

ABSTRACT

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During the late 19th century, Swedish dairying developed into a leading export industry. In contrast to other important dairying countries such as Denmark, England and Canada, the skilled labour force of the mechanized Swedish dairies established during this period was almost exclusively female. Not until the late 1920s did dairymen outnumber dairy-maids, and women in skilled dairy work were not definitely replaced by men until the 1940s.

This thesis shows that the masculinization of Swedish dairying cannot be explained with reference to any single explanatory factor such as technological change or a lack of educational opportunities. In 1930, dairymaids made up a significant minority of the skilled work force even in the largest and most mechanized dairies, and up to 1938, more public dairy schools were open to women than to men.

Instead, the masculinization of skilled dairy work must be understood as a political and cultural process, which finally resulted in a reinterpretation of the gender of dairy work. During a period of several decades, the traditionally female coding of milk and dairy work gradually dissolved. A starting point for this recoding was the increasingly technological and scientific character of industrial dairying, which, in accordance with a strong Western tradition, made it possible to interpret dairy work as a male activity. In addition, masculinization was fostered by cultural influences from the nearby province of Holstein, where men had been in dairying since the protoindustrial phase. Geographically, the masculinization process spread along the established routes of innovation diffusion in Sweden. Dairymen were found first in southwestern Sweden and the Mälars region, while they were slow to appear in the southeastern and northern parts of the country.

State financed dairy education effectively promoted the masculinization process by giving men a more adequate, theoretically oriented training than women. In the 1930s, when Swedish dairying entered a period of rapid restructuring, the more practically educated women were perceived as being less suited for the modern dairy industry than men. Masculinization was also fostered by the Association of Swedish Dairymen, which pursued an offensive strategy of professionalization.

In the 1930s, women turned their backs to the dairy industry. At this point, dairy-maids found themselves increasingly obliged to accept subordinate positions in the workplace. At the same time, the rise of new ideas of femininity, rooted in the ideology of separate spheres, made the physically demanding, originally agrarian occupation of dairymaid less attractive.

KEYWORDS: Dairy industry, gender division of labour, de-feminization, vocational education, professionalization, women's history, labour history.

Lena Sommestad, Uppsala University, Department of Economic History, Box 513, S-751 20 Uppsala.