Talking about coloured working-class families in the western Cape, he continues: the general powerlessness of these women in wider society is ‘partially overcome by their ability to control and implement the bulk of the household’s practical, nurturing and moral tasks. However, these women do not have sufficient tangible power and space to explore and realise their own desires, wants, needs and interests. At the level of appearances, these families do constitute a departure from the stereotypical patriarchal model, but at the deeper level of personal power relations, these homes are still rooted within a patriarchal framework’ (Field 1991:61). Here there is a major difference, because the ONFs provided their female members with power and influence in wider society. By virtue of being ONF, women had power over black people, but they also had the confidence and resources to be purposive agents in wider society. ONF women vested themselves fully in the family, protecting it, propagating it, as though their very lives depended upon it.

Between 1880 and 1920 the role of women in the family changed in two important respects. Their involvement in farm production became less significant but their opportunities to find employment beyond the farm improved. Secondly, as the importance of social life (an integral aspect of making the ONF network function) increased, so women’s responsibilities increased.

When the settlers first began farming operations, women shared the labour. This involved actual manual labour, but also drew on their agricultural knowledge. Fanny and Harriet, wives of the Nicholson brothers, shared the manual labour with their husbands when they set up their farms in Richmond in the 1850s. In Nottingham Road, husband and wife and children of the King family shared the manual labour because local African labour was not available (Gordon:1988:10, 29). Many wives actually knew a lot more about farming than did their husbands and were thus indispensable to farming operations. Charles Smythe openly acknowledged this and he was not an exception (Morrell interview 1992). Daughters of the Midland families who grew up on the farms knew a lot about farming and
when they married eligible British emigrants they were frequently in a situation of expertise in relation to the production-side of farming (Taylor interview 1992).

In the early days, when the returns from farming were minimal and transport-riding or some other non-agricultural pursuit brought in the bulk of income, women were frequently left in charge of farms. Duncan McKenzie's mother often looked after the family farms when her sons and husband were away. She had the Zulu nickname Umfazi N'doda ('A woman who was a man') (McKenzie [n d]:8).

Women quite often farmed alone as a result of the death of their husbands. In some cases this was brute necessity (Gordon 1988:3) but in others it was a choice. When P D Simmons died, his wife, Maude, continued with the farming operations. She chose not to remarry and managed to 'scratch a living' with the advice of her friend and neighbour, George Richards, and the assistance of a farm apprentice. She farmed with pedigree shorthorn and thoroughbred horses, showing and winning prizes at the Royal Show (Taylor interview 1992).

It remained true for the whole of this period that many of the farms run by the Midland families could not be run efficiently without the support of the wife. For some twenty years (from 1900 onward) Aubrey Jonsson farmed at Mooi River, on the 2 500 acre farm 'Dartington'. When his wife died, he found he could not continue and sold up, moving to a smaller farm much closer to Pietermaritzburg (Jonsson interview 1992).

It was, however, the exception rather than the rule that women farmed alone or took an equal or major share of responsibility in farming. Increasingly, their role on the farm was defined in narrower terms. They were given responsibility for vegetable gardens (generally for domestic consumption) and poultry (pin money and domestic production). In some families women retained an interest and influence in dairying, but this changed as well. The trend in Europe was for the dairy industry to be masculinised. In the nineteenth century, dairy work was generally done by women. By the early twentieth century the work had been taken over by men, partly as a consequence of mechanisation and the spread of single-sex agricultural colleges but also as a result of changing gender discourses around 'women's work' (Bourke 1990; Sommestad 1994).

The importance of women's contribution to production varied from family to family. In the bigger, more prosperous families, they were financially insignificant. In the smaller families, or in families that were experiencing hard times, these activities could be vital for liquidity. It was quite common (and again a consequence of the widespread tendency of giving daughters a secondary education) for wives to undertake the bookkeeping of farming
operations. This became steadily more important as farming became more commercial. In the Smith family in Creighton, for example, the custom of the wife doing the books was into its third generation in 1992 (Smith interview 1992). Taking in boarders was another way of helping to tide a family through hard times, but this was only viable close to towns and so most families could not depend on it. But it was not uncommon for a member of the extended family (often the sister of the farmer's wife) to be set up in Pietermaritzburg to run a boarding house which provided not only a job for the sister, but also a place for family members to stay when visiting the town. This was utilised heavily by families unable to afford the heavy costs of boarding school – children went to school in Pietermaritzburg as day pupils and stayed in the boarding house of the extended family member (Daphne Pennefather interview 1992).

Another fairly common practice was for wives to run farm schools. Phillipa Smythe, wife of Charles John’s son, David, lived on the farm ‘Dalcrue’. David was a poor farmer and they were consequently not well off. Phillipa was the driving force in the family; her husband was sweet-natured, well liked but not forceful. In 1922 in order to make ends meet, Phillipa started a farm school. The venture was a major success: in 1942 it included four teachers and 50 boarding pupils. Phillipa made all the decisions about the school and, indeed, even some about family matters (Reed interview 1995).

The realm of teaching and clerical work widened as professional outlets for women during this period. From the 1870s onward the establishment of schools, especially in Pietermaritzburg, provided job opportunities for young women. From 1891, training in nursing was available at Grey’s Hospital in Pietermaritzburg (Rose 1988:183). Initially British immigrants rather than local women took up these options. It is not clear why there was a dearth of volunteers. Popular magazines like the Natal Mercury Pictorial urged young, single women to enter the professions (Beall 1982:128). One of the reasons, suggested by Shula Marks, was the morally threatening prospect of white ‘ladies’ having to nurse black men. This, it was felt, might prejudice their ‘purity of mind’ (Marks 1994:50). Another reason was poor working conditions and low levels of pay. In the rural areas, the demand for governesses or tutors persisted into the 1920s. These posts initially were filled primarily by landless men or spinsters. Later, young girls with a secondary schooling were preferred. As with boys, so it was for girls that an education in one of the ‘good’ schools – St Anne’s (Hilton), Collegiate, Epworth, St John’s (Pietermaritzburg) and St Mary’s (Richmond) – became a criterion for ONF status. Since the single-sex girls schools employed mostly female teachers, attractive jobs became available particularly in the twentieth century.

Particularly after the First World War, a host of farm girls went into teaching and nursing, notably the two daughters of James Marwick (nephew to J W Marwick of Richmond)
(Gordon 1988 124–126). In the family of Theophilus St George, Natal civil servant and, at the end of his career, Master of the Supreme Court, the entry of women into nursing and teaching in this period was astonishing. While three of the five sons went into farming, all five daughters went into nursing or teaching. Nancy, the eldest, wanted to be a governess on a farm but her mother insisted on her attending the Natal Teachers College in Pietermaritzburg. She did so in 1917–19. She then taught at schools in Greytown and Durban (Ogilvie interview 1992).

These professions gave single women some economic independence, but more than this, they were socially respectable. This had not always been the case. Remembering the first decade of the twentieth century, Ruth Pennington, recounted this anecdote: her sister wanted to be an architect but her mother said ‘No, it wasn’t done’ (Pennington interview 1992). By 1920, however, things had changed. Teaching was considered a good occupation, even though very few women at this time obtained a tertiary education. Teachers, furthermore, were considered to be good wives, and many a farmer in the twentieth century married a woman with educational qualifications (Daphne Pennefather interview 1992). While a job was more readily available, it remained true that ‘first prize’ was marriage. Most fathers insisted on it, or at least encouraged it. S B Woollatt, Principal Veterinary Surgeon of Natal and Midland farmer, believed that his daughters should ‘stay on the farm’ until they got married (Barbara McKenzie interview 1993). Mothers, on the other hand, hoped their daughters would marry well or, to use Ruth Pennington’s mother’s expression, ‘would marry a count’ and fashioned their daughters’ educations to this end (Pennington interview 1992).

Another change, just as important, also occurred during this period. Between 1880 and 1920 the women’s role and place in the family underwent transformation: they became responsible for the social engagements of the family and thereby, for its prestige. In the process, they became ladies.

The family home became increasingly important throughout this period. In terms of architecture, houses were expanded, and gentrified. Gardens were laid out, for those who could afford them, with English trees and plants like elm and hyacinth. Houses could accommodate many visitors and became the location for parties – tennis and croquet, dinner and luncheon functions. ONF women were absolutely indispensable to this development and this gave them considerable influence and importance. As Michael Gilding puts it for colonial Australia: ‘Such social duties promoted the cohesiveness and organisation of the colonial elite’ (Gilding 1991:51). This development was part of a transition described earlier as the move from private to public patriarchy (Hearn 1992). Women were now prominent in representing the family and far from being invisible. Making a home to be proud of in
adverse conditions conferred status from family and community (Strobel 1987:381).

Becoming a lady involved acquiring a ‘good’ education. During the period under discussion it became automatic for girls to be sent to school (as detailed in chapter 3) and, for those who could afford it, to finishing school in Europe (Pennington interview 1992). Apart from being educated, speaking properly, dressing well, and knowing how to dance, play the piano and other popular leisure-time activities, ladies also had to manage the household economy. They were not expected to do the work themselves, but were generally charged with commanding the establishment of domestic servants.

While the social role of women in the family changed, expectations of biological reproduction (by husband and wife alike) remained a central concern. In Europe, family sizes were declining (Wrigley 1978:151). In Natal, large families with eight or more children were common in the nineteenth century but decreasingly so in the twentieth. In Australia, from the 1870s onward, birthrates dropped and abortion rates rose, as women began to practice birth control (Gilding 1991:67, 70). There are a number of possible reasons for declining fertility. Amongst those that specifically refer to women are the following: numerous children strained the household budget and women, having responsibility for that budget, responded by limiting their fertility; women began to define their role not just as mothers but as carers of children who required special attention (and were now regarded as more than just potential carriers of the family name or as social security for old age) (Stone 1981:74; Davidoff & Hall 1987:343).

Up to the 1850s there prevailed an understanding that a child was an immature adult to be used to the economic advantage of the parents. In mid-century, this changed such that the child was no longer expected to earn for the parents. The reverse occurred and ‘parents cheerfully ma[d]e a heavy economic and emotional investment in their children in order to launch them successfully into the world, with little or no expectation of return in their old age, except in terms of psychic satisfaction. Not surprisingly, it was among the bourgeoisie and landed elite, where economic transfers between parents and children had always been downward, that this great emotional shift was first experienced’ (Stone 1981:74). The emphasis on child as child led to the development of women’s specialisation in child-minding, leaving economic production increasingly to men. This transition can be expressed another way: from the 1850s there was a shift ‘from patriarchal authority to domestic affection ... by the 1850s the father’s authority had been dissolved in paeans to loving domesticity ... This veneration of motherhood was more substantial than the waft of sentimentality that blew through nineteenth-century culture. It signaled a new and important family function. Most directly, mother love was the lynchpin in a new method of socialising children. A mother’s tender ministration was actually a substitute for patriarchal will-breaking’ (Ryan 1981:231–232).
The changes indicated above were evident in Natal. ‘Colonial parents were beginning in the ‘eighties to make less exacting demands on their children, to insist less on “moral deportment” and to allow them to discover recreation for themselves’ (Hattersley 1940:177–78). Schools were taking over the tasks of inculcating good values and teaching manners. But at an earlier stage of child-rearing, mothers were being forced, at the turn of the century, to re-evaluate the well-established tradition of letting African ‘nannies’ take the major responsibility of childcare. In a 1906 text Dr A L Robinson admonished settler mothers. ‘The practice of handing over baby and “comforter” to a small native nurseboy or a dusky maid-of-all-work during the busy hours of the day cannot be too strongly condemned’ (quoted in Dyer 1990:68). On the farm, it appears as though little heed was paid to such warnings, but this did not detract from a situation where women were having to take on increasingly complex managerial functions in the household. Looking after the children, with all that entailed, plus social occasion and guests were time-consuming tasks. In addition to these, most women were also involved in budgeting. In a persuasive article Ann Whitehead (1984) has argued that in the area of income distribution in the household women were subjected to an additional burden, having to sublimate their own needs and desires in order first to meet those of husband and children. In addition, argues Whitehead, women’s earnings were frequently swallowed up in the household budget. She concludes that insofar as running the household went, the home was not a place of female autonomy. A similar finding is made by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1988), who examined the position of gentlewomen in the plantation economy of the American South. She concluded that white women were ultimately dependent upon white men. More than this, they were controlled by their husbands. In the sphere of production, some scholars come to similar conclusions. Participation in production did not necessarily confer decision-making power or influence. Women who participated in production generally had no control over the resources central to the running of the household and therefore were effectively powerless (Ditz 1986:127). On the other hand, it is observed that women were important in household production and since household harmony and productivity could be damaged if they did not cooperate, they enjoyed some power by virtue of this. The evidence at my disposal reveals both these trends. Take the case of Barbara McKenzie (née Woollatt), for example, who was involved in her father’s cheese factory. She did the books and in the late 1920s even had responsibility for the day-to-day running of the factory. Yet her father always had the final say and she was never permitted to work with the cattle (Barbara McKenzie interview 1993). Similarly, in the Smith household at Creighton female supervision of finances did not give women control over decision-making. As Raymond Smith put it, ‘The women saved the money and the men spent it’ (Smith interview 1992).

But many ONF women became part of an inheritance chain which transferred wealth across generations. In this process they gained access to independent means which gave
them room for initiative and manoeuvre. Apart from inheritance, many wives who were ONF in their own right, had the capacity to borrow money and enact schemes on their own. Owen Solomon's wife, for example, decided that she wanted a new house. She owned the farm and, in 1926, she used it as security to borrow £2 000. To pay the amount back, she ran fowls, pigs and took in paying guests (Solomon interview 1992).

One cannot make an assessment of women in the family only by measuring their power vis-à-vis their fathers or husbands in the economic spheres of production, distribution and consumption. There are other important factors to be taken into account. Firstly, many women had resources and skills of their own. Secondly, much of women's power was in the area of culture, leisure-time use and the conspicuous display of class and racial identity. Thirdly, as I have already argued, men needed wives to make families. The family unit needed husband and wife. The dependence was mutual.

With the family being an institution of such great importance it is not surprising to find unmarried women remaining, where possible, within the family. They sometimes commanded places of social importance. The Nicholson spinsters, for example, kept the two branches of the family (at Richmond and Underberg) together by hosting family get-togethers. They virtually functioned as dynastic patriarchs (Nicholson interview 1992). More commonly, unmarried women occupied positions of stability and security but with little prospect or status. In such circumstances they were given the tasks of assisting the aged or infirm and of helping with the household. In the house of Thomas William Gold (b 1889) (eleventh child of William Gold of Ixopo) this was the reality. An elder sister, Georgina, was a widow with limited independent means and little independent earning capacity. She kept house for Thomas, a bachelor. She did not enjoy the lonely life with her brother, particularly as he was disturbed. His death in 1926 was by suicide. In answer to a question in the hearing concerning a family dispute over his estate, she said: 'I did want to leave him, I wished to obtain the position of housekeeper elsewhere. I wanted to be independent ... My brother asked me not to leave him so long as he was a bachelor and he promised to pay me for housekeeping.' 'In addition to being Thomas' housekeeper I was also his companion and I did many personal things for him such as mending his clothes.'

The transformation of ONF women to ladies was assisted by public portrayal. Women were revered, becoming symbols of purity. In the South African War, for example, the MC school magazine paid tribute to the women.

No one will ever be able to calculate all that Natal women have suffered and done during the last twelve months, for much of it was in secret, but there is evidence enough in the number of ladies' committees enrolled all over the Colony, and the amount of good...
work they accomplished, for the sick and wounded and for the thousands of refugees ruthlessly driven across our borders, that their charity and self-abnegation knew no limit (*Pietermaritzburg College Magazine*, 1(5) (December 1900):6).

In terms of this quote, it is easy to see why Jo Beall comes to the conclusion that ‘white women were to be the symbols of the authority and superiority of the white ruling class. They were urged to maintain their purity, morality and domesticity and were discouraged from thinking or, at least, from expressing their views’ (Beall 1982:134). And Ann Stoler comes to similar conclusion, though she holds white men responsible because they ‘positioned European women as the bearers of a redefined colonial morality’ (Stoler 1989:640). But the situation was more complex than that. The white women had not just had the status of ‘lady’ thrust upon them. They accepted it enthusiastically as testimony of the enduring influence of ‘home’ and their success in preserving their class position in the face of adversity. A wife rooted in a farming family had three reputations to defend: her own, her family’s and that of her class. In a fascinating letter signed from ‘Wife of Walter J Slatter’ this reputation is stoutly defended.

Pardon my troubling you with what may appear as trivial a case but which I as representative of the Grey Town wives look upon my self to use as a test case – it is a known fact that on a farm the mistress employs the native girls and if necessary punishes them if she see fit with the consent of their fathers. Never have I had any trouble until last week, when TWO OF MY GIRLS WENT TO COURT AND COMPLAINED of me. I had taken them into my home - beaten them about the head and face. This is absolutely untrue - every word - what happened was this: I returned from Grey Town - saw neglect of duty, not feeling well pushed our girl away and scolded her.

This is the first time a mistress in my position has been summoned to court - it being deemed sufficient that the master should do this. I maintain that if this is adhered to women will not appear and the case be dis .... (illegible) and false witness (?) be condoned. If Mr Fannin had been here no servant of mine would have done such a thing and more over for this made up late of utter falsehood a reprimand would have been given to them they would never have forgotten ... a wholesome dread of the magistrate would obviate all these petty annoyances to which we future mistresses will be subjected.

Mrs Slatter concluded by apologising for writing but said ‘how deeply I feel being made to appear in a court full of native police and other natives – when my husband could be asked to be allowed to save me this – and no satisfaction obtained in any shape or form – but being lowered (in) my servants eyes’.31.
Thus far ONF women have basically been treated in a undifferentiated way. There were, however, significant divisions amongst them. Initially, they came from widely differing class backgrounds. Another important difference was that the early settlers developed a type of rough frontier femininity which was superseded by more genteel femininities. To use Connell’s distinction, the frontier femininity, which I describe below, was overtaken by an ‘emphasised femininity’, which prevailed because other femininities, for example those of madwomen, maiden aunts, prostitutes, midwives and witches, were kept out of the media and the public eye (Connell 1987:188). A femininity shaped around the Midland lady emerged as the primary femininity. It included aspects of frontier femininity which derived from the ongoing relatedness (if not direct involvement) of farm wives to agricultural production. The emphasised femininity was fluid, taking different forms in different places and at different times and requires a study of its own for proper sense to be made of it.

Women on the Midland farms, particularly those who settled in the early period and who were forced to share hardship and labour, with little time or energy to be given to notions of social station and grandeur, developed a strong sense of independence, which went along with a dislike for social pretence and the valuing of qualities of tenacity and toughness. At the other end of the scale were the later arrivals, women who expected to be mistresses of well-appointed households with servants and a strict regime of mealtimes, child upbringing and a generous schedule of social engagements. Life on a farm forced some compromise in an upper-middle-class model which had the ring of the Raj as well as of London to it. Distance and the nature of the transport network meant that social occasions were not so grand or frequent as some wives would have wanted. The lack of proficiency in Zulu meant that the kitchen staff could not be trained to a standard expected. (Many families thus employed Indian menservants to overcome this problem.) But nor could the hardy frontier model of femininity survive intact either. As the Midland community was moulded, so accommodation was made to the demands of femininity which emanated from Pietermaritzburg and more distantly from the metropole. New responsibilities centring on house and family were given to women. In the social institutions that developed wives increasingly were expected to undertake tasks of catering and support derived from naturalised notions of the female role. Women were also expected to be sociable, to play tennis, bridge, or the piano. They were expected, and expected themselves, to look good at public functions. They were also naturally expected to support their husbands and promote the family name.

One of the most colourful of the early settlers was Sarah Jane Bryant. Her father, a ship’s captain, died when she was ten (c 1840). At an early age she was driving wagons and working with Zulu men. She was one of the first settlers in Greytown in the 1850s and started the Commercial Hotel there c 1860. She eventually married a local farmer, Henry Plant. She was known for her strong will and independence. She had a ‘fiery temper, sharp
tongue and managing nature' and was a 'dragon of a mother-in-law' (Gordon 1988:20). Less extreme was the more private Margaret Smythe. She lacked public visibility, but in her way she continued the version of femininity which made little concession to nicety – she was an excellent shot and good farmer as well as being a very busy mother (Gordon 1988:30).

These women may have been the minority, but they were not exceptions. In the McKenzie family, there was a tradition of very confident, independent and strong women. Pat McKenzie described them as ‘liberated’. In about 1890 Donald, the eldest of Duncan Snr’s sons, married his cousin Margaret Thomson, who was twenty years his junior. She spent her honeymoon travelling to Giant’s Castle, Barberton and Lourenco Marques, and on arriving back in Durban, had a miscarriage on the wharf. She could drive a carriage and four (horses). Margaret Campbell McKenzie (one of Duncan Jnr’s daughters) never married. She farmed and was called Nkosaan by local Africans. Duncan’s eldest daughter was a nurse. Another daughter drove ammunition trucks and ambulances in Flanders during the First World War (Pat McKenzie interview 1993).

On the other side were the wives of the wealthy and the titled. Andrew Green, who grew up in Mooi River, remembers the wives of the district’s elite (many of whom were, or had been, senior army officers) as being ‘very snooty’ (Green interview 1992). While these women made farm wives conscious of their place, they also instilled in their children attitudes that were ‘terribly proper’. Ruth Pennington describes these as ‘very Victorian’, saying that it was unthinkable to have sex before marriage. Ruth herself admitted that she did not know (had not heard) swear words and accepted that any cosmetic like lipstick or powder was unbecoming of a young girl (Pennington interview 1992).

Yet by the turn of the century, the gap between farm girls and wives with good breeding was closing. Take Dorothy Simmons for example. Daughter of wealthy farmer P D Simmons, she was born in 1897. She went as a boarder to Maris Stella School in Durban. Thereafter she went to finishing school in England. On her return she married, and with money left to her by her rich English aunts, bought the farm ‘Stoney Hall’. She knew much more about farming than her husband and effectively ran it (Taylor interview 1992).

There were a number of factors which promoted the development of a more inclusive, integrated femininity in the Midlands. Prime amongst them were the developing education system and the custom of sending daughters to school at the single-sex boarding schools. Within the family too a more standardised approach developed as parents consciously began to cast themselves as members of respectable middle-class, patrifocal institutions. In these families girls were not just respected; they were expected to represent the
family, to spread and honour the family name and, in return, were rewarded with a place of belonging and identity. This was not just nominal – daughters were generally treated well, if not always equally, in the distribution of family wealth at times of parental death. Remembering her own childhood, Agnes Foster of Ixopo said that she had never felt disadvantaged. 'I was treated the same as everybody' (Agnes Pennetfather interview 1994). And it was this treatment, and the importance of having a family belonging that allowed women who married into farming families easily to take on the identity of that family, and in the process to grant a secondary importance to their family of origin. Ruth Pennington’s mother was Ethel Vanderplank, daughter of John Vanderplank, early Natal pioneer, who owned vast tracts of land obtained from the Boer Republic before the British occupation of Natal (Morgans [n d]). Her mother first married Lawrence Frampton, a racehorse breeder and Greytown farmer. He died in 1900 and she remarried Arthur Hutchinson (Standard Bank manager in Greytown). Interestingly, Ruth constructed her identity around the two old farming families. She said that she considered ‘herself a Vanderplank, and very much a Pennington, never a Frampton’. She went further to stress her loyalty and affiliation: ‘Penningtons were my life from the cradle really’ (Pennington interview 1992).

A third factor was the development and expansion of farming. As arable farming expanded and labour forces grew, farming became more market oriented. In the early days it had been man and wife, side by side, against the elements, eking out an existence. By the late nineteenth century agriculture was more businesslike with sons involved in the farming and wives more concerned with the sphere of social reproduction. Women played less of a role in production and so the strong, independent, manure-splattered depiction of women gave way to a more sedate and maternal image.

An impression which readers might have received from the foregoing is that the family was a place of idyllic harmony, or at least of little conflict. This is unlikely to have been true, and I attempt here to disrupt that image. Kura Taylor, wife of William Palframan of ‘Watermead’, Underberg, shocked the district by leaving her husband after bearing him four children. She was a farm girl herself and had grown up in the district. Underberg had a harsh climate, was socially isolated and the Palframans had difficulty in making ends meet. Kura was very frustrated, artistic and volatile. She left and went to New Zealand. It was not that William was an unkind or mean husband, it was just that the conditions were extremely harsh (Phyllis Palframan interview 1992). Phyllis (nee Mingay) had difficult memories about her parents’ marriage. She spoke of her mother, Nancy Mate, who was born in Durban in 1902 and who married Wilfred Mingay (b 1892). She had no say in farming operations but was queen of the home. The Mingays were well off so she had no need to engage in money-making pursuits. She was involved in garden clubs, the Women’s Institute and stock sales. She hosted tennis parties at ‘Inglenook’, the family farm. As
Phyllis put it, 'She flew the Mingay flag in the district.' Though in general terms she was happy, Phyllis had some resentments. Her concluding comments were perhaps the most revealing and suggested that the 'resentments' might have been more serious: 'But people didn’t get divorced in those days, women had no other options.'

What is so unusual about the Palframan testimony is that it breaches the blanket of silence usually cast over such matters. One has to dig deep into family history to find examples of the more volatile and tempestuous state of marriage. In the 1880s and 1890s, for example, the history of a bad marriage in Ixopo is recorded. It involved a drunken husband who beat his wife often. He eventually tried to kill her and then committed suicide (Christison 1986:35). Another tale is of Henry Gold (of Ixopo) trying to seduce his sister-in-law, while his wife was in labour! (Christison 1986:56).

While divorce was exceedingly rare, marital disharmony obviously existed. Novelist Julian Barnes captures the form that dissent could take:

> The village women managed their husbands. They fed them, waited on them, cleaned and washed for them, deferred to them; they accepted men’s interpretation of the world. In return, they got money, a roof, security, children and irreversible promotion in the hierarchy of the village. This seemed a good enough deal; and having got it, they patronised their husbands behind their backs, calling them children, talking of their little ways (Barnes 1986:77).

Living on a farm often entailed isolation and periods of loneliness. As Mary Ryan puts it, isolation could ‘mire women in a world that was remote from the public spheres where men continued to wield power’ (Ryan 1981:240–241). Life on a farm was also harsh, especially for women unused to it. Freely available domestic labour reduced the load, but some found the crudity of the environment and the need to keep a respectable house almost intolerable burdens. Genteel women with resources of their own, like Florence Woollatt, thought Africa barbaric. They evaded the most testing challenges of home and children by employing, in addition to African house servants, English nurses, and later governesses, to look after the children (Barbara McKenzie interview 1992).

Beyond the confines of family, women could also feel alienated or excluded. Women often entered the social arena on the terms of men. While tennis clubs and a variety of other clubs which they established themselves operated as safe enclaves in which their own routines and rhythms predominated, they were, as wives and daughters, also called upon or expected to participate in organisations dominated by men, for example the agricultural societies (see chapter 7). Indeed, it was not just that wives were expected by their husbands...
to assist in catering and in various other social roles, the wives themselves considered it part of their duty (as ladies) to involve themselves in their husbands’ public activities. In a bizarre episode, the wives of certain prominent members of the Mooi River Farmers Association appealed for the right to cater at shows and other agricultural functions. As early as 1908 P D Simmons unsuccessfully requested that the ‘Ladies of the District’ be allowed to provide lunch on the day of the Christmas stock sale. George Richards made a similar request in July 1914, again unsuccessfully. The turbulence of war made the district’s women more forceful. In August they had a meeting among themselves in order to raise funds for the war effort. The winds of change appear to have had some effect. In July 1915 women were for the first time allowed to become members of the Mooi River FA, though at the end of that year and in the following year they were still denied permission to cater at stock sales.

The behaviour of the Mooi River FA committee in denying women the right to cater must have been very galling when such tasks were routinely granted to women in other AS/FAs. In the Umvoti AS, for example, women were considered to be an indispensable part of the organisation. There as early as 1911 they had their own committee, were allowed to be full members, and took the task of catering at all functions. Time and again they were singled out for special praise at annual meetings. In 1912 the president noted that functions had netted £206. ‘The energy and enthusiasm displayed by the ladies ... was testified by the huge success ... and they deserved unstinted praise for their efforts to further the interests of the Society.’ In 1916 the president spoke again on the issue: ‘I tender my sincere thanks for the enthusiastic and wholehearted manner in which they have assisted the Society.’ In sharp contrast to the fortunes of their counterparts in Mooi River, the Umvoti women were given ‘control of the Refreshment Tent during the two days’ Show’.

Women had very strong ties to family, which gave their lives stability and meaning. Yet the strength of their position within these extended families often confirmed their place within reproductive kinship relations which tended to limit their options and perpetuate male dominance (Stivens 1984:189–190). Be this as it may, struggles for women’s rights elsewhere in South Africa came about when the family was breaking down (Du Toit 1992). It seems therefore that family provided more comfort than hardship and that where it remained strong, as in the Midlands, there was little move to struggle collectively for gender equality.
The importance of a will for a family is clearly set out by Daniel Blake Smith:

The idea of the family was most strongly affirmed in the preparation of the last will and testament. Will writing was often a kind of summing up, an important, final opportunity for an individual to come to terms with his family, kin and friends, at least in an economic sense, and to pass on his accumulated material wealth and social status to the surviving generation ... in parceling out family property, directing the management of children and the maintenance of surviving spouse, a man gave expression both to how he conceived of the family – who belonged and who did not – and to the proper balance between control and autonomy for the future of those left behind (Smith 1980:231).

Wills could include and exclude. In the Midlands most adults apparently left wills; only those dying untimely deaths appear not to have. Wills seem to have been left equally by men and women, indicating their involvement in the practice and their esteem for its importance. 41

In the course of demonstrating their commitment to dynastic growth, families selected and excluded, emphasised and dismissed people who on genealogical grounds had a claim to inclusion. Inheritance was a major instrument by which families perpetuated themselves, ensuring transgenerational survival. It was thus a key element in the reproduction of racially bounded family, class and community.

Inheritance is a civil process by which individuals transfer their possessions at death. Various laws in modern times regulate the process, dictating procedures and inserting the state (via its judicial arm, the Supreme Court) into the contract between the dead and the living. When a person dies, he or she may have left a will. If so, this testamentary document will determine the way in which his/her goods are distributed. If not, the person's estate is declared to be intestate. In this situation, the law of succession comes into play, determining who shall get what.

The laws of succession in colonial Natal and in the Union of South Africa originated by and large in Roman-Dutch law. Despite these juridical origins, Natal's laws also bore the mark of English law, which in some areas gave the testator greater freedom to bequeath property and thereby reduced the power of the state.42 In Natal and South Africa there was very little legal proscription limiting the rights of the testator (will-maker) to leave property to whomsoever he or she pleased (Anon 1959:436).
The first law in Natal to address the issue of succession was Law 22 of 1863. This law gave to the wife who was married to her husband out of community of property rights of succession *ab intestate*. This law was part of a tendency in North America and Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century which allowed women to inherit property and to retain control of their own property after marriage. Henceforward wives with capital were more powerful *within* their own families (Shammas et al 1987:6). Another effect of the liberalisation of laws of succession was that illegitimate and adopted children could be recognised as eligible to inherit. This could have momentous implications.

The importance of succession became apparent when, five years later, another law (Law 2 of 1868) was passed 'to regulate the Execution of Wills and Codicils' (Fraser 1894; Corbett, Hahlo, Hofmeyr & Kahn 1980:586, 670). After Union, the laws of all the provinces were harmonised via Act 24 of 1913. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, inheritance in Britain began to be seen as a source of state revenue. The process was gradual, since those most vulnerable to this form of taxation were the traditionally well-heeled, landed, politically powerful aristocracy. In Natal, Law 35 of 1905 imposed 'duties on successions to property'. The tax was very low. Neither surviving spouses nor estates which did not exceed £100 in value were liable to pay duty. Interestingly, 'natives' (including indentured Indians) were specifically exempted from the Act.

The percentage paid depended on the relationship of the legatee to the legator. At Union, Natal had the lowest rates in the country. Direct descendants, for example, were taxed at 1%, whereas in the Cape it was 3% and in the Union (via Act 29 of 1922) the rate was fixed at 2%. Similarly brothers and sisters were taxed in Natal at 2%, in the Cape at 6% and in the Union, 4%. South Africa's rates compared very well with those of Britain: at the low end of the scale estate duty on amounts £0-£2 000 was 0.5% whereas in Britain duty in this bracket varied from 1% to 3% (Howard 1931:54–55, 100). In our period, therefore, the state assisted families to perpetuate themselves economically by making very low demands on their historically accumulated capital. In the 1920s rates of succession duty escalated sharply.

The literature on inheritance in the context of European and North American history is truly vast. Astonishingly, I have not been able to find one historical study of inheritance in South Africa, and the local legal literature on succession is very patchy as well. In general, the historical interest in inheritance derives from an interest in the family and its place as an economic unit in the transition from feudalism to capitalism. By examining inheritance patterns answers are sought to key questions such as the role played by families in accumulation; the impact of changing family demography on inheritance and vice versa; the role played by inheritance in the form of the family; inheritance as a mechanism of
class differentiation; the role of inheritance in releasing or withholding family labour from
the labour market; the impact of inheritance considerations on fertility patterns and so on
(Brittain 1978; Clignet 1992; Goody, Thirsk & Thompson 1976; Tilly 1978).

There was one legacy of British law which had a major impact on inheritance patterns in
Natal. This was primogeniture and entail. Primogeniture dated back to feudal times. It was
the custom of leaving land to the eldest son. This practice privileged the eldest son over
other children. Yet, perversely, it strengthened family solidarity. Commenting on partible
inheritance – the sharing of inheritance rather than giving it all to one male heir – the
French historian de Tocqueville wrote, ‘When the law ordains equal shares, it breaks that
intimate connection between family feeling and preservation of the land; the land no
longer represents the family’ (quoted in Ditz 1986:27).

A refinement of primogeniture is the practice of entail, which places restrictions on the
land handed down to the eldest son to ensure that it remains within the family for suc­
cceeding generations. In these cases the son is generally forbidden to sell the land
(Wedgewood 1929:70). White patriarchs wanted to assert the right of eldest son inheri­
tance but such customs were being undermined by precedents in colonial and metropoli­
tan law. The concern then was to make a statement about the universal centrality of
the family and the importance of inheritance thereto. Primogeniture often was invoked by
male farmowners when they drew up their wills. A salutary example is that of the eminent
Henderson family, who passed down the family farm, ‘Melbrake Fell’, not far from
Pietermaritzburg, through five generations (Hathorn 1973:220–221). Entail, on the other
hand, was rarely stipulated. In the Woollatt family, this was fatal. S B Woollatt believed that
daughters got husbands and not inheritance, so he left the family farm to his son Jack. His
four redoubtable daughters were upset about this as they knew that Jack would sell it but
‘it had to be accepted because that was the outlook in those days’ (Barbara McKenzie inter­
view 1992). Although entail itself may not have been invoked, there were testators who
made their intentions that the land not leave the family very clear: in 1906 John Marwick
of Richmond specifically so stated, and the Supreme Court later (in 1926) upheld this wish
in the face of debtors demanding the liquidation of some of his assets. Similarly, Henry
Kimber, of Yorkshire, established his eldest son, P D Kimber, on the Dargle farm ‘Selsey’.
Percy Kimber then gave his son Guy life usufruct rights over the farm but bequeathed the
farm to his grandson, M Jardine Kimber, when he turned 25 years old to ensure that the
farm went into the fourth generation (Francis interview 1992). Near-neighbour Jeffery
Morphew of ‘Furth’ made a careful will, which included a primogenitary aspect when he
specifically set out that ‘any of my sons who may desire to be farmers or who may desire to
take over my landed property shall have an opportunity of doing so’ but this was to be on
the basis of ‘seniority’ and by purchase not by direct inheritance.
Entail could be ruinous because farmers gave farms to eldest son and then, in order to give their other children something, often bonded that farm. The bond would eventually cripple the farm, making it unprofitable and causing bankruptcy, which defeated the aims of entail and caused the farm to be sold. Only where farmers were rich and successful were they able to apply entail successfully and keep land in the family.

In examining the wills of Midland families, it became clear that most wills gave land to sons, often the eldest or most capable son. Where this was not the case, the family farm may often already have been transferred to the eldest son, smoothing intergenerational transition and avoiding death duties (Smith interview 1992). Frequently where this occurred, the will stated that the eldest son's share of the estate was less because of the prior transaction. There were many good reasons for transferring a farm to an eldest son before death. Continuity was ensured. The patriarch could maintain control of the farm, while leaving the day-to-day running of operations to the son. The patriarch could ensure by such transfer that the provision for his (and his wife's) old age was secure.

Another case where the primogeniture principle was watered down was where a patriarch attempted to provide all his sons with land. In Europe the shortage of land was a major reason for primogeniture. In Natal, at least in the nineteenth century, there was not a shortage of land, and many farmers were able to adopt a more egalitarian practice. Wealthy farmers like Charles John Smythe divided up their farms, giving each son his own sizeable farm unit. In other cases, particularly in the remoter areas where land was cheap, fathers often purchased each son a farm. Ernest Mingay, for example, bought each son a farm (Phyllis Palframan interview 1992).

There were dangers in veering away from the principle of primogeniture. When Duncan McKenzie died unexpectedly (1932) he left the farm to all of his children and not to his eldest son. His wife regretted this as it was an obstacle to keeping the farm in the family. The result was 'a bit of a mess' and led to the creation of the Cotswold Syndicate created specifically to keep the farms in McKenzie hands. The syndicate, however, was characterised by sibling animosity, and within a generation most of the farms had passed out of the family (Barbara McKenzie interview 1992).

Another example is that of John Eustace Fannin. The original Fannin settler, Thomas Fannin (d 1862), established his farm 'Dargle' in the area to which the farm subsequently gave its name. His life was blotted with financial misfortune and he died insolvent. However, his personal misfortune did not fatally affect the careers of his sons. Some struck it lucky on the diamond fields, and two of the brothers became wealthy land surveyors (Juul 1982). The more successful of the two, John Eustace Fannin, took over the manage-
The residence of Duncan McKenzie: Cotswold, The Dargle

ment of the family farm on his father’s death and rescued it from insolvency. By the end of his life (d 1905) John Eustace Fannin had risen to Judge of the Native High Court. Not unexpectedly, his will was a classic of legal exactitude and evenhandedness. He left a portion immediately for distribution to the family, the remainder to his widow for distribution to the family subsequent to her death. John Eustace had twelve children, eleven of whom reached maturity, while one predeceased his father while studying at Trinity College, Cambridge. The will treated his surviving five sons and five daughters equally, so in the end each child received very little – about £200–300. But the nature of Midland society meant that, for this prominent family at least, limited inheritance was not a disaster. Before John Eustace’s death all his children had already established themselves. He had sent all of them to Hilton or St Anne’s. Ability, the family name, family capital and their education served them well. Jack (b 1876), the eldest surviving son, farmed at Dalton on a farm leased from his father. When his uncle, Meredyth, died in 1912, Jack took over his farm, ‘Kilgobbin’, which had become the family centre. Dennis Fannin remembers his uncle Jack as ‘a poor farmer but (who) succeeded in keeping his farm’ (Fannin interview 1993). Henry Fannin
(b 1879) worked in the Standard Bank before joining his elder brother Jack on the Dalton farm. He was a very active soldier in the UMR, rising to the rank of major. In 1907 he married and bought a farm in Ixopo, where he grew wattle and bred pedigree South Devon cattle.\textsuperscript{51} Meredyth (b 1881) became a magistrate. Valentine (b 1884) also farmed with his brothers at Dalton, before searching for a farm of his own in Rhodesia. He was active in the UMR, becoming its commanding officer after a nearly forty-year association with the regiment. It was his time with the UMR that made him familiar with the Greytown area and he bought a farm there in c 1920 (Juul 1983:160–161). The youngest son, Charles, was a Rhodes Scholar who became the surveyor general of Kenya.

The Fannins were an exemplary case of familial cooperation. There were no disputes about inheritance and the extended family cohered well. Of course, this was not the story in every family. It was not uncommon for inheritance to end in acrimony. The Alcock family of Polela were dogged by inheritance struggles. Joseph Alcock was a wealthy landowner in Polela, owning at least four farms there. He had seven children. The home farm, ‘Home Rule’, stayed in the family for the next two generations but only after the family splintered and became embroiled in intrigue. Joseph Alcock’s brother-in-law, Joseph Paterson, who lived in Pietermaritzburg, seems to have entered into the spirit of what Roy Alcock describes as ‘Alcock nastiness’ (Roy Alcock interview 1992). According to Jane (Daphne), his granddaughter, he was ‘mean and nasty’ and excluded his wife, a daughter and one of his sons from his will (Daphne Pennefather interview 1992). In the next generation, family intrigue resulted in two sons being disinherited, with the family farm being left to three daughters and the remaining son. Two of the sisters then ganged up against the son for control of the farm (Roy Alcock interview 1992). The family’s history is plagued by discord with little of the cooperation that marks many Midland families.

It was not uncommon for eldest sons to battle with their fathers over their inheritance. In the case of the Mingays, the younger brother Wilfred (b 1891) (son of H E Mingay) inherited the family farm, ‘Inglenook’, near Ixopo. His older brother, Arthur, had strong disagreements with his father and set up his own farming operation, though with money provided by his father (Phyllis Palframan interview 1993). And when the eldest son got everything, as in Andrew Green’s family, he, the youngest of three sons, got nothing. When I interviewed him in 1992, he still recalled with anger this injustice (Green interview 1992).

Being the eldest son and recipient of the family farm was not an undisguised blessing. Frequently the gift came with obligations. Ditz describes this common strategy towards inheritance as the ‘favoured heir plus burdens’ approach. Productive land was given to the eldest son on condition that he assist those children who had not received inheritance as well as their wives and his parents (Ditz 1986:27).
By the end of the period, farmland was expensive and it was becoming difficult to enter the land market without inheritance or some independent financial base outside of agriculture. In some cases this might have promoted a stricter approach to primogeniture, ensuring that family land stayed in the family. On the other hand, there is evidence that the subdivision of farms to provide sons with land and selling farms to raise capital has resulted in some families being forced off the land (Christison 1986:69).

By the 1980s and 1990s, family farming had ceased being profitable. Nor did it offer a comfortable lifestyle. Throughout the Midlands, families who have been on the land for a hundred years or more have come to the end of the line. Their children seek well-paid jobs in the cities rather than enter the risk-riddled field of agriculture (Mackenzie interview 1993; Jonsson interview 1993).

Another feature of wills is the extraordinary emphasis on fairness. From the humble to the rich, fairness was generally a guiding principle. George Paterson, Pietermaritzburg tailor, made his will in 1908. He left to his three daughters all his property, ‘to be divided equally amongst them’. Similarly, Joseph Alcock of ‘Mossbank’, Polela, left a will in 1913. He had three sons and four daughters. He left one son a 1 000 acre farm in Ixopo, another £1 000 cash, and the eldest, part of the home farm (which he farmed along with his parents) (the value of which he ensured should equal £1 000). Alcock, like many other testators went to great lengths to ensure fairness and his will is filled with statements such as ‘It is my wish, desire and intention that he shall receive a bequest ... the same as my other Children.’

Some feminists claim that inheritance was (and is) a major mechanism for the perpetuation of patriarchal power. The issue is complex, however. Wedgewood’s classic study of inheritance patterns in Britain in the 1920s found that men inherited much more than women, that in the categories of large inheritance men were particularly dominant, and that only in the categories where small amounts were inherited did women predominate (Wedgewood 1929:48). Yet 30 per cent of all property subject to Estate Duty was left to women in England (Wedgewood 1929:53).

Wedgewood also found that where women did inherit large amounts, they did not convert this into productive capital, but rather through unstated processes allowed it to dwindle, leaving less to their heirs than they themselves had inherited. For men, the trend was dramatically different, with much more left to their heirs than they themselves had received (Wedgewood 1929:142). A possible explanation for this is the gendered structuring of business and the fact that men were in a much better position to accumulate on the basis of their inheritance.
In judging the gendered effect of inheritance one should distinguish between the law and its implementation, and the enactment of wills. In the 1920s the English Law of Property (1922) brought in a new age of gender equality, confirming a ‘revolution (that had) been quietly, stealthily going on’, one which had gradually but surely undermined the practice of primogeniture (Lee 1927:174). These and other laws affecting succession, passed in the 1920s, were described as ‘a new charter for women. It is a new victory for the common people.” Yet even if in law and in its execution there was equality, this did not prevent testators from leaving property to sons exclusively. But although this did happen, the instances were not sufficiently numerous and the counter tendency was sufficiently strong to substantiate the claim that inheritance was not a major source of gender inequality in the Midlands.

The one obvious inheritance practice which discriminated strongly against women was primogeniture which, in its narrowest form, could leave daughters nothing. Francina Otto of the wealthy Pietermaritzburg Otto family was totally excluded from her father’s will. She married a new emigrant, with a public school pedigree but no skills, and ended her life, sour and bitter, running a boarding house in Umkomaas (Pennington interview 1992). Some women did feel aggrieved at being neglected. Joy Taylor, one of P D Simmons’s daughters, claimed that she got no inheritance. She put this down to the process of entail – ‘a silly old-fashioned thing’ (Joy Taylor interview 1992). In fact, a perusal of the records pertaining to her inheritance shows something different.

Percy Simmons died in 1913. He left four children, two sons and two daughters. He left his two farms to his wife and sons. For the rest, he set up a trust and instructed the executors to ‘divide the Trust Estate among all my children in equal portions share and share alike ... In arriving at the value of the Trust Estate the Trustees are hereby directed to include therein the value of my farms ‘Brayhill’ and ‘Guildford’ at the value thereof at the time of my death and the value thereof shall be charged to my eldest son or other my descendant entitled to the farms as part of the share to which he is entitled’.

Joy did not like her father, whom she described as ‘a difficult, quick-tempered man’ (Taylor interview 1992). Maude Simmons died only in 1939, by which time the proceeds of the estate had been whittled down considerably. She left her share of the family farm to the surviving son, and her jewellery and silver in equal share to her daughters. It is perhaps these circumstances that caused Joy to represent the will as a major injustice.

Others noted the gender difference, but not necessarily with rancour. Agnes Pennefather put it simply: ‘Among the Fosters, men got land, girls got money’ (Agnes Pennefather interview 1992).
Once women had received their inheritance, there was only a limited range of things that could be done with it. What was quite usual was for it to be included in the husband’s farming operation, which was generally regarded as the family’s operation. Thus a female inheritor would bury her inheritance in a communal project over which she had little control (Loudon 1970:41). While the female inheritor might make the calculation that she would be able to bequeath her own property at her death, or might justify such a strategy in terms of her becoming part of a new family, her father (the male testator) could take alarm at the alienation of what he considered to be family property. In such instances, precautions could be taken. In his 1930 will, Robert Marwick of Richmond (b 1872) deemed his wife his sole heir, but stipulated that if she remarry, she should not alienate property inherited to her new husband, but should draw up a will leaving such property to their children.59 Another kind of precaution was not to include in one’s will daughters who were well-off on account of marriage (Solomon interview 1992; Barbara McKenzie interview 1993). This left more for sons and those daughters who were either single, or who merited consideration in terms of their own straitened circumstance.

Not all women were prepared to sink their lot into the family. For some, loyalty to their family of birth remained primary. In 1886 W J Fly bought two adjacent farms in Elandskop from the Natal Land and Colonisation Company. In making the purchase and in keeping the farms running, he borrowed money from his wives (he was married three times). When he died in 1939, the farms were divided up and parts sold in order to repay the widows’ families for their original financial contributions (Fly interview 1992). In other cases, women found the family into which they married a source of irritation, a burden, or a prison. These women could take their revenge when they drew up their wills. When John Craven Nicholson died in 1920, aged 61, he left no children. His wife, Alice, became the major beneficiary. He provided for her generously, setting up an estate and stipulating a minimum of £500 per annum for her living costs to be paid from that estate. He also stipulated that the executors consult with her in relation to his farm land and investments. It soon became clear that Alice was not going to cooperate. She refused to sign legal papers and neglected to answer correspondence.60

Her nephew, Ravenor Nicholson, looked after her Richmond farm, ‘Hillingdon’, as an act of family loyalty. She did not thank him for it, or mention him in her will. A family member’s view of her was that she was a ‘tough woman’. She was very mean and rarely gave birthday gifts. She was called ‘Auntie Millions’ by the extended Nicholson family. ‘She used the family and left them nothing in her will’ (Skonk Nicholson interview 1993). Skonk Nicholson’s memory was correct. When she died, aged 94, in 1954, her estate was worth £21 000. She left not a penny to any of her family. She bequeathed it to London charities such as St Dunstan’s Home for the Blind and the Governesses’ Benevolent Institution.61
Husbands generally left their wives with a lifetime usufruct over their farms and property. If there was more than one farm in the estate, other farms might be given to sons, but even here, wives were often left with some jurisdiction or claim against those farms. A particularly generous example of providing for a wife is that of Captain Ulric Knut Mackenzie, who was killed in the First World War, in 1916, aged 43. He farmed at Lidgetton. He had no children and his parents lived in London. He provided his wife with a trust fund, and specifically stipulated that if she remarried she could dispose of the estate as she chose.3 While generally provided for well, widows could also be the subject of punitive conditions. Perhaps the most punitive is to be found in the will of James Marwick. His son, the executor, was instructed to pay from a trust set up ‘whatever money she may need from time to time, so long as she shall live, or so long as she shall remain my widow’. If she were to remarry, he stipulated that she should get the derisory sum of £5 pa and would ‘receive nothing more from my Estate’.5

As has already been indicated with John Craven Nicholson’s widow, it was in the power of widows to either promote or reject the family project. In some cases, wives/widows followed their husbands closely, choosing to give farms to sons. In others, however, they might (without endangering the family project) consciously make a gendered choice. Charlotte Moor (née Moodie) was married to F R Moor. She was an energetic and creative woman, who wrote novels, diaries and took a keen interest in family and public affairs. Shortly before her husband’s death (1927) she made a will. In it she named as beneficiaries only two of her children, her daughters. The boys were ignored, presumably because their father had catered well for them.6 She gave the farm ‘Craigievar’ to her daughters Charlotte Stella and Marjorie Esme on condition that no part of it be sold until 20 years after her death. She then divided all her worldly goods between her two daughters and three daughters-in-law.65

Perhaps what is most significant about the patterns of inheritance is that they seldom included people who were not members of the family, however distant. Wealth was kept in the family, either on the male or female side. And since the Midland families were so intermarried, such wealth, even if it went via daughters into other families, went into consolidating a community. It was extremely rare for Africans to be beneficiaries. James Ralfe was descended from the earliest settlers in the Estcourt area. His family had a long association with local African families who were either resident on family farms or who had long been in family service. When he died in 1921, he remembered his African servants in his will.

To my faithful domestic servant Umfaba Mbongwe in consideration of her services to my late mother and subsequently to myself the interest on a sum of £300 sterling for the term of her natural life and also ten average cows and eight good draft oxen together
with yokes and spanning gear for eight together also with six sound blankets such bed linen as she may select two pillows a bedstead and mattress five chairs and a table and I direct that she shall be permitted to reside on my farm at Frere (near Estcourt) free of charge for the term of her natural life and in regard to this bequest I direct that it shall be free of all such restrictions and control as usually attach by law or custom to the property of Native women in Natal ... and to my native servant Franz Mgati a sum of fifteen pounds sterling.66

This rare example shows that there were weak (and very limited) impulses within the Midland settler community to create families along principles which ignored biological family and racial divisions. (In the next chapter, we shall witness the fate of such attempts in an unsympathetic environment.)

In the period under review there were changes in inheritance practice. These are in line with the changes identified by Toby Ditz in her study of the US East Coast in the early nineteenth century. Ditz identifies two contradictory pressures on inheritance: provision and unity. By provision she means the need to maintain productive capacity, and by unity, the concern for perpetuating, transgenerationally, the family line. In an undeveloped economy where communities are isolated and totally dependent for survival and wealth on production from farming and where the marketable surplus is small, families are likely to settle all of their male offspring on farms (a process Ditz calls patrimonial inheritance). In this situation, the interests of daughters and spouses and the concern for egalitarian inheritance practices are secondary to the imperative to establish viable farms (Ditz 1986:37).

The development of the economy and the growing productive base of agricultural families allow for a more inclusive, less gender-skewed approach to inheritance (extended cognate inheritance). In this study, the agricultural economy was, by 1880, beginning to generate surpluses for local and export markets. Most of the wills examined therefore belong more in the extended cognate category, though in areas far from markets, unconnected by rail and poorly developed, patrimonial patterns persisted until later.

Inheritance, it was widely conceded by informants, was a particularly powerful mechanism for perpetuating the presence of white families in the Midlands and stabilising their productive and social base, even when the cost of this was intra-family dispute (Francis interview 1992). It frequently functioned to strengthen kin ties, because wills bound family members together in a range of complex and reciprocal arrangements (for example grown sons were often required ‘to care for aged parents, to provide legacies for other adult sisters and brothers, and to cooperate with each other in the running of inherited enterprises’ (Ditz 1986:33)). Retaining land in the family prevented the intrusion of outsiders, and
permitted the consolidation of the community. Retaining land within the family, in turn, rested on careful inheritance practices and monogamy.

The family was the basic unit out of which the ONF community was constructed. That the community operated credibly was because the family was a healthy, dynamic institution, able to respond to the various pressures which built up during this period. The family was also able to contain centripetal forces which threatened it – wives remained at home, and daughters, even when educated, generally did not lose contact and steer a course independent of family. The family’s vitality rested on the fact that it worked for men and women alike. Over time the position of women changed: they moved out of production and into the vitally important realm of social display and interaction and in the process became ladies. Both in relation to their own and other families, women had the task of ensuring that the family name was not tarnished. For the most part, they undertook this work with gusto and effectively. In it they were affirmed. Despite having some professional options and resources of their own (these often coming to them through inheritance), ONF women tended to commit themselves (and their resources) to the family. The family succeeded not because ONF men were generous or kind, or because the sexual division of labour was equal, or because women were remembered in wills. Nor did it succeed because women had no options, because they were downtrodden beyond the point of rebellion, without option or capacity to do anything other than be wife and mother. In the end, the success of the family has to be understood in wider terms – that it was in the family that racially exclusive, classed conceptions of society were embodied. These conceptions were translated through daily practices and institutions (some of which have been discussed in this study) into social power which white men and women shared alike.

Notes

1 A dissenting view from one branch of men’s studies comes from Warren Farrell (1993). While accepting that men do have economic power (in the family and without), he argues that they carry disproportionate responsibility which results in high burnout, sickness and suicide rates. Furthermore, he argues that their economic power is diverted into the consumer power of women (who spend all the money which the men work so hard to earn).

2 D H J Morgan points out that there are a huge number of definitions of the family and it is generally sterile to argue simply in definitional terms (1985:1712). He cites Bourdieu’s use of *habitus* as a way of alerting us to the weakness of static structural conceptions of the family: ‘people do not routinely follow rules or laws but rather evolve a set of practices, usages, strategies and understandings which emerge from the particular sets of economic conditions and constraints within which they find themselves’ (Morgan 1985:173).

3 This problem exercised the minds of colonial and imperial officials who were concerned to fos-
ter a pure race and decent families. Efforts were therefore made at the turn of the century to import single white women from Britain (Van Helten & Williams 1983).

4 The history of sex in colonial society is notoriously difficult to reconstruct, and I can only offer one tentative source here. Alan Paton's biographer, Peter Alexander, suggests that in the early years of the twentieth century Paton's father quite often clandestinely sought sex with black women (Alexander 1994:1056).

5 Among the prominent families who had members at the diamond diggings were Baynes, Fannin, Foster, Hathorn, Moor, Murray, Rawlinson, Slatter and Winter.

6 Slater (1980:163) argues that the movement of land from a rentier class to white farmers occurred primarily in the early twentieth century. My evidence suggests that this process was already gathering pace in the 1890s. An examination of the increase in settler lands under maize cultivation shows, for example, significant increases between 1875 and 1880, 1895 and 1900, and 1900 and 1905 (Ballard & Lenta 1985:127).


9 Intermarriage between ONFs was in fact very widespread and remained so into the 1970s (Loudon 1970:49). The extent of intermarriage may be gleaned from an examination of one of the many family histories of ONF families. The Speirs history, for example, reads like a who's who of the Midlands (Speirs 1985).

10 The 1949 photograph includes the following ONF members: Colonel Hugh Richards DSO (Mooi River), Priscilla Francis, Phyllis Otto, Natalie Campbell and Elizabeth Jonsson.

11 For a comparative view see Winer and Deetz (1990:55), who argue that in the Eastern Cape the 1820 settlers borrowed selectively from British culture, 'producing a cultural world consistent with the re-creation of an agrarian way of life'.

12 A particularly successful example of this was Joseph Baynes, his brother Richard and father William who constantly assisted one another. 'Father would sell to son, brother would sell to brother' (Pearse 1981:29).

13 MSCE 24/182, Estate of Fanny Tanner Smythe.

14 Dissenting views come from third world and black feminists. Hazel Carby, for example, argues that for exploited and culturally alienated minorities, the family was a site of resistance and solidarity (Carby 1982).

15 There has been little research on white colonial women in Natal. A major exception is the current research work of Julie Parle (1995). An earlier and important work was by Jo Beall (1982), which produced an overview of the position of women (black and white) in Natal. Unlike Parle's work, however, this was based largely on official sources and was more concerned with economic indexes than the cultural aspect of women's lives.

16 There is a vast feminist literature which debates essentialism; see for example Barrett and Phillips 1992; Butler 1990; Butler 1993; Fuss 1991.

17 The argument that women had reason to vest themselves in the family is picked up by Anne McClintock (1995), who argues that women were powerful within the private domain of the family.

18 It has been argued that an explanation for the phenomenon of women defending the family may be found in protecting the household from the intrusion of capitalist forces which erode the pri
vate sphere, in so doing, endangering the zones of power and influence which women enjoyed within it (Bozzoli 1983:160).

19 In 1891, 58 women were recorded as farmers in their own right (Beall 1982:120).

20 My findings here are born out in comparative studies of mid- to late-nineteenth-century American society. Mary Ryan, for example, concludes that in the rural family the function of the housewife regarding boarders could be critical, giving her as much economic importance as the man – ‘the housewife continued to command important material resources’ (Ryan 1981:231).


22 Colin Bundy’s (1986) examination of poor whiteism in the eastern Cape in the nineteenth century begins with the observation that many white men, down on their luck, were employed as tutors by farmers. It is not clear whether the Natal appointees were as inappropriate as Bonaparte Blenkins, Olive Schreiner’s character from The story of an African farm, but I have some evidence for the calibre of male ‘teachers’ working alone or for small institutions in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. See the account of Robert Mason of the education he received in a small private school in Pietermaritzburg. His description of ‘Paddy F’ is of a man with a permanent hangover who constantly took his bad temper out on the small children (1960:2).

23 Teaching was the preferred occupation, but in the 1920s and 1930s, on leaving school more young girls began training in nursing. Two of Daphne Alcock’s older sisters, for example, became nurses (Daphne Pennefather interview 1992).

24 Shula Marks notes that there was much argument over what was socially respectable in terms of class and race values. The dilemma of white women handling black (especially male) bodies vigorously exercised the colonial mind through the period under discussion (Marks 1994).

25 It should be noted that this trend differed strongly from urban developments where during the mid-nineteenth century the middle-class home was becoming a place of privacy, work was being conducted beyond the home and women were becoming invisible (see Davidoff & Hall 1987).

26 This warning was repeated throughout the empire (Stoler 1989:650).

27 Here I take issue with the view that sees white colonial women as ‘incorporated wives’ (Garrell 1984). In the Indian context, the argument is made that wives’ identities were derived from their husbands, that their social identities were subsumed under theirs. As Karen Hansen has argued, women had many identities and were not solely dependent on their husbands either for status or life opportunity (Hansen 1991:264).

28 I do not have figures for the percentage of women who never married. In 1891, of white females over 16 years of age, 56% were married, 39% unmarried, and 8% widowed or divorced (Beall 1982:212).

29 MSCE 6171/1921, Estate of William Gold.

30 MSCE 11824/1926, Estate of Thomas William Gold, transcript of an examination in the Magistrate’s Court, Ixopo, [nd]. For a full and tragic account of this, see Christison 1986:69. His suicide note read, ‘My honour is worth more than my life.’


32 It should be noted that neither of these cases of marital dysfunctionality belongs, strictly speaking, within my period (since they both refer to the 1920s and 1930s) but in the absence of other evidence, which I put down to reticence rather than absence, I have cited it here.
The experiences of Ellen McIntosh (recounted through her letters to her sister Louisa) show that she was married to a vehement, domineering man, yet there is little in her letters which exposes her feelings about this. On the other hand, she leaves the reader in no doubt about the level of her devastation and grief when he died.

KCM 24436, Mooi River FA, minutes of a special committee meeting, 24 October 1908.

KCM 24436, Mooi River FA, minutes of a fat stock show committee, 15 July 1914.

Mooi River FA, minutes of a public meeting held at Mooi River on 27 August 1914 for the purpose of deciding what steps should be taken to assist the homeland during the present crisis.

KCM 24436, Mooi River FA, minutes of a special general meeting, 31 July 1915; committee meeting, 12 November 1915; committee meeting, 5 August 1916.

KCM 33659, Umvoti AS, minutes of annual general meeting, 23 October 1912.

KCM 33659, Umvoti AS, minutes of annual general meeting, 8 December 1916.

KCM 33659, Umvoti AS, executive committee meeting, 27 January 1917.

This parallels the pattern in the US in this period (Shammas et al 1987:119-120).

See Wessels 1908. In the latter part of the nineteenth century Natal’s law-makers introduced many aspects of English Law even though Roman-Dutch law was the basis for the colony’s system (Spiller 1986:90-91). It should be noted, however, that the law in South Africa did prescribe, to some extent, that family members be included in succession arrangements. This practice is called *legitim* and was not present in English law (Wedgewood 1929:67).

For example, the authoritative collection on women in South Africa (Walker 1990) contains no references to white women’s inheritance, though African women’s rights to property are discussed. A rare and illuminating example set in the Orange Free State has been documented by Colin Murray. He tells the story of the McPhersons, a settler family engaged in agriculture from the first decade of the twentieth century, who built themselves up dynastically, and transmitted their wealth transgenerationally through the mechanism of entail (Murray 1992:267-272).

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MSCE 10290/1925, Estate of John Marwick.

MSCE 2104/1917, Estate of Jeffery Morphew, will of 5 January 1914.

For example, MSCE 12180/1927, Estate of Frederick Robert Moor.

Smythe owned 7,500 acres of farmland in a block. He divided this amongst six of his sons (MSCE 2645/1918, Estate of Charles John Smythe; Pat Smythe interview 1993).

He entered the civil service as magistrate of the Lower Tugela division in 1883 and left ‘Dargle’ for good. But he retained ownership for the sake of his mother, who with her husband were the original settlers on the farm. When she died in 1892, he sold the farm, as there were no siblings or relations to bequeath it to. By this time, an adjacent farm, ‘Kilgobbin’, farmed by John Eustace’s uncle, Meredyth, had become the Midland headquarters of the Fannins (Juul 1983:124).

MSCE 44/87, Estate of John Eustace Fannin. Will, 26 October 1900; Codicil, 7 May 1903; Codicil, 21 October 1904.

MSCE 44/87, Estate of John Eustace Fannin; Fannin interview 1993.


Wills of George Paterson and Joseph Alcock in possession of Daphne Pennefather.

The most recent feminist literature eschews single causes of women’s oppression, including that of inheritance. See Barrett and Phillips 1992:2.
In the US, similar developments occurred. A 1917 law amendment (Law of Decedents' Estates) gave women equal share in the marriage estate, and in 1920 women got the vote (Shammas et al 1987:165).

In the case of the Underberg Palframans, for example, the two sons (William (b 1892) and George) got farms, the seven daughters virtually nothing (Roger Palframan interview 1992).

His elder son was killed in the First World War.

A search for P D Simmons’s file proved fruitless. There is no record of it in the Natal Archive Depot, so I have relied on the records of his wife’s estate in which his will is, fortuitously, duplicated.

MSCE 29040/1939, Estate of Maude Simmons.


MSCE 5617/1920, Estate of John Craven Nicholson, Walter Thrash to Master of the Supreme Court, 19 September 1921.


MSCE 600/1916, Estate of Captain Ulric Knut Mackenzie (10th SAI).

MSCE 13369/1928, Estate of James William Thomas Marwick.

F R Moor left a substantial estate to his sons, and nothing to his daughters. It thus appears as though there was some agreement between the couple to pass property down a gendered line (MSCE 12180/1927, Estate of Frederick Robert Moor).

MSCE 16177/1930, Estate of Charlotte Mary St Clair Moor. See also the will of Isabella Cramond Mackenzie, which left her entire estate to her unmarried daughter, so long as she remained so. MSCE 2429/1918.


Here I take issue with the view that white women lacked ‘social prestige’ in the colonial period (Walker 1990 11).