Chapter Four – Migration

As part of the mass exodus of workers from Scotland’s industrial communities that occurred in the months following Red Clydeside, Ellen and her family migrated from Scotland to the county of Lancashire in the north-west of England in December 1919.¹ It was yet another relocation in the family’s multi-generational quest for economic survival. Four of Ellen’s eight great-grandparents moved from Ireland to Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century, and at least two others moved from Scottish crofts to industrial villages during the same period. Millgate, however, provided only a brief stopover. After less than two years in England, the family abandoned their native land and emigrated on to the United States. In America, they settled in the ethnically diverse textile community of Passaic, New Jersey, only a few miles northwest of Ellis Island, the government center where a majority of immigrants were processed before they were allowed to enter the U.S.

Examining the economic conditions of Glasgow and Lancashire during the years surrounding 1919, it is evident why the family was forced to move.² There was sufficient employment in Barrhead, Paisley and Glasgow during World War I, but after the war unemployment along the Clyde skyrocketed. As one Barrhead resident noted, “Among the first casualties of peace were the soldiers returning from war to find that there were no jobs; and women, who had worked through the war in
factories, suddenly paid off. By April 1919 the Paisley area (including Barrhead) saw its ‘normal’ figure of about 1300 unemployed (males) swollen by 1150 demobbed soldiers and almost 4500 redundant female workers.”

This economic depression extended throughout the industrial base of Scotland. As Marjory Harper observed, “The depression (after 1918) was felt with varying intensity across the British Isles, with South Wales, Tyneside, Clydeside and Belfast probably experiencing the greatest hardship. Yet, although the expulsive catalysts of depression and lengthened dole queues affected the whole of Britain, they were particularly acute in Scotland, where the worst affected area was also the area of greatest population density.”

This area was Glasgow and the surrounding region.

By contrast, the textile industry in Lancashire endured very different economic fortunes. The Lancashire economy was weak during the war, surged back immediately after the war, but then collapsed in the very early 1920s, forcing the Dawsons to migrate on to America. As John Walton noted, “The year 1913 was the high water mark of the Lancashire cotton industry. The First World War brought disruption to raw material supplies, production and marketing; its aftermath saw a short-lived but disastrous investment boom, fuelled by false expectations of returning prosperity; and this in turn worsened the impact of the sustained slump which followed, as established markets were irrevocably lost to overseas competitors.”

The Dawson family’s departure from their Scottish home after World War I was not unique. Numerous forces were at work. As Harper explained, “the return to peace ushered in a renewed outflow that was to have notable demographic effects on the country…the volume of Scottish emigration during the 1920s – aggravated by a steady southward drift and the ongoing repercussions of heavy male mortality in the war, and combined with a relatively low inward movement” all contributed to
Scotland’s declining population during the post-war years from 1921 to 1930. “In that decade, despite a natural increase of 352,386 individuals, or 7.2 per cent, the actual population of Scotland as a whole declined by 0.8 per cent, from 4,882,497 to 4,842,980.” In 1919, Ellen and her family were simply a tiny group within the long-established and ever-continuing “steady southward drift” that has for centuries siphoned Scots from their native homeland.

Like Barrhead, Millgate was a small industrial village situated in a valley, amid rolling green hills, outside a large industrial center. Where Barrhead was outside Glasgow, Millgate was less than fifteen miles north of Manchester and perhaps four miles north of Rochdale, a textile community of approximately the same size as Paisley. Rochdale was where the Rochdale Equitable Pioneers started the British cooperative movement in 1844, a movement for which Barrhead was also well known. Millgate’s primary industries were cotton textiles and mining in the sandstone quarries of the Rossendale Fells, two industries that were equally important to the Barrhead economy. Additionally, both communities had established Roman Catholic churches and a significant number of individuals of Irish origin.

Initially, Millgate must have provided sufficient employment, or the prospect of employment, for the working members of the family. By 1919, at least seven members of the Dawson family were of wage earning age. Unlike Barrhead and other regions of Britain, a significant number of married women in Lancashire worked. In 1920, female workers in the Lancashire cotton textile industry outnumbered male workers by more than three to two. Of this number, more than a third of the women workers were married – the highest number of married women workers in Britain. By employing more women than men, employers were able to keep their labor costs low because women earned less than half of their male counterparts. By employing
more married women, employers were able to reduce turnover, because married women had far less flexibility to move from one job to another. As a result, men in the region had greater difficulty finding employment. When they did find work, they were often forced to accept below-average wages. This, in turn, forced more married women back into wage-earning work in order to help support their families. It was a system that worked to the advantage of the employers and the distinct disadvantage of the workers.

Although Ellen worked first as a spinner and later as a weaver in Lancashire for less than eighteen months, the experience would contribute to her ever increasing knowledge of the textile industry, just as it helped to shape her attitudes toward the role of the worker in a modern industrial society. Lancashire was pivotal in the history of the Industrial Revolution in general and the textile industry in particular. In his classic work of 1845, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Frederick Engels observed that, “The history of the proletariat in England begins (in the late eighteenth)…century, with the invention of the steam-engine and of machinery for working cotton. These inventions gave rise…to an industrial revolution, a revolution which altered the whole civil society.” That revolution took place in Lancashire.

As a result of inventions such as the jenny, spinning throstle, the mule, the carding engine, and preparatory frames – all invented by Lancashire workers – the new system of manufacturing spread throughout Britain. The Levern Mill in Barrhead, for example, was built in 1780 by a partnership of Lancashire and Glasgow capitalists. The rapid growth of the British textile industry during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries can be clearly seen in the import and export statistics. “In the years 1771-1775, there were annually imported into England rather less than 5,000,000 pounds of raw cotton; in the years 1841 there were imported 528,000,000
pounds, and the import for 1844 will reach at least 600,000,000 pounds.” As for production, in 1834 the country “exported 556,000,000 yards of woven cotton goods, 76,500,000 pounds of cotton yarn, and cotton hosiery of the value of £1,200,000.”

The impact on Lancashire was enormous. “The chief center of this (the textile) industry is Lancashire, where it originated; it has thoroughly revolutionized this county, converting it from an obscure, ill-cultivated swamp into a busy, lively region, multiplying its population tenfold in eighty years.”

As for places such as Millgate, Engels noted, “The towns surrounding Manchester vary little from the central city, so far as the working-people’s quarters are concerned…The towns are purely industrial and conduct all their business through Manchester upon which they are in every respect dependent, whence (these surrounding towns) are inhabited only by working-men and petty tradesmen, while Manchester has a very considerable commercial population.” Describing towns such as Rochdale, just south of Millgate, he noted that despite populations in the tens of thousands, they “are almost wholly working-people’s districts, interspersed only with factories… The towns themselves are badly and irregularly built with foul courts, lanes and back alleys, reeking with coal smoke, and especially dingy.”

Based on photographs from the period, this also describes Millgate during the years Ellen and her family lived there.

Millgate was never more than a tiny mill village, one of several such villages located between the larger communities of Bacup and Rochdale in the Whitworth Valley. Even when the Dawsons lived in the area, the distinction between the various villages was less than clear. On their Ellis Island immigration records, Ellen and her brother David listed their home in England as Shawforth, just north of Millgate,
toward Bacup, while their brother Michael, who arrived three months later, listed his as Facit, just south of Millgate, near Rochdale.\textsuperscript{12}

The Hey’s Buildings, where the Dawson family lived, were adjacent to the Facit Quarries and the Millgate and Facit Cotton Spinning, Manufacturing and Mining Company.\textsuperscript{13} The Millgate mill was the largest in the Shawforth/Facit area, operating more than 21,000 spindles and more than 600 looms. It was one of seventeen cotton spinning mills, two calico printing and dyeing mills and one sizer that operated in the Whitworth Valley at the time.\textsuperscript{14} Although no employment records were found, it seems highly likely that the waging-earning members of the Dawson family worked in either the mill or the mining operation. According to local historians, many of the local miners lived in the Hey’s Buildings during this time.\textsuperscript{15}

Industry in the Whitworth Valley dates to the early seventeenth century. Coal mining began in 1631, and local parish records from 1705-1707 list twenty-three woolen workers living in the valley.\textsuperscript{16} In 1755, Parliament authorized the construction of a turnpike road through the valley between Rochdale and Bacup, and by 1800 the first textile mill was built.\textsuperscript{17} Industrial development increased rapidly, as various modes of transportation connected the villages with the outside world. Construction of a railroad through the valley was started in 1862 and by 1881 the various villages were connected to Bacup and Rochdale. In 1885 a steam tram system began operation in the area and by 1911 an electric tram service connected Shawforth and Facit with both Bacup and Rochdale.\textsuperscript{18} In 1870, there were twenty-one mills operating in the Whitworth Valley, and by 1878 the mills surrounding Bacup were operating more than half a million spindles and more than thirteen thousand looms.\textsuperscript{19}

Migration into the Whitworth Valley during the nineteenth century was driven by the area’s two major occupations -- mining and yarn manufacturing -- industries
that attracted a large number of Irish workers. In 1841, one-third of all Irish-born individuals living in England lived in Lancashire. By 1851, the total number of Irish-born living in Lancaster was more than 190,000.20

Although the Whitworth Valley never experienced the level of labor unrest that the Dawsons witnessed in Scotland, or that affected Manchester or the more populous regions of Lancashire during much of the nineteenth century, there was a history of labor disputes dating back to the early nineteenth century. In 1826, for example, weavers destroyed more than 150 looms in four Bacup mills as a protest against longer hours and lower wages,21 and flannel weavers in Rochdale went on strike in 1830.22

As for the years close to when the Dawson family lived in the valley, the correspondence files of the Whitworth Branch of the Powerloom Overlookers’ Association indicate an ongoing series of labor disputes in the valley, including a spinners’ strike in 1918, and a weavers’ strike in March 1920, a strike in which Ellen may have been an active participant. The weavers’ strike was over wages and resulted in a five day lock-out of all the workers. The following month, on April 22, 1920, the overlookers walked out. As J.R. Hoyle, the Whitworth Branch secretary, explained in a letter to Mr. Duscbury, the general secretary of the union, “Our reason for tendering Notices is Unpleasant Working Conditions, not wages.” Hoyle said the overlookers’ concern was connected to an ongoing conflict with the weavers and that the mill managers’ response to the overlookers’ action was that “our reason is Humbug and Fault finding by listening to Petty tales from weavers.” In a letter to J. Brown, the Weaving Manager at the Whitworth Mill, Hoyle explained that “The men at your place report to me that they are being treated unfair in respect to the amount of mechanical work they have to do.” Finally, in a letter to Thomas Brindle, secretary of
the Overseers’ Club, Hoyle explained that the overseers had produced a leaflet outlining their grievances and explaining why they had walked out, adding that “we consider it a dirty action on the Masters’ part.”

What makes these letters of particular interest is the workers’ lack of cooperation. The spinners, weavers and overlookers each went out on strike at a different time. Clearly, they spent much of their time bickering among themselves, rather than supporting the efforts of workers outside their particular skill group.

During the months that Ellen lived in Millgate – from December 1919 until April 1921 – she worked first as a spinner and later as a weaver in a local cotton mill, probably the Millgate Mill adjacent to the Hey’s Buildings where the Dawsons lived. One observer from the period provided the following picture of what Ellen’s working life in Lancashire must have been like. “Many women and girls in the district worked in some branch of the textile industry. Of these, we accepted weavers as ‘top’ in their class, followed by winders and drawers-in. Then came spinners. They lacked standing on several counts: first, the trade contained a strong Irish Catholic element, and wages generally were lower than in other sections.” The mills were hot and humid. “Because of the heat and slippery floors, women worked barefoot, dressed in little more than calico shifts. These garments, the respectable believed, induced in female spinners a certain moral carelessness. They came home, too, covered in dust and fluff; all things which combined to depress their social prestige.” At the lowest level of the hierarchy were the women who labored in the dye works, “their work was dirty, wet and heavy and they paid due penalty for it. Clogs and shawls were, of course, standard wear for all.”

In trying to understand what Ellen’s life in Millgate must have been like and how her own individualism was being shaped during these years as she became a
working woman, I believe it is worth noting a popular literary genre of the period – the romantic tales of the “Lancashire Lass.” The genre began in the final decade of the nineteenth century and reached its peak in the years immediately following World War I. Extremely popular, thousands of these “mill-girl stories” were published in weekly publications of the period, usually written for a working-class audience, especially young working women such as Ellen. It is important to remember that Ellen, unlike her mother, could read and as a result was exposed to ideas which would have reached few working-class women of her mother’s generation. Billie Melman noted that the women in these Lancashire stories “came to epitomise a set of ‘authentic’ values of the British working class: a simplicity that is not simile-mindedness, an unbending spirit, fierce independence and a defiant local chauvinism – curiously coupled with class allegiance.” As one of the more successful writers of the genre described a real-life, Rochdale-born, music hall performer in one his stories, “All the qualities are there: shrewdness, homely simplicity, irony, fierce independence, an impish delight in mocking whatever is thought to be affected or pretentious.” These are characteristics that could have been used to describe Ellen in the late 1920s.

The mill-girl stories also provide some insight into the massive change that was beginning to impact British society in the years following World War I, particularly with respect to the role of women. “As in any transitional age…there could be two responses to such significant changes: a conscious adjustment, or even deliberate assimilation, to the new way of life; or a withdrawal from the real world to the security of the old, familiar traditions.” For the older generation, the Lancashire mill-girl stories offered a retreat, but for younger women, such as Ellen, they defined a new role model, one that drew upon the old strengths – independence, shrewdness,
and determination – in order to face the new challenges and take advantage of the new opportunities that were so much a part of the evolution of working women in the 1920s. The strength of the Lancashire Lass may have, unknowingly, helped this new generation of women define themselves.

With the economic collapse that hit the textile industry in Lancashire in the early 1920s, the members of the Dawson family were again forced to relocate. This time they moved to the United States, part of a massive post-war migration of working-class families. Ellen and her older brother David were the first to leave, sailing from Liverpool on April 30, 1921 aboard the SS Cedric. They were followed three months later by another brother, Michael Hurle Dawson, who made the journey with two other men from Barrhead. The three men departed Glasgow on July 30, 1921 aboard the SS Columbia. Then, on October 14, 1922, Ellen’s mother Annie sailed from Liverpool aboard the SS Baltic. Traveling with Annie Dawson were her five youngest children, daughters Anna and Grace, and sons Richard, Joseph and John. Patrick Dawson, Ellen’s father, did not make the journey. He died in Millgate of stomach cancer less than four months before Annie and the children departed for America. Ellen’s brother, Edward, and his wife remained in Barrhead. Her sister, Mary, entered a convent in England.

The courage and determination of young women like Ellen, who with David, her brother, led the family to the U.S., can be found in the words of another young woman, Agnes Schilling, who migrated, at the age of fifteen, from a Scottish town southeast of Glasgow, to New Jersey in 1922. As Schilling later recalled: “My whole idea was to get to the United States, and that I could work when I got here and help to bring my family eventually…so I was very insistent…it wasn’t easy for me to convince my parents, my family, everybody, that I was capable of going over and
taking care of myself, but I was determined, and no matter what obstacle came up I always found a way out of it. So I finally got my way.”

It is not hard to imagine Ellen leading a similar campaign in an effort to motivate her family to move on to the United States. In fact, as niece Betty Dawson later remembered, Ellen “thought she was the head of the family and liked to be in control.” The economic reasons for going were clearly expressed by Margaret Kirk, a Glaswegian woman the same age as Ellen, who migrated to New York in 1923. “There was loads of work while the war was on. Shipyards were booming. As soon as the war was finished, everybody was getting laid off. There was depression in the country, and everybody wanted to come to America…that’s why so many people came from Scotland, because of the depression. There was no work, so they were gasping for a job. And America sent out signals that everything was wonderful here.”

Ellen was twenty, and David was twenty-six when they arrived in New York on May 9, 1921, after nine days on the North Atlantic. They made the voyage aboard the SS Cedric, in the cramped and crowded third class section of the ship commonly referred to as steerage. Built in Belfast in 1902, the SS Cedric was owned by the White Star and Dominion Lines, and was a regular on the Liverpool to New York passage, transporting Europeans, representing nations from throughout the continent, to their new homes in the United States. The SS Cedric was 700 feet long, 75 feet wide, weighed 21,035 gross tons, and carried a crew of 475. It was capable of carrying a total of 2,875 passengers on the transatlantic voyage. This included 365 first class passengers, 160 second class passengers and 2,350 third class passengers.

According to other accounts of crossing the Atlantic aboard the SS Baltic, Ellen’s journey was much like that experienced by countless European immigrants on
their way to America. The voyage, even in third class, provided a basic level of comfort that many immigrants might never have experienced prior to boarding the ship. Third class passengers shared cabins, were fed in large dining rooms, and had access to the essential amenities of life on a large ship. They were, as was the custom, segregated from the first and second class passengers. Third class passengers often entertained themselves with song and dance, making new friends and building a temporary community with other travelers from throughout Europe. When the weather was good, children played on deck and adults enjoyed the beauty and tranquility of the open ocean. When the seas were rough, seasickness was a common problem for passengers of all ages. Crew members, like most of the third class passengers, were workers, and this common bond helped to ease the trauma of the journey, as they often went out of their way to be of assistance. Even the ship’s captain visited with third class passengers. On many ships there appears to have been a real camaraderie among many of these transatlantic passengers, a bond shared by millions of immigrant workers in the United States. During this period, steamship lines competed for third class passengers, who contributed to the financial success of the companies.

One particularly interesting note with respect to Ellen’s crossing aboard the SS Cedric, was the birth of two babies, both daughters of Eastern European women. The babies were named Ettel Cedrica Ruvinski and Julia Cedrica Baloq. Their shared middle names reflect their special places in the history of transatlantic migration.

Arriving in New York, the first- and second-class passengers disembarked immediately. Third-class passengers, such as Ellen and David, were taken by barge or ferry to Ellis Island, where they were processed by U.S. immigration officials. Ellis Island was the primary point of entry for aliens coming to the United States, and
of the 805,228 who came to the United States in 1921, 560,971 went through Ellis Island. Processing was not a pleasant experience, in fact, as the man who was commissioner of Ellis Island when Ellen and her brother arrived observed, it was a “miserable place.”

At Ellis Island, immigrants were organized in groups of thirty, that being the maximum number of individuals that could be listed on a single manifest sheet -- and a tag, with their name and manifest number, was pinned to their coat. Filing off onto the island, immigrants were greeted by interpreters, who grouped them according to the language they spoke and guided them into the reception building. There were twenty-nine individuals in Ellen’s group, all English speakers. Ellen’s tag was numbered seventy-three for her manifest group and four for her position in the group. Her brother was one place ahead of her in the line.

Looking at Ellen’s group, there were ten domestic servants, seven laborers, three housewives, three tailors, three textile workers, one dressmaker, one teacher and one student. David and Ellen were the only Scots. There were twenty-one individuals born in Ireland, four in Wales and two in England. The high number of Irish born individuals is representative of the second- and third-class passengers aboard the SS Cedric. A review of the SS Cedric’s manifest from that voyage indicates that there were more than 1,250 immigrants from the British Isles, including more than 940 from Ireland, more than 230 from England, more than 50 from Scotland and approximately 20 from Wales. The next highest group was from Eastern Europe, with more than 300 passengers. The leading countries were Romania with more than 160, Poland with more than 70, and Czechoslovakia with more than 50. Fourteen other countries were represented among the passengers, but none with significant numbers. The large number of Irish-born immigrants reflects the depth of
Britain’s economic problems and its effect on the country’s most disadvantaged workers. Some historians have offered other explanations for migration – adventure, meeting family members, escape from persecution -- but when these explanations are examined more closely, economic opportunity almost always remains a part of the individual motivation. This was certainly the case with the Dawson family.

Three places ahead of Ellen in group seventy-three was a twenty-one-year-old women from Rochdale, Mary Doherty, who had been born in Ireland and was traveling alone to meet her mother in Baltimore. It seems reasonable to speculate that Mary and Ellen may have built a friendship on the voyage, even sharing a cabin. Certainly they must have reassured each other as they moved through the U.S. immigration processing procedures, especially during the times when Ellen was separated from her brother. The hours, and sometimes days, spent at Ellis Island were, as many immigrants later noted, “very scary.”

Inside the giant hall of Ellis Island, its walls of white tile scrubbed clean, new arrivals were divided by gender. They were forced to disrobe and shower while their clothing was fumigated. They were then given a blanket and sent on for medical examinations where doctors and nurses checked each immigrant’s scalp, throat, hands and neck, looking for infectious diseases. Medical staff members also observed how the immigrants walked with their luggage. Did they limp? Were they weak? Were they easily winded? Finally, their eyes were checked. This was often the worst part of the examination. Doctors might use a buttonhook, hairpin or a finger to open the new arrival’s eyes. They were looking for trachoma, an eye disease that was common in southeastern Europe, but rare in North America. Emigrants who had trachoma were not allowed to enter the United States.
Aliens who failed these initial medical checks had their clothing marked with chalk and were held in a detention area until they could be given a closer examination. Chalk marks were usually single letters: B indicated a problem with the individual’s back, E indicated a concern about their eyes, H meant heart, and Sc was scalp. Women marked with Pg were thought to be pregnant. An X indicated mental retardation and a K inside a circle marked the recipient as insane. Immigrants who passed their medical screening, as Ellen and David Dawson did, were allowed to move forward to the next section of processing.41

In the Registry section, information provided by immigrants was checked against the ship’s records. Because of rumors that circulated among arriving immigrants about the type of questions asked, this was often one of the most feared parts of the processing. In truth, only a small number of individuals were detained at this point. Here, the two young Dawsons affirmed that they were neither polygamists, nor anarchists; that they did not believe in the overthrow of the government of the United States; that they had not been in prison or the poorhouse; and that they had not been previously deported from the United States. These questions were part of a standard list of questions that were asked of millions of immigrants, and were the result of a series of immigration laws intended to limit the number of individuals entering the United States and exclude certain groups considered to be undesirable. These laws began in 1875 with the Page Act, which sought to prevent prostitutes and certain classes of criminals from entering the country. In 1885, the Foran Act prevented employers from hiring working from abroad (contract workers). In 1891 the exclusionary list was expanded to include “all idiots, insane persons, paupers or persons likely to become a public charge, persons who had been convicted of a felony or other infamous crime or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude, (and)
polygamists.” And, in 1903, anarchists and persons advocating the overthrow of the American government were added.42

As a young woman, Ellen was also questioned separately by a matron to ascertain her moral character, and to make certain that she was not being lured to the United States to become a prostitute.43 As one immigrant to the U.S. later recalled, “America was very fussy about who they let in to the country…No woman could come to America in these days unless she had a sister claiming her or a brother claiming her, but he had to show that he was her brother…because they were afraid of prostitution or whatever it would be, but no girl could come in here without somebody claiming her.”44 On the manifest of the SS Cedric, a handwritten note clearly indicates that Ellen was David’s sister. David’s daughter, Betty Dawson, recalled her father telling her, “Someone had to meet them (young women and children) so they weren’t taken into the white slave traffic.”45

Looking at Ellen and David Dawson’s answers to the final questions on the immigration list highlights the uncertainty with which they approached their future in the United States. Unlike the other members of the Dawson family who followed, Ellen and David were the only ones who said that they did not intend to become U.S. citizens and that they were uncertain when they might return to Britain. At Ellis Island, someone wrote “six years” above the typed response of “uncertain.” This uncertainty was probably because they did not know what they would find in America, and having recently moved from Scotland to England, only to find the promise of economic opportunity wither before their eyes, they must have held serious doubts about what the future would bring.

Once they finished with the Registry questions, which normally took about forty-five minutes, and were approved for admission to the United States, they were
directed to the currency exchange, where they changed their British pounds sterling into dollars.\textsuperscript{46} Then, with their “Admitted” tickets in hand, Ellen and David moved on to Ellis Island’s last room. It was at this moment that the brother and sister, the first contingent of the Dawson family to arrive in America, must have shared a sense of joy and relief at having completed the processing ordeal, mixed with a feeling of anxiety and fear about the new country that opened before them. The final room was called the “Kissing Post,” because it was where new arrivals were finally welcomed by family and friends, the moment they knew they had been accepted into the United States. It was here that Ellen and David met their cousin, Mrs. John Curley, the individual who served as their American sponsor.

Thus, on a mild and sunny day, with the temperature in the upper fifties,\textsuperscript{47} the sister and brother, three-thousand miles from their native Scotland, walked onto the ferry and headed for their first home in the United States -- 207 Randolph Street in Passaic, New Jersey, in the heart of one of America’s major textile centers. They had paid for their passage, they had at least fifty dollars between them, and they had a place to stay. It would not be long before they had jobs in the local textile mills.

Three months later, on August 7, 1921, Ellen’s twenty-four year old brother, Michael Hurle Dawson, became the third member of the family to arrive in the United States. He had made the crossing with two other men from Barrhead, aboard the \textit{SS Columbia} from Glasgow. Thomas Dougall, a pastry baker, age twenty-three, left his wife at 374 Main Street, a few doors down from Ellen’s brother Edward, who was living at 330 Main Street. After arriving, he went to Brooklyn, New York in search of work. The other man was Thomas Robertson,\textsuperscript{48} a forty-one year old iron moulder who lived at 5 Bellefield Street. He may have worked with Patrick in the Shanks’ foundry. He left his wife in Scotland, searching for employment in Kearney, New
Jersey, a few minutes south of Passaic. Michael Hurle was met by his brother, David, and taken to Passaic. The following year, on October 22, 1922, Ellen’s mother Annie, her sisters Annie and Grace, and younger brothers Richard, Joseph and John arrived on the SS Baltic from Liverpool.

Although only one member of the Dawson family sailed from Glasgow, they rightfully belong to the enormous wave of Scottish emigrants who crossed the Atlantic during the early 1920s. “Between 1921 and 1923 about 100,000 emigrants, primarily from Lanarkshire and Renfrewshire, sailed from the Clyde, most to North America. The United States was fairly well represented, with thirty-four sailings in 1921 (including the one that carried Michael Hurle Dawson) and thirty-seven in 1922, compared with twenty-seven sailings to Canada in 1921 and forty-five the following year. 1923 saw more emigrant departures from Scotland than any other year in the decade.”

One reason for the decline in emigrants after 1923 was the establishment of an immigration quota system by the United States. In 1921 the United States Congress passed a law limiting immigrants to three percent of people of each nationality already living in the U.S. This was based on the 1910 Census. The quota system targeted immigrants from regions outside Northern Europe, particularly Eastern and Southern Europe, Asia, and Africa. As a result, total immigration into the United States dropped from 805,228 in 1921 to 309,556 in 1922. The impact of the new system on Scottish immigrants is debatable. Marjory Harper noted that, “Scotland had filled its quota (for July 1, 1922 to June 30, 1923) by April 1923 (and) bookings from the Clyde to the United States were suspended until 1 July, when there was an immediate upsurge in activity, with 4,000 leaving in one weekend.” Another historian, however, points to the fact that the British quotas went unfilled in the later
part of the 1920s. The reality may have been that assisted passages and other incentives may have pulled the majority of Scottish emigrants to Commonwealth countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and the fear of not being allowed into the U.S. because of the quota system may have caused many Scots to select other destinations. However, the Scottish quota, because of several hundred years of Scottish migration to the United States, was one of the largest.

Looking back at Ellen’s early life, from her birth in Barrhead to her arrival in Passaic, there are several significant forces that I believe shaped Ellen into the woman who became a leading American labor activist. These forces included the poverty to which she was born and the economic hardships that she and her family faced during those early years in Scotland; Barrhead’s spirit of cooperation that gave workers the hope of a better life for those who were willing to work together; the labor unrest in the Glasgow, particularly the radical activists and dramatic confrontations that Ellen witnessed as a young Scottish textile worker; the struggle between skilled and unskilled workers, a selfish battle that often proved particularly detrimental to women workers; exposure to the greed and abusive actions of capitalists who sought to control their workers with paternalistic management, Taylorism, violence, intimidation and reprisal; the hardships of economic migration from Scotland to England and on to the United States; and Ellen’s close association with immigrant workers from throughout Europe during the transatlantic crossing, something that helped prepare her for the diversity of Passaic and instilled in her a sense of international community.

Finally, and this is another one of those observations that comes from the mysterious bond that develops between biographer and subject, it seems highly likely that Ellen took to America the attitudes and convictions epitomized by the Lancaster
Lass – authentic working class values, simplicity (not simplemindedness), unbending spirit, fierce independence and a defiant class allegiance.
1 Whitworth Township of Poor Rate, 1919 (Whitworth Local History Museum, Whitworth, England), p. 29. This information, along with the death record of Patrick Dawson, survived solely because of the efforts of a group of older men, some in their eighties, who live in the Whitworth Valley. Together they organized the Whitworth Heritage Museum, a local history museum housed in an abandoned mill building in Whitworth, just south of Millgate. There they continue to collect wealth of information concerning the area. The two specific records I used from their collection came from the Shawforth Council. When the Shawforth Council ceased operation some years earlier, council records were discarded. One of the members of the local heritage society literally climbed into a large dust bin to rescue these and other volumes. Perhaps more than any other single experience during my three years of research, this one shows how much sheer luck is involved in uncovering the history of workers such as Ellen Dawson. As historians, I believe that we all owe a debt to dedicated individuals such as the members of this local history museum.

2 This is supported by Patrick Dawson’s letter of 1921, which was discussed in the second chapter – “Ellen Dawson.”

3 Housing the Heroes (Barrhead: Community Council, 1983), p. 7.


6 Harper, Emigration from Scotland between the wars, p. 6.


8 Melman, Women and the Popular Imagination of the Twenties, p. 125.


10 Ibid, p. 43.

11 Ibid, pp. 75-76.


13 Lancashire Ordnance Survey, Sheet LXXX 4.


15 This point was confirmed by several members of the Whitworth Historical Society during a conversation on May 6, 2003.


17 “Rossendale Collection,” Whitworth Chronology (Rawtenstall Regional Library, Rawtenstall, England).

18 Ibid.

19 Bowen, The Book of Bacup, p. 36.

20 Ibid, p. 34.

21 Ibid.

22 Walton, Lancashire, p. 145.

23 Correspondence files, Whitworth Powerloom Overlookers, January 1914 to August 1920 (Lancaster Public Records Office, Preston, England).


25 In the American South, textile workers were often called “Lint Heads” for this reason.


27 The author is J.B. Priestley. The performer was Gracie Fields. The quotation is from his novel English Journey (Chicago: University Press, 1984).


29 Ibid, p. 133.

30 Ellis Island Oral History Project, interview EI-172, Agnes Schilling.


32 Ellis Island Oral History Project, interview EI-440, Margaret Kirk; Harper, Emigration From Scotland between the wars, p. 144.

33 www.ellisisland.org.
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34 Cabins were small, interior compartments without portholes. They were outfitted with wooden bunks and provided accommodations for several passengers, often strangers who were assigned to live together during the journey.
35 Dining rooms provided simple but generally nutritious meals based on the standards of the day, meals that were often far better than what many third class passengers had eaten in their native land.
36 Coan, Peter Morton, Ellis Island Interviews (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1997), p. 112. Coan’s book includes an extensive collection of immigrant interviews. Although these interviews are presented as the actual interviews, Coan finally admits on page xxv that the interviews have been edited (highly edited from my perspective) and that the names of the individuals have been changed to protect the person’s privacy. A comparison of the original interview of Agnes Schilling, who Coan identifies as Marge Glasgow, indicates that the Coan interviews are factually correct, if not actual transcripts. For this reason, I have used his book for the purpose of general information only. I have been very careful not to quote directly from his interviews or use the fictitious names referenced in his book. I think Coan’s book is a meaningful contribution for the general reader. However, as I have done, historians must use it carefully and selectively.
37 SS Cedric manifest, May 9, 1921.
39 SS Cedric manifest, May 9, 1921, page 73; Ellis Island interview, Agnes Schilling.
40 Tiffit, Wilton, Ellis Island (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), pages not numbered; Reeves, Ellis Island: Gateway to the American Dream, p.59; Coan, Ellis Island Interviews, p. 42.
41 Reeves, Ellis Island: Gateway to the American Dream, p.59.
43 Tiffit, Ellis Island, pages not numbered.
44 McCarthy, “Personal Accounts of Irish and Scottish Migrant,” comments are by Margaret Kirk, Ellis Island interviews (Ellis Island, New York).
45 Betty Dawson interview.
46 Ellis Island records indicate that the pair had a total of at least ten pounds, or fifty dollars, in their possession.
47 The New York Times, May 9, 1921.
48 Where the connection between Michael Hurle Dawson and Thomas Dougall seems clear – similar ages, having been neighbors in Barrhead, and being in line together at Ellis Island, the connection with Thomas Robertson is not as clear. He lived in a different part of Barrhead, was older, and was several positions away in the Ellis Island line. Even if the men were not friends before the voyage, it seems highly likely that they met during the journey. It is also possible, being older, that Robertson looked out for the two younger men during the trip.
49 SS Columbia manifest, August 7, 1921.
50 Interestingly, Thomas Halford, who may have been one of Annie’s brothers, arrived five days earlier about the SS Assyria. He was sponsored by his brother-in-law John Curley, the husband of the woman who sponsored Ellen and David Dawson. The following year, Thomas Halford’s daughter, Jane, arrived aboard the SS California. At this point, Thomas was living with the Curleys at 207 Randolph Avenue, Passaic, the same place the Dawsons lived when they first arrived in the United States. This certainly demonstrates the willingness of individuals to assist in the emigration of other family members.
51 Harper, Emigration from Scotland between the wars, p. 29.
52 Ibid.
54 Melman, Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties, pp. 121-124.