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The United Farm Women of Alberta: Political and Educational Advocacy, 1915-1939

by

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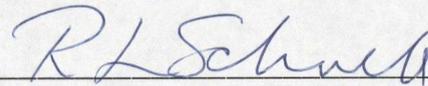
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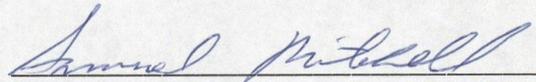
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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The United Farm Women of Alberta: Political and Educational Advocacy, 1915-1939" submitted by Alexis Ann Soltice in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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## ABSTRACT

The aspirations of the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) were multifaceted, although the sole motivation for the activities of this progressive organization remained the same. From its genesis in 1915, then known as the Women's Auxiliary to the United Farmers of Alberta, to 1939 when the United Farmers organization voted to cease political activity, the UFWA maintained its self-appointed advocacy of women and children on the Alberta prairies. Through its advocacy, the UFWA organization became involved in the promotion of eugenics as a strategy to protect the women and children of pioneering families.

This study is based on archival records of the United Farmers organization found at the Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary, Alberta. Specifically, the Minutes of Annual Conventions and meetings were employed as the primary material in this project, while numerous secondary sources were called upon to supplement and clarify what was found in the Minutes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a graduate student, I was fortunate to have carried out my program in the Department of Educational Policy and Administrative Studies (EDPA) at The University of Calgary. Through my association with the many fine students and EDPA staff I have grown academically and personally.

My initial experience with graduate level course work was Samuel Mitchell's "Change and Innovation in Education" taken through teleconference. This course was my first after concluding a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, and piqued an interest in the complexities within the study of Educational Policy. Later as a Professor and my Interim Graduate Advisor, Dr. Mitchell provided unwavering encouragement and gave me the confidence to progress at the graduate level.

My interests in the history of education were honed through the completion of Dr. Rodolph Schnell's courses: "Women, Education and Social Policy", and "Education and Feminism." Through Dr. Schnell's careful guidance as both professor and Supervisor my academic abilities have become refined and focussed. I am most grateful to Dr. Schnell for his invaluable encouragement, direction, and expertise.

Dr. David Jones also deserves credit for his guidance toward the completion of this project. As both a professor for a self-directed study course and a Supervisor, Dr. Jones helped me to develop my primary material research skills facilitating this final result.

Without the support of my special family I could not have realized this achievement. To my parents, thank you for always championing my pursuits whether they be equestrian, agricultural, or academic. To my brother, John, thank

you for asking my advice regarding your own studies. And finally, to the newest member of my family, I thank my husband, Bryan, for his unselfish devotion and encouragement in my academic pursuits.

## DEDICATION

*This thesis is for my parents,  
Gordon and Norma Soltice.  
My parents have carefully guided  
me through all my endeavors;  
my successes are because of them.*

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction to the United Farmers of Alberta

The formation of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) as a pressure group in 1909 was followed a year later with the organization of a women's section. In 1915 the Women's Auxiliary to the United Farmers of Alberta (WAUFA) agreed to change its name to the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) and officially did so in early 1916 when the Constitution of the UFA was amended to allow for the addition of a women's section to the organization. At that time the UFWA became equal partners with the UFA faction in prairie reform. Following World War I the UFA consciously moved from a pressure group to a political party in order to more effectively protect the interests of the Alberta farmer. In 1921 the United Farmers organization came into power by winning thirty-nine of sixty-one seats, and governed Alberta until 1935 when the Social Credit party handily took over provincial politics in Alberta.

With the addition of the UFWA, the United Farmers became a powerful, all-encompassing prairie activist movement. Their goal remained the same: the protection of the interests of the Alberta farmer. To achieve this goal the Farmers considered nearly every aspect of prairie life; the men focussed on the economics and finances, while the women centered their attention on factors affecting the home, women and children. To improve the lives of the women and children of rural Alberta, the UFWA realized the value of education. Although the first motivation to bring rural women together was for social interaction, education soon became a focal point. By employing methods of non-formal education the UFWA

intended to help rural women obtain an improved quality of life through “increasing the efficiency of the housekeeper, by learning what we can through addresses and otherwise of food values, proper preparation of food etc.”<sup>1</sup> As the UFWA matured and progressed they moved beyond home economics into the arenas of school curriculum and mental health, including the eventual endorsement of eugenics. L. J. Wilson illuminates the early intentions of the UFWA in “Educational Role of the United Farm Women of Alberta.” Wilson asserts that through the very structure of the UFWA organization, an intricate system of committees and conventions whereby information and new ideas were disseminated, it had an educational basis from its genesis. The UFWA resolved “[t]o assist our members to educate themselves to be the best possible citizens of the community, the nation, and the world, to interest them in that which makes for reform in social conditions, particularly those affecting the childhood and youth of our land; to popularize the study of social and economic questions; and to develop local taste for literature, music and the finer things in life.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, with the task of improving the lives of women and children in rural Alberta before them, the UFWA chose to achieve this through educational means. Non-formal education was the vehicle through which the UFWA reached its own members, the UFA men, and the residents of Alberta.

### Focus Of This Study

In studying the educational role of the UFWA in its efforts to better life

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<sup>1</sup> UFWA Minutes, Annual Report “The Aims and Objectives of the United Farm Women of Alberta,” by Mrs. R. W. Barritt, Secretary Treasurer, 1916. The UFA and UFWA Minutes employed in this thesis were obtained at the Glenbow Museum and Archives.

<sup>2</sup> L. J. Wilson, “Educational Role of the United Farm Women of Alberta,” Alberta History 25 no. 2 (Spring 1977), 29. Wilson obtained this material from a “pamphlet on the 1928 ‘Suggested Program Ideas for Locals.’ Winnifred Ross papers, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton.”

conditions for Alberta's rural women and children, this project focussed on the involvement of the UFWA, and ultimately the UFA party, in eugenics as a strategy to achieve rural life betterment. After examining UFA and UFWA Convention Minutes, in addition to numerous secondary sources, it became clear that certain areas of Alberta prairie history in the 1915-1939 period demanded to be included. This thesis posits that because of the hardships placed on the Alberta farmer due to a poor economy after WWI, the effects of immigration, and the Depression as well as other factors, the United Farmers chose to implement a eugenics policy through the passing of the Sexual Sterilization Act on March 7, 1928. The question that then must be asked is, Why did they choose eugenics as their strategy to improve conditions for the farmer? In attempting to answer this question the following topics were each allotted a chapter: Immigration, The Organization of the UFWA, The Contributions of Farm Women, and finally, Reproductive Strategies. This order was chosen to create a progression of events in aid of gaining a thorough understanding of the social and political climate of the period which led to the legislation of eugenics in Alberta. The Immigration chapter was approached from the standpoint that the immigrant was a perceived threat to the farmer. From this, the questions asked were, why and what did the Farmers do about this perceived threat? Chapter Two, which focussed on the organizational workings of the UFWA, was undertaken to provide a clear understanding of the complex workings of this organization that was both progressive and pro-active in a difficult period of history. Further, Chapter Three focussing on the lives and contributions of farm women was completed to put into perspective the vast undertakings of the UFWA, as well as the courage and drive of the women who were the members of this organization. Chapter Four concerning the promotion of eugenics and the eventual move to endorse contraception, was difficult to write. This chapter could easily have been an

entire thesis; for this reason it was necessary to be selective resulting in the exclusion of considerable material and ideas.

This thesis carefully examines only a portion of the activities of the UFWA. The activities of the United Farm Women went far beyond the endorsement of a eugenics policy in Alberta. Essentially, in their effort to improve the lives of farm women the UFWA focussed their energy on all inequalities and hardships Alberta farm women were viewed to be experiencing. Included among the numerous additional avenues the UFWA travelled were: property rights, equal pay for women, equal parental rights, the Mother's Pension Act, the Dower Act, inheritance rights, personal naturalization, and numerous other areas of legislation including divorce, destitute widows, and deserted wives and mothers. Therefore, this thesis is the study of a small part of the drive of the UFWA to achieve a higher level of social citizenship for Alberta's farm women.

### Sources

#### Primary Sources

Sources employed for this essay were both primary and secondary. It was the intention throughout the writing process to base the thesis on archival materials, namely the Annual Convention Minutes of the UFA and UFWA. The Minutes themselves were then limited to the years 1915 to 1939, with only the conventions and board meetings being researched; meetings at the local level were not used. It was deemed necessary to review both the UFA and UFWA Minutes as the two factions maintained close communication and sometimes an important resolution would only appear in the UFA Minutes. Nevertheless, the UFWA records were considered the foci and employed as such in this study; the influence of the UFWA

on the status of women in Alberta was more easily gleaned from the Minutes of the women's faction as women's issues were not customarily recorded in the UFA records reviewed. The drawback to this form of research is that the researcher has access only to what was recorded in the Minutes and yet there is an awareness that only part of the UFWA story is found here.

### Secondary Sources - Literature Review

Secondary sources were called upon to supplement the archival material. These sources took the form of books and journal articles, and can be classified into groups according to how they were employed. The secondary sources relied upon to complete this work, that is, not quoted infrequently, will be grouped into the following categories according to the type of source they were for this project: 1) all-encompassing; 2) specific; 3) peripheral. Each category including the applicable sources which fall within these groups will be discussed separately.

The sources classified as the all-encompassing category were labelled as such according to their utility throughout the thesis as a whole. Canadian Women: A History, by Alison Prentice et al., proved to be invaluable. Canadian Women proved to be an excellent source of women's history; whether a quote or an explanation was required, this book was able to provide it. The Canadian Prairies: A History, by Gerald Friesen, belongs in this group as well. Friesen's book focusses on Canadian prairie history, the same way that Prentice et al. centered their work on the history of Canadian women. The Canadian Prairies was employed more frequently during the first three chapters, but still warrants inclusion in this group. Similar to Canadian Women, The Canadian Prairies granted explanation to queries during the course of this work. A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women, by Linda Rasmussen et al., similarly contributed to the contents of this thesis.

Because A Harvest Yet to Reap is written with the intention of illuminating the life of prairie women only, it provided in-depth perception to some issues that Canadian Women did not. Finally, The Last Best West, by Jean Bruce, furnishes both a written and pictorial account of the early prairie west. Bruce reviews early prairie history from the first advertisement of land to settlement; this review is made more complete by the inclusion of numerous pictures which award a visual account of the written description. The Last Best West addresses some aspects of prairie settlement superficially examined or avoided entirely by other sources. The sources outlined in this group can be characterized as having boundless applicability to this thesis topic; as a group, these four books formed a complete history of prairie settlement.

Sources denoted as being specific sources, were grouped as such because they were useful for certain portions of the thesis only. The most fitting author to begin this category with is Angus McLaren, author of Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945, A History of Contraception: From Antiquity to the Present Day, "The Creation of a Haven for 'Human Thoroughbreds': The Sterilization of the Feeble-Minded and the Mentally Ill in British Columbia," "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada, 1870-1920," and The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980, co-authored with Arlene Tigar McLaren. McLaren's work was nearly the exclusive secondary source for the eugenics portion, in particular. This exclusivity nearly led to an over-reliance on the use of Our Own Master Race which fit nicely into the chosen time period of study. However, the heavy reliance on this book demonstrates that there are few sources which examine the beginnings of the eugenics movement in Canada. Many sources approach this subject, but it is usually limited to a mention or brief explanation. Further, even though Alberta was the

only Province to earnestly engage in a eugenics program, it is difficult to find sources which examine the Alberta situation as a separate entity. Our Own Master Race can be criticized for not providing a deeper examination of the Alberta situation, such as the extensive involvement of the United Farmers of Alberta in the passing of the Sexual Sterilization Act. Nevertheless, without McLaren's material, the eugenics and contraception portions of this thesis would be desperately lacking in depth and detail.

Additional sources included in the "specific" group are numerous, and include the following articles: "Early Eugenics Movement in Western Canada", by Terry L. Chapman, "Vivian Dowding: Birth Control Activist," by Mary F. Bishop, "Pulling Double Harness or Hauling Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie," by Veronica Strong Boag, "Improving Rural Life in Saskatchewan," by R.G. Marchildon, and "'Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Farmer?': Women's Work on the Farm, 1922," by Mary Kinnear. Each article addressed issues which contributed to a more complete final product. Marchildon gave a clear description of the life of a farm women during harvest. Kinnear's article furnished the results of a United Farm Women of Manitoba survey requesting the number, and use of labour saving devices in the rural home. Strong-Boag's extensive article regarding the work of farm women was highly useful providing a perspective of the work of prairie women. Bishop's article is similarly regarded as a most useful source in its provision of a brief history of the beginnings of the birth control movement in Canada. The article, "Early Eugenics Movement in Western Canada," was beneficial to employ along-side McLaren's material. Each of the above mentioned articles were important facets in the writing process; even though each focussed on certain portions of history, the details they supplied because of this are appreciated.

Books belonging to the "specific" grouping include: Linda Gordon, Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America, although her account of birth control is centered on the American situation, it still proved to be valuable as a guide for the movement in general. The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada, by Wendy Mitchinson, presented a clear and descriptive view of the interpretation of the mental and physical aspects of women. Although this thesis did not deal specifically with these issues, Mitchinson's work granted a fuller, more complete picture of the social position of women during the period when eugenics first gained recognition. This allowed a fuller understanding of why and how eugenics acquired popularity. William Irvine's The Farmers in Politics provided a review of the political workings of the United Farmers of Alberta, from genesis to the exit from party politics. The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918, by John Herd Thompson gave a description of the situation on the western prairies during WWI. The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939, by Veronica Strong-Boag provided an in-depth understanding of the daily lives, workload, and expectations of women in early prairie history. Finally, Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community, by Paul Voisey further illuminated the lives of pioneers; specifically, Voisey includes a useful account of the lonely life of a bachelor in addition to the general effects of isolation on the frontier.

The final grouping of secondary source material is labelled peripheral and includes sources which were influential as background material, and quoted from either little or not at all. Terry L. Chapman's PhD Dissertation entitled "Sex Crimes in Western Canada 1880-1920," disclosed the social and legal position of women through the examination of multiple court cases. Chapman's Dissertation further defined the attitudes of society leading up to and during the period of my thesis

granting a better understanding of eugenics, the slow support of contraception, and the prevailing attitudes surrounding these issues. An additional aid to gaining a more thorough grasp of the history in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Canada is the Thesis by Ian Clarke, entitled, "Public Provision of the Mentally Ill in Alberta, 1907-1936." Clarke's account of the early treatment of the mentally ill was outside of, or peripheral, to my work; however, this background material was significant social history on the Alberta situation. Within the material covered by Clarke the philosophy of eugenics as a theory and its application are reviewed: this was helpful in putting the involvement of the United Farmers of Alberta into perspective. Early in the first pages of his thesis, Clarke asserts that his work is the first research into the area. This statement alone warranted a review of Clarke's thesis.

#### This Project in Relation to Other Work Completed in This Area of Study

There were many materials, primary and secondary, which were reviewed and not employed in this thesis. However, it is important to state that undoubtedly, as a whole, unused sources are still an aid to reaching the final product. Occasionally a book or article, for example, that does not provide needed information has useful endnotes that send the researcher in another direction pursuing further sources.

Other research projects centering on eugenics and the organizations that promoted it have been completed; however, I chose to write this thesis focussing on the UFWA, and the reasons they had for publicly endorsing eugenics. Eugenics, viewed as a strategy to improve the level of social citizenship for women and children, appears thus far to be a unique approach to the rationale behind its endorsement by any organization. In relation to other research completed to date,

this thesis fits in somewhere between the work of Ian Clarke, who examined the treatment of the mentally ill in Alberta, and Terry L. Chapman, who has completed research on eugenics, as well as numerous areas peripheral to eugenics, including her article, "Early Eugenics Movement in Western Canada," employed in this project. Finally, Angus McLaren has accomplished exhaustive research in the area of eugenics; however, my project fills a small area of research left open. This thesis attempts to fill in a gap not fully explored by other writers: the motivation of the United Farmers of Alberta in its drive to legislate eugenics in Alberta.

## Chapter II

### IMMIGRATION

#### The Changing Population of Alberta's Prairies

The influx of immigrants onto the Canadian prairies changed Canada's social milieu forever. Little more than casual concern and general interest in the large numbers of immigrants was overtly expressed by the Canadian public until 1914; after 1914 campaigns against immigration surfaced as attempts to "Canadianize" the immigrant failed.<sup>1</sup> These failed attempts to assimilate immigrants proved to be only the first of many attempts to mould the immigrant population of Canada into socially acceptable Canadian citizens. Such endeavors involved the participation and co-operation of political groups and intellectuals. The United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA), and their affiliate The United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), focussed much of their attention on the control of the prolific immigrant population through eugenics, contraception, and sterilization.

The period 1897-1929 was characterized by a virtual "burst of immigration" to Canada.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants of British heritage were preferred and dominated the make-up of the foreign influx until the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> However, at the beginning of World War One all this had changed:

Almost half of all prairie residents at the start of the First World War had been born in another country, and the proportion was still one in three as late as 1931. Those who were British in 'origin' (...defined by the ancestral roots of the family's male line) had similarly declined to about 50 per cent of the prairie

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<sup>1</sup> Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 345.

<sup>2</sup> Friesen, 245.

<sup>3</sup> Angus McLaren, Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1990), 65.

total (of this group, half were English, one-quarter Scots), while the various eastern European groups (Ukrainian, Austro-Hungarian, Polish, and Russian) numbered about 20 per cent, and western Europeans (German, Dutch, French, including French Canadians) also numbered about 20 percent.<sup>4</sup>

The foreign population became extensively diverse and created new issues in Canada. It was this population diversity, and the ensuing social consequences, which provided the impetus for the formation of the United Farmers organization. Driven by concern for the welfare of the Alberta farmer the United Farmers was formed, and determined to improve the quality of prairie life through the use of non-formal education.

#### The Perceived Problem

A major issue for native Canadians, and particularly the prairie farmers, was the effect that the masses of immigrants were having on the agricultural industry. The United Farmers demonstrate this concern in their Minutes of 1925:

Resolved, that this Convention go on record as being absolutely opposed to the Government spending any money for bringing immigrants into Alberta until conditions in the Province are such that the average farmer at present in the Province can make a decent living on an Alberta farm.<sup>5</sup>

This resolution was carried by a decided vote showing a concerted resolve not to jeopardize Alberta's agricultural base. Many Canadian farmers had emigrated to farm in the United States where the economy was thought to be better, and the Canadian settlers who had chosen to stay worried that more were yet to leave.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Friesen, 244.

<sup>5</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1925. The UFWA Minutes employed in this thesis were obtained from the Glenbow Museum and Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Friesen, 147.

This fear is apparent: “we do not oppose the coming of suitable immigrants of their own free will, but that we oppose the spending of our money in order to induce them to come, by the same Government which allows conditions to exist which drive present settlers out.”<sup>7</sup> It is not specified here as to what the UFA party considered to be a suitable immigrant, but the apprehension of immigrant settlers was considerable; the farmers, represented by the UFA party, perceived immigration as an economic problem. The continual influx of immigrants was believed to be at the heart of the difficulties experienced by prairie farmers. There were simply too many immigrants flooding into Canada to be absorbed into the economy in the late 1920s.<sup>8</sup> Finally, although “[t]he Conservative government elected in 1930 erected the barriers that put an end to Canada’s interwar wave of immigration. . . . it was the depression that terminated large-scale immigration to Canada.”<sup>9</sup> The Depression began with the crash of the stock market in October of 1929 and lasted well into the 1930s. Immigration would never reach its previous levels again; declining from 1.8 million immigrants between 1911 and 1921, to 1.2 million in 1921-1931 to only 140,000 between 1931 and 1941.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, even though there were now few new settlers, many inhabiting the prairies were not Canadian born and this posed problems on the Canadian prairies.

### Genesis of the United Farmers Organization

The United Farmers of Alberta began as a farmers’ revolt seeking to protect the interests of the Alberta farmer. The UFA was started in 1909 and functioned

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<sup>7</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1926. The UFA Minutes employed in this thesis were obtained from the Glenbow Museum and Archives.

<sup>8</sup> Friesen, 247.

<sup>9</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Friesen, 248.

under its president's "group government" theory.<sup>11</sup> Henry Wise Wood's "theory proposed that each economic group in society send its own representatives to parliament to replace the traditional parties.... thus, the organization's candidates would be responsible only to the farmers who elected them."<sup>12</sup> However, the end of World War I brought a recession and caused the UFA to change from a pressure group into a political movement. During the War farmers had gone into debt to finance their farms. After the War grain prices fell and a drought lasting several years hit southern Alberta. In order to effectively represent the Alberta farmers, the UFA realized they had to move from group government into party politics. In 1921 they officially entered provincial politics winning thirty-nine of sixty-one seats.

In 1915 its Women's Auxiliary became the United Farm Women of Alberta, an official part of the UFA.<sup>13</sup> Members were encouraged to go beyond their domestic realm and to initiate local projects or to organize lectures and study groups.<sup>14</sup>

The United Farm Women of Alberta . . . [was] the women's section of the farm protest movement. . . . they saw themselves as co-combatants in the struggle against the political, economic and social enemies of prairie agriculture. They were members in full standing of the farm movement who preferred working together as women, from a woman's point of view.<sup>15</sup>

The farm women did not view themselves as wives of farmers, but as partners in a common movement for a common cause namely the betterment of the Alberta

<sup>11</sup> Susan M. Kooyman, "The Policies and Legislation of the United Farmers of Alberta Government, 1921-1935" (unpublished MA thesis, The University of Calgary, 1981), 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Kooyman, 2-3. The entire paragraph draws on Kooyman.

<sup>13</sup> William Irvine, The Farmers in Politics (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), 119. And, L.J. Wilson, "Educational Role of the United Farm Women of Alberta," Alberta History 25 (2) (Spring 1977): 28.

<sup>14</sup> Alison Prentice et al., Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada Inc., 1988), 268.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Rasmussen et al., A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), 122. The paragraph is drawn on Rasmussen et al., pp. 122 and 123.

farmer. Their motivation was faintly connected to a domestic sphere, as “their preference was to upgrade home life by reforming the economic and legal framework of society.” Further, the UFWA members held motherhood as a vital component in their philosophy; however, they defined the type of motherhood which they deemed to be appropriate for the time period. Motherhood carried with it a higher level of responsibility and an added political air. Francis Benyon of the Women Grain Growers’ Association of Saskatchewan, a women’s organization similar to the UFWA, depicted responsible motherhood in a 1913 editorial:

We have too long been contented with the kind of motherhood that can look out of the window and see little children toiling incredible hours in factories and canning sheds .... I tell you sisters, this kind of motherhood isn’t good enough for the present day. We want a new spirit of motherhood ... mothers who will not boast of their weakness but seek for strength to fight the battle for their own and their neighbour’s children.<sup>16</sup>

The farm women’s movement was a political, as well as an educational, movement demanding unwavering determination, a certain amount of courage, and a strong desire to make a difference in Alberta.

#### The UFA and UFWA: Differences and Similarities

Both the UFA and the UFWA based their party philosophies on economics and politics. The UFA party was more directly committed to economics, but when poor economic conditions of rural Alberta began to infringe on the home the Women’s movement became a political force in the struggle for economic betterment.<sup>17</sup> The Women’s party became a necessary counterpart to the Men’s party, thereby creating a movement which became all-encompassing. “Although there are two organizations, the movement is one. There are two bodies because the

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<sup>16</sup> Rasmussen et al., 123.

<sup>17</sup> Irvine, 118-119.

men and the women approached the same problems from different angles.”<sup>18</sup> The two farm organizations complemented each other in their common endeavors; the varied approaches taken by each group made the overall result more complete. The following UFA objectives demonstrate their far reaching intentions:

1. The study and practice of the principles of co-operation.
2. To further the interests of farmers and ranchers in all branches of agriculture.
3. To promote and secure necessary and just legislation.
4. To promote social intercourse, a higher standard of community life, and the study of economic and social questions bearing out our interests as farmers and citizens.
5. To settle disputes between members without recourse to law whenever possible.
6. To take into consideration any member's case of grievance as far as it may be possible and just.<sup>19</sup>

Further, the relationship between the two factions is explained:

Members of the UFWA shall have the same standing in The Association as members of the UFA ... 5. Board of Women's Section. (a) The Board shall have especial charge under the executive of The Association of such branches of The Association's work as relate especially to women and children.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, the interests of the two farm groups were essentially identical, following the same principles, but the Women had special authority in matters concerning women and children. The motivation for development of the UFWA stemmed from the experiences of prairie women.

The UFA and UFWA shared a common disapproval of the immigrant population of the prairies. The United Farmers felt the immigrant presence made it more difficult for the Alberta farmer to survive, while the United Farm Women of Alberta saw the strenuous farm life and the worsening poverty as unduly harsh on women and children; many newcomers had personal qualities and attributes which

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<sup>18</sup> Irvine, 123-124.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1923.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1923.

the Women saw as threatening to women, children, and the Anglo-Saxon race. Both groups approached the issue from different angles but came to the same conclusion: the immigrant population was a threat. "They believed that the foreigners, primarily from central and southern Europe, would not only take away their jobs, but would also 'infect' the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race."<sup>21</sup> The UFA and UFWA worked in unison to ensure a higher standard of living for native Albertans; "The United Farmers [fought] for markets and finance, the United Farm Women for health, education, and morals."<sup>22</sup> This is shown in the United Farmers Minutes; when, for example, the UFA describe the financial implications of immigration in 1926:

Whereas, it is hardly to be expected that the farmers of Canada will be highly enthusiastic over paying extra taxes to induce foreigners to come into our country and try their extra production to reduce the price of our products in the world's markets, when the manufacturers of Canada are extremely careful to have themselves adequately protected from foreign competition, this also at a tremendous cost to Canadian Agriculture.<sup>23</sup>

The United Farmers perceived the presence of the immigrant to be competitive in the market place; their livelihood, and communities were to suffer because of the economic consequences. The UFWA similarly expressed social concerns at their Conventions. "Perhaps this is the greatest achievement possible to rural women, that instead of calm acceptance of, or ignorant railing against conditions, there is now an eager questioning . . . clearly challenging an existing social order which not only permits, but ensures, the degradation of great masses of people."<sup>24</sup> Their fear of social integration of the immigrants and the effect on Canada as a nation was a

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<sup>21</sup> Tom M. Henson, "Ku Klux Klan in Western Canada," Alberta History 25 (Autumn 1977): 1.

<sup>22</sup> Irvine, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1926.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address, Annual Convention, 1929.

rallying point.

### Canadianization

The first attempts to assimilate the immigrant population into Canadian society were led by the Churches. However, the Churches' conceptual image of the new Christianized Canadian proved unattainable and other measures were then resorted to in a determined effort to keep Canada for Canadians in the face of the massive influx of immigrants.<sup>25</sup> The attempt to Canadianize new Canadians through the schools followed as the next method of assimilation. Originating before 1914, "the movement for unilingual education contained an element of pure Anglo-Saxon Protestant bigotry, but the roots of the movement extended back into the first decade of the century. Unilingual education was seen as a reform and the movement drew its strength from the English-Canadian population of the West."<sup>26</sup> The prairie school house was intended to become the vehicle by which immigrant children would become more like the native born. This process was later labelled "Anglo-conformity" and reflects the early belief that the immigrant would be automatically absorbed into the Canadian way of life; "assimilation simply meant that the immigrants would become Canadians by adopting the language, cultural patterns, and institutions of English Canada."<sup>27</sup> Efforts were made to ensure that the Alberta prairie school house reinforced only English-speaking Canadian values.

'We recommend to the National Council of Education  
that 'Oh Canada' be recognized as the National song  
of the Dominion and that the words and music be

<sup>25</sup> Terry L. Chapman, "Early Eugenics Movement in Western Canada," Alberta History 25 (Autumn 1977): 10.

<sup>26</sup> John Herd Thompson, The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1978), 92.

<sup>27</sup> Martin L. Kovacs, ed., Canadian Plains Studies. 8: Ethnic Canadians Culture and Education (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1978), 282. See also Thompson, 87.

taught in every school, and that one translation alone  
be used for this purpose, viz: that beginning:

Oh Canada, our home and native land,  
True Patriot love in all thy sons command.<sup>28</sup>

Additional to this resolution it was decided "that instead of the present ensign on the Union Jack that there be a distinctive Canadian Flag, preferably a golden maple leaf on the plain ground." Therefore, the only language and values recognized in the schools were to be Canadian. Elementary school-age children were considered the easiest to reach through the schools due to their young age and subsequent adaptability to new ideas. It was found to be most difficult to Canadianize the rural immigrant because there was less daily contact with English-speaking Canadians. Further, immigrants such as Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Ukrainians settled in blocks and made assimilation even more difficult.<sup>29</sup> An additional barrier to assimilation of the rural immigrant was that, "[i]n some rural areas with immigrant majorities, students did not attend school at all, or went for only part of the official school year. Many students left to work on their family's farm before they had completed the primary grades. The result was an educational system that could not complete the task of assimilation."<sup>30</sup> It had been assumed that the children would attend school thus enabling Canadianization to take place; by not attending on a regular basis, or not at all, the language and values of the home country continued to dominate.

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<sup>28</sup> Minutes, UFWA Board Meeting, 1920.

<sup>29</sup> Kovacs, ed., 283-284.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, 89.

The teaching of old country values by the mother in the home was a further barrier to Canadianization. Mothers viewed it as their responsibility to teach their children the language of the home country, observe traditional holidays, and cook traditional meals. This was intended to counteract the influences of Canadian culture. This concentration on maintenance of old country values was especially prominent when times were good for the family and survival was not a struggle. Mothers were more vigilant about the preservation of the home country culture as they had limited exposure to Canadian culture and had often spent a further decade than their husband in the home country; they still held fast to their European values. Traditionally, men would first sojourn to Canada and send for the family when a home was ready. As a result, these women were not only still very attached to their ancestral culture, but had become independent and accustomed to making decisions for themselves and their children in the absence of a husband.<sup>31</sup>

### Canadian Immigration Policy

As the immigrant population, or particular segments of it, increasingly became regarded as a burden, Canada's Immigration Policy became the target of criticism and many proposed changes. Canada's Immigration Policy began as a segment of the 1867 BNA Act. Almost from its inception, the Immigration Policy began to undergo revisions. In principle, the Immigration Act began with few restrictions; those who were invalids or destitute were admitted with a bond payment and only criminals were denied entrance. The most restrictive element of

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<sup>31</sup> Jean R. Burnet with Howard Palmer, "Coming Canadians": An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), 89.

<sup>32</sup> Friesen, 245-246. Entrance was prohibited "to those deemed medically or morally unfit, to those who were likely to become public charges, to criminals, to those no on a continuous journey from their country of origin...and those who advocated the violent overthrow of constituted authority." p.246.

the early policy was an amendment in 1885 stating the requirement of Chinese immigrants to pay a tax. Clifford Sifton, Minister of Interior in 1897, altered the Immigration Policy again and encouraged agriculturally-oriented immigrants while discouraging others such as blacks and anyone else likely to settle in an urban area. To achieve this, Sifton recruited from agricultural areas of the United States, Britain, and Europe, and held farmers to be "blue-chip stock" in the building of Canada. This type of policy, based on occupational criteria, tended to encourage groups such as the Ukrainians and Doukhobors. Frank Oliver replaced Sifton in 1905 and again amended the policy. Oliver's aim was to increase immigration from Great Britain while reducing the numbers of central and eastern European immigrants. Further, entrance was eventually prohibited to those determined to be unfit based on established criteria.<sup>32</sup> Oliver developed the most restrictive immigration policy during the period 1906 to 1910, whereby modifications to the Immigration Act allowed immigrants to be nearly hand-picked and guaranteed not to cause public turmoil. Unfortunately, many of the British encouraged by Oliver were poverty-stricken and came with nothing.<sup>33</sup> Although Sifton and Oliver were both Liberals, they held somewhat different views on immigration. While Sifton described his choice of immigrant as "a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born to the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children,"<sup>34</sup> Oliver wanted the "'right class of British immigrant from the Old Land.' [He reasoned] the Englishman, Irishman, Scotsman comes to Canada practically a ready-made citizen."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Friesen, 246.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Bruce, The Last Best West (Ontario: Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., 1976), 7.

<sup>35</sup> Bruce, 11.

### Attracting Immigrants to Alberta

Both Sifton and Oliver actively recruited newcomers to Canada. This was not the first time that recruiting had been used to find settlers; Friesen posits that in the 1880s and 1890s various methods were used to attract immigrants. However, at this time Canada was as yet too young a country in terms of settlement, to attract immigrants from distant lands.<sup>36</sup> Jean Bruce terms Sifton "a natural promoter," and states that \$900,000 was spent on recruitment in 1896, and by 1905 over four million was allotted. Sifton made immigration a priority and carefully organized the Immigration Branch of the Canadian Government. Bruce further states that the number of immigrants to Canada rose from 16,835 in 1896 to 141,465 in 1905 and maintained an increase for some time. Aiding in this increase was the lack of low-priced land in the United States by about 1900. Sifton marketed Canada by inviting American, British, and European media to come view "the land of opportunity," with passage paid by the Canadian government. Additionally, immigrant farmers who were successful in the new land were sent home during the winter months to tell all in the old country about the bountiful Canadian frontier.<sup>37</sup> Finally, demonstrating the enthusiasm of Sifton's recruiting team, "[i]n the United States in 1904, when Oklahoma Indian Reserve lands were put on the market, enterprising Canadian agents pitched their tent alongside the American land office, and competed for business, offering better land and free homesteads in Canada."<sup>38</sup>

Propaganda promoting the Canadian frontier was also common. Posters described Western Canada as, "The Richest Land on Earth." Further, readers were told that there were "Railways Spreading out in every Direction" while reminding that one hundred and sixty acres were free.<sup>39</sup> It was also claimed that Northern

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<sup>36</sup> Friesen, 248-249.

<sup>37</sup> Bruce, 1-2.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce, 19.

Alberta had the best climate in America, and those suffering from discomforts such as asthma and consumption were frequently cured by it; moreover, in a Saskatoon Board of Trade promotion of 1908 it was touted that "Crop Failure is entirely unknown in Saskatoon District."<sup>40</sup> To accompany the enthusiastic advertising through brochures, posters, and exhibits, "The Canadian government paid American railway booking agents a bonus of \$3 for every male agricultural immigrant over 18, \$2 for every female and \$1 for each dependent child."<sup>41</sup> Additionally, "agents in Britain and Europe were paid a bonus of \$5 per head for farmers, farm labourers and domestic servants, and \$2 per head for dependent children."<sup>42</sup> Immigration agents were not well received everywhere they went; they were not welcome in Northern European countries and Germany banned them outright. To combat this obstacle small card-like advertisements were created and sent through the mail to Europe where recruitment was not allowed. This form of recruitment was facilitated by a "secret organization of German steamship agents known as the North Atlantic Trading Company."<sup>43</sup>

Persuasive recruitment and encouraging stories from friends, neighbors, and acquaintances were not all that attracted newcomers to the prairies. The newcomers themselves had many reasons of their own to make the distant and often rather trying journey. Determination to start a new life in Canada was more powerful than the thought of hardships enroute. Settlers travelling across the land by horse and wagon met with treacherous situations and poor living conditions during the trip. Settlers travelling in the early 1900s relate some of the incidents that happened on their journey:

The travellers started early in the day and journeyed  
till noon, the men then went game hunting while the

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<sup>40</sup> Bruce, 30 and 28.

<sup>41</sup> Bruce, 19.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce, 5.

women prepared the rest of the meal. They had to always stop at water, but alas if you wanted to drink you had to close your teeth so as not to swallow tadpoles, etc.

Two days were wasted by a rain and one by being stuck in a bog. Action was necessary to unload the wagon before it sank anymore and the oxen were able to drag it out. It was hard work to carry every article from the wagon to dry land and then back to the wagon.

One day when going down a steep hill onto the ferry the oxen broke into a run and everything went flying, bedding here, dishes there, tins, knives and forks all flew everywhere, and what is more the oxen very nearly ran off the other side of the ferry which was not unusual those days.<sup>44</sup>

Although this account has a humorous element it also demonstrates the sheer determination to make the journey to the predetermined destination despite unruly oxen and tadpoles in their drinking water.

Upon arrival on the prairie frontier, the settler had to find a place to homestead. Free land opportunities were bountiful in the earlier 1900s especially, but had conditions that came with it. In 1903, James A. Smart, Deputy Minister of the Interior stated what a farmer had to do to secure land:

As soon as he arrives in Winnipeg, he can put a claim, and have allocated to him 160 acres of fertile land, free of timber and stones. The only conditions are that a fee of \$10 be paid for recording the entry, and that the party receiving the homestead reside thereon six months out of the year for the first three years and cultivate at least five acres a year.

If he has a little capital, the newcomer may buy a wagon and horses and start farming right away. If not, he may enter under another man, at \$10 per month, with board and lodging, guaranteed by the Immigration Commissioner.<sup>45</sup>

Although the land itself was free the cost of working it was not. A condition of

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<sup>44</sup> Bruce, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Bruce, 72.

obtaining the free land was that at least five acres had to be cultivated per year. The cost of one team of horses was \$250.00, harness was \$32.00, one plow was \$28.00, one set of harrows was \$20.00, and the list for necessary farm implements continues.<sup>46</sup> Feed for the horses and money to buy new parts when there was a break-down were additional costs.

The personal reasons driving each immigrant enroute to a new life on the Alberta frontier varied widely; married and single women in particular were lured to the prairies for diverse reasons. "The married women probably came for the same reasons which brought their men: religious persecution, political oppression, thin stony farmland, factory-town grime. Stirred by the vision, they came with enthusiasm and hope. Others came reluctantly, following their husbands' initiative."<sup>47</sup> Single women came for other reasons; the prairies were touted as a destination offering women an opportunity for independence, a chance to find a job, usually as a maid, and it was likely that a husband could be found. Two-thirds of the 900,000 immigrants between 1900 and 1911 were men. Unmarried men were plentiful, outnumbering women two to one in Manitoba for the twenty to twenty-four age group and eight to one in the twenty-five to thirty-four age group in the West. It was recognized that a properly functioning homestead needed a wife and a family. While strength, solid morals, and British origin were most positive attributes, what was most vital was that she was willing to work.<sup>48</sup>

### Continuous Change in Entrance Requirements

No matter the motivation for settlers coming to Alberta, entrance regulations continually altered throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s when the great

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<sup>46</sup> Bruce, 75.

<sup>47</sup> Linda Rasmussen et al., *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), 13. The remainder of the paragraph is drawn on Rasmussen et al., 13.

<sup>48</sup> Rasmussen, 13.

majority of immigration took place. From 1910-1911 free entry was granted to unskilled labourers who would build the railway more cheaply than Canadian labourers.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Sifton, Oliver gave in to pressure from the business sector of Canada to lure these "alien navvies" to build the railway for minimal wages. This free entry policy remained unchanged until 1914 when World War I began.<sup>50</sup> World War One altered public opinion dramatically; because of the strains of war, discrimination against immigrant groups - both of enemy and non-enemy origin - became the rule rather than the exception.<sup>51</sup> John Herd Thompson related the story of how the Germans, viewed as highly desirable immigrants pre WWI, quickly became the opposite when news of German "atrocities" in Belgium and the sinking of the *Lusitania* reached Canadians. Germans in Canada reacted to this blackened image by simply "changing" their nationality, becoming Swedish, for example, which was an acceptable nationality.<sup>52</sup> Thompson adds that by 1918 the German image had changed so much in Canada that, "self-appointed racial theorists demonstrated that English Canadians and Germans had no racial affinity; a writer in the *Winnipeg Telegram* (emphasis his) redefined 'Anglo-Saxon' as 'Anglo-Celtic,' with the admonition that 'all Scottish, Irish, and Welsh people and most English folk would do well to remember that they are not the descendants of an insignificant German tribe.'<sup>53</sup> In the United States, this part of history is referred to as "the most spectacular reversal of judgement in the history of American nativism."<sup>54</sup> In Canada, Berlin, Ontario, became Kitchener, additionally, Dusseldorf and Carlstadt, Alberta, became Freedom and Alderson.<sup>55</sup> Mennonite

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<sup>49</sup> Friesen, 246-247.

<sup>50</sup> Friesen, 247.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, 73.

<sup>52</sup> Thompson, 74-77.

<sup>53</sup> Thompson, 76.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, 74.

<sup>55</sup> Thompson, 77.

communities were placed in a tenuous position at this time; in effort to improve their image they stayed out of the public eye and made significant contributions to Canadian institutions such as the Red Cross. When wounded men began returning home, the English-speaking Canadian view of Mennonites and Doukhobors, in particular, lost favor.<sup>56</sup> "If this country is not good enough to fight for," wrote one returned soldier, "it is not good enough to live in."<sup>57</sup> Thompson noted that this opinion was held steadfast by veterans, and popular among the civilian population as well by 1918. The blackened image of the German people in Canada was sharply contrasted by other immigrant groups. The Icelanders, for example, became "honorary Anglo-Saxons"; the Icelandic people were seen as loyal first to Canada during the First Great War. The Polish were also considered to have been ultimately loyal to Canada during this period.

The interruption in immigration triggered by the start of World War I continued into the early 1920s when "Doukhobours, Hutterites, Mennonites, 'enemy aliens,' Ukrainians and Germans" were not allowed entry. This restriction was lifted in 1923 when European communities began pressuring for entrance into Canada to escape the difficult life in their own countries. In 1925 the Liberal government of MacKenzie King allowed the Canadian National Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway to recruit immigrants from central and eastern Europe. These same people had been considered undesirable only a few years previous.<sup>58</sup> The railway agreement was later cancelled by the Conservative Prime Minister, R.B. Bennett, in 1930 when the numbers of new arrivals had essentially saturated the need for immigrants. After this time it was difficult to enter Canada; those allowed in as immigrants were carefully chosen according to particular criteria. "Immigrants

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<sup>56</sup> Thompson, 81.

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, 81-82. Men of Pacifist religious sects could not be drafted.

<sup>58</sup> Friesen 246-247.

of Asian origin found it virtually impossible to enter, and from 1931 only certain British subjects and American citizens, wives and children of legal Canadian residents, or agriculturalists 'having sufficient means to farm in Canada' were permitted to enter the country."<sup>59</sup> The immigration policy after 1931 appears similar in nature to the racially-based policy set forth earlier by Oliver who sought an immigrant with agricultural roots, but who also came from British stock.

### The United Farmers Organization and Immigration

The Minutes of the United Farmers speak most harshly about the Oriental immigrants. Although the UFA did not mask their preferences and objections in reference to the immigration issues, they did not often single out a particular race. Mention was made of the communal dwellers such as the Hutterites and Doukhobors, and their lack of community mindedness; however, they were not spoken of with the same negativity as the Oriental immigrant. Twice, in 1927 and 1930, the perceived situation of British Columbia in relation to the Oriental people in its province was referred to.

Resolved, that in view of the very serious situation created in British Columbia and to a certain extent elsewhere in Canada owing to the competition of Asiatics, no more Orientals of whatever nationality shall be allowed to settle in Canada, and that no Oriental shall hold title, directly or indirectly, to any land, nor shall any land be leased to him directly or indirectly, for any period longer than one year, and Further, that he shall not hold shares in any company or corporation which is a holder of any Canadian land, reasonable compensation being paid to present Oriental holders of land, they being allowed a term of years in which to liquidate their present holdings.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Friesen, 247-248.

<sup>60</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1927.

This resolution was seconded, but after discussion it was lost. In 1930 no mention of owning land is made; instead, it is expressed the social effects of Oriental immigration that have been observed in British Columbia, such as intermarriage, should be prevented in Alberta.<sup>61</sup> Finally, again in 1930 another judgement regarding the Oriental immigrant is recorded. The quotation from 1927 is repeated with the addition: "We strongly urge the adoption of this resolution, knowing the trouble Australia has had and still has with Oriental labor, and also with the knowledge that wherever the Oriental is, there will be opium and narcotic drug smuggling, it being utterly impossible with any reasonable police and custom forces to prevent or combat this evil with any degree of success."<sup>62</sup> No other race was discussed in as negative a light as were Asians. The apparent problems in B.C. with Oriental immigration swayed the opinions of the United Farmers; the United Farmers saw the Oriental immigrant as an additional threat.

Immigration had a direct effect on Canadian farmers; as the number of newcomers increased, so did the number of farmers on the Alberta prairies resulting in a drop in prices of farm products. Simply put, as according to the laws of supply and demand, there was a surplus of goods and prices fell. The United Farmers opposed continued immigration based on this very fact alone: "Be it resolved that we do not oppose the coming of suitable immigrants of their own free will, but that we oppose the spending of our money in order to induce them to come, by the same Government which allows conditions to exist which drive present settlers out."<sup>63</sup> Moved and seconded unanimously, this resolution exhibits mounting resentment toward the effects of the immigrant on the Alberta prairie. By 1929 frustrations had risen and the United Farmers again spoke out on behalf of the farmer, but this time

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<sup>61</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1927.

<sup>62</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1930.

<sup>63</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1926.

using more a direct tone:

As the Immigration [P]olicy as at present conducted is not in the best interest of Canada, and will benefit chiefly the big transportation companies and a few land speculators and manufacturers, and

Whereas, mass immigration tends to lower the standard of living for the working class and to drive the farmers into cities or out of the country, and

Whereas, we have a great number of farmer boys and other citizens in villages and towns who have been or are working for farmers and thereby have practical knowledge of farming in Western Canada who would like to secure a farm of their own but lack the necessary capital to start farming;

Be it resolved, that we ask the Dominion Government to discontinue the present Immigration [P]olicy and instead set apart sufficient moneys to loan to our own citizens at a low rate of interest, and on long terms, so as to enable them to secure farms of their own, thereby keeping our own citizens here and making more employment for immigrants who come to Canada on their own initiative; those being the only immigrants who are welcome.<sup>64</sup>

This resolution was carried unanimously, but a further resolution to lure back to Alberta the settlers who had gone to the United States was lost. The farmer was experiencing mounting difficulty remaining on the farm as farming was no longer economically viable with the drop in prices for farm goods.

The standard of living of the farmer was in jeopardy; however, the United Farmers were not placing the blame on the immigrant population alone. Again in 1929 they speak out about the welfare of the farmer: "That we protest most strongly against misrepresentations and conditions in Canada by the railways and other immigration agencies that the Federal Government be responsible for immigration activities."<sup>65</sup> The Farmers realized the problem was political and not purely agricultural. Burnet and Palmer posit that under the Railway Agreement of 1925-1931, "the railway companies played a leading role in promoting immigration to fill

<sup>64</sup>Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1929.

<sup>65</sup>Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1929.

the lands they held in the West. On the whole, however, fewer immigrants went west than in the pre-war years; the wheat lands were filled, the wheat boom was faltering, cities were beginning to burgeon, and the new arrivals were more urban in their outlook than their predecessors."<sup>66</sup> Further, they state that the "second wave" of immigrants tended to settle in occupations other than farming such as industry and construction. This was compounded by the migration of farmers to the cities. A House of Commons committee contemplated this situation and expressed frustration that the newcomers intended to work the frontier were choosing instead to settle into other more urban areas and occupations. Additionally, they realized that these groups were sometimes choosing slum areas to dwell in, but did not find a resolve to the complex many-sided issue of settlement.<sup>67</sup>

During a UFWA Board Meeting on July 5, 1929, a perceived need for change in immigration policy, that eventually took place in 1930, was expressed. They stated: "That we urge our Canadian Government to regulate the flow of migrants to Canada so that in no year would the number from other countries exceed those of British birth." Further, in the same year, another resolution regarding immigration is recorded:

"Whereas, we view with alarm the ever-increasing number of Doukobors [sic] entering the Dominion; Therefore be it resolved, that we are unalterably opposed to the further immigration of Doukobors [sic] and other Europeans of communal views as this class of people are of no value to community life, and do not offer a good prospect of becoming good Canadian citizens.<sup>68</sup>

The remarks made by the UFA in their Convention Minutes reflect their repugnance for the immigrant not of British birth, and current state of economic

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<sup>66</sup> Burnet and Palmer, 34.

<sup>67</sup> Burnet and Palmer, 34.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1929.

affairs in Canada. Years earlier, the UFWA defined a desirable immigrant as follows: "the type of woman immigrant most desirable at the present time is the one who is willing to make her home on the land."<sup>69</sup> Therefore, in the earlier years of immigration to Canada, in the view of the UFWA, the desired immigrant was one that stayed and improved the land. Later, this changed to where only particular characteristics and racial type were wanted; staying and working the land is not mentioned.

An immigration policy was drafted by the United Farmers organization in 1930. The policy opens by declaring that the Canadian Immigration Policy which sought to increase Canada's agricultural population had created a lop-sided development in the country. As well, the UFA state the immigrants who come into the country are not cared for responsibly by the Federal Government, thus putting a great burden on Provinces and Municipalities when the immigrant settles. The UFA then became specific and stated their policy:

- (a) That the practice of subsidizing various organizations for the purpose of immigration be discontinued, and that only the agents appointed directly by the Federal Government shall be authorized to carry on his work.
- (b) That the Federal Government shall co-operate with the different provincial governments to the greatest degree possible to the end that only those immigrants may enter each province as may be usefully assimilated during each year.
- (c) That no financial assistance be granted actual or prospective immigrants, either by way of assisted passage, or of land settlement.
- (d) That all immigration shall be strictly selective, based upon the racial possibilities of assimilation, the physical, mental, and moral qualities of the applicant, and the willingness of each to assume the full responsibilities of Canadian citizenship, and further, that no discrimination be practiced as between occupations save that brought about by the prospective employment which may be in view.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1923.

<sup>70</sup>Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1930.

The UFA immigration policy was a frustrated reaction to the recent years of immigration which had not been favourable for the prairie farmer. The UFA called for a highly restrictive policy, allowing into Canada only a specified calibre of immigrant who would not impede the economy any further.

#### Examination at Point of Embarkment

To ensure a higher calibre of immigrant, Canadian Immigration Policy underwent a series of revisions; the policy became highly selective through the employment of pre-determined criteria. Immigrants were eventually required to undergo a physical and mental examination at the point of embarkment. Canadian immigration agents would not accept proposed newcomers who did not meet the standards set for entrance into Canada. In January of 1927 the UFA's desire for such examinations to take place was recorded. "Resolved, that all immigrants should be examined by competent psychiatrists at the port of embarkation and that such examination should be final."<sup>71</sup> This resolution was both moved and seconded. Later in 1927 this issue was addressed again. "Mrs. Price reported that examination of immigrants at port of embarkation, as urged by the UFWA in Convention, was coming into effect in Old Country, according to newspaper reports."<sup>72</sup> At this time in history the Farmers' did not approve of immigrants that could not be totally self-sufficient. By 1932, even the British immigrant was under scrutiny. "Resolved, that this Convention go on record as being opposed to the Alberta Government giving financial aid to British or foreign immigrants."<sup>73</sup> The UFA became opposed to providing financial support to any immigrant regardless of their home country; formerly the British had been considered the ultimate immigrant because of their

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<sup>71</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1927.

<sup>72</sup> Minutes, UFWA Board Meeting, 1927.

<sup>73</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1932.

race and assumed elevated moral status. Furthermore, as stated in the United Farmers immigration policy drafted in 1930, the immigrants now welcomed must be self-sufficient, possess a high chance of full assimilation, have high physical, mental and moral qualities, and be willing to assume full Canadian citizenship. Finally, the Farm Women tried to pass a further resolution endorsing discriminatory employment policies: "Whereas, many Canadians and other British born subjects are out of work and government positions are held by aliens; Therefore be it resolved, that we ask the Government of Alberta to discharge all aliens holding positions in the public service and employ British subjects in their places."<sup>74</sup> This resolution was moved and seconded, but finally lost after a letter from Hon. O.L. McPherson concerning this issue was read aloud. No mention was made in the Minutes what this letter specifically said.

A remarkable reversal occurred in 1933. Now, only one year later there is a distinct emphasis on human rights. Formerly, the only concern expressed was for the farmer and the immigrant deemed desirable according to the UFA criteria. An "Amendment to Immigration Act" reads as follows:

Whereas, under the present Immigration Act residents of Canada are being seized and detained on mere suspicion or taken to distant ports for an investigation into their conduct; and  
 Whereas, in our opinion, this is an utterly unfair procedure and constitutes an unwarrantable infringement upon human rights;  
 Therefore be it resolved, that we call upon the Dominion Government to so amend the Immigration Act that:  
 1st. No person may be arrested or detained upon mere suspicion or statement of one person;  
 2nd- In case of an enquiry into the conduct of any person, such enquiry shall be held in his or her own district.<sup>75</sup>

This resolution was moved and seconded unanimously; additionally, it was

<sup>74</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1932.

<sup>75</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1933.

“moved in amendment that after the word ‘detained’ the words ‘for deportation’ be added.” Although the United Farmers initially appeared nearly ruthless in their promotion of the British stock and self-sufficient agriculturalist newcomers, they show here that they did not lose all sense of what was fair and reasonable. While the 1933 Minutes show they hold high regard for human rights, the 1934 Minutes demonstrate they remain vigilant about protecting the position of the farmer.

‘Whereas, it has been brought to the attention of the Milo Conference that the Dominion Government and the C.P.R. are allowing European immigrants to settle in Alberta, and  
Whereas, we do not believe with our present unemployment problems that immigration is expeditious;  
Therefore, be it resolved, that we ask our UFWA Executive to ascertain the facts and take action accordingly.’<sup>76</sup>

The welfare of the farmer was always their main focus; they saw the financial position of the farmer deteriorate as the numbers of immigrants migrating to Canada increased.

The flow of immigrants appears to have become a preoccupation of the Farmers’ organization; the immigrant was viewed as the origin of all problems which greeted the Alberta farmer during this period. This preoccupation, whether justified or not, motivated the United Farmers during the period they were in power. The only preoccupation stronger than their ire for the immigrant was their advocacy of the Alberta farmer. Through the education of its members and other Alberta residents, the United Farmers promoted its pro rural nativist campaign acting as a vehicle for information concerning Alberta’s transforming social and political climate. Employing scrupulous organizational methods, the United Farmers consistently mixed an advocacy of the rural lifestyle and non-formal education; this mixture was promoted through careful group organization which

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<sup>76</sup>Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1934.

facilitated communication among all members.

## Chapter III

## THE ORGANIZATION OF THE UFWA

Motivation for Organizing

Motivation for the development of the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) stemmed from the experiences of farm women. Farm women yearned for the social interaction enjoyed by urban women. A passage from the June 18, 1913 Moose Jaw Evening Times describes the experience of living on the Canadian prairie: "A woman's life in Canada is extremely hard, and lonely, and it is because of their loneliness that the asylums there are being filled with women, who are driven mad by loneliness. They are caged in a 'shack' often miles from any populated district."<sup>1</sup> The lives of farm women could not compare to the lives of women in towns or cities. They suffered from loneliness, poor or no medical attention, and little or no educational opportunities for their children. It was this poor quality of life for rural women which motivated the United Farm Women to act and become responsible for the health, development, and happiness in their very own communities.<sup>2</sup>

The poverty and isolation of farm life was often unbearable and women welcomed the opportunity to socialize to alleviate the monotony of the farm. Their social interaction gradually became more organized and community improvement

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Rasmussen et al., A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women (Toronto, The Women's Press, 1979), 22.

<sup>2</sup> William Irvine, The Farmers in Politics (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), 121.

was envisioned.<sup>3</sup> One of the earliest UFWA leaders was Mrs. Walter (Irene) Parlby who saw a need to improve the position of rural women and encouraged the involvement of the UFWA: "the domestic conveniences enjoyed in the city must be brought to the farm; and proper care of health, including medical attention, must also be found for the rural communities"<sup>4</sup> Still driven by economics, the UFWA focussed on the plight of the isolated farm woman. The poverty on the prairies had adversely affected the quality of life for women in particular and the United Farm Women intended to provide relief. The extent of this relief is described in a 1917 UFWA Annual Report:

the care of the race is not the man's job, it has never appealed to him ... It has ever taken a secondary place ... It is up to you as organized women, to take your burden, to shoulder your work, part of your work which was taken out of the home in the dim past of history ... The bearing of the race, and the care of the race is the woman's job.<sup>5</sup>

The farm women recognized that the UFA ignored women's issues. The bearing and caring of children and the home would remain with women, even politically.

Veronica Strong-Boag posits that for early feminist organizations, such as the UFWA, the "sexual division of labour" had long been a focal point. Although women's groups did not always agree on the solution(s) to the "sexual division of labour" problem they were nearly always in accordance that labour differences between the sexes was a grievous issue.<sup>6</sup> Strong-Boag chastises historians who discount the achievements of prairie activist women by crediting them as being no different than their male counterparts except for their gender. In doing this, she believes that

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<sup>3</sup> Irvine, 128.

<sup>4</sup> Irvine, 129.

<sup>5</sup> Rasmussen et al., 144.

<sup>6</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling Double Harness or Hauling Double Load," in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 403.

the result ignores the strong, even passionate, sense of same sex identification which moved Canadian women to sign temperance petitions, to contribute their might to women's missionary societies, to agitate for the vote, and to demand recognition of women's right to employment and the value of their domestic labour. Argue as they did about precise solutions, profitable tactics and suitable allies, prairie activists were highly sensitive to the particular situation of their sex.<sup>7</sup>

It was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) that first spoke for the female gender on the prairies. The WCTU continually offered inspiration to farm women's groups that later formed; WCTU activists Louise McKinney and Nellie McClung -later UFWA members- both remained vigilant about defending women's rights throughout their public careers.

It was not until the years just previous to WWI that the farm women's movement in Alberta began. Emerging between 1913 and 1919 were the women's sections of the United Farmers of Manitoba, and Saskatchewan Grain Growers, as well as the first women's local of the United Farmers of Alberta, the UFWA itself, and the Interprovincial Council of Farm Women. The presence of farm women's groups represented, according to Strong-Boag a "collective consciousness" which could be expressed as never before. Strong-Boag affirms that while the farm women shared numerous hardships with their male counterparts, they also experienced many hardships common only to their gender, including a poor representation from the male dominated farm movement itself.<sup>8</sup> Violet McNaughton, "founder of the Saskatchewan Women Grain Growers and woman's editor of the Western Producer from 1925 to 1951," expressed the frustration felt by farm women regarding the labour issue: "Do men believe that women are just a domestic machine for

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<sup>7</sup> Strong-Boag, 403.

<sup>8</sup> Strong-Boag, 403-404.

keeping the wheels of life going[?],’ she asked.”<sup>9</sup> McNaughton, a prominent leader in the farm women’s movement demonstrates the growing collective consciousness of farm women, as suggested by Strong-Boag; McNaughton’s purposeful statement is a reflection of the changing attitude of the activist farm women’s groups across the Western Canadian prairies. The collective consciousness of rural Alberta women was achieved through the non-formal education of members; by working together rural women had a common meeting place, or home base, through which issues affecting the home could be communicated to one another.

### Project Parameters

The activities of the UFWA demonstrate that the UFWA regarded as vital the same issues that farm women’s groups in Manitoba and Saskatchewan did. The years 1915-1939 show the historical progression of organizational activities reflecting the values, attitudes, and issues of the UFWA as it matured and encountered new events affecting farm women. Notable policy-related happenings and issues cited describe the UFWA as an organization. The gradual organizational policy changes which occurred are a reflection of the needs of Alberta farm women and the growth of Alberta as a province. The UFWA altered its organization in order to meet the continually changing needs of farm women, and therefore remain effective in its self-appointed advocacy role.

### Beginnings

The 1915 Minutes showed considerable organizational work. The Organizational Convention of the Women’s Auxiliary to the UFA established a

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<sup>9</sup> Strong-Boag, 404-405.

Provincial Executive of women with the authority to hold their own convention. Additionally, the positive aspects of co-operating with the UFA were both discussed and emphasized to the members.<sup>10</sup> Most notable during this time period was the proposal to change the name: "The question of the change of name from Woman's Auxiliary to the United Farmers came up for discussion and it was unanimously agreed that 'United Farm Women of Alberta' would be better, such name to be referred to the Convention for final decision."<sup>11</sup>

Early in the following year the Constitution of the UFA organization was amended allowing for the addition of a Women's Section. The Women's Auxiliary to the UFA was to be known as the United Farm Women of Alberta: "'a name that explains its meaning to everyone'."<sup>12</sup> While the UFWA became an entity separate from their male counterparts, the right to "exercise our vote in the Men's Convention for Provincial Officers and on any matter in which we are specially interested"<sup>13</sup> was retained. In fact, in "The Aims and Objects of the United Farm Women of Alberta," written by Mrs. R.W. Barritt, Secretary-Treasurer, a reverence for the economic position of the female gender on the Alberta prairies was made clear. Barritt began by stating that what adversely affects the men of Alberta will similarly affect the women and that the two divisions of the United Farmers must work together for this cause; however, she goes further by declaring that the women of Alberta deserve improved legal rights. The following statement demonstrates the tone of Barritt's document: "the greatest enemy of her suffering sisterhood is the comfortably married woman."<sup>14</sup> This assertion is followed by similarly powerful

<sup>10</sup> Minutes, of the Organizational Convention of the Women's Auxiliary to the UFA, 1915. And Minutes, of New Provincial Board during the Organization Convention of the Women's Auxiliary to UFA, 1915.

<sup>11</sup> Minutes, of New Provincial Board during the Organization Convention of the W.A.UFA, 1915.

<sup>12</sup> Minutes, of the Organizational Convention of the W.A.UFA, 1916. The UFA and UFWA Minutes employed in this thesis were obtained from the Glenbow Museum and Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Minutes, of Meeting of Directors and Executive, 1916.

<sup>14</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Report, 1916.

statements reinforcing the determination of the UFWA to better the lives of Alberta's women and children. The Annual Report of 1916 closes with: "Our motto is 'Forward'; our watchword 'Better' - better schools, better homes, better children....we are first and last home-makers. The hearth is the centre, and all else is an effort to improve the larger home, which is our fair Province and our Dominion."<sup>15</sup>

The year 1917 brought fewer organizational changes, and instead appears to have been a period of reflection and evaluation. The Annual Report contains a summation in which the UFWA evaluate their relationship with their male counterparts.

When we remember that the women now have the franchise, and that not only their domestic, social, and economic interests are identical with ours, but that their political interests, as well as responsibilities are also identical, we will begin to realize how important it is that they should be thoroughly organized on identical lines with the UFA, advising, counselling and acting with the UFA in everything.

Any organization of the farmers that does not include farm women will be weak and imperfect.<sup>16</sup>

This passage provides rationale for the continued close association with the United Farmers. Without the two sections working in unison, although at times regarding different issues, the farmers' movement would not have been as powerful or all-encompassing. The desire for improved living conditions and a general "better life" is further demonstrated in the same Annual Report. "Commendable work has also been done in the establishment of rest rooms in many places. This has meant self-sacrifice on the part of our women, but when was anything worth while

<sup>15</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Report, 1916.

<sup>16</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Report, 1916. The remainder of this passage states that without cooperation between the men and women of the United Farmers, failure will result.

accomplished without it? Before long we hope to see rest rooms wherever women meet for business."<sup>17</sup> The establishment of rest rooms for women may at first appear insignificant; however, the opposite is true. That the UFWA concerned itself with this issue concerning women proved they were sincerely motivated to improve the lives of women in every way.

An obstacle for the UFWA was the distance which the members lived from each other. Through scrupulous organization, it was ensured that organization correspondence reached each member.

'Whereas the UFWA Locals are widely scattered and, whereas the Directors find great difficulty in covering the work owing to distance,  
'Therefore be it resolved that in each provincial riding the several locals be asked to elect one member from each local to constitute a Board of Directors for that Constituency, electing a Chairman and Secretary for Board meetings from their own number. Such organization to be known as a District Association, to undertake the organization of the farm women of the constituency, and it be the connecting link between the Provincial Board and the members.'  
N.B. It has been found more practicable that this District Association be formed in the Federal rather than the Provincial Ridings.<sup>18</sup>

Where it was not possible to formally organize or become a member of a Local due to adverse conditions it was suggested that officers be elected thus placing them on the mailing list with Central Office. The members would then know who to contact for current information. When finances improved and the \$2.00 membership fee could be collected, a Local could formally join. Although there were women who wished to become UFWA members, but could not pay the membership fee, the organization still provided a means of including these women until they could

<sup>17</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Report, 1916.

<sup>18</sup> Minutes, UFWA Board Meeting, 1920. Further, the \$2.00 yearly membership fee was to be remitted to Central Office; however, \$1.00 of that could be retained by the Local branch and used for group expenses.

officially join.

A UFWA discussion on the importance of community centres includes a humorous story that explains the power of a carefully organized group. This story is introduced in the Annual Report by the sentence, "Under this plan almost anything can be accomplished."

The story is told of a colored man who was driving a pleasure party over the mountains with a team of twelve mules. With his long whip he could flick a fly off the ear of the head mule without disturbing an animal, and his skill in cutting off twigs and leaves from the trees amazed his passengers. Soon they came in sight of a hornet's nest beside the road and the men besought him to try his skill on it. He refused and they coaxed again. This time he looked at the mules and looked at them and answered, 'No, sah, not dem, dey's organized.'<sup>19</sup>

The hornet's nest is representative of an organized community comprised of a multiplicity of organizations within it functioning as separate groups, all working towards a common goal: the betterment of the community as a whole. Perhaps the United Farm Women of Alberta could be compared to a hornet's nest; they too were well organized, realized the power of working with other groups, and were willing to defend women's rights.

### Politics and Housekeeping

Many comparisons were made between housekeeping and politics in the years 1922 and 1923. In "The Place of Women in Public Life," the role of women in public life is examined: It appears that as the UFWA continued in its public position, the women of this organization were progressive in the questioning of their new roles as pro active women in a community organization. Perhaps in

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<sup>19</sup>Minutes, UFWA Annual Report, 1920.

order to help themselves understand, or to help the public understand, they approximated their actions to housekeeping in the broadest sense.

I'll venture to say that we will no longer have the class some writers refer to as 'parasites.' When women waste their energies in frivolity, it is because what should have gone hand in hand with their homemaking duties has been considered beyond their intelligence by both men and women. . . . But we have come to realize that women as a whole have great potential abilities. All that was lacking was the opportunity to develop those abilities to their fullest extent. Our environment creates the need for various women's organizations. The numerous walks in life which women are following today have interests and problems peculiar to each, which can best be solved in organizations based on those particular needs.<sup>20</sup>

The Annual Reports of the early years of the WAUFA and the UFWA did not contain words of such conviction pertaining to the place of women in a public role. If the women of the UFWA did not feel as if they had found their niche in public life before, by 1922 they knew they had. These confident words were reinforced by the election of "one of our very own women to Parliament. The Honorable Mrs. [Irene] Parlby, who was the Provincial President of our organization for a number of years, has been assigned the position of Minister without portfolio in the Cabinet."<sup>21</sup>

In the following year, women in politics and housekeeping are compared again; in an Address by the UFWA President at the UFA Convention of 1923, a further deeper description of the perceived connection between the home and the community is provided. Marion L. Sears stated that her Address was written to provide a better understanding of the meaning of politics. She offered, "There are three definitions of politics. Webster defines it as 'The art of government, or the administration of public affairs.' Party politicians act as if it meant 'The administration of public affairs for personal or party ends.' The women know it in

<sup>20</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Report, 1922.

<sup>21</sup> Minutes, UFA, Report of Legislative Investigation Committee, 1922.

the words of Mrs. Parlby as 'Not a contest for power between two political parties, but a science that affects our daily lives for good or ill.'" Further on in the Address she declares: "Politics defined thus makes a direct appeal to women."<sup>22</sup> Sears perceived that until women became politically active only a portion of their daily lives was considered by the men in politics. An analogy to housework aptly elucidates how she believed women fit naturally into public politics: "Word was sent to me last summer that instead of organizing Locals, I should be home darning socks. Too long we have remained at home to darn socks. Had we concerned ourselves with the forces that determine the price of socks, we might not have found so much public mending to be done."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the rationale was that if women have been mending and maintaining the home, why not do the same in the public sphere? In the remaining portion of the President's Address, Sears provided examples of the positive differences made in society by women who have entered politics. The areas which she highlights, and states have long been neglected, include the health of mothers and children, women's legal issues, segregation of mental and moral defectives, and liquor and drugs. Finally, she speaks directly to her female constituents and affirms:

Politics can no longer be regarded as a matter of remote concern to women. It is intimately associated with vital, living issues. In some cities there are civic and pre-election classes for the education of women voters. In the country this work is carried on through our Locals. We must be intelligent voters if we ever expect to become good housekeepers in the broadest sense of the word. . . . If we have a hope of securing wholesome and effective legislation, that hope is based on the mobilization of citizenship and the intelligent selection of legislative representatives, who will keep in close, sympathetic touch with an active, intelligent, organized citizenship.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address to the UFA Convention, 1923.

<sup>23</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address to the UFA Convention, 1923.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address to the UFA Convention, 1923.

Sears identified two close connections. She spoke of the link between being informed and continually aware of what is occurring in our society, but also said that in order for an organization to be effective there must be an alliance with the public at large. In doing this, a politically astute public will elect qualified public figures and in turn receive attentive political representation in the form of effective legislation. This is good housekeeping.

### Organizational Growth and Change

There is also a questioning of the United Farmers group organization in 1923. Attempts by some members of the UFA to join with other political groups was met by vehement protest within the organization:

‘Whereas, the basic principle upon which the UFA organization is built is that of economic group organization, and  
 ‘Whereas, action has been taken in both Federal and Provincial politics, and members elected on this principle and  
 ‘Whereas, we are now facing a crisis wherein this principle is seriously threatened through the efforts of certain farmers leaders and others in endeavoring: (1) either to amalgamate or affiliate with the Liberal party, or (2) to form a Progressive political party of “broadening out” from this basis to take in members from any or all other classes;  
 ‘Be it therefore resolved, that we hereby reaffirm our adherence to the principle of economic group organization and co-operation between economic groups, and demand that our representatives stand firm in adherence to this principle and that they oppose any steps looking to either amalgamation or affiliation with a political party or to the formation of a new political party by any “broadening out” policy.’<sup>25</sup>

The United Farmers was an economic based co-operative organization and wished to stay that way. At this time they did not view themselves as a typical political

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<sup>25</sup> Minutes, UFA, 1923.

party, rather, they were an economically motivated organization seeking a betterment for Alberta farmers.

The United Farmers organization continued to alter as years passed. In 1926 there was a further defining of their place in society as well as a few small changes within the organization itself. An amalgamation of farm organizations is recorded. "Whereas, farmers' organizations for each Province is unnecessary, and Whereas, unity is strength; Therefore be it resolved, that steps be taken for an amalgamation between the U.F.A., U.F. of C, G.G. of Saskatchewan, U.F.A., U.F.O. and all other farm organizations."<sup>26</sup> This resolution was carried, and is reminiscent of the story about the hornet's nest; the notion that organization brings power is upheld here. Also, it is stated that although they do not question their position or purpose in society, nor the interest and loyalty of their members, the United Farmers were having difficulty collecting membership dues.

Whereas, we are convinced that the vast majority of the farmers of Alberta have due appreciation of the great and valuable services of the UFA as an educational organization, of the invaluable benefit it has been for the promotion of the farmers interest, both social and economic, in the past; and we believe also that it is just as essential that it should continue to flourish and function as a guiding influence in the future over all its other branch activities comprising the industrial pools which it has been responsible for promoting, and

Whereas, the membership strength of the UFA (as represented in the actual paid up memberships) is not at all as representative as it should be, caused, we believe, not so much by apathy toward the organization as to the present method of collecting membership dues, the objection that many Locals secretaries have to be continually asking for dues, the inconvenience often of the member to pay, etc. etc.,

Therefore, be it resolved, that it is in the best interests of the organization that the Board of Directors should seriously consider putting the UFA on as business like basis as possible and using some more practical means of collecting

<sup>26</sup> Minutes, UFA, 1926.

membership dues....<sup>27</sup>

The Farmers' organization found themselves in a predicament whereby members were not as eager to pay dues as they were to reap the benefits of membership.

Membership queries continued into 1928; Susan Gunn, UFWA President, provided an interpretation of the membership woes expressed two years earlier. In a section entitled "Unity of Group Emphasized," Gunn asserted that while unity of the UFWA had always been a focal point, membership had not. As a result, she posited there are three categories into which the membership falls:

First, there are those who may become indifferent and drift away from their own economic group. Second, seeing those who seeing this, would accentuate the UFWA, and concentrate on retaining every farm woman to the end that a strong, virile, loyal membership might be built up as a farm women's organization. Third, those who wish to emphasize the unity of the aims and aspirations of farm men and women, leaving to each community the decision whether the work shall be carried on in joint or separate Locals.<sup>28</sup>

Gunn maintained that the first two options were what she termed "the easiest way out"; however, the final alternative is a challenge because it involves the men, women, and youth of each community. To be successful the community members would have to understand the principles of reciprocity, and finally, "for the perfecting of this alignment will mean in creative spirit, in breadth of vision, in understanding and strength of purpose, infinitely more than the mere sum total of its parts."<sup>29</sup> The UFWA is consistent with their intent to achieve true unity within the Farmers' organization; through unity there is strength, and through strength they predicted success and a better level of citizenship for the farm women of

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<sup>27</sup> Minutes, UFA, 1926. It was also suggested that members sign "special authorization slips" where they are members of a Pool to automatically have their annual membership fees deducted.

<sup>28</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address at the UFA Convention, 1928.

<sup>29</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address at the UFA Convention, 1928.

Alberta. This sentiment is expressed in the close to the President's Address in a section entitled "Economic Freedom Through Co-operation": "For the war we wage is against poverty, the monotony of which is 'a thousand times more deadly than the monotony of factory routine.' The battle we fight is for freedom, for ourselves and for our children, that there may be leisure to enjoy."<sup>30</sup> The UFWA was not lacking in ambition; they undertook the betterment of society without hesitation. The expansion of housekeeping from the farm home reached far to the boundaries of society.

### Re-emphasis on Group Co-operation

In 1929 the goal of improvement of the existing level of society was labelled "perhaps the greatest achievement possible to rural women."<sup>31</sup> President Gunn asserted that women were becoming progressively more involved in areas including "education, marketing, junior work, legislation, immigration, and world peace." She held that because women are no longer satisfied by remaining silent in public matters, and are now challenging "the existing social order," they have made a great achievement. Furthering the continual theme of co-operation, Gunn provided a portion of the address Irene Parlby made to the International Wheat Pool Congress the previous year.

'Co-operation is itself a revolution as radical, as fundamental as anything they could desire, and is peacefully and quietly at work in many different countries transforming economic thought and the economic structure of society.' This transformation is an utter negation of the things that men and nations have so long revered, and indicates in marked degree the dethronement of strength and power as the guiding forces of humankind. . . .

<sup>30</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address at the UFA Convention, 1928.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes, UFWA President's Address at the UFA Convention, 1929. The following quotation is drawn from the same source.

The belief in co-operation has not waned, but amplified. Originally, co-operation and unity were heralded as bringing power and success; at this time co-operation is given a form of cosmic almightiness capable of overcoming any obstacle in its way, even the long-held dogmas of men and society.

Co-operation as the central goal of the United Farmers organization persisted into 1931:

No social system can continue to exist, half democratic, and half autocratic. The United Farmers of Alberta are trying to contribute to this work of social reorganization. They have moved in political reorganization and they are moving in economic reorganization. They have put their hands to the plow. . . . Will the United Farmers turn their back in their efforts toward economic reconstruction; will they press onward toward their ultimate goal, a new social order where co-operation instead of competition shall be the determining force?<sup>32</sup>

Finally, the ultimate goal is declared in direct terms. Through careful organization and co-operation, the farmers' movement described its goal as the transformation of society from a competition driven society to one whereby communities share and work together in co-operation, thus benefiting everyone.

The President's Address of 1931 prescribed a new social order as the ultimate goal; the following year they had progressed to quoting the ancient philosopher Confucius. "In the words of the famous Chinese philosopher, Confucius, 'To improve the Empire, improve the State; to improve the State, improve the individual; to improve the individual, improve the heart; to improve the heart, improve the soul.'"<sup>33</sup> Amy Warr, UFWA President, then further explains the ideals of co-operation. She affirmed that the actions of the governing body of a nation influence the acts of the people of that nation. "If love of profit controls the actions of individuals, it will be equally the dominating force of governments; and

<sup>32</sup>Minutes, UFWA President's Address to the UFA Annual Convention, 1931.

<sup>33</sup>Minutes, UFWA President's Address to the UFA Annual Convention, 1932.

on the other hand if service and brother love radiate from the soul of individuals, this force will in turn be reflected in their chosen representatives.”<sup>34</sup> In closing, Warr continued in the mode of co-operation and ultimate ends, but appears to make a contradiction:

The UFA has been teaching the principles of co-operation for more than two decades, working toward a Christian Democracy, in which sympathy, understanding and tolerance shall be the guiding force of individuals and nations. Let us keep this ideal ever before us, remembering always that no matter who we are or where we are, or in whatever humble capacity we serve our Creator, we yet have a part to play in the great drama of life.<sup>35</sup>

These themes have been consistent throughout the UFWA Presidents’ Addresses, and they have been developed in depth as the UFWA itself developed. However, here it is stated that tolerance is a “guiding force,” and no matter who you are or how humble, it does not have consequence, because everyone can still take part in life and its events. This is contradictory to statements made in the Minutes of the United Farmers organization where it is resolved that Oriental immigrants and selected other groups are deemed undesirables. Further, in references to members of society labelled feeble-minded, they are recommended for segregation and/or sterilization. Did the UFWA employ selective tolerance by designating who can take part in the new social order, or did they just overlook the segments of society previously discounted as substandard?

### The Future

In January of 1936, after their defeat to the Social Credit, the United Farmers of Alberta began formally questioning their future place in politics. The resolution to retire as a political organization heard at the Annual Convention was

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, UFWA President’s Address to the UFA Annual Convention, 1932.

<sup>35</sup> Minutes, UFWA President’s Address to the UFA Annual Convention, 1932.

“unanimously lost;” however, the resolution itself clearly explains the current political climate and resulting position of the UFA at this time:

Whereas, the UFA was originally organized to deal with all phases of agriculture, touching the life of the farmer, and Whereas, specialization in industrial development has led to grain pools, dairy pools, livestock pools, egg and poultry pools, wool growers associations, etc., thus draining the ranks of the original organization and in some cases causing competition as between pools, and Whereas, the original objective of the UFA is in the process of being achieved in these specialized groups, and Whereas, the formation of the C.C.P. by the UFA and kindred organizations has provided an avenue offering much greater opportunity for progress in the political field, and Whereas, affiliation with any political organization prevents the fullest development of commercial activities; Therefore, be it resolved, that the UFA cease all direct political activity and constitute itself a provincial rallying point for agricultural organization.<sup>36</sup>

Farming itself had progressed; when the UFA first entered politics there was essentially nothing in place to protect the welfare of the farmer. By 1936 there were a variety of Pools representing different aspects of farming, thereby fragmenting what was originally a cohesive agricultural community. This fragmentation resulted in the eroding of the United Farmers organization.

By 1937 members of the UFA were becoming less supportive of their organization. The Minutes of the Annual Convention contain another tabled resolution; previously, in 1936 the resolution on the same matter was unanimously voted down, but in 1937 there were a few members voting in favor of the resolution to cease political activity. “Whereas the primary function of the UFA is and has been the improvement of our social conditions and the raising of the economic status of the farmers and their families; “Therefore be it resolved that this Convention believes this end can best be accomplished by the UFA as an

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<sup>36</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1936.

organization ceasing all political activity.”<sup>37</sup> This resolution was decidedly voted down 71 to 9. However, the question of future political activity was not answered by the defeat of the resolutions of 1936 and 1937. This dilemma only grew in intensity until 1938 when four options were presented to the members in the following UFA Board Resolution:

‘In view of the difficult situation that has developed with regard to the future political activities of the UFA;  
 ‘Be it resolved that to obtain the decision of the Convention with minimum of confusion, a preferential ballot be placed before the Convention, and discussion permitted thereon to cover all resolutions now before it on that subject, and that the ballot be in the following form:  
 ‘I favor that the UFA organization shall:  
 ‘(a) Become an industrial organization, as the UFA was prior to 1919, namely, suspend direct political activity .....  
 ‘(b) Become an economic group organization, taking political action as was done from 1919 to 1933, namely, pursue an independent course politically as an organization .....  
 ‘(c) Remain affiliated with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation .....  
 ‘(d) Support the proposed Unity political movement in Alberta.’<sup>38</sup>

This resolution was discussed, moved and seconded, and it is recorded that “congratulations be sent to the UFA Board for their elucidation of this problem.” It appears as if the United Farmers executive viewed the current political situation as more of a problem than did the members at large. After two definite indications on the part of the members to remain in the political arena, as indicated by voting down the resolutions to suspend political activity, the Board simply presented four options and asked for a vote this way.

The outcome of the ballot was recorded in the Minutes of 1938 as clause “c,”

<sup>37</sup>Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1936.

<sup>38</sup>Minutes, UFWA Board of Directors Meeting, January 16 and 17, 1938.

“remain affiliated with the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.”<sup>39</sup> Later at the same Convention, the future of the UFA in politics was discussed at length; however, a final decision was still in the distance. The UFWA faction moved and seconded a resolution (known as Resolution #4) which stated, “the UFA organization remain active in Provincial politics, as a provincial group known as the UFA.” It was then requested that further information on this matter be obtained, and that no decisions be made nor votes taken until that time. A UFA member spoke to the UFWA members, and “explained the present standing of the organization . . . . (It was) suggested that the vote on this resolution be taken at 3:30 when the UFA vote on the resolution will be taken, and that the UFWA votes be counted with those of the UFA.” First, before voting with the UFA members on Resolution #4, the UFWA voted on the adoption of an amendment and sub-amendment. The amendment read, “co-operating with other groups in the C.C.F.,” while the sub-amendment read, “willing to co-operate with other groups having similar objectives.” “The sub-amendment was lost by a large majority” at the UFWA Convention. However, the amendment was also lost at the UFA Convention. In an effort to expedite the matter of making a final decision, it was ruled at the UFA Convention that, “In the event of Resolution #4 being defeated, the UFA is out of Provincial politics altogether.” The consequence of the vote on Resolution #4 is notable; it was the votes of the UFWA members that maintained the UFA party in their current political role a little longer. “A standing vote was taken with the result that the resolution was carried 87 to 5. It was announced that the resolution was defeated in the UFA Convention, but with the combined UFA and UFWA vote, the resolution carried.” The United Farm Women remained

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<sup>39</sup> Minutes, UFA Annual Convention, 1938. The entire paragraph is from this source. The UFA President made the ruling that if Resolution #4 was defeated the UFA would cease political activity. This ruling was made in effort to reach a final conclusion. Votes of the UFA and UFWA were counted together.

driven by their desire to improve the quality of life for women on farms across Alberta. Although the United Farmers organization was initiated by men, it was the women of the organization who joined after its genesis that upheld the farmers' movement.

### Conclusion of Political Activity

Finally, in 1939 the UFA organization concluded their political activities. The final Board Resolution was recorded in the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention

#### Minutes:

Whereas, for many years the UFA has functioned as an economic group taking direct political action as one of its many avenues toward its main object - that of better conditions for our farm people, and  
 Whereas, for fourteen years our representatives in the Legislature and in Parliament have made it one of their first responsibilities to strive continuously for a higher standard of farm life and have made many noteworthy contributions to that objective, and  
 Whereas, an organization to be effective in behalf of the farmers of this province must have a very large measure of untiy (sic) in support of its proposals, and  
 Whereas, to achieve more effective unified action towards such measures of amelioration as are possible within the limitations of our present economic system, it is necessary to receive more support from larger numbers of our farm people....<sup>40</sup>

This resolution was carried "after several members had spoken." Therefore, after striking down the resolution to cease political activity a number of times, it was finally passed that the UFA organization would withdraw from political activism. Support for the United Farmers had waned, as in the final resolution it was noted that more support was needed from the farm people. The wide-spread unity that

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<sup>40</sup> Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1939. Political activity ceased based on the apparent lack of effort to continue as before.

had carried the party for so long had dissipated; without great numbers of members and supporters, the powers of organization and co-operation are not attainable.

### Reflections

When the farmers' movement first began and quickly gained momentum, the political, economic, and social climates were much different than in 1939. In 1915 when it was resolved that the WAUFA would become a separate entity and was ultimately named the UFWA in 1916, there was still considerable population movement and with that came many social and economic issues.

As a new area of settlement, the Prairie region was a cauldron into which was thrown a great range of political ideas and perspectives: American populism, British labour socialism, British Toryism, European liberalism, socialism, anarchism, communism, and a variety of forms of utopianism. American and British immigrants contributed to the growth of the farmers' movement in Alberta and Saskatchewan during the 1910's and 1920's.<sup>41</sup>

The United Farmers organization emerged when there was a need for an organized political group that could affect change on behalf of the under represented farmer. The women's section undertook the portion of this representation that the men's section essentially overlooked: the home, and the women and children which inhabit it. Linda Rasmussen states that nothing could have been more logical than for women to become directly involved in the farmers' movement. "Labor-saving devices, conservation of health, better rural schools and higher education were directly connected with better markets, co-operative buying and selling, and better agricultural credit. In other words, the farmer's problem was his wife's problem

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<sup>41</sup> Jean R. Burnet with Howard Palmer, "Coming Canadians": An Introduction to a History of Canada's Peoples (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), 156.

also.”<sup>42</sup> Farm women learned about these avenues of rural life through the UFWA organizational structure, and at the same time became active in bringing about positive changes for rural women and children in their communities. The farm women of Alberta were unique according to Rasmussen. Their deep involvement in the public world of politics was common only to farm women.

The rural women of Alberta were the white hope of the progressive movement in that province. The Women’s Institutes and the United Farm Women were not afraid to tackle social problems and their reading courses and discussions showed serious purpose. The women of cities were more likely to be entangled in social affairs and in danger of wasting their time in matters of constitution and procedure, such as ‘Who should sit at the head table at their annual banquet?’ but there was real stuff in the countrywoman.<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps farm women became so politically active because they were living what they were fighting for. Women of the cities did not exist in an environment where everyday household tasks were extensive due to a lack of labour-saving devices, a shortage of help, and simply more responsibilities. Farm women were hardy because they had to be, otherwise they did not survive. “Such women had a strong sense of the need to organize their sex in defence of equal treatment on and off the farm, in and beyond the family. In the face of widespread indifference to the special plight of farm wives, however, they were often perplexed as to the best course of action.”<sup>44</sup> The women who were part of the United Farm Women of Alberta were activist women unafraid of obstacles and hardship; they had fewer resources than urban women had to work with, yet they accomplished more for farm women than was likely first imagined.

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<sup>42</sup> Rasmussen, et al., 138.

<sup>43</sup> Rasmussen, et al., 138.

<sup>44</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939 (Ontario: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1988), 198. See also, Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, “‘Ever a Crusader’: Nellie McClung, First-Wave Feminist” in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1986), 178-180.

It is remarkable that so many farm women were willing to focus their energy on a prairie women's activist movement. A review of their daily responsibilities reveals endless labour and hardship. Ironically, activist farm women worked extremely hard and often received little in return, yet they tirelessly strove for a better level of social citizenship for all Alberta women.

## Chapter IV

### FARM WOMEN

#### The Focus

The pioneers of Alberta's prairies journeyed from distant lands in search of a new beginning. Lured by free land in the early 1900s, propaganda, the chance for independence, or escape from persecution in their homeland, the newcomers faced many years of hardship regardless of their motivation for choosing Alberta as their destination. The immigrants came with little or nothing, and initially rarely enjoyed shelter of any consequence. Life on the prairie meant the beginning of years of rigorous hard work and isolation. Survival was dependent upon a willingness to forsake comfort or luxury, and a raw determination to succeed.

The contribution of farm women in the early 1900s will be the focus of this chapter. Labour was a central issue; who was responsible for what farm duties and what happened when the predetermined roles, often gender based, were disturbed? Further, what were the household power dynamics in an early farming household? Isolation similarly played a significant role in the lives of women and their families on the prairie. These broad themes and their underlying issues will be scrutinized. Through an examination of the labors of a farm woman, the motivation behind the ambitious aim of the UFWA to improve the quality of life of rural women is better understood.

#### The Labours of a Farm Woman

The single most compelling issue of farming on the Alberta prairie was

labour. While there were some single men that farmed, the most common circumstance was a husband/ wife team that undertook the laborious task together. It was soon realized that a wife was necessary for the success of a farm. Not only could she bear children who would eventually help on the farm, but she could work alongside her husband. "Many farmers acknowledged the work women did, and in rural areas it was well known that bachelors were not as successful farmers as married men because the work done by wives and children remained so essential."<sup>1</sup> It was expected that a wife would both bear children, usually many of them, and work to build a productive farm. A farm wife had two roles: mother and farm labourer. The fact that she was born with the ability to bear children resulted in the farm women being burdened with more tasks than her husband. It appears that women simply accepted these predetermined roles and excelled in them.

Although many farm men recognized the work women did alongside them as being both essential and productive, they did not usually reciprocate in helping with household labours. "One sign of a good husband was his willingness to pitch in...[m]en who were committed to a more egalitarian marriage were probably most likely to 'help out' but there is little evidence that many questioned the traditional division of labour."<sup>2</sup> Women's dismay with this division of labour became well-known. Violet McNaughton who founded the Saskatchewan Women Grain Growers, articulated this issue by proclaiming: "Prairie men may work hard, there may be chores early and late, but never later than the woman, besides there is eight hours rest per day on many of the implements. I would rather disc than bake any

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Prentice et al., Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada Inc., 1988), 118.

<sup>2</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling Double Harness or Hauling Double Load," in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 413.

day.”<sup>3</sup> The division of labour was such that women completed tasks also considered men’s work, and men undertook only the tasks which fit into their gender role. In general, the woman’s domain was anything to do with the house and children; additionally, she was responsible for the garden, the barn, the chickens, and any field work her male counterpart was unable to do.<sup>4</sup>

For some immigrant women the labour issue was even more divided. In some cultures it was given that the women would work as hard as the men and also bear and rear the children, wash clothes, clean house, and do all the cooking. If it could be afforded, some farmers hired domestics to help the wives, but the demand was always greater than the supply.<sup>5</sup> In the Slavic communities in particular, women were the subservient helpers of men.

The women “are little better than slaves who toil laboriously at the beck and call of inconsiderate husbands” ...Wife beating is common, and while we hear that women take advantage of the more favourable laws in this country, in general they submit as to an unalterable law in this best-of-all-possible worlds. It might be humorous were it not so pathetic to hear, as we did, of a big able-bodied Ukrainian woman in one of the settlements who could outstrip her husband cutting cordwood, yet submitted to a beating from the rascal when in the house.<sup>6</sup>

In the Ukrainian culture, the household power dynamics were such that in matters of the home, the senior male of the family held ultimate authority. Traditionally, many immigrants came from cultures whereby the authority of the male family

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<sup>3</sup> Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939 (Ontario: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1988), 136. See also, quote from Nellie McClung on same page.

<sup>4</sup> Linda Rasmussen et al., A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1979), 43.

<sup>5</sup> Joe Cherwinski, “Early Working-Class Life on the Prairies,” in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), 547.

<sup>6</sup> Jean R. Burnet with Howard Palmer, “Coming Canadians”: An Introduction to a History of Canada’s Peoples, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988), 85.

members was not questioned. In Ukrainian homes, the husband and father was responsible for the matters of discipline of wife and children; this was said to show his love. The wife was expected to fulfill all her husband's needs, sexual and otherwise, bear children, in particular a son, care for the children, and do all the housework aside from the farm chores. She was to consider herself subordinate to her husband as well as the male children once they reached a certain age. The eldest son was second in authority to the father. Aside from her husband, a wife did not associate with males other than family members; she was bound to her husband and their children. It was hoped there would be many children, and this was often the case, as contraception of any sort was unacceptable. Sons were taught economically-oriented tasks, while daughters were taught how to become good wives and mothers. The elderly, male and female, were held in high regard for their wisdom gained by life's experiences. All family members shared in the educating of the young, ensuring the passage of family traditions and cultural customs.<sup>7</sup>

There truly was a difference between the Slavic and Anglo-Saxon beliefs regarding women. The Slavic women may best be described as a combination of work horse and slave, while the Anglo-Saxon women were expected to exhibit some femininity, while also toiling long hours on the farm.

The Doukhobor woman is a housewife. She does not believe that her home is a jail, and that her babies are turnkeys. Like Solomon's virtuous woman, she 'seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.' On the other hand, she is a housewife only. She is not expected, and our Anglo-Saxon women are, to be a combination of Mary, Martha, Magdalen, Bridget, and the Queen of Sheba.<sup>8</sup>

The female labour role can be interpreted in varied ways. The Ukrainian woman must carry out her arduous farm tasks and subservient household role in life and

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<sup>7</sup> Burnet and Palmer, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Rasmussen et al., 56.

look forward to old age when she will receive respect for her years. The Anglo-Saxon woman must be a farm helpmate, housewife, and physically appealing, in turn for these attributes she receives respect. Which expectation is more desirable depends on the woman's perception of success. Nevertheless, the women who farmed with their husbands on the prairies were all subservient workers; Nellie McClung once asserted that women were "the unpaid servants of men."<sup>9</sup>

The phrase, "division of labour," suggests that there is an equitable division of the work to be done. Rather, McClung was accurate in labelling women "the servants of men." The work of homesteading women was staggering; farm women often did the work of two people, receiving little in return. In The Western Producer on October 23, 1924, the work completed by farm women was approximated:

There is no harder worked woman than the woman on the farm. Not only must she perform her duties as housewife, not only must she nurse and care for her children, but she is expected to be, and usually is the general servant of the farm itself. Her working day is the length of time she can manage to stand upon her legs. Her reward is desertion by her children when they are old enough to take care of themselves. Poverty and isolation make her function of motherhood a real hardship and burden, and self-neglect makes her old before her years.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately, The Western Producer was not exaggerating the poor status of women of the prairies; there are countless examples of women who experienced inhumane treatment from their husbands, incredible work loads, endless isolation, poverty, and even desertion. Even though the quality of life for many women was so poor, Nellie McClung believed "they were simply too busy to complain."<sup>11</sup> It appears that a sheer determination to preserve the family unit, insurmountable

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<sup>9</sup> Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling Double Load," 417.

<sup>10</sup> Rasmussen et al., 150.

<sup>11</sup> Rasmussen et al., 43.

energy, and a great sense of organization were the greatest attributes of farm women. One woman tells of how she worked all corners of the farm, and makes it sound easy. "I myself have for six seasons ridden the binder beside my husband, who handled the other and I can do my 15 acres in a day too! I do this work because men are scarce and getting the crop off the field is a first thought. I do all my own housework, besides milking a dozen cows, churning and making every week a hundred pounds of butter for market."<sup>12</sup> This woman helped her husband in the fields and in addition managed to complete her tasks in time for weekly market; exceptional organizational skill was a further attribute of the farm wife.

Field work and household duties were not the only labours considered the woman's domain. The farm livestock also required care which included butchering and cleaning of the carcass. Women had a different view of what their choices were. This may have been because they grew up learning to do all sorts of chores, and not discerning between what the gender-correct task was. It was this quality in farm women that made them invaluable; no matter the undertaking a woman would not hesitate because she knew someone had to do it.

Father would never stick a pig nor even kill a chicken. He always had a neighbour come to kill the pigs, and mother used to wring the necks of the chickens. She didn't like doing it any better than he did, but she was realistic and if we were going to eat, someone had to do the deed. She did it as she did many unpleasant things that had to be done. I can't remember father doing anything he didn't want to do. Once the pigs were killed mother had more hard jobs to do. The lard had to be rendered, a greasy, smelly job, but we all enjoyed the pies and other good things made with it afterwards.<sup>13</sup>

Another woman from Camrose, Alberta, related how she did all the veterinary care because her husband "was no good at it." She divulged how she pulled a calf, cured

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<sup>12</sup> Rasmussen et al., 52.

<sup>13</sup> Rasmussen et al., 54.

abscesses when the cow was hurt, used a crochet hook to remove a sliver which had abscessed in a cow's bag, and tended to one of the work horses which had an injured back. She treated the horse by hauling heated hot water to the barn, and dipping an old quilt in water to place on the horse's back. All the while she stood on a box to reach high enough. The woman said she became known as "the veterinary," but that she did not learn from anyone, and was not afraid to try to help an injured animal because there was no money to do otherwise.<sup>14</sup>

Was it a learned behavior trait that differentiated men from women? Men learned they did not have to do chores which did not complement their gender, while women learned the opposite. If women had been as choosy regarding their duties as were men, many family farms would have failed. Frontier historian, Julie Roy Jeffrey, concluded that "women hoped not to add male tasks to their own, but looked forward instead to 'the promise of a day when their lives would not be so hard, their tasks so numerous. Domesticity, with its neat definition of woman's place, helped women bear what they hoped were temporary burdens and reestablished their sense of identity and self-respect.'"<sup>15</sup> Therefore, field work, never ending household chores, tending to and butchering animals, were all viewed as temporary hardships that would later disappear. That they were women did not seem to stop them from any chore which needed doing. "In a prairie farming frontier, most wives were doing work that [was suggested] was men's work; they seem not to have felt that by plowing or stooking they were not sufficiently feminine."<sup>16</sup> Nothing stopped pioneer women; what needed doing was done.

The ultimate test of a farm wife was harvest. During this time, aside from all the usual obligations, there were threshers to cook and sometimes launder for.

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<sup>14</sup> Rasmussen et al., 54.

<sup>15</sup> Eliane Leslau Silverman, "Women's Perceptions of Marriage," in Building Beyond the Homestead, ed. David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1985), 50-51.

<sup>16</sup> Silverman, 58.

Harvest was a vital time of year when the work putting in the crop culminated in anticipation of an adequate yield to support the family through the next year. This meant long hours and many hungry threshers. What is different about this time of year is the extraordinary effort that was often put into cooking for the harvesters. Cooking was an endless chore involving continual food preparation to ensure five hearty meals per day.<sup>17</sup> A farm wife in Saskatchewan who wrote to The Guide, and called herself "'Farmer's Wife (Slave)'" elaborated on the endless tasks during harvest made worse by the inability to secure assistance at this time.

'[A] farmer's wife has to work and cook for twenty-five men as a rule, and only one woman to help, and the hour for men to get out in the morning to the mill is about seven o'clock and very often half past seven, and I have seen the mill not start until eight o'clock. Of course, no matter to the woman! In they come at twelve o'clock as hungry as hounds and the woman has to have everything ready in a minute. And if they would hurry back to their work the way they hurry in - but no! A shirk here and a dodge there. But, hold on, it is not three o'clock until they are looking for lunch and the lunch has to be iced cakes and hot buns.... Also women work and cook all day Sunday (rainy days included) for these men who lay up in the caboose and smoke and have a good rest; in fact its [sic] got nowadays that threshers expect a small banquet three times a day, and a lunch in between.... I really think men...look forward to threshing time for a filling out, especially men who have no housekeeper. The idea of hearty men wanting lunch when they eat three good meals in a day[!]'<sup>18</sup>

According to this farm wife, harvest is more work for the women than the men; the men are able to focus on the harvesting task while the women must contend with large-scale cooking duties in addition to the other daily labours. Compounding the already barely manageable amount of cooking was the sense of pride many farm

<sup>17</sup> R.G. Marchildon, "Improving Rural Life in Saskatchewan," in Building Beyond the Homestead, ed. David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1985), 95.

<sup>18</sup> Marchildon, 95. The remainder of the paragraph is drawn from this source, same page.

women had in their cooking. It was not unheard of for farm women to compete with each other for the reputation as the best cook in the district. This entailed preparing more exotic foods than would normally be readied for the harvesters. Nellie McClung wrote in her autobiography that a woman who did not amply feed the harvesters was placed low on the community social scale. Therefore, a farm wife did not only have endless labours to complete during harvest, but she also had to prepare food of such quality and quantity to meet and exceed the acceptable norms of the community.

### The Oppression of Farm Women

The insurmountable labours continually placed on women on the farm were central to their oppression.<sup>19</sup> The work of women was not held in the same regard as that of men. Women realized the worth of their work, and took pride in that work, but because it was women's work it did not garner the recognition of the work of men. "Feminists knew that once men took even a modest share of domestic labour it would acquire the importance women had always claimed for it."<sup>20</sup> An association with the male sphere was the key to gaining recognition for the traditional obligations of women on the farm. Their work repressed them; it kept them home, and there was no financial remuneration allowing independence. Irene Parlby spoke to this issue in 1925 in the Alberta Labour Annual:

Because the work of the married woman, in caring for her household, was supposed to be a labour of love, and of no economic value....women were at first content to sell their work at far below its real value, and thus depress the wage scale for all workers....Perhaps no group of women have suffered more from this condition of affairs than the Farm women. Certainly no group has labored so hard so ungrudgingly and so unselfishly. And yet we know for a

<sup>19</sup> Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," 417.

<sup>20</sup> Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," 413.

fact that in many instances, not even the produce they raise by their own labor, can be sold and claimed as their own.<sup>21</sup>

It was published articles like this one that brought the disproportionate division of labour issue to the forefront. Additionally, many newspapers such as the Free Press Prairie Farmer contained women's sections whereby women could send in submissions; the submissions regularly contended with the female labour issue. Through newspapers and farm journals, and there were many across the prairie provinces, women spoke to one another. The preoccupation with the division of labour in the women's sections shows the "unself-conscious feminism" of the readers and the depth of their desire to escape the labour of the farm.<sup>22</sup>

Surveys were employed to obtain statistics on the female labour issue. The number of labour-saving devices in a home was deemed a satisfactory method of determining the amount of labour a farm wife was undertaking in her daily chores. Answering a perceived need to record women's contribution on the farm, and to sway the opinions of those in disbelief of the amount of work carried out by women, in 1920 the Women's Section of the United Farmers of Manitoba surveyed forty-eight farm homes requesting information on conditions in the home. Two years later they did the survey again, but this time three hundred and seven homes were reached. In 1923 the Women Grain Growers of Saskatchewan canvassed farm women for information about "problems of the rural housewife" by mailing out questionnaires. Further, in 1927 Violet McNaughton was part of a Research Committee formed at the University of Saskatchewan to research women's work; McNaughton focussed the Committee on the study of "labour-saving devices, water supplies, waste disposal, ventilation, humidification, insulation, electrification and

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<sup>21</sup> Rasmussen, et al., 170.

<sup>22</sup> Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," 407.

power" found in the farm home. The purpose of these surveys was to publicize the work women did. With this, it was hoped the labour contributions of women would no longer be ignored and as a result would be improved.<sup>23</sup> Survey results revealed a commonality: a burdensome labour load for farm women. The 1922 United Farm Women of Manitoba survey told the following:

176 of 307 farm homes lacked a kitchen water system. Only 37 had baths. Fewer still benefited from labour-saving technology: only five gasoline irons, five electric irons, one mangle, two bread mixers, and two vacuum cleaners were reported. Two-thirds of the correspondents cleaned stoves, carried in wood, and took out ashes, only one-third had furnaces. Lighting was also far from optimal: 21 farms were lit by electricity but 243 made do with coal oil lamps. In addition, farm homes were usually equipped with cellars rather than basements, making access to storage difficult: 'Usually we see a chair dropped down and the woman swings herself down, and strains herself up'....<sup>24</sup>

The survey methods were not revealed. It is not stated whether the more prosperous or poorer areas were surveyed, nor how the surveyors themselves were told to interpret answers. That is, did the surveyors record exactly what the farm women stated, or did they sometimes record a response in their own wording? Nevertheless, the results show a strong theme of relentless labours for the farm wife.

### Labour Saving Devices

The existence of labour-saving devices in the home was a type of

<sup>23</sup> Strong-Boag, "Hauling a Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," 406. See also Mary Kinnear, "Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Farmer?: Women's Work on the Farm, 1922," in Canadian Papers in Rural History, ed. Donald K. Akenson (Ontario: Langdale Press, 1988), 139.

<sup>24</sup> Strong-Boag, "Pulling a Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," 407. The survey also revealed that "Only 15 women ...did not sew; the majority sewed for the entire family. Although 25 percent performed no outside chores, 50 percent milked and 45 percent assumed responsibility for gardens, poultry, and outside jobs in general." Aside from these duties, women commonly laundered and mended for hired men. Finally, 15 women replied that they had hired help all year.

measurement; the fewer the labour-saving devices, the more laborious the life of the woman residing in that home. It was the lack of such devices that troubled the United Farm Women of Manitoba (previously the Women's Grain Growers Association until the name change in 1920); the work of a farm wife was demanding, but the heavy labours were made more intense by the lack of labour-saving devices on prairie farms. The 1920 United Farm Women of Manitoba survey concluded that "every one" of the women polled would happily leave the farm if they had the choice; the women asserted they were disenchanted with the constant poverty, and weary of the general conditions of the country. Further, the women expressed that they were now past the age where they could undertake a new form of work.<sup>25</sup> The message that farm women were dissatisfied with their lives was clear. "One respondent...wrote in the space beside 'Other labour savers,' 'a well trained husband.'"<sup>26</sup> Better conditions for farm women was cited as the key to keeping women on farms; central to this goal was increasing the number of labour-saving devices in farm homes. The disillusioned farm women further clarified their opinions about farm life when the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Guide ran a contest offering thirty dollars in prize money for the "best" twelve answers to the question, "If you had a daughter of marriageable age, would you, in the light of your experience as a farm woman, want her to marry a farmer and make her future life on the farm? If so, why? If not, why not?" It is recorded that four hundred and forty entries were received which was the greatest number of submissions ever received for such a solicitation. Most remarkable is that despite widespread dissatisfaction with their lifestyles, three hundred and sixty of the four hundred and forty entries, or eighty-two percent, said "Yes" to the question which showed overwhelming faith

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<sup>25</sup> Kinnear, 139-140.

<sup>26</sup> Kinnear, 146.

that the quality of life for the farmer would eventually improve.<sup>27</sup>

Often the greatest barrier to obtaining labour-saving devices for the home was the farm wife's male counterpart. "Farmers were notorious for purchasing new equipment for the barn or fields but refusing to buy anything for the house."<sup>28</sup> Farming was considered an occupation, whereas being a farm wife was not. Conveniences for the home were not a priority; producing a profitable crop was the focus. Money made from a good year was likely spent on machinery for producing the next crop or additional land. With this, the household was of least concern and as a result was often less modern than the machinery used to work the fields.<sup>29</sup> "Long after the farm work had been taken over by horses and machines, many farm homes ran on womanpower."<sup>30</sup> The invention of the combine was a great labour saver for the farm woman because it significantly changed the nature of harvest season.

No more big supplies of food to be stored up....No more getting up at half past three in the morning to prepare breakfast for fifteen or twenty hungry men....Now I get up at half past five, have breakfast at six, the men go to the field and you hear the hum of the combine at half past six....With the old method of threshing, there came wet weather, you had a crew on hand for perhaps several days....You were supposed to feed them and be very pleasant as well....With the combine that all changed.<sup>31</sup>

That the combine benefited women was pure chance; nevertheless, the combine became a welcomed addition to the farm for women soon saw its potential for lightening their work load. It was luck that a device intended for improvement of the male sphere also aided the farm wife, for women were not in a position whereby they could simply purchase a needed household device. Typically, it was the

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<sup>27</sup> Kinnear, 146-147.

<sup>28</sup> Prentice et al., 118.

<sup>29</sup> Rasmussen et al., 42.

<sup>30</sup> Rasmussen et al., 42.

<sup>31</sup> Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling Double Load," 408.

husband who was perceived as being the ultimate authority and this included handling the finances. Household labour-saving devices were far down on the list of farm necessities.

The most laborious of all chores was the weekly washing. In the winter months especially, getting the laundry washed and dried occupied the better part of daily chores.

Washing! What a job that always was. Usually it took me the entire day. In summer I washed outside; in winter, down in the basement. The boiling, sudsy water had to be carried in pails from the stove to wherever my tubs were set. More than once I burned myself severely, spilling water on unprotected hands and legs.

I washed for the hired men as well as for my own family.... Drying the clothes was almost as much of a job as washing them, especially in winter. It often took the best part of a week, and for many months during the year, when the weather was cold, the various rooms of our house were made uncomfortable and unpleasant with smelly underwear and clumsy flannel shirts which took not hours but days to air thoroughly.<sup>32</sup>

Laundry was only one of the unrelentless duties. It is inconceivable to imagine someone being expected to wash, by hand, for twenty people in addition to cooking and cleaning for them. What happened if the farm wife became very ill and could not carry out her duties? Did someone else take on her chores if she were pregnant and feeling ill or close to giving birth? Even though her chores were extensive and even dangerous, it was the household which usually was last to achieve modernization. Nellie McClung lamented in The Stream Runs Fast that, "Many [women] broke under the strain and died, and their places were filled without undue delay. Some man's sister or sister-in-law came from Ontario to take the dead woman's place. Country cemeteries bear grim witness to the high mortality rate in

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<sup>32</sup> Rasmussen et al., 46. Sometimes there were up to 15 hired men, resulting in endless dirty clothing and bed linens to be laundered aside from the usual family washing.

young women.”<sup>33</sup> It appears that women were expendable. There was always another woman available who could fill the new vacancy and fulfil the same duties that were the domain of the first woman. Was it over-work or the absence of choice that was the cause of high mortality among pioneering farm women?

The advent of technology into the farm home was liberating; a new freedom resulted with the release from time consuming, onerous household tasks. The conveniences now taken for granted were emancipating. One of the most significant technological advancements was hot and cold running water. This eliminated the constant boiling and subsequent carrying of water to tubs for laundry. Laundry has been labelled “the white woman’s burden” as it could easily consume a woman’s life, particularly during harvest.<sup>34</sup> Another distinctive benefit of household technology was the new importance homemakers gained, as the advertising media touted the benefits of labour-saving devices and began to refer to homemakers as “new ‘professionals’”. This delivered a status to the housewife who had not before been recognized. The new technology was most appealing to the middle-class families who had disposable income, but could not afford to hire servants. Additionally, new products advertised were geared toward the homemaker, giving her a new form of power. She now had products to choose from which lightened her work load, but also granted her buying power. This gave women recognition of their position in the family unit as the family member responsible for buying household products. The ultimate household technology was electricity, and became available in more established areas in the late 1920s. Electricity meant that lighting and cooking were easier and safer, that the home could have a refrigerator or washing machine and many other appliances. With the

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<sup>33</sup> Rasmussen et al., 82.

<sup>34</sup> Sheila M. Rothman, Woman’s Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), 13-15.

introduction of appliances, the standards of cleanliness and housekeeping rose and many kitchens were remodelled to accommodate appliances and other forms of modernization. Few families could afford to follow the new technological trends; however, with the exposure given to household modernization by the media women could see a way to improve their lives. Farm homes were the last to receive electricity; in a 1941 census almost all urban homes, and 60 percent of rural non-farm homes had electricity, but just one in five farm homes had it.<sup>35</sup>

The life of a typical farm wife can be reduced to one word: labour. Her duties never concluded, resulting in a vicious circle of farm labor. "'Woman's sphere' was defined long ago, not by women, but by men."<sup>36</sup> Women worked on the farm according to the duties allocated to them by generations of men. It was typically the senior male family member who controlled the finances, and hence the family activities. Not until they were emancipated from the burdens of farm labour by labour-saving devices and other new technologies did women begin to define their own spheres. Women were essentially the tools and chattels of men until they gained freedom from their labours.

### The Expectations of a Farm Woman

Women were restricted by their labours, but also accepted societal beliefs concerning women and work. The housewife was viewed as just that. She was to be a wife that worked in the home and did not venture forth to earn money working off the family farm. A wife working off the farm was looked down upon as a sign that her husband could not provide for his family. This meant embarrassment for her husband, and as a result often no matter how badly extra

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<sup>35</sup> Prentice et al., 245-246.

<sup>36</sup> Rasmussen et al., 118.

money was needed a wife was not allowed to work away from the farm. Irene Parlby acknowledged this problem in the Alberta Labour Annual issue of September 5, 1925; "the work of the married woman, in caring for her household, was supposed to be a labor of love, and of no economic value."<sup>37</sup> This was the code of conduct and any deviation from it was frowned upon by society in general. The public sphere was considered the male domain; the woman was expected to function within the realm of the home only and not have any interaction with the competitive public world. By virtue of his sex society deemed the man more intelligent and aggressive while the woman was to be emotional, nurturing, and submissive. A woman treated poorly by her husband, according to early twentieth century maxim, did not deserve his love because she had not earned it. Therefore, there was an intense pressure to conform with not only societal, but also familial gender roles. Any woman that did not conform to societal expectation was viewed as being unstable as she was acting in opposition to the laws of nature, and ultimately, God.<sup>38</sup>

The labour issue presented a stark double standard for farm families. When a family experienced financial difficulties the opposing expectations for each gender became apparent. During tough times, a woman who stayed home, looked after the children and persevered, was revered as a fine person who could cope. However, for men who were in this position the situation was much different; a man with failing crops and not enough money to care for his family was considered a failure. Bread-winning was the responsibility of the male gender, yet when there had been economic failure women were often placed in more favourable position whereby their skills and ability to "make do" were admired and viewed positively by society.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Rasmussen et al., 170.

<sup>38</sup> Rasmussen et al., 88.

<sup>39</sup> Strong-Boag, A New Day Recalled, 137.

In a multitude of individual strategies, they did everything from giving up on commercial foods 'to go back to less expensive methods of food preparation,' to finding uses for the flour bags they might have thrown out in better days, to transforming old coats into quilts, to keeping bees to cut down on sugar purchases, to expanding gardens and picking more wild berries, to experimenting with a host of ways of adding to cash income. Their greater responsibilities broke the health and spirit of some women but the resolve and energy of others kept families from total disaster and made homemakers in many instances the 'Heroines of the Depression.'<sup>40</sup>

Financial disaster created a schism between the genders. Women gained prominence for their ability to stretch a dollar, while men lost status because their failure as a breadwinner placed the family in an economically troubled position. When a woman's income became the family support, the traditional male breadwinner role was thwarted, and as a result the male identity threatened.<sup>41</sup>

### Isolation

Isolation was an additional characteristic of life most pioneer farm families had to cope with. "Although a number of immigrants came to Canada in community groups, most farms were established by individual families. Since the government only permitted homesteading on alternate sections of land, initial settlement was thinly scattered. It might be two or three miles between farmsteads. Because of the size of the 'spreads' the problem was particularly acute in the ranchlands."<sup>42</sup> The proximity of homesteads was particularly hard on the women. Men were the most mobile family members and often had off-season jobs away from home. If any family business needed attention it was the husband who

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<sup>40</sup> Strong-Boag, *A New Day Recalled*, 137-138.

<sup>41</sup> Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," 409.

<sup>42</sup> Rasmussen et al., 42.

ventured off the farm to tend to this. Because of these factors, it was the men who made friends off the farm and who were the first to learn English. Women were also burdened with extensive home-based labours which kept them at home. The extent of the desire for outside communication and human contact was apparent by the number of homes purchasing a radio, telephone, or car. "By 1941, 77.8 percent of all occupied dwellings included a radio: 60.6 percent of those in rural areas and 90.6 percent of those in cities over 30,000. . . . By 1939 Canadians rented over 949,000 residential telephones and over 50,000 extension phones. . . . [Further,] the dramatic increase in passenger automobile registration despite the collapse to the economy, from 251,900 to 1,191,000 in 1939 touched women directly.<sup>43</sup> These statistics show that off-the-farm communication was a priority; the structure of farm life itself fostered an isolated lifestyle alienating farm women in particular from human interaction.

The need for social interaction was common to men and women; family and community gatherings were valued and rarely missed. Despite the rigors of harvest, it was a time of year when there were more social opportunities than usual. Neighbours and family members would sometimes gather to help one another harvest the years crop. Additionally, when time allowed it, farmers would travel many miles in open wagons during periods of cold wintry weather to attend community gatherings, concerts, and meetings. The danger of travelling in winter conditions was a factor, as deaths from becoming lost in blizzards was not unheard of. The risk was not enough of a deterrent as local gatherings were always well attended by people from great distances.<sup>44</sup> "Almost every winter coroners' files and local newspapers reported the deaths of those caught in blizzards. None the less,

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<sup>43</sup> Strong-Boag, "A New Day Recalled," 135.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Voisey, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 159.

pioneers took the risk. In 1911 some settlers travelled twenty-five miles to see a schoolhouse play at Blackspring Ridge, and for decades the Priscilla Club of Carmangay, a women's recreational organization founded in 1910, routinely attracted members up to fourteen miles distant."<sup>45</sup> Because of the distances farmers had to travel, the poor travelling conditions, and the time it took to reach a destination, many clubs and groups having a particular purpose, took on other unrelated activities as well. Further, it was common to stay for a significant period of time once a destination was reached because of the length of time it took to get there. For example, community dances did not usually conclude until four a.m.<sup>46</sup>

'UFA meetings were well attended as they were usually followed by cards and other games and the inevitable abundant supply of sandwiches, cakes, and coffee.'  
UFA picnics frequently featured half a dozen different activities over a twelve-hour period and might include several sports, a band concert, a play, and a dance, as well as political speeches. Special holidays like the joint 1 July and 4 July celebrations, often turned into gruelling marathons that collapsed even the hardiest socializers.<sup>47</sup>

Outings were a welcome reprieve for the isolated pioneers.

Although there were occasions to travel off the farm for social events, this was an exceptional circumstance. Farmers became experts at making do and learning how to do things themselves. Farm women learned to use gasoline to cure bed bugs, how to "dope each other," a book called "'Tohology'" was employed by wives and mothers, and there were a multitude of home remedies used to cure a variety of ailments from congested chests to sore breasts.<sup>48</sup> Adaptation was the only way to survive. Homesteaders learned how to help themselves and each other because they had to; there was no choice. The isolation was not always considered a

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<sup>45</sup> Voisey, 159.

<sup>46</sup> Voisey, 170-171.

<sup>47</sup> Voisey, 171.

<sup>48</sup> Rasmussen et al., 46, 68, 70.

misfortune or drawback of pioneering. An Alberta settler in 1903 observed, "Can you imagine being able to hear silence? I have stood outside alone and listened - absolute quiet prevailed. It filled the air. It must have been like the Garden of Eden, I think."<sup>49</sup> This settler appears to have an appreciation for the isolation of her homesteading lifestyle; however, this feeling was infrequently shared. "In reality disenchanted men soon left the frontier, but many women felt trapped by determined husbands. One Vulcan woman actually escaped back to England, but when her husband refused to follow, she reluctantly returned seven months later."<sup>50</sup> The difficulties of beginning life in a new place and being confronted with relentless back-breaking labours was compounded by alienation from social interaction. Often high hopes for bountiful harvests and a release from poverty were smashed by the hard realities of life, and that there would rarely be anyone, other than a spouse, with whom to share experiences.

Paul Voisey posits the isolation was most difficult for bachelors; many left their farms for the winter when the fields could not be worked. Furthermore, sometimes groups of bachelors took up residence together to alleviate the monotony of being alone.<sup>51</sup> The longing for a social life is demonstrated by the activities of one bachelor:

When one settler began homesteading he had little cash - no money for a riding horse and very little for machinery. He broke his land with a walking plough, work of the most physically demanding sort. Yet once a week after finishing for the day, he walked ten miles to attend a dance. (The draught horses needed a rest for the next day's ploughing, so they could not take him.) He then danced most of the night, and by the time he walked home again, dawn had broken - just in time for another day behind the walking plough. Sometimes exhaustion and inebriation overcame

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<sup>49</sup> Jean Bruce, *The Last Best West*, (Ontario, Fitzhenry & Whiteside Ltd., 1976), 96.

<sup>50</sup> Voisey, 31. Another woman refused to unpack her belongings for years. "The new environment particularly depressed some of them. "Mother was just sick when she saw it," .... p.31.

<sup>51</sup> Voisey, 160.

him on the way home, and passers-by found him lying unconscious on the prairie. Once, icicles had formed on his chest during the chilly dawn.<sup>52</sup>

Attendance at such a function was likely the only way this fellow would find a wife or meet his neighbours. Further, after a week walking behind a plow with only the horses for company, it did not much matter how far away the dance was or that he had work to face the next day. The desire for human interaction far outweighed the difficulties in getting to the dance.

### Conclusion: A Circle of Labour

Women were the human workhorses, protectors of the family unit, and bearers of the race on the Alberta prairies. They had the innate ability to persevere and survive, even excel in, the most difficult of lifestyles: pioneering. A woman could work on any part of the farm, and did so in addition to her predetermined housekeeping role. If farm women had not been so flexible in their work attitudes, and abilities, would more farms have failed? Farm men worked extremely hard, but so did the women. When they finished helping their male counterpart in the field there were still children to care for, and the household sphere to maintain. Work did not have an end for the farm wife; she existed in a circle of labour which only varied with the season. The UFWA recognized the inequitable division of labor experienced daily by farm women across Alberta. Organizing fostered communication between rural women and enabled them to learn from each other how to more easily and effectively carry out their daily duties.

It was the recognition of the inequitable division of labor by farm women, and the general hardships associated with pioneering which led to the eventual

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<sup>52</sup> Voisey, 160.

endorsement of a eugenics program in Alberta. Eugenics was chosen by the United Farm Women as another strategy to improve the lives of rural women and children. Rural life was difficult, and the immigrant population was perceived as intensifying the harshness of pioneering primarily through the resulting drop in grain prices as the prairie population quickly grew. The United Farmers advocacy role was unwavering as demonstrated by the nearly limitless parameters they placed on the methods employed to protect the interests of the farmer. When it was concluded that the immigrant population was the basis for the social and economic problems of pioneering life, eugenics was utilized as a solution.

## Chapter V

### REPRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES

#### Introduction: The United Farmers and Eugenics

Immigrant selection and ultimately eugenics are areas which the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) became inextricably involved. The physical and mental characteristics, as well as moral qualities of the immigrant were of concern; apprehension of the immigrant stemmed from a fear of Canada's gene pool being degraded. The broadening range of ethnic origins in Canada had stimulated "... a belief in the superiority of Canadian institutions and the inferiority of the new immigrants."<sup>1</sup> Women, the keepers of women and children, became entangled in the selection of immigrants and remedies for those already in the country deemed to have inferior characteristics. The eugenics movement was powerful, attracting supporters looking for a remedy to the social problems of the period. The United Farmers were among the many who wholeheartedly rallied behind the eugenics philosophy in Alberta.

#### Evolution of Eugenics

By the time the United Farmers took up the cause, eugenics had already evolved from its earliest form. The eugenics movement began as a melding of environmental and hereditarian thought whereby "individual improvements acquired through an improved environment could be transmitted to offspring; and also that corrupt social relations would produce physically and mentally deformed

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<sup>1</sup> Terry L. Chapman, "Early Eugenics Movement in Western Canada," *Alberta History* 25 (Autumn 1977): 10.

individuals.”<sup>2</sup> The belief in environmental influence on individual characteristics was eventually dropped, and a revised eugenics theory based on hereditarian beliefs emerged. Selective breeding became the catch phrase for “the new eugenics” which held a more elitist view than previous.

### Hereditarian Influence and Women

The United Farm Women of Alberta demonstrated a strong conviction in hereditarian influence early in their organization through an address made by Irene Parlby in 1916:

Scientists differ, I think, in their opinions as to the extent of prenatal influences, but there seems little doubt that the conditions of a mother’s mind has great influence on the temperament of her coming child. How many women think of this, and of how that future citizenry is developing for good or evil even before they have given him to the world? And afterwards? What is their chief thought, their dearest ambition for that son or that daughter?<sup>3</sup>

According to Parlby’s address, the United Farm Women based their beliefs on the premise that character is determined solely in the womb, and promoted a more cautious approach to the selection of marriage partners. Also notable is the emphasis placed on the responsibility of the maternal parent not only for genetic influence, but also for selecting the best paternal genes for her child. The wrong choice is not only her error, but she must then bear the full responsibility for allowing a poor quality of paternal heritage to be propagated through her.

. . .until women - all women- are raised to a much higher standard and educated to realize that in their hands lies the remedy for all these evils, not by the getting of the votes, and the passing of laws, but by the searching of their own hearts, and thoughts, and lives- by their prayers, and resolutions,

<sup>2</sup> Linda Gordon, Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), 274.

<sup>3</sup> Minutes, UFWA Convention, 1916, Irene Parlby, “Women’s Place in the Nation,” . The UFA and UFWA Minutes employed in this thesis were obtained at the Glenbow Museum and Archives.

and ideals to bring forth only that which is good, by refusing to give themselves to men of low and ignoble lives. Only so shall the highest in the race be achieved, and sin and disease be triumphed over!<sup>4</sup>

Parlby further identifies the power bestowed upon women during this time period; however, here lies what appears to be a theoretical contradiction of the period whereby the propagation of the human race was the responsibility of the maternal parent, but in other facets of life women had few human rights. Was the strong belief in the role of woman as propagator of the human race a powerful and honorable role, or was it the greatest burden that women would ever have to overcome?

At the most basic level women were defined by their ability to reproduce. Even the suffrage movement was scrutinized according to how allowing women the vote would affect childbearing and in turn society.<sup>5</sup> The independence of women, or feminism, was not supported by many men or women at this time; anti-feminism sentiment was implied throughout the origins of eugenic thought. "Eugenics, a term first used by Britain's Sir Francis Galton in 1883, can be defined as 'the improvement of the human race by better breeding.'"<sup>6</sup> Galton, the Father of eugenics, was not a supporter of equality:

Galton was a well-known anti-feminist, a supporter of the Anti-Suffrage Society, and a defender of the Contagious Diseases Acts that permitted the forcible medical inspection of prostitutes. W.C.D. Whetham, the Cambridge scientist and agriculturalist, wrote that it was no coincidence that the feminist movement emerged as the birth rate of the upper classes fell; the better sort of woman was shirking her maternal duty.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Minutes, UFWA Convention, 1916, Parlby, "Women's Place in the Nation,"

<sup>5</sup> Angus McLaren, Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), 20. It was understood that the function of woman was race production, and it was feared that emancipation would inhibit women from functioning as they were intended.

<sup>6</sup> Chapman, 9.

<sup>7</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 21.

Maternal duty was not all that Galton and other eugenists communicated to women. As a gender, women were viewed in contrast to men; mentally, women were held to be on another level from their male counterparts. The mental condition of women was, again, interpreted in relation to reproduction. Wendy Mitchinson addresses the relationship between women and insanity, and provides numerous examples of this relationship. First, she posits that in the nineteenth century, while both genders were recorded as potentially mentally unstable, emphasis was placed upon the mental problems of women and how to handle such cases. Hereditary insanity was believed to be particularly prevalent in women. Such beliefs are a reflection of the understandings of the medical profession during this period.<sup>8</sup> The perceived connection between the female reproductive system and mental state is demonstrated by the convictions of the medical profession concerning epilepsy during the Victorian period.

'The Practical Home Physician of 1884 speculated that the cause of epilepsy was abuse of alcohol, sexual excesses, venereal excess, masturbation, and lead poisoning, although the author did not feel that masturbation and venereal excess were as frequent causes as many believed.' As for women suffering more from epilepsy than men, several physicians accounted for this by linking it to ovarian irritation, irritation of uterus, or menstrual irregularities.<sup>9</sup>

Mitchinson further evaluates this medical interpretation observing that through the study of asylum records epileptics accounted for only three percent of the total patients, and the numbers of men with the condition were greater. She continues, that perhaps because epileptics can be difficult to control doctors were less tolerable of the disability in women than in men. Further, the direct connection made between the mental health of women and the reproductive system was specific to

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<sup>8</sup> Wendy Mitchinson, The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 291 and 293.

<sup>9</sup> Mitchinson, 293.

the female gender; the cause of epilepsy in men was not considered in relation to the male reproductive system.<sup>10</sup>

It has been established that the female reproductive system and mental disorder were viewed as having a direct cause and effect relationship. However, this relationship was given substantial credence extending to nearly every aspect of the female body. The monthly menstruation cycle was held as a time of particular strain for a woman; according to a nineteenth century medical text, "the insanity of females is always aggravated at the period of menstruation."<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the ovaries were considered to affect the intellect in all women, and in unmarried females the ovaries were held as a cause of insanity particularly during childbirth and the onset of menopause. However, menopause did not mean improved mental health; the menopausal woman was said to be a host for a bevy of additional mental disorders.<sup>12</sup> Whether menopausal or pre-menopausal, women were expected to experience some form of insanity on a regular basis. While insanity is not defined, the mental disorders said to be attributed to women due to their reproductive capabilities shows the extreme limitations placed upon women during the spawning of eugenic thought. Women who followed the prescribed gender role by marrying and having a family were also not without risk of insanity. Puerperal insanity, or puerperal mania as it was also labelled, caused by puerperal fever, post-partum depression, and additional childbirth related problems was a known, and valid, condition at this time. A woman who chose not to have children could not contract puerperal fever, but because of her denial of the "natural order" was said to be vulnerable to numerous physical diseases as well as insanity.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mitchinson, 293.

<sup>11</sup> Mitchinson, 296.

<sup>12</sup> Mitchinson, 296-297. Mitchinson further explains that women viewed as not conforming to the expected norm of marriage were regarded as especially unstable. All women were susceptible to psychological illnesses including widows and old maids.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchinson, 298-299.

Age, marital status, mother or not, a woman in the Victorian period was not exempt from being diagnosed as insane at some time in her life. When Sir Francis Galton first defined eugenics in 1883, women were believed to be of a fragile mental state during their entire life cycle; an examination of the medical and social background of this time period, considered in conjunction with Galton's theory, brings forth a fuller understanding of eugenics and its rationale. Eugenic thought underwent a progression of change by the time the United Farmers first agreed to publicly endorse segregation in 1922.

### The Appeal of Eugenics

Eugenics, and its firm hereditarian basis, appealed to the upper classes who chose to think that through better genetic selection the population could be bred to be of a superior social class than what they felt was currently being produced by the recent influx of immigrants. The changing social climate was interpreted as a threat to their status; by identifying the occupational categories from which the supporters of eugenics came, this becomes clearer. "The eugenicists were largely university academics in various fields - genetics, demography, economics, psychology, and sociology in particular. Scholarly eugenic organizations, however, brought them together and gave them a collective consciousness."<sup>14</sup> A prominent eugenic organization was the Eugenics Society of Canada (ESC) which emerged in 1930 taking on the role of "political voice" of those who supported solving the failings of society by practising eugenic ideals.<sup>15</sup> The Medical professionals attracted to the ESC proved to be a powerful group of pro-eugenics agitators; they published articles

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<sup>14</sup>Gordon, 257.

<sup>15</sup>Diane Dodd, "Women's Involvement in the Canadian Birth Control Movement of the 1930s: The Hamilton Birth Control Clinic," in Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19th and 20th Centuries, ed. Katherine Arnup et al. (London: Routledge, 1990), 152. McLaren, Our Own provided additional background to the ESC, which was founded in 1930 and states it advocated that present social problems were caused by biological factors. 107.

in medical journals debating heredity versus environmental influence as well as segregation versus sterilization. Among the many medical professionals who were active in the eugenics debate, the most prominent were: Dr. Peter H. Bryce, Dr. Charles Hastings, Dr. Charles Kirke Clarke, and Dr. Helen MacMurphy. Each was a staunch supporter of hereditarian influence and a leader in the public health arena. Additional prominent supporters included: Dr. Madge Thurlow Macklin, geneticist, an original organizer of the ESC, and active writer and speaker in support of eugenics, Dr. C. B. Farrar, notable psychiatrist who believed social and medical problems were one in the same, Dr. William Hutton, a one time president of the ESC, and an innovator in the area of public health, and A. R. Kaufman, businessman and financial secretary of the ESC. The ESC had an executive comprised of three members, which included Dr. Hutton, Kaufman, and D.B. Harkness who was a "welfare expert and magistrate." Notably, the ESC did not exceed one hundred members, with professionals in the areas of medicine and social welfare being strongly represented.<sup>16</sup>

According to Linda Gordon, eugenics was not a type of social reform, but rather a "justification for the status quo."<sup>17</sup> She further explains, "eugenics, in the long run, was a type of population-control thought. . . aimed to manipulate reproduction on a large scale in order to control a society's development."<sup>18</sup> The middle and upper classes of society who supported the eugenics movement were seeking to maintain their social position. Eugenics was looked upon by the upper classes as a form of protection from the social evils perceived as threats to their social positions. More specifically, Angus McLaren posits that "the eugenicists' activism was a sign, also, of a new fear of the lower classes. Terrified by the prospect

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<sup>16</sup> McLaren, *Our Own*, 30, 77, 114, 115, 118, 119, 138.

<sup>17</sup> Gordon, 274.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon, 290.

of the unfit multiplying thoughtlessly while the prudent restricted family size, the eugenicists called for state controls."<sup>19</sup>

### Positive and Negative Eugenics

Although it was the desire to limit the reproduction of the unfit that first sparked the adoption of a eugenics policy, the reproduction of the fit was also a focus. From this arose the terms positive and negative eugenics; negative eugenics meant discouraging the reproduction of the unfit, while positive eugenics denoted encouraging the reproduction of the fit. Positive and negative eugenics was originally defined by Sir Francis Galton who relied on social indicators to determine who was fit and unfit.<sup>20</sup> At one time the creation of a "human stud book" was proposed, whereby individuals deemed superior would be given a rating of A1 and encouraged to reproduce through a reward system. It was also proposed that rather than being identified through a name, individuals could be assigned a number corresponding to their position in the human species. Through this method it was intended that "a pride in one's digit would develop."<sup>21</sup> The eugenicists essentially became the sex educators of the period; in answer to the decline in birth rates of the upper classes, the higher birth rates of the lower classes, the continuing influx of immigrants, the growing independence of women as well as other social changes, the eugenicists offered comfort. They undertook the task of controlling reproduction: "the eugenicists sought by investigation, categorization, and education to subject sexuality to greater control than had ever existed in the past."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 18.

<sup>20</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 16.

<sup>21</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 25.

<sup>22</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 68.

## Race Suicide

Before eugenics would gain the momentum it finally accrued during the Depression, social thought had to pass through another period of change. The fear of race suicide, that is, an Anglo-Saxon outbreeding by the recent influx of immigrants to the Alberta prairies, was the final precursor to full blown eugenic activity. As fears of a dying out of the Anglo-Saxon population grew and spread the climate for an active eugenics policy in Alberta ripened. There existed two main fears in the early years of the twentieth century: "the first was the reproduction *in* [emphasis his] Canada of the unfit; the second was the immigration *to* [emphasis his] Canada of the unfit."<sup>23</sup> This was said to lead to a 'racial degeneration' whereby the so-called fit would eventually be drastically outnumbered by the unfit. Canada was not alone in its growing discomfort with its new populace; the United States and Britain had similar fears, however in Canada the fears were heightened by the high French Canadian birth rates and later the growing numbers of immigrants of non-British origin.<sup>24</sup>

Linda Gordon asserts the fears of race suicide were based more on belief and exaggeration than fact. Terming race suicide a "misnomer", Gordon explains that society was experiencing demographic change, and many of the changes were difficult to accept by the middle and upper class segments of society. "It provided a focus for distress among...business and professional classes about the growth of working-class and...about shifts in family and sex role patterns (that is, the increase in married women wage-earners) produced by industrialization and the feminist movement."<sup>25</sup> It appears that it was the way these demographic realisms were

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<sup>23</sup> McLaren, *Our Own*, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Angus McLaren, "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada, 1870-1920," in The Canadian Historical Review Vol. LIX, no.3, 1978: 320-321. McLaren notes it was feared that the higher birth rates of Catholic French Canadians would lead to a Catholic domination. The Protestant birth rates were lower in comparison.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon, 156.

interpreted that fueled the race-suicide paranoia. Gordon outlines three basic beliefs of the race-suicide theorists, prefacing the first two as being accurate. The first concept was that fertility statistics for the nineteenth century showed women were having fewer children. Secondly, the steady decline in births was not a coincidence; birth control was progressively being employed. Finally, the third belief was that the birth rate was lowest among the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant population. However, Gordon clarifies that while the birth rates of new immigrants were the highest, statistics show that birth rates dropped as the length of time in the new country increased.<sup>26</sup> The crux of the race-suicide scare is summarized by Gordon when she states: "By stressing or suppressing the birth-rate statistics of certain social groups over others, one could arrive at a picture of the race-suicide 'problem' that would prove any of a number of theories of its causes - economic, ethnic, feminist, or religious, among others."<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it is feasible that the supporters of the race suicide theory could have extrapolated the demographic statistics to support their own fears and rationalized possible outcomes.

### Eugenics Applied to Western Canadian Immigration

Early eugenic philosophy was promoted by James S. Woodsworth, a Social Gospeller, who studied immigration. Woodsworth's study concluded that the immigrant should be segregated and sterilized. He labelled the current immigrants entering Canada as "inferior stock" and expressed his fears for the future of Canada.<sup>28</sup> Tommy Douglas, a founder of the Canadian Commonwealth Federation Party (CCF) and New Democratic Party (NDP), and premier of Saskatchewan from

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<sup>26</sup> Gordon, 153-154.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon, 154.

<sup>28</sup> Chapman, 11.

1941 to 1961, held views similar to that of Woodsworth. Douglas' Master of Arts thesis, entitled "Problems of the Subnormal Family," is described by McLaren as typical of eugenic thinking whereby the cure for social troubles was biological.<sup>29</sup> McLaren explains that Christian thought and eugenics were touted by many as inseparable; it was believed that the portion of the population considered below par was a threat to society and the Christian way was to impose limitations upon them and allow God to do the rest. "When education and legislation have failed there is still One who can take the broken earthenware from life's garbage heaps and make them vessels of honor in his temple of love."<sup>30</sup> Apprehension of the immigrant became widespread; Canada's Immigration Act eventually prohibited the entry of immigrants who had an infectious disease which could be of danger to public health. Entry to Canada was prohibited or granted based on a physical examination.

...it is evident that Canada wanted to create a society of superhumans. Under the law prospective hopefuls were examined for 'defects' ranging from paralysis of the leg, hernias, and abscesses on the face, to sprained groin muscles, poor limbs, and most importantly, poor physique.<sup>31</sup>

The eugenics program eventually adopted by the United Farmers was not original. Rather, the social climate was such that they became a vehicle to implement Sir Francis Galton's theory. For the UFWA, eugenics was a strategy to control the immigrant population blamed for the poor standard of living of the Alberta farmer. Eugenic principles were implemented into the UFWA non-formal education program whereby eugenic population control ideals were touted among members as the answer to the deteriorating quality of life on the farm. Thus, eugenic

<sup>29</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 7-9. During the period Douglas wrote his thesis he was a Baptist minister; Douglas described his thesis "as a topic in 'Christian sociology.'" Douglas became the first leader of the NDP in 1966 and carried on as defender of state health care.

<sup>30</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Chapman, 12.

philosophy became another component in the mixture of non-formal education and advocacy of the farmer.

The massive influx of immigrants from the turn of the century created considerable disenchantment among Anglo-Saxon Canadians. "The larger families and higher birth rates of the newcomers encouraged xenophobia, as did immigrants' supposed lenient attitudes towards alcohol and prostitution."<sup>32</sup> For the Anglo-Saxon race to survive the United Farmers resolved that action had to be taken to control the immigrant population perceived as being prolific, genetically inferior, as well as morally and physically defective. Initially, the UFWA promoted eugenics through segregation; it was thought that the immigrant and lower classes had to be segregated from the middle and upper classes to ensure that there was no mixing of genes.<sup>33</sup>

Essentially, anything regarded as undesirable in society was attributed to the immigrant population. The UFWA supported the popular belief in a direct connection between physical and mental health.

Another subject that goes hand in hand with education in the building of a better social order is that of physical and mental health .... for we know that mental health is so often a corollary of physical health .... And it is recognized that with proper training and environment the average and high grade morons may become self-supporting, economic units, presenting no serious problems as to social or economic adjustment.<sup>34</sup>

Three years later in 1931 President Amy Warr asserted, "The United Farm Women of Alberta are trying to contribute to this work of social reorganization," explaining the motivation of the United Farm Women in endorsing a eugenics program.

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<sup>32</sup> Alison Prentice et al., Canadian Women: A History (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Canada Inc., 1988), 192-193.

<sup>33</sup> Chapman, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, UFWA 14th Annual Convention, President's Address, 1928.

### Social Disease as Threat

Social diseases were a weakening factor in the population and regarded as another in a series of threats posed to the Anglo-Saxon race. In particular, venereal disease was deemed the worst of all evils due to its connection to prostitution. Prostitution, common to the lower social strata, was linked to the immigrant population; eugenicists could see an advantage to making a connection between heredity and immoral behavior such as prostitution.<sup>35</sup>

Dr. Charles Hastings, Toronto's medical health officer, informed the 1914 Social Service Congress that venereal disease led to degeneration and depopulation, high infant mortality, and low national efficiency. It was spread by prostitutes who turned to their trade, he asserted not out of a need for money but as a result of a natural penchant .... 'Evidence is accumulating to show that the primary factor is an inherited predisposition towards an exceptionally active sexual life.'<sup>36</sup>

Disease was connected to behavioral irregularities rather than a bacterial problem. This gave the eugenicists a method through which they could prove that sexuality was a destructive danger to society. Essentially, scare tactics were employed to discourage reproduction of the unfit. Segments of the population viewed as a threat were labelled carriers of VD by virtue of their social class, ethnic origin, or gender. Women who were not fulfilling their predetermined role were also labelled carriers, as were the feeble-minded who were thought to be the cause of prostitution. Employed as a method to control the population, eugenics was designed to ensure selective breeding, but also to convince the public of its necessity.

### The Cure: Sterilization

The only way to ensure that the feeble-minded did not produce like offspring

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<sup>35</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 72.

<sup>36</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 72.

was to sterilize them. Sterilization of the defective was held as a cure for the social problems with a biological cause.<sup>37</sup> Segregation could cure feeble-mindedness possibly over a generation, but the ultimate was sterilization.<sup>38</sup> Emily Murphy, noted reformer, supported eugenics and sterilization of the mentally deficient, " She argued that to protect women and children from sexual attack, to end the crippling expenses of incarceration, and to promote the mental and physical betterment of the race, sterilization of the unfit was required."<sup>39</sup> Murphy also likened sterilization to pruning a tree or protecting the public from diseased cattle.<sup>40</sup> For Murphy, the feeble-minded were like animals to be kept segregated from the public and rendered unable to reproduce for the public good. Regarding marriage of the feeble-minded, Murphy consented, " ... but only if sterilized so that insanity, venereal disease, tuberculosis, and epilepsy could be contained ...."<sup>41</sup> An identical attitude was held by the UFA: "Be it resolved, that all parties seeking marriage shall first submit themselves to an examination by a medical doctor and those found infected or diseased with venereal disease shall be isolated and made incapable of transmitting it further."<sup>42</sup> For many sterilization had become the accepted remedy for the diseased. It is notable that the requirement of a health certificate before marriage was made mention of numerous times in the UFWA Minutes; sporadically, during the years 1918 through to 1939, statements reinforcing their support of a pre-marriage examination were recorded.

In 1922 when the UFWA promoted the eugenics program to the UFA members, public backing for eugenics had grown enough that such a proposal could

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<sup>37</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 8.

<sup>38</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 42.

<sup>39</sup> Angus McLaren, "The Creation of a Haven for 'Human Thoroughbreds': The Sterilization of the Feeble-Minded and the Mentally Ill in British Columbia," Canadian Historical Review 67, no. 2 (1986): 140.

<sup>40</sup> McLaren, "The Creation," 140.

<sup>41</sup> McLaren, "The Creation," 140.

<sup>42</sup> UFA, Convention Minutes, 1926.

be put forth. The UFWA was enthusiastic about the program and high profile supporters emerged. The President, Susan Gunn, in response to opposition to the eugenics program stated, " ... 'democracy was never intended for degenerates.'"<sup>43</sup> In addition to the support of Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, the noted feminist, made her support for the movement public. Howard Palmer asserts, that in the 1926 to 1930 time period, while native born Canadians were concerned with the preservation of Anglo-Saxon purity, as was also the case in the United States, Canada had an added focus; "Anglo-Saxon nativism in Canada was given added impetus by the desire of some traditionalists to preserve Canada as 'British'."<sup>44</sup> Many of the first immigrants to the Alberta prairie were British, and this later influenced the rationale behind the adoption of a eugenics policy. First, in 1922, the UFWA promoted segregation at a UFA meeting by requesting, " ... the adult mental defective of both sexes be kept under custodial care during the entire period of reproduction."<sup>45</sup> Later in 1926 the UFWA resolved to support sterilization and asked the UFA government to create an act in which:

'two skilled surgeons of recognized ability, whose duty it shall be in conjunction with the chief physician of the institution, to examine the mental and physical conditions of such inmates as are recommended by the institutional physician and properly constituted board of managers. If ... procreation is inadvisable, it shall be lawful for the surgeons to perform such operations for the prevention of procreation ....'<sup>46</sup>

The United Farm Women also stated their reasoning for this weighty request in their resolution: "Whereas, heredity plays a most important part in the transmission of insanity and all grades of feeble-mindedness, and, Whereas, under

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<sup>43</sup> McLaren, *Our Own*, 100.

<sup>44</sup> Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982), 98.

<sup>45</sup> Chapman, 15.

<sup>46</sup> Chapman, 15.

certain conditions many feeble-minded and many intermittently deranged persons could, with safety to themselves and without menace to the public, be permitted their freedom.” Therefore, freedom for the feeble-minded was acceptable, but only if first sterilized.

### Sexual Sterilization Act Passed in Alberta

The continual promotion by the UFWA in support of eugenics was rewarded in 1928 when the Sexual Sterilization Act was passed.<sup>47</sup> On March 7, 1928, George Hoadley, Minister of Health in the United Farmers of Alberta government led by Premier John E. Brownlee, presented the Sexual Sterilization Bill in the legislature. When Hoadley introduced the bill he referred to it as “An Act Respecting Sterilization”: “If it is quantity of production of the human race that is required, then we don’t need the bill.... But if we want quality, then it is a different matter.”<sup>48</sup> “Opposition was voiced by the Conservatives and Liberals but the government, assured of the grassroots support of the UFA, the UFWA, the Local Council of Women, the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire, and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, pushed the bill through.”<sup>49</sup> The Sexual Sterilization Act allowed a patient to be sterilized providing there was a Eugenics Board recommendation and consent from a parent or guardian.

### Debate Within the UFWA

The proposed Sterilization Act created debate within the UFWA

<sup>47</sup> Chapman, 15 and Minutes, UFWA Annual Convention, 1927. The 1927 Minutes of the UFWA contain the entire lengthy resolution. The resolution requests that an act be passed that would make it law that mental institutions each have two skilled surgeons on staff, aside from the resident physician, for the purpose of carrying out sterilizations.

<sup>48</sup> Palmer, 113.

<sup>49</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 100.

organization. Resolutions recorded in the Convention Minutes of 1927 and 1928 reveal there was opposition within the UFWA organization to the Act. The resolution first presented by the UFWA in favor of sterilization was carried unanimously in 1927. Again in 1927, at the same UFWA Convention, a further resolution regarding the feeble-minded was also carried. This resolution addressed the perceived social and economic consequences of the feeble-minded as well as their higher birth rates said to be "two to six times as great as the birth rate for the population as a whole." While the former resolution stated support for the Act itself in addition to how it should be carried out within each institution, the second 1927 resolution compares segregation and sterilization:

Whereas, segregation involves insuperable financial obstacles, and, Whereas, surgical treatment making reproduction impossible can be given without danger to life or health; Therefore, be it resolved, that we request the Government of Alberta to pass legislation providing that all feeble-minded persons, showing an intelligence quotient of less than seventy, after examination by a competent tribunal of psychiatrists be sterilized, unless confined to institutions.<sup>50</sup>

The resolutions of 1927 are void of hesitation or doubt regarding the proposed Sexual Sterilization Act. However, in 1928 at the Annual Convention the UFWA tabled an opposing resolution for further discussion as follows:

Whereas, sterilization constitutes a violent and drastic invasion of the most elementary human rights and does not take away the sexual desire, and still leaves the patient utterly lacking in moral resistance, and leaving them a prey to the dangers of social contact with people of low moral standards; Therefore, be it resolved, that we are opposed to the said Sexual Sterilization Act and urge upon our Provincial Government a measure of "segregation" of the feeble-minded of this province. We advocate the help obtained in financing this by eliminating undesirable immigration, by making marriage laws more strict and proper supervision and education, making the mentally defective partly self-supporting.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Minutes, UFWA 13th Annual Convention, 1927.

<sup>51</sup>Minutes, UFWA 14th Annual Convention, 1928.

The Minutes then record the following outcome: " Re: Sterilization. The resolution on this subject was again taken from the table, and discussed. This resolution was lost, the Convention reaffirming its position taken last year on this subject."<sup>52</sup> This resolution opposing the passing of the Sexual Sterilization Act did not appear again or in any other version. The Minutes do not provide explanation for this resolution opposing legislated sterilization over segregation; however, possible reasons can be surmised. The Sexual Sterilization Act was passed on March 7, 1928, and the resolution in opposition to the Act was presented in January of the same year. Did members of a Local who were not in agreement with the Act view the Convention as a last chance to voice their opposition? Whatever the reasoning the 1928 opposing resolution did not carry the support it needed to succeed. Nevertheless, the 1928 resolution does show that support for the Sexual Sterilization Act was not unanimous among UFWA members.

#### Broadening of Act

On numerous occasions the UFWA Minutes reveal that the organization requested a broadening of the Sexual Sterilization Act in the years following 1928. As it was originally legislated in 1928, the Sexual Sterilization Act applied only to persons detained in mental institutions; anyone deemed mentally deficient but not institutionalized was not affected in any way under the Act. The Okotoks UFWA made it clear they believed this portion of the Act required revision, citing as reason the parameters placed upon the Sexual Sterilization Act in limiting it to institutionalized persons.<sup>53</sup> The Okotoks proposal that the Act be broadened was endorsed by the UFWA organization as a whole in 1935. "Whereas, the present Sterilization Act applies to cases in mental institutions, and Whereas, many cases

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<sup>52</sup> Minutes, UFWA 14th Annual Convention, 1928.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes, UFWA 19th Annual Convention, 1933.

outside such institutions constitutes an even greater menace to society by the propogation [sic] of their kind; Therefore, be it resolved that we are in favor of extending the Act under the Eugenics Board to take in recommended cases.”<sup>54</sup> It is clear that the UFWA as an organization supported extending the authority of the Sexual Sterilization Act; however, not until 1937 did they push for this reform in earnest.

Nineteen thirty-seven was a notable year in the UFWA organization with more requests for a broadening of the Sexual Sterilization Act to include recommended cases outside of mental institutions, as well as a call for more humanitarian admittance policies into mental institutions. A resolution was passed at a Board of Directors meeting asking “that the scope of the Sterilization Act be widened, and that a psychopathic ward be established in the University Hospital.”<sup>55</sup> Just days later at the Annual Convention it was agreed another resolution presented by the High River UFWA would be substituted. The High River resolution was redrafted by the Resolutions Committee and became: “Whereas the present Sterilization Act only applies to cases in the Mental Institutions, and Whereas, many cases outside such Institutions constitute an even greater menace to society by the propagation of their kind; Therefore be it resolved that we are in favor of extending the Act under the Eugenics Board to take in recommended cases.”<sup>56</sup> This resolution is identical to the Okotoks resolution passed in 1935; if nothing else, that the same resolution was passed twice within a two year period demonstrates the UFWA was strong in their conviction that the Sterilization Act, in its current form, required a broadening to mental cases within the public at large. Most noteworthy is that in the original draft of the 1937

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<sup>54</sup> Minutes, UFWA 21st Annual Convention, 1935.

<sup>55</sup> Minutes, UFWA Board of Directors Meeting, January 18, 1937.

<sup>56</sup> Minutes, UFWA 23rd Annual Convention, 1937.

resolution presented by the High River UFWA the phrase, "sterilization may be carried out by the Department of Health without the consent of the relatives or guardians" did not reappear in the redrafted resolution. While the United Farmers of Alberta were in political power in Alberta, the consent provision of the Act which required the permission of a parent or guardian was not removed. "About 400 operations were carried out by 1937 when the new Social Credit government, convinced that even more draconian measures were required, introduced amendments that removed the consent provision from the 1928 Act."<sup>57</sup> The Social Credit were voted in by a wide margin in 1935; two years later they broadened the Sexual Sterilization Act resulting in a greater number of sterilizations after this date. The hesitation of the UFWA to request the removal of the consent clause of the Sexual Sterilization Act reflects an unwillingness to grant institutions carte blanche decision making powers. Further in 1937, regarding admission to Mental Hospitals, the UFWA asked for a revision in procedure. "Whereas, we the United Farm Women consider the present plan of admission to the mental Hospitals quite inconsistent with humanitarian principles; Therefore be it resolved that we petition the Government to change the policy in effect at present and allow prospective patients to be examined privately."<sup>58</sup> A similar request was made in 1938 when the UFWA voted to petition the government to review the poor conditions in Alberta's mental institutions due to overcrowding.<sup>59</sup> Although the UFWA promoted the institutionalization of the mentally deficient, it appears they did not forget about their welfare once they were admitted.

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<sup>57</sup> McLaren, *Our Own*, 100.

<sup>58</sup> *Minutes*, UFWA 23rd Annual Convention, 1937.

<sup>59</sup> *Minutes*, UFWA Board of Directors Meeting, January 16 and 17; and 24th Annual Convention, 1938.

### The Loss of Popularity of Eugenics

In early twentieth century Canada it was much easier for the middle and upper class segments of the population to attribute Canada's faults to the feeble-minded immigrant than to themselves; the feeble-minded individual was feared and labelled the cause of most social ills. Additionally, the middle and upper classes preferred to hear that society's shortcomings were as a result of personal weaknesses of another sector of society and not flaws attributable to themselves.<sup>60</sup> "Eugenics was thrown into disrepute by the excesses of the Nazis."<sup>61</sup> Some who did not completely comprehend the principles of eugenics found the workings of the Nazi regime terrifying. Eugenics in Canada was interpreted as a science; the Nazis made eugenics into an atrocity. Further, some individuals and organizations began to criticize and ridicule the eugenic philosophy. One critic wondered " ... who was 'fit' or 'unfit.' Beethoven was deaf, Homer blind, and Caesar epileptic; clearly they would have been sacrificed by the eugenicists."<sup>62</sup> Post-Depression Canadian society no longer needed to go to an extreme to solve its problems.

### Alberta Not Alone

According to Angus McLaren, Alberta was not the only province to pass legislation allowing the sterilization of the mentally ill. In 1933 British Columbia passed a sterilization bill and created a Eugenics Board in the same year; the bill was enacted in July, while the Board was established in November. Manitoba and Ontario also considered similar legislation but eventually rejected it.<sup>63</sup> However,

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<sup>60</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 37.

<sup>61</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 127.

<sup>62</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 152.

<sup>63</sup> McLaren, "The Creation," 129.

McLaren holds that despite the absence of legislation sterilizations were being carried out in Ontario as late as 1978 and had been for some time. As for Alberta and British Columbia, after the defeat of the Social Credit, legislation allowing the sterilization of mental defectives was removed in 1972.<sup>64</sup> In comparison to Alberta, fewer sterilizations were carried out by the Eugenics Board of British Columbia due to the restraint of a proviso stating “[t]he consent of the subject was required if capable of being given or that of spouse, parent, guardian, or Provincial Secretary.”<sup>65</sup> McLaren further states “[i]n Alberta between 1928 and 1971, 4725 cases were proposed for sterilization and 2822 approved.” The numbers sterilized in British Columbia are uncertain; however, McLaren believes it is limited to a few hundred. Notably, during the period the United Farmers were in power relatively few sterilizations took place (about 400); therefore, it was during the years the Social Credit were in power that the majority of the sterilizations were carried out. Nevertheless, even though it was during the years the Social Credit government was in power that the majority of the sterilizations were carried out, the general public continues to associate the United Farmers more closely with the sterilization of the mental defective.

### The UFWA and The Eugenics Movement

The UFWA served in the eugenics movement as protectors, or advocates, of the women and children on the Alberta prairies; eugenics was viewed as a strategy to achieve this ultimate goal. The beginnings of the UFWA were basic, it was a formal meeting group for women. Joining a women’s group like the UFWA was an

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<sup>64</sup> McLaren, *Our Own*, 169.

<sup>65</sup> McLaren, “The Creation,” 144. The following quotation containing statistics is also drawn from “The Creation,” p.145.

easy way to become acquainted with neighbours, and to break the monotony of rural life. Female companionship was limited and women's groups provided women with a way to socialize. Eventually, the Farm Women adopted a purpose: the betterment of rural life for women and children. They realized rural women suffered from poor living conditions, a lack of medical attention, and continual pregnancies, and accepted it as their responsibility the raising of healthy future Canadians.

For many years education, health and child welfare have engaged the [efforts] of our women, who have labored long and earnestly to raise the standard of education and improve health facilities in their communities, striving thereby to develop and conserve child life, the valuable asset of our Province. The depression calls for the closest co-operation of both Government and people against waste or alienation of this priceless possession, to the end that we [are] assured of possessing a future citizenry that will measure up to the highest standard of intellectual development as well as of physical, mental and moral health.<sup>66</sup>

Amy Warr, the UFWA President, provided a summary of the work of the Farm Women in this 1933 Address. Their work was considered radical, and women who joined also had to hold some less conventional notions about how women should fit into early twentieth century society; they believed that women had a place in society beyond the home. The home was never forgotten, rather, responsible motherhood was their motivator as they fought for acceptance of the home as a vital part of the State.<sup>67</sup> Responsible motherhood was a steadfast theme throughout the time period studied in this project. Improvement of the home was maintained by the UFWA as the way to protect the interests of the women and children of the prairies. Attempts at improving the home environment were made through the implementation of non-formal education including home economics and eugenics.

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<sup>66</sup> Minutes, Address of the UFWA President at the UFA Convention, 1933.

<sup>67</sup> Rasmussen et al., 122.

The roles of advocate and educator proved complementary; by educating its members, and others, the United Farmers showed the rural citizens of Alberta how to improve the quality of their lives.

### From the Endorsement of Eugenics to Contraception

Responsible motherhood took on new meanings as the UFWA matured and years passed. Behind the support for eugenics, followed an earnest endorsement of birth control; however, this endorsement did not come forth without hesitation. The role of women was first viewed, in the early years of the UFWA, as that of bearing and raising children in a quality home environment complete with love and proper care. Birth control was initially not supported, but possibly feared, because without the role of mothering women would not have a purpose, and the political basis for the UFWA was that they were working towards better social conditions for future generations.<sup>68</sup> Mothering was essentially the only role women were considered appropriate for in the early years of the organization. Emily Murphy posited in "Companionate Marriage" published in Chatelaine magazine in 1928: "The chief concern of society lies with nests and birdlings. Any system. . . that interferes with those should be promptly stepped on with a heavy and well-shod shoe."<sup>69</sup> It was not long after 1928 that the UFWA would come forward publicly endorsing birth control as a right.

The transition from promotion of eugenics as the only "cure" to an endorsement of birth control was both gradual and turbulent. Steadfast eugenicists were uneasy with allowing the public to retain control over their reproductivity;

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<sup>68</sup> McLaren and Tigar McLaren, The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1986), 68.

<sup>69</sup> McLaren and Tigar McLaren, 68.

birth control was not as certain as sterilization or even segregation. The argument against birth control was that in order to be effective a certain amount of intelligence was required of the individual using it. Opponents did not believe that the lower classes and perceived prolific immigrants could master the use of contraceptive devices ultimately resulting in many unplanned pregnancies, and eventually an outbreeding of the Anglo-Saxon population. A further concern was that the upper classes would employ birth control techniques and their birth rates would forever plummet. Finally, birth control was a contentious issue for the Catholic Church, in particular, as well as the medical profession which promoted only the natural methods of contraception. The birth control movement evolved despite numerous complicating factors; a brief history of this movement and the involvement of the UFWA follows.

#### A Brief History

Prominent proponents of the birth control movement included A.R. Kaufman, businessman, financial secretary of the Eugenics Society of Canada, and founder of the Parent's Information Bureau (PIB) in 1933, and close associate A. H. Tyrer, a retired Anglican minister, who was both part of the eugenics movement and a promoter of birth control.<sup>70</sup> Kaufman and Tyrer each made contributions to the birth control movement. Tyrer founded the Canadian Birth Control League in 1931, renamed the Birth Control Society of Canada in 1932. Additionally, Tyrer authored a number of pro birth control publications including a 1936 book entitled, Sex, Marriage and Birth Control: Lifting the Blinds on Marriage, his 1944 autobiography entitled New Earth, and two pamphlet sized releases entitled Some Facts About Birth Control, and Birth Control and Some of its Simplest Methods. In

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<sup>70</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 77.

1931 Tyrer had financial difficulties and turned to Kaufman for aid; Kaufman agreed to supply Tyrer with five hundred dollars per year to further his cause, and they remained closely affiliated after this time. McLaren and Tigar McLaren label Kaufman "the most original of the Canadian birth controllers"; Kaufman was firstly a eugenicist as demonstrated through his concentration on distribution of contraceptives to the poorest districts which housed the sector of the population Kaufman deemed the biggest threat. Tyrer, in contrast, was more of a birth control "propagandist" but did take on a more eugenicist tone as his affiliation with Kaufman matured.

Kaufman's PIB became an organization which employed visiting nurses who worked on a commission basis; these nurses were to reach the far corners of the country to the most needy. Kaufman obtained the idea of commission based nurses in 1933 from the Winnipeg Bureau of Feminine Hygiene who had been operating in this manner, and were said to be making many contacts as well as a profit from the sale of the contraceptives. Kaufman was lured by the notions of profit and an increased number of the lower classes exposed to the use of birth control devices. Kaufman also operated a Toronto clinic from 1933 to 1938 but closed it because in comparison to the travelling nurses it was not effective. The travelling nurses were considerably more successful, as nurses travelled the roads ranging from Vancouver to Newfoundland. However, in order to keep the PIB active and to finance some of the contraceptives supplied gratis, Kaufman had to personally finance his organization. McLaren and Tigar McLaren provide a figure of fifty thousand dollars per year that was supplied by Kaufman himself.<sup>71</sup> The birth control movement quickly progressed in the 1930s. "In 1930 no birth control movement existed in Central Canada; by 1937 clinics were active in Toronto, Hamilton, and Windsor, and

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<sup>71</sup> Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, 92-111.

a Parent's Information Bureau existed in Kitchener," and "by 1942 he [Kaufman] had responded to over 120,000 applications"<sup>72</sup> for contraceptive devices. McLaren and Tigar McLaren do not cite comparable activity in Alberta except for the UFWA passing a resolution supporting removal of the ban on birth control in 1933.

One of the initial indicators of a need for contraceptive devices was during World War I when control of venereal disease was a grave concern for the troops. The army recognized the need for providing prophylactics to the troops; however, their regular use for birth control or protection from VD did not gain acceptance in Canada. The prevailing attitude at this time was that those with a disease should be isolated and possibly sterilized; the notion that only perverts caught VD remained. In response, the Federal Government established the Department of Health to police the issue.<sup>73</sup> After World War I the Canadian Social Hygiene Council came into being in Toronto, and had public education as its goal but maintained that eugenics was the best method of controlling disease: "If only eugenic marriages were allowed and all citizens subjected to annual checkups, it was possible ... to foresee the end of most diseases."<sup>74</sup> Fear of encouraging promiscuity kept the Hygiene Council from informing the public that a drug, Salvarsan, which effectively treated syphilis had been discovered in 1909 and the condom was a favorable type of protection against such diseases. Eugenists did not want to see the public take control of their own sexual behavior.<sup>75</sup> "[L]umped together as causes of race extinction [were] venereal disease, drink, divorce, and birth control."<sup>76</sup>

Initially, the proposal to allow the immigrants and working classes, in addition to the middle and upper classes, to use birth control was greeted with

<sup>72</sup> McLaren and Tigar McLaren, 111 and 92. See page 70 regarding the UFWA support of the removal of the ban on birth control.

<sup>73</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 73.

<sup>74</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 74.

<sup>75</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 74. See also, Gordon, 205.

<sup>76</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 74.

mixed reactions:

The response of ... eugenically minded commentators to birth control was ambivalent. The more conservative believed the restriction on fertility by the fit was dysgenic because it deprived the community of sound stock. The progressives tended to accept birth control as a fact of life among the intelligent. It did not have to be socially harmful as long as the reduction of the birth rate of superior types by contraception was balanced by the restriction of the inferior by sterilization.<sup>77</sup>

The primary concern remained that the upper class Anglo-Saxon population remain numerically dominant. "The claim that birth control threatened 'race suicide' was countered by the argument that it prevented unwanted births and infant deaths."<sup>78</sup>

The UFWA and other women's groups endorsed abolishing the ban on contraception in 1933 believing that it was " ...'the only humanitarian way of preventing a mother from being overburdened and broken in health with too numerous progeny."<sup>79</sup> Additionally, birth control was desired by the public; there was a strong desire to safely limit family size and to obtain protection from venereal disease.<sup>80</sup> Opponents of birth control became few and it was eventually declared that effective contraceptive methods

had to be made available ... both to curb the fertility of the unfit and to free the unfit of fear and frustration ... [additional concerns were] the immorality of depriving individuals of contraceptive information, the right of women to control their reproduction, the legitimacy of non-procreative sexual pleasure ... [therefore,] birth control would serve eugenic goals in subjecting reproduction to rational goals.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> McLaren, "The Creation," 140.

<sup>78</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 22.

<sup>79</sup> McLaren and Tigar McLaren, 69-70.

<sup>80</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 72.

<sup>81</sup> McLaren, Our Own, 86.

Staunch eugenicists viewed birth control as a license for promiscuity, more disease, and a further drop in upper class birth rates. However, others such as Kaufman realized that allowing birth control would solve many social problems in addition to the soaring immigrant and working class birth rates. It was not easy gaining support for the birth control movement, as it had many negative connotations associated with it. "In the first decades of the century, birth control had been associated either with feminists calling for women to have the right to control their own bodies or with leftists striving for a democratization of contraception."<sup>82</sup> McLaren and Tigar McLaren assert that for fear of being labelled a radical supporters did not readily come forward; additionally, conservative thinkers did not rally behind the birth control movement until the Depression when it became apparent that such a movement could lessen the financial burden of the welfare system in Canada. In other words, the campaign for birth control did not gain acceptance on its own merit; countless peripheral factors played a role in the final endorsement of the movement by society as a whole.

According to their Minutes, the UFWA began discussing birth control a decade prior to passing the 1933 resolution supporting lifting the ban on birth control. In an early resolution presented for "consideration" in 1922 they surmise:

Whereas, one of the primary necessities for family, and therefore public health, is an intelligently determined interval between pregnancies, to be secured by regulating the inception of life and not by interfering with life after it starts, and Whereas the lack of knowledge as to how to secure such an interval frequently results in serious disaster for mother and babies, and indirectly or directly for the entire community; Be it resolved that this Convention urge the speedy removal of all barriers, due to legal restrictions, tradition, prejudice or ignorance, which now prevent parents from access to such scientific knowledge on this subject as is possessed by the medical profession.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> McLaren and Tigar McLaren, 123.

<sup>83</sup> Minutes, UFWA 7th Annual Convention, 1922.

This resolution was moved and seconded to table, but the motion to table was lost; it was discussed again, and finally moved and seconded "that the resolution be received and referred to the locals for consideration under a new title:

'Amendments to the Criminal Code.'" This motion was carried. That the UFWA was considering a resolution regarding lifting the ban on birth control in 1922 is observable; however, it would be 1933 before a formal resolution endorsing removal of the ban would be put forth to the public. In 1923 the same resolution was presented again, but "[t]he convention voted to lay the resolution on the table"<sup>84</sup> thereby deciding once again to do no more than present it and discuss it later.

Health certificates before marriage, communicable diseases, sex education, and birth control eventually became regular issues for the UFWA. In 1932 a resolution regarding birth control was presented and passed unanimously. This resolution was the beginning of the final decision to publicly endorse birth control.

Whereas, Birth Control is the subject of intensive study in every part of the civilized world today, and Whereas, the economic condition caused by the failure of Birth Control is more evident than ever before, and Whereas, in this Province we are given to understand that over 60 cents in every dollar appropriated for expenditure by the Health Department is now used in taking care of our mental institutions; Therefore it seems to us that every one of the questions that has a bearing on the problem of Birth Control, economically and socially, should receive consideration, by this Convention of United Farm Women of having this matter fully discussed ....<sup>85</sup>

A connection between eugenics and birth control is made in this resolution. Similar to other supporters of eugenics, the UFWA observed the link between availability of contraceptive devices and improved economic and social conditions. The following year, in 1933, this matter was attended to again. At the UFWA

<sup>84</sup> Minutes, UFWA 8th Annual Convention, 1923.

<sup>85</sup> Minutes, UFWA 18th Annual Convention, 1932. The resolution passed stated that the Executive research information about birth control and report their findings at the next Convention.

Annual Convention the birth control report was read and adopted, and then the following was recorded:

Dr. Folinsbee Newell next addressed the Convention on the value of birth control or contraception, and stressed the urgent need for clinics on this matter. Therefore be it resolved, that for those married women who desire information on family limitation and for those whose health and welfare it is deemed advisable, the Department of Health be petitioned to establish clinics, these clinics to be under Medical supervision.<sup>86</sup>

While the resolution is limiting it is still liberal and progressive thinking for the time period. Predictably, only married women are to be recognized under this resolution and further, the phrase “ and for those whose health and welfare it is deemed advisable” is open to interpretation. In 1934 support for the 1933 resolution is reaffirmed. After the resolution itself is restated and amended to “include word ‘educational’ before the word ‘clinics’”, a report on the progress of the resolution is made. “Mrs. Ross stated that the government reported they had this proposal under careful consideration and have been working in conjunction with the government of other provinces looking to fairly uniform action.”<sup>87</sup> Although it sounds as if the government is considering lifting the ban on birth control, this in fact did not occur until 1968.<sup>88</sup>

Considerable attention was given to the issue of health certificates before marriage in the UFWA Minutes for the years following 1933. Sexually transmitted disease became almost an obsession. A resolution of 1934 “to be presented to the Board for consideration” stated “we deplore the spread of venereal diseases, Therefore be it resolved that we advocate for each party to the intended marriage

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<sup>86</sup> Minutes, UFWA 19th Annual Convention, 1933. The resolution was “carried unanimously after considerable discussion.”

<sup>87</sup> Minutes, UFWA 20th Annual Convention, 1934.

<sup>88</sup> Mary F. Bishop, “Vivian Dowding: Birth Control Activist,” in Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1986), 200.

[sic] a certificate stating that the contracting party is free from venereal disease as evidenced by a negative Wasserman and Smear.”<sup>89</sup> In 1935 the resolution was amended adding “Therefore be it resolved that we advocate for each party to the intended marriage, an affidavit stating that the contracting party is free from any transmissible disease and that we suggest the following form: ‘I hereby solemnly declare that I am not infected with a venereal disease, or any other infections or transmittable disease.’”<sup>90</sup> Also throughout the years following 1933, family limitation clinics are addressed multiple times; the UFWA continuously reaffirmed their stand on birth control by restating their desire and support for family limitation clinics. Until 1937 the Minutes simply record that the position of the UFWA on family limitation clinics is reaffirmed. This changed in 1938 when the UFWA halted support of the Calgary Birth Control Clinic because it was operating without supervision of a physician or the government. For these reasons the clinic was denied the dissemination of their literature among UFWA Locals. Even though the clinic was local, the UFWA did not waiver in their decision to support the birth control movement only within particular guidelines.<sup>91</sup> Finally, in 1939, the final year of this study, support for government supervised family limitation clinics was again reaffirmed under the same guidelines as had been first established.<sup>92</sup>

Various contraceptive methods had always been passed on between women by word of mouth even though birth control was illegal. Terry Chapman states in her dissertation entitled Sex Crimes in Western Canada 1890-1920, that fears of unwanted pregnancy, and childbirth itself, culminated in a conscious restriction of intercourse. Moreover, “this limitation was further necessitated by a lack of

<sup>89</sup> Minutes, UFWA Executive Meeting, November 19 and 20, 1934.

<sup>90</sup> Minutes, UFWA 21st Annual Convention, 1935.

<sup>91</sup> Minutes, UFWA Board of Directors Meeting, Jan. 22, 1938.

<sup>92</sup> Minutes, UFWA 25th Annual Convention, 1939.

information, and access to, birth control devices, of which advertising, sale and supply was made illegal by the Criminal Code of 1892.”<sup>93</sup> Mary F. Bishop provides additional detail, expanding on the provisions of the Criminal Code. “Section 207 of the Criminal Code of Canada stated that, unless an accused could prove that promotion or provision of birth control methods had not ‘corrupted morals’ but was ‘for the public good’, a conviction could bring two years in prison.”<sup>94</sup> Women desired to have control over their own reproductive lives; Section 207 of the Criminal Code of 1892 did not deter women from this desire. Because the state did not support women in their want of safe birth control techniques, they relied on each other for information about contraception. Unfortunately, sometimes the methods utilized were unreliable and/or dangerous resulting in unplanned pregnancies, and sometimes death. “By 1921 the fertility of urban couples was approximately 20 percent lower than that of rural couples.”<sup>95</sup> Bishop reaffirms this and adds that “by abstinence, by contraception, by induced abortion, even infanticide, the crude birthrate of Canada had been declining since before the national census of 1871. Total fertility had shrunk from 6.8 children per married woman in 1871 to 2.6 children in 1937.”<sup>96</sup> Therefore, by the time the birth control movement came into being and the UFWA, among others, endorsed lifting the ban, birth rates were already dropping substantially. Birth rates had fallen because of intentional efforts to control fertility contrary to current laws and beliefs.

Although by the 1930s there were various supporters of birth control emerging publicly, its use was still illegal in Canada. However, women had always found ways to limit their fertility and would continue to do so. Contraceptive

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<sup>93</sup> Chapman, Terry L. “Sex Crimes in Western Canada 1890-1920” (Ph. D. diss., University of Alberta, 1984), 250.

<sup>94</sup> Bishop, 201.

<sup>95</sup> Prentice et al., 166.

<sup>96</sup> Bishop, 201.

methods employed were varied; rural women tended to use more severe forms of birth control due to their lack of knowledge and practices. Most knowledge about contraception was passed from woman to woman:

Well, I can tell you several different methods. I have the real recipe of that cocoa butter .... A friend's .... sister... got from her doctor after she'd had four. He charged her \$50 for it, but since, she's given it to dozens and it works. It's just 1 lb. cocoa butter and 1 oz. of common boric acid and 1 1/2... oz. of Tannic acid....<sup>97</sup>

Some Canadian women relied on what information that could obtain from the U.S. and Britain as their sole sources. "I read certain American magazines at the time .... I wrote my cousin in the States and asked her about it, and she told me what to do."<sup>98</sup> Women who had a friend or relative in the United States or Britain, the turf of birth control advocates Margaret Sanger and Marie Stopes respectively, where birth control was available were fortunate; second or third hand knowledge was far better than absolutely none. Women wanted relief from "... the social and economic misery resulting from unwanted pregnancies," and were desperate to control pregnancies even in a time period when birth control was illegal.<sup>99</sup> "I am 31, the mother of 7 children, eldest 11 years, and youngest 8 months, not at all strong, and owing to farm conditions, very heavily in debt. I would like to have any information I can get re birth control."<sup>100</sup> The health of the farm woman was poor in many instances due to being in a constant state of pregnancy. Rural women had little or no contact with other women and rarely knew any safe contraceptive techniques. "In my day, nobody knew much about birth control. It was just like a

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<sup>97</sup> Rasmussen et al., 72. McLaren also cites this recipe in "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada, 1870-1920," 326. McLaren identifies the recipe as that found in the papers of Violet McNaughton.

<sup>98</sup> Eliane Leslau Silverman, The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930 (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984), 60.

<sup>99</sup> McLaren and Tigar McLaren, 70.

<sup>100</sup> Rasmussen et al., 72.

secret.”<sup>101</sup> Access to contraceptive information of any sort was limited, but access to correct and effective means of fertility control was even more limited.

The difficulties rural women experienced in learning contraceptive techniques was compounded by the general lack of knowledge about birth control by even the medical profession. Doctors themselves were not always a good source for information because of the illegality of the dissemination and use of birth control. Bishop points out that contraception “was not taught in medical schools. When a few [doctors] had learned anything about it, they had learned from each other. Although some doctors had sets of rubber rings to measure diaphragm size, their skills were uncertain. One woman told Vivian Dowding, one of A. R. Kaufman’s PIB travelling nurses, that she had been given a pessary so large that it had popped out of her vagina when she leaned over the baby buggy!”<sup>102</sup> McLaren expands on this by contending that “respectable” doctors did not counsel in the area of family limitation; however, some would discuss forms of birth control considered natural and therefore morally acceptable. The first of the three natural techniques outlined was simple continence, or self-control, achieved through the use of twin beds, as well as extending the period of nursing which was accepted as a form of birth control. The second method was restriction of intercourse to the woman’s so-called safe period in her ovulation cycle. Many doctors incorrectly taught women the safe period; it was not until the 1920s that the ovulation cycle was properly understood. A final natural method was intercourse without ejaculation, but it was not as well accepted as the other methods as it “demanded a degree of self-control available to few Canadian males.”<sup>103</sup> Forms of birth control deemed unnatural, such as the sheath, douche, and pessary, were all known forms of contraception but were

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<sup>101</sup> Silverman, *The Last Best West*, 62.

<sup>102</sup> Bishop, 203.

<sup>103</sup> McLaren, “Birth Control and Abortion in Canada,” 324-325.

considered unacceptable because of the physical assistance of a foreign object. Methods considered unnatural were negatively associated with prostitution, while the natural methods were promoted as “scientifically determined.” By claiming scientific determinism the medical profession, which for the most part knew very little about human fertility, could rationalize their support for the natural methods over the assisted methods.

As an alternative to birth control techniques abortion was resorted to in many instances. Without reliable contraceptive information available women had a high failure rate resulting in unwanted pregnancy. Coitus interruptus was the most common form of birth control for couples, but it was also very unreliable. A failure in the birth control used meant resorting to abortion as the only means left to limit fertility; McLaren posits that as the number of couples turning from methods of incontinence to other methods such as coitus interruptus increased, so did the number of abortions.<sup>104</sup> This would attest to the extreme unreliability of contraceptive techniques available to couples who did not wish to practice continence. “Contraception cannot be discussed without adding abortion to the methods of limiting births. Whether legal or illegal, women have always resorted to this method. Its illegality seemed never to inhibit its use, although it certainly increased its danger and intensified women’s fear and guilt.”<sup>105</sup> The desperation to end a pregnancy made women put their lives in jeopardy. “This woman had done something to herself with a knitting needle. She had a miscarriage, but she was flowing. She got weaker and weaker. She got so weak you’d think she was wax ....”<sup>106</sup> The cures for an unwanted pregnancy reached far beyond the knitting needle solution. Women tried anything: “... a variety of home remedies were known ....

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<sup>104</sup> McLaren, “Birth Control and Abortion in Canada,” 327.

<sup>105</sup> Silverman, The Last Best West, 62.

<sup>106</sup> Silverman, The Last Best West, 62.

These ranged from jumping off a hay wagon, taking excruciatingly hot baths, or drinking carbolic acid or a mixture of turpentine and sugar ...."<sup>107</sup> Women in urban areas were often using more sophisticated methods of birth control and these methods had to be communicated to rural women who continued to maim themselves.

Various herbal remedies and recipes have been in circulation among women for centuries. It would appear that as long as there have been human beings there has been some level of attention paid to fertility. One author on the subject provides what resembles a grocery list of substances employed as one form or another of birth control.

An incomplete list of the astonishing things used at one time would include: okra seed pod, tannic acid, various seaweeds, lemon juice, the root of spotted cowbane, castor beans (quite poisonous), marjoram, thyme, parsley, lavender, rosemary. Crocus, myrtle, camphor, black hellebore, a small ball of opium, elephant dung, crocodile dung, camel dung. Olive oil, cedar oil, copper sulphate, willow, fern root, cabbage blossoms, a piece of bark tied in three knots, tea made from gunpowder and foam from a camel's mouth.<sup>108</sup>

Whether these substances were used as a means of contraception or as abortifacients is difficult to know. Abortion was considered another form of birth control, abortion being the back up method should the first method fail. The prepared abortifacient was a popular and relatively easy commodity to obtain for a woman with access to an urban center. Women who were rural and isolated were more likely to resort to one of the "traditional abortifacients such as tansy, quinine, pennyroyal, rue, black hellebore, ergot of rye, savin, or cotton root."<sup>109</sup>

Should a remedy fail to produce the anticipated miscarriage, there were yet

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<sup>107</sup> Prentice et al., 164.

<sup>108</sup> Hardin, Garret, Birth Control (New York: Western Publishing Company Inc., 1970), 15.

<sup>109</sup> McLaren, "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada," 330. See also Mitchinson, 131. Mitchinson provides additional information about prepared abortifacients available to urban women.

more options available. A list of choices included, "hot baths, violent exercises, and consumption of large quantities of gin. After this would come the riskier step of attempting a dilation of the cervix with slippery elm, a sponge tent, or catheter."<sup>110</sup> It should be noted that as tried methods failed, the ensuing list of alternatives was more severe and extreme. The sixteenth week of pregnancy, or quickening which meant when movement of the fetus could be felt, was the understood deadline for all attempts to end a pregnancy. An abortion was the final option if all other methods had been unsuccessful and quickening had not yet occurred.

The refusal of certain sectors of society including the legal and medical professions, in addition to the Catholic Church, to accept contraceptive methods was contrasted with the determination of women to control their fertility. Social mores of the period did not allow women to challenge their predetermined role in society through the use of birth control. Chapman expands on this issue:

The last decades of the nineteenth and the first two of decades of the twentieth century were characterized by concerted efforts by both law and society to dictate acceptable sexual activity for Canadians. As a Christian nation, acceptable sexual activity for Canadians was to be confined to married couples and solely for the purpose of procreation. All else was, by definition, socially abnormal, legally criminal and a threat to the very foundation of Canadian society.<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, that there were both single and married women using birth control including methods other than the natural, such as induced abortion through abortifacients, indicated that the social mores were changing. Previously held powers of the Catholic Church were dissipating; moreover, there was a changing in the legalities of society as carried out by the medical and legal authorities. For the 1892 law prohibiting the use of birth control to be struck down, social mores had to

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<sup>110</sup> McLaren, "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada," 330.

<sup>111</sup> Chapman, "Sex Crimes in Western Canada 1890-1920," 257.

first change. Once society began to re-evaluate what was socially acceptable through a questioning and subsequent altering in the way daily life was carried out, the laws had to follow. This was shown in the eventual termination of Section 207 of the 1892 Criminal Code of Canada in 1968 when the public use of birth control became legal in Canada.

### Eugenics to Contraception: An Ambivalent Progression

When Galton first defined the term eugenics in 1883, society was influenced by Victorian beliefs and morals. At this time, that any faction of society, particularly the middle and upper classes, should have legal access to birth control was unthinkable. Similarly, when the UFWA first considered birth control in 1922 the need was apparent, but it remained a subject not yet palatable to society as a whole. When the UFWA passed their 1933 resolution endorsing birth control, a full decade had gone by, and it was a more appropriate time to publicly endorse birth control. Not unlike other birth control advocates like Kaufman, the UFWA recognized that with a reduction in unwanted births, there would be numerous social benefits such as a lowering of immigrant birth rates, and fewer children for the financially struggling farm family to care for. Therefore, the public support of eugenics in 1922, followed by the endorsement of birth control in 1933, was a logical progression of thought and action for the UFWA. Through the employment of a continuum of non-formal educational methods, such as conventions, and lectures within the many locals, the UFWA helped women improve their social welfare and quality of life on the Alberta prairies. The UFWA held a central role in the eugenics and birth control movements within Canada; they were no less vital or important in these movements than the central players such as Kaufman. The difference was the

UFWA remained focussed on the social and political climate of Alberta. The UFWA women were pioneers in two senses: they came to Alberta to obtain land to farm, but also through their own initiative they became powerful advocates of women's rights long before the rest of society was prepared to follow.

## Chapter VI CONCLUSION

### A Party For Farmers

The Social Credit handily won the election of 1935, thus concluding the political reign of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA). This study reveals the UFA party to have been dedicated to improving the lot of the farmer, thus leading the party through the dilemmas and controversies of immigration, Canadianization, and eventually eugenics, all for the same cause. For the UFWA, the self-appointed keepers of prairie women and children, the endorsement of a eugenics policy was only one of many strategies employed to improve the lives of farm women. Because of the limits of this study it was not possible to delve into the endless additional undertakings of the UFWA.

The persecution of the immigrant as a focal point for many social ills is a consistent theme in this essay. However, on a deeper level, the motivation for this theme stems from a very natural and innate aspect of human character: self-preservation. The UFA was an organization created by farmers for farmers; this did not change. Most notably, the UFA party members were living their cause, that is, they were farmers and understood the trying life of a pioneer. A criticism of the United Farmers could be that their convictions resulted in a myopic view of the immigrant situation; the UFA members themselves were all immigrants or progeny of immigrants in the earliest years of migration to Alberta. Further, most were of British origin and retained the British notion that British is best.

### A Comparison: The UFWA and Charlotte Whitton

The formation of the UFWA out of the Women's Auxiliary to the United Farmers of Alberta (WAUFA) in 1916 was the beginning of one of the earliest and most influential advocates for women's rights in Alberta's history. The women's section had its own jurisdiction to work within; as a result the UFWA derived decision-making power. Issues of the home and women were theirs with which to work. The United Farm Women can be compared with a prominent political woman, Charlotte Whitton, first woman mayor of Ottawa, Ontario, and long-time social welfare advocate. Patricia T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell document the career of Whitton in their article, "'An Idiot's Flowerbed' - A Study of Charlotte Whitton's Feminist Thought, 1941-50." Rooke and Schnell discuss Whitton's convictions concerning the character of women and their abilities; Whitton held that, "women. . . had grave responsibilities as educators of their children and keepers of their households for the family unit was the bastion of 'citizen responsibility and character training' which the State could 'provide or purchase in no other way.'"<sup>1</sup> Whitton's belief in women as the ultimate care provider is an echo of the beliefs of the UFWA. Similarly, the UFWA had an educational foundation to its movement which strove for the education of its members as well as the children of Alberta. They advocated that through education a better quality of life would be achieved. Politics became the vehicle enabling them to realize their goals. The isolation of farm life was limiting for both mother and child, thus becoming the initial motivation for the organization of the UFWA.<sup>2</sup> It was the organizational structure

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, "'An Idiot's Flowerbed' - A Study of Charlotte Whitton's Feminist Thought, 1941-50," in The Promise of Women's History, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1986), 219.

<sup>2</sup> L. J. Wilson, "Educational Role of the United Farm Women of Alberta," Alberta History 25 (2) (Spring 1977): 28-29.

of the UFWA itself which was responsible for its early successes. "It was through committee structure that farm women were made aware of the intensity of various social inequities and malpractices, such as primitive or nonexistent health care facilities in many rural areas. And it was from these committees that impetus for social change, using the organization as a pressure group, came about."<sup>3</sup> With numerous UFWA Locals researching, discussing, and learning about local and provincial issues, the UFWA quickly became abreast of the issues affecting women and the home. Through this web of intelligence they agitated for improved school curriculum, libraries, improved health care in rural areas, and an overall improvement in the quality of rural life.<sup>4</sup> The UFWA may have been an earlier, less sophisticated, version of a female politician such as Charlotte Whitton; however, their ideals and motivation were much the same.

### The UFWA: A Criticism of the Status Quo

In contemporary terms, the UFWA were feminists. Feminism has been defined in limitless ways; therefore, it is prudent to define feminism for the purpose of this essay. Estelle Freedman asserts: "Women's culture can remain 'prefeminist,' as in the case of some nineteenth-century female reform associations that valued women's identity as moral guardians but did not criticize the status quo. When the group experience leads to insights about male domination, however, the reformers often become politicized as feminists."<sup>5</sup> Employing the insights of Freedman as a springboard for this analysis, the UFWA in terms of feminism can be explained. The United Farm Women were a post-nineteenth-century organization that saw

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<sup>3</sup> Wilson, 29.

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," Feminist Studies 5, no.3 (Fall 1979):527.

women as more than moral guardians. When the WAUFA became the UFWA these women moved from moral guardian to activist reformers. They criticized the status quo, but within limits, that is, they sought improved living conditions on the prairies for the weaker members of the population: the women and children. What was not criticized, or at least not openly, was the perception of male as head of the household. This study was limited to the use of minutes of conventions and other formal meetings; this in itself may have caused the exclusion of documents which would tell otherwise. Nevertheless, that there was a female counterpart to the UFA is in itself a criticism of the status quo. The UFWA members were not satisfied with the current political representation the female citizens of Alberta had available. With the inclusion of women in the United Farmers organization, women of Alberta gradually achieved a higher level of social citizenship; the UFWA were therefore "politicized as feminists."

"Tua res Agitur"

The success of the UFWA itself, as well as the individual women within the organization, is clearly the result of the UFWA being an independent body of thought. "The creation of a separate, public female sphere helped mobilize women and gained political leverage in the larger society. A separatist political strategy, . . . 'female institution building,' emerged from the middle-class women's culture of the nineteenth century."<sup>6</sup> Again drawing on the analysis of Freedman, it was the separation from their male counterparts which added momentum to their cause. They were free to succeed or fail on their own merit. Rooke and Schnell provided the Latin phrase that Charlotte Whitton chose as her motto to describe how she

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<sup>6</sup> Freedman, 513.

conducted her life and affairs in the later part of her life. "*Tua res Agitur*"<sup>7</sup> meaning she was handling her business and affairs by herself; the same can be said of the UFWA. The women of the UFWA were farm women, primarily of little education and worldly experience. Although many would see this as a handicap, they too managed their business proficiently, achieving lasting improvements for Alberta's rural women and children.

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<sup>7</sup> Rooke and Schnell, 223.

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