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David Warren Sabean  
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## **Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870**

This work analyzes shifts in the relations of families, households, and individuals in a single German village during the transition to a modern social structure and cultural order. Sabean's findings call into question the idea that the more modern society became, the less kin mattered. Rather, the opposite happened. During "modernization," close kin developed a flexible set of exchanges, passing marriage partners, godparents, political favors, work contacts, and financial guarantees back and forth. In many families, generation after generation married cousins. Sabean also argues that the new kinship systems were fundamental for class formation, and he repositions women in the center of a political culture of alliance construction. Modern Europe became a kinship "hot" society during the modern era, only to see the modern alliance system break apart during the transition to the postmodern era.

This book is one of a series of monumental local studies coming out of the Max Planck Institute for History in Göttingen. It is the most thoroughgoing attempt to work between the disciplines of social and cultural history and anthropology, and it demonstrates successfully the power of microhistory to reconceptualize general historical trends.

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# Kinship in Neckarhausen, 1700–1870

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DAVID WARREN SABEAN

*University of California, Los Angeles*



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*to George L. Mosse*  
who taught us all about teaching

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In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, or agency.

When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

From a mountainside, camping with their household goods, Ersilia's refugees look at the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain. That is the city of Ersilia still, and they are nothing.

They rebuild Ersilia elsewhere. They weave a similar pattern of strings which they would like to be more complex and at the same time more regular than the other. Then they abandon it and take themselves and their houses still farther away.

Thus, when travelling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of the abandoned cities, without the walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form.

—Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

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## Abbreviations

B	brother
BM	Bürgermeister
D	daughter
F	father
fl	Gulden (florin)
FRKN	Frickenhausen
GRBTLG	Grossbettlingen
GRTZ	Grötzingen
H	husband
M	mother
NH	Neckarhausen
NTLF	Neckartailfingen
NRTG	Nürtingen
OBBHNG	Oberboihingen
OBENSG	Oberensingen
RDWG	Raidwangen
S	son
UNENSG	Unterensingen
W	wife
WLFS	Wolfschlugen
x	step
Z	sister
ZSHN	Zizishausen

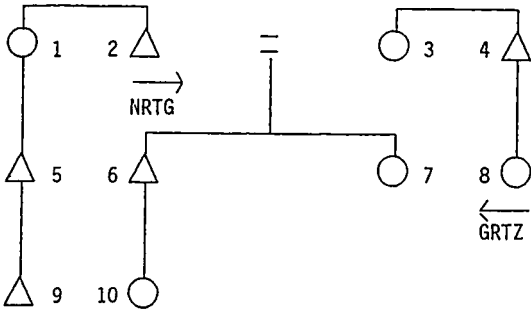
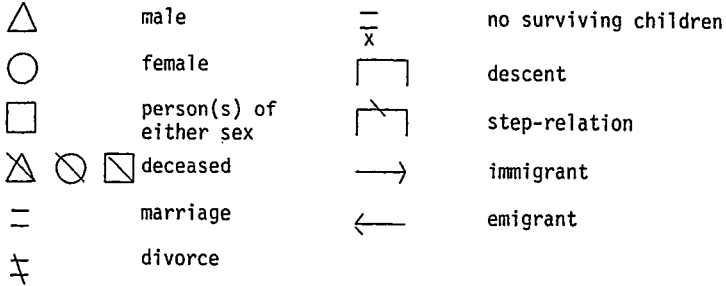
*Note:* All dates follow German usage: day, month, year (12.2.1796 = 12 February 1796).

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## Abbreviations of sources

Gericht	Gerichts- und Gemeinderatsprotocolle, Neckarhausen
HSAS	Hauptstaatsarchiv Stuttgart
KB	Kaufbücher
Kirchenkonvent	Kirchenkonventsprotocolle, Neckarhausen
LKA	Landeskirchliches Archiv, Stuttgart
Nürtingen Stadtgericht	Stadtgerichtsprotocolle, Nürtingen
Oberamtsgericht	Nürtingen Oberamtsgerichtsprotocolle, STAL
Reyscher	August Ludwig Reyscher, ed., <i>Vollständige historisch und kritisch bearbeitete Sammlung der württembergischen Gesetze</i>
RPTK	<i>Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</i>
Schultheissenamt	Schultheissenamtsprotocolle, Neckarhausen
STAL	Staatsarchiv Ludwigsburg
Vogtruggericht	Vogtruggerichtsprotocolle, Neckarhausen (Bescheid- und Rezessbuch)

## On reading kinship diagrams



- 6 is 5's MBS (mother's brother's son)
- 7 is 6's Z (sister)
- 8 is 7's MxBD (mother's step-brother's daughter)
- 3 is 2's W (wife)
- 3 and 6 are first cousins (Vettern)
- 6 and 9 are first cousins once removed
- 9 and 10 are second cousins
- 2 immigrated to Neckarhausen from Nürtingen
- 8 emigrated from Neckarhausen to Grötzingen

---

## Glossary

German words are italicized when they occur for the first time in the volume or when attention is focused on their use.

- affinal** related by marriage  
**agnatic** relations reckoned through father  
**Amt** bureau; district  
**Amtmann** officer, official, administrator  
**Amtsverweser** temporary incumbent of an office  
**Bauer** agricultural producer, peasant  
**Beständer** contractor; farmer  
**Blutsfreundschaft** kin or kinship by blood  
**Blutschande** incest  
**Bürger** enfranchised member of a locality, citizen  
**Bürgerausschuss** committee representing locality inhabitants  
**Bürgermeister** chief financial officer of a locality  
**Bürgerrecht** citizenship, full rights in a locality  
**Bürgerschaft** citizens of a locality  
**Bürgschaft** pledge, bond, surety  
**clan** group of people related through descent  
**cognatic** relations reckoned through both parents  
**consanguineal** related by blood  
**Conventsrichter** church consistory elder  
**cross cousins** cousins reckoned through parent's different sex sibling  
**dot** dowry  
**Döte** godfather (relation to child)  
**Dote** godmother (relation to child)  
**Ehesuccessor** marital successor (spouse's subsequent spouse)



## *Glossary*

- endogamy** marriage inside the group  
**exogamy** marriage outside the group  
**Familie** family; kin-group  
**Freund** friend; relative  
**Freundschaft** kinship; affinity  
**Gant** bankruptcy  
**Gegenschweher** co-(rresponding)-parents-in-law  
**Gemeinderat** local council; member of local council  
**Gemütlichkeit** comfort  
**Gericht** court  
**Gerichtsschreiber** court clerk, recorder  
**Gerichtsverwandter** Richter; member of the court; justice  
**Geschwister** siblings  
**Geschwisterkind** cousin  
**Gevatter(in)** godfather (mother) (relation to parents)  
**Gevatterkind** godchild (relation of parent to godparent)  
**Gevattermann** godfather (relation to parent)  
**Gevattersohn** godson (relation of father of child to godparent)  
**Grad** degree  
**Güterpfleger** warden, property overseer, or administrator  
**Hausmacht** political influence of a family  
**Herrschaft** lordship; authority, domination, dominion, rule; power; domain;  
   seignury  
**herrschaftliche Interesse** fiscal interests of the prince  
**heterogamy** marriage of unequals  
**Hofbauer** farmer; tenant of a large farm  
**homogamy** marriage of equals  
**hypergamy** marriage upward (by women)  
**isonymy** matching names  
**kindred** group of relatives related to an individual  
**Kindskind(er)** second cousin(s)  
**Kirchenkonvent** church consistory  
**Kirchenordnung** ecclesiastical code  
**Kriegsfrau** court ward (woman); correlative to *Kriegsvogt*  
**Kriegsvogt** curator ad litem; gender tutor; representative  
**Kriegsvogtschaft** gender tutelage  
**Landschaft** parliament, estates  
**Markung** territory of a locality  
**matrifocal** relationships centered on or constructed by a senior woman  
**matrilateral** relationship reckoned through mother  
**matriline** descendants through females of a common progenitrix  
**Mütterliches** maternal inheritance  
**Mundtod** incompetent, in state of civil death  
**neolocality** residence not defined by parents' residence

## *Glossary*

- neonymy** creation of a novel name  
**Nutzniessung** usufruct  
**Oberamt** district  
**Oberamtman** chief district officer (see Vogt)  
**ousta** household  
**parallel cousin** cousin reckoned through parent's same-sex sibling  
**Partei** faction  
**Parteilosigkeit** neutrality  
**patrilateral** relationship reckoned through father  
**patriline** descendants through males from a common progenitor  
**patrilocality** residence according to father's kin  
**Pflegekind** ward  
**Pfleger** guardian  
**Pflegschaft** guardianship  
**Pförc** sheepfold  
**Rat** council; member of council  
**Richter** justice; member of the court (Gericht)  
**Schichten** social strata  
**Schultheiss** chief administrative officer of a village  
**Schultheissenamt** Schultheiss bureau  
**Schwägerschaft** affinity  
**Scribent** lower clerk  
**Sippe** kindred  
**Stadtknecht** town baliff  
**Stamm** root; progenitor  
**Stammgut** ancestral home; estate belonging to the chief line  
**Stand, Stände** corporate group(s); status; class(es)  
**teknonymy** naming by occupation or trade  
**Unteramtman** deputy to the Amtmann  
**Untervogt** deputy to chief regional official  
**uterine** relations reckoned through mother  
**uxorilocality** residence according to mother's kin  
**Väterliches** paternal inheritance  
**Verein** club; association  
**Vetter** cousin; earlier usage: uncle  
**Vetterle** Swabian dialect form for Vetter (diminutive)  
**Vetterlesgericht** a court full of relatives  
**Vetterleswirtschaft** nepotism; corruption  
**Vogt** chief regional official; representative; guardian  
**Waisengericht** orphan's court  
**Waisenkind** orphan  
**Waisenrichter** justice of the orphans' court  
**Waldmeister** forest administrator



## Preface

George Mosse once explained to his graduate students how to put a book together: take notes until the shoe box is full, throw the box out the window, and write. Ah, but we were young, and the smell of revolution was in the air. Social history, with its need for stakhanovite heroes, beckoned and promised to overturn our understanding of the past. We were to spend long hours in the archives, years filling out family reconstitution forms, and more years figuring out what to do with them, all the while (although we did not suspect it at the time) shunting data from one outmoded technological system to another. Today I see more clearly how astute the practical advice was, but I also see how much I was building on the sure foundations George had already provided and how pervasive his influence has been. He taught me to pay close attention to the symbols and ideas that have moved people in the past. There was no great leap, apart from methodological razzle-dazzle and less readable prose, from his kind of cultural history to my kind of social history. Most important were his broad understanding of what constituted political practice and his sympathetic grasp of concrete existence. He understood that just those areas of life that people develop to avoid power, flee self-interest, and obtain distance are as much inflected with politics and with material culture as anything else. He was practicing critical history long before there was a word for it. When I look back on my intellectual development, I think that George taught me above all else two essential things: history writing as the practice of irony and history teaching as a high calling, demanding discipline, care, and a great deal of humor. I recently had the chance to hear George lecture once again after more than thirty years, this time in Los Angeles. The audience was full of students from Madison in the '60s – all of us reminded of an almost forgotten intensity of intellect and moral commitment. I want to dedicate this book to one of America's most successful teachers. No one who failed

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## Preface

to hear Mosse lecture in the early '60s can experience history quite in the manner that we still do.

I have a second major debt, one that came later as I was puzzling out ways to incorporate social anthropology into the practice of history. During the academic year 1972-3, I had a Social Science Research Council postdoctoral fellowship to Cambridge University, where I spent the time in daily exchange with Jack Goody. Jack introduced me to that powerful and coherent school of British anthropologists who had studied and worked with Bronislaw Malinowski and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown. In conversations with Jack and his wife Esther, I worked out ideas about social reproduction and about the usefulness of a relational concept of property for historical and social analysis. Jack's broad vision of kinship, his elemental good sense, and his interest in historical process have all had a profound effect on how I have thought through the problems in this book. He has always been far more interested in building on past scholarship than on novelty for its own sake. I think he got it right recently when he remarked, "It is an impoverished field that sees itself as having to discard its predecessors at each generation instead of critically building on their achievements."<sup>1</sup>

Like M. Jourdain, who found out that he had been speaking prose for forty years without knowing it, I had been practicing "microhistory" without being aware that it might have a name. I have left it to my former and present colleagues, Hans Medick and Carlo Ginzburg, respectively, to explain the assumptions behind the methodology.<sup>2</sup> Simply put, I set out to examine kinship as an analytically distinct issue that required my data base to be restricted to a single locality in order to reach the details that could not be had any other way. I found that kinship was an inordinately useful starting place for elucidating a social order and that the study of one locality was a most powerful heuristic device. Tracking everyday aspects of intra- and interfamilial exchange, patterns of marriage, care for orphans, cooperation in agriculture, habitual ways of doing things, and the promotion and placing of children connects kinship to matters of gender, politics, production, and culture. I found that a number of fundamental historical issues could not be made sense of without understanding kinship and without starting the inquiry in a controlled and restricted location. Take, for example, the problem of class. If class is about anything, it is about the coordinated and managed access to property. Just for that reason, property, and indeed class, remain incoherent in the absence of kinship. And seeing how they are connected requires a patient attention to small details. Fundamental matters such as the nature and composition of households, the social division of labor, the distribution of authority,

<sup>1</sup> Jack Goody, *The Expansive Moment. The Rise of Social Anthropology in Britain and Africa 1918-1970* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 144-5.

<sup>2</sup> See the introduction, "Entlegene Geschichte? Lokalgeschichte als mikro-historisch begründete allgemeine Geschichte," to Hans Medick, ed., *Weben und Ueberleben in Laichingen 1650-1900. Lokalgeschichte als allgemeine Geschichte* (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1996). See also Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It," *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1993): 10-35.

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the dynamics of social hierarchy, and the arrangement of political practices within gender-constructed milieus, all remain unintelligible without a thoroughgoing analysis of kinship. Furthermore, the more distanced the viewpoint, the easier it is to fail to grasp kinship as a coherent system. But the methods of microhistory have to tuck continuously with those of comparative history in order to bring lives as they really are lived – locally, on the ground – into recognizable and discussable shape, not as generalized information but as alternative logics of patterned reciprocity. Comparison in its turn cannot be done in bits and pieces but involves a careful reading of complex social structures against each other, looking for variations in strategical coherence or unexpected consequences of different social dialectics.

In an earlier work on the village, *Property, Production, and Family in Neckarhausen 1700–1870*, I looked at internal family and household dynamics, examining relations between husbands and wives and parents and children. I argued that toward the end of the eighteenth century the opening up of the village to outside markets, the reconfiguration of agricultural output, and the intrusion of capital profoundly altered the sexual division of labor, relations between husbands and wives, the structure and ideology of the house, intergenerational distribution and control of wealth and productive resources, the patterns of authority, and the way property mediated relationships among family members. The fact that the more fluid economy of the village shifted interactions within and between families poses new questions for studying kinship in other places and at other social levels during the process of modernization. Just as in the earlier book I argued for a reworking of the theme of family and modernity, here I am arguing for a reconceptualization of gender and class in terms of sharply focused attention on kinship as a modern construction.

This book therefore takes as its theme the set of familial relations among individuals and households. Sometimes kinship studies confine themselves to marriage exchanges, but I am concerned throughout with the encompassing patterns of reciprocity as well as with their reverse side – with forms of behavior that refuse exchange, establish lines of fission, or set up practices of exclusion. Kinship is very much about identity, for, after all, within its dynamics people are socialized, recognized, and ordered into intelligible hierarchies. Thus the examination of kinship promises to link issues of pressing current concern about subjectivity to older ones of social practice. Thinking about both identity and kinship prompts, as I will show, consideration of parallel problems of memory and narrative construction. Kinship is based on recall, commemoration, and remembering old debts, and its basic working procedure explicitly or implicitly operates from within a repertoire of mutually constructed stories. Kinship displays recurring patterns, and even though in my analysis I constantly endeavor to tease out form and structure, I am well aware that they are the result of numerous everyday practices – activities such as getting together a plow team, competing for a young girl's favor, discussing the fair allocation of building wood, or bidding on a village contract. Despite being embedded in mundane practices

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and produced within them, kinship proves to be systemic. Although it is constructed in the give and take of daily life, in the end it offers a system of patterned expectations, a coherent set of constraints, and an arena in which claims and obligations can be negotiated with strategic intent and greater or lesser degrees of tactical finesse.

Opening up kinship reveals a largely unexplored terrain of political activity. In the analysis of the history of Neckarhausen, the rise of a market in land and the massive influx of capital for agricultural intensification provided an explanatory entry into the problem of reordered relations among kin. In a parallel fashion in the larger society, the processes of bringing together capital and distributing it cannot be grasped outside the politics of kinship. In nineteenth-century Europe, strategic support for families in crisis, in bankruptcy, and at stress points in the life cycle called upon the calculated if intermittent intervention of kin. Skilled negotiations among existing and potential kin were necessary to maintain entrances to and exits from social milieus and to police cultural and social boundaries. Within the dynamics of family occurred a large part of the ludic, festive, competitive, and charitable activities that configured political cultures. Part of the reason that kinship has not been systematically brought into the conceptual framework of the political has to do with the central place of women for configuring alliances between subpopulations, for maintaining the practices of code and symbol recognition so crucial for sexual and cultural attraction, and for training rules and practices into bodies. Class habitus grew out of the interplay among kin, the setting of which in the nineteenth century was staged mainly by women. Connubium was at the heart of class formation, and alliances were continually configured around the negotiating activities of women. Politics is not only about ideology formation and party struggles, but it is also about cultural struggles: fashioning mannered discourses, patterning everyday forms of social intercourse, and configuring the aesthetics of distinction. To get at such issues, I consider the finely spun networks of social interaction, the complex interplay of reciprocities, and the links between familial intercourse and social imagination. Both kinship and politics are about building the ties that bind, and much of what this book is about is understanding cultures of obligation. The argument that emerges here is the reverse of older understandings of the relationship between politics and class. Rather than social differentiation and class articulation leading to certain forms of intervention in the political sphere, power is far more autonomous and politics is an active force in configuring class formation and ordering relations between classes.

\* \* \*

I have many, many people to thank for helping me with this book. The initial lessons in social anthropology came from Robert Groves and George Bond during my first academic appointment at the University of East Anglia from 1966 to 1970. In 1968 Christopher Turner and I taught an interdisciplinary course on the history of the family and kinship in which I first outlined the problematic of

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this book. Many of the early methodological discussions took place at the University of Pittsburgh from 1970 to 1976, where Sam Hayes had brought together a remarkable group of innovative social historians. Larry Glasco talked me into using the computer to create a data base. With Jonathan Levine, the editor of *Historical Methods*, I discussed methodological practice for hours, and the happy occasion of long visits by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Edward Thompson strengthened my resolve to experiment with new ways of getting at things. Members of the peasant studies group at Pittsburgh encouraged me to read widely in comparative approaches to rural life. I also had help from a number of assistants. Sandy Dumin and Ella Jacobs keypunched and verified all of the parish register forms I had filled out. Eva Savol and Raymond Monahan prepared some of the tax records and inventories for keypunching by Lena Crnovic.

From 1976 to 1983, I was a fellow at the Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte in Göttingen. The director, Rudolf Vierhaus, presided over an innovative, *eigen-sinnige* group of social historians concerned with the history of protoindustrialization, working class culture, and rural society. He was still a firm believer in basic research as the central role of such an institution, and I think that the recent publications of his group show that that form of ground-breaking scholarly pursuit is compelling and cannot be rushed. I found Alf Lüdtke's interests in power and everyday life crucial for my own formulation of the issues. Peter Kriedte offered a superb knowledge of agrarian institutions. Jürgen Schlumbohm read and commented on every word I wrote. He has proved a constant friend. His own book on the parish of Belm is a model study of demographic and social analysis, one of the most profound works of microhistory I know. Hans Medick chose to work on a Swabian village not far from Neckarhausen. We spent an intense seven years discussing the ins and outs of sources, the uses of anthropology for historical work, and the meaning and practice of microhistory. Although I do not think I ever convinced him of the central importance of kinship, the argument owes as much to his skepticism as anything else. Loli Diehl and Gerlinde Müller redacted the complex marriage and estate inventories onto forms, which Kornelia Menne entered on the computer. The computerization of the entire data base was made possible by the system "Kleio," developed by Manfred Thaller.

Many visitors to the Max-Planck-Institut helped me think through the issues: David Gaunt, David Levine, Jonathan Knudsen, Vanessa Maher, Gerald Sider, and Robert Berdahl. Above all, William Reddy was a congenial visitor. He has thought more profoundly than anyone else about how anthropology and history can speak to each other. He eventually read the first version of the manuscript, and his comments led me to recast the argument completely. He has also offered penetrating comments on the current version. Various members of the continuing seminar on family history and the Round Table in Anthropology and History discussed issues of family and kinship with me: Barbara Duden, Michael Mitterauer, Heidi Rosenbaum, and Regine Schulte. Karin Hausen at the Technical University in Berlin has been especially important in approaching my work with

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good humor and the right touch of ironic detachment. She introduced me to the Ernst Brandes texts, gave me leads to many sources, and prompted me to write the concluding two chapters. She has always been an engaged critic of my work, and many of the questions I have asked have grown out of conversations between us. I have gained many insights about Württemberg history over the years from talks with Carola Lipp and Wolfgang Kaschuba. I also learned a great deal from younger scholars at the Institute: Gadi Algazi, Michaela Hohkamp, and Peter Becker. I am particularly grateful to Bernhard Jussen for helping me think through the issues of godparentage.

Such a work as this could never have been written without the gracious and patient help of the staffs of various archives. For many years, the Württembergisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Stuttgart was a home away from home. I want to thank the staff there, as well as at the Staatsarchiv in Ludwigsburg for establishing excellent working conditions and a professional atmosphere. Dr. Dietrich Schäfer at the Landeskirchlichesarchiv in Stuttgart offered welcome encouragement and assistance in getting the Neckarhausen parish material microfilmed. I have also benefited from assistance in Neckarhausen. When I first arrived in 1967, Bürgermeister Schwarz gave me permission to use the sources in the Rathaus, and Gemeindepfleger Hagenlocher arranged to let me have them microfilmed. The present Gemeindevorsteher, Willi Knapp, continued to allow access to the material and microfilming privileges.

During my years at the University of California (from 1983 to 1988, and since 1993) and at Cornell University (from 1988 to 1993), many colleagues and students have encouraged me and offered valuable critical readings. William Clark went through the first version as well as the current one line by line and offered brilliant structuralist readings. Scott Waugh thought it was important to keep the details. Isabel Hull read every word and gave me sensible ideas about how to revise and encouraged me to finish up. She was a delightful colleague and a major reason for missing Ithaca. Erik Monkonnen liked the diagrams and all the details. Bernard Heise gave me amused comment and insisted on clarity. Christopher Johnson explained why my arguments were important. Ever since we started out in graduate school together, he has offered the challenging perspective of a socially committed historian.

I want to thank Frank Smith once again for being an encouraging and patient editor. Vicky Macintyre did a superb job reading her way into the rhythms of my prose and saving me from many inconsistencies. I was very pleased that she was willing to take on another monster manuscript from me.

All through the many years, my wife, Ruth, has been striding ahead into the informational future, while I have been making forays into the more settled terrain of the past. Twenty-five years ago, a graduate student remarked that we both seemed so spry. Now that the term might have some meaning, I have visions of us skipping off into the new age, continually wrangling about the gains and losses of the new technology.