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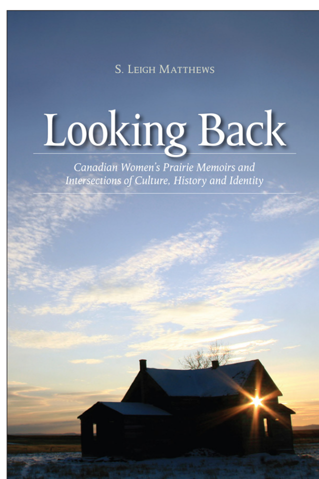

LOOKING BACK: CANADIAN WOMEN'S PRAIRIE MEMOIRS AND INTERSECTIONS OF CULTURE, HISTORY, AND IDENTITY

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"Seemingly Trivial": Re-Visioning Historical Narratives of Western Settlement

> Presuming that by force of circumstances the question of a desirable change has come over you, … the first thought will be "Where shall I go to better my condition?" To such I would say "Follow Horace Greely's [*sic*] advice, 'Go West,' to that magnificent stretch of that agricultural territory, Western Canada, with its millions of free acres, and the British flag for a reserve." Your choice falls on this fair portion of Canada! You have concluded rightly that it offers splendid opportunities, …
>
> – "To the British Emigrant," By W.S. Urton (1893)[1]

1 This letter was included in the Duck Lake Agricultural Society pamphlet titled *In the Saskatchewan country: Facts about the wheat growing, cattle raising and mixed farming of the great fertile belt: The Duck Lake district of Saskatchewan, Northwest Territories of Canada* (Winnipeg: Printed by Acton Burrows, at the Western World Office, 1893) (Peel #2079). According to Robert Chadwell Williams, Horace Greeley, who was one of the founding editors of *The New-Yorker* in 1834 and who founded the *New York Tribune* in 1841, was a definite advocate of western expansion, although the oft-repeated phrase "Go West, Young Man!" has been possibly erroneously attributed to him (40–43).

> Not long ago I met a man who said: "So you are writing a book? What and why?"
>
> "I am writing a book," I replied impressively, "about Canada."
>
> "But *what* about Canada?" he asked.
>
> "The truth, as I see it," I told him.
>
> At that he looked pained. "Why," he said, almost with annoyance, – "why do women always do that?"
>
> "Do what?" I said, fearing that my bright idea had been stolen.
>
> "Tell the truth, of course!"
>
> – Marjorie Harrison, *Go West – Go Wise! A Canadian Revelation* (1930)

> Funny how sometimes it takes fifty years to understand something seemingly trivial.
>
> – Nell Wilson Parsons, *Upon a Sagebrush Harp* (1969)

In order to understand the "re-visioning" potential of prairie memoirs written by white, English-speaking women, it is important to map out, at least briefly, those narratives/images which dominated representations of western land settlement in the contemporary moment of expansion.[2] The timeline covered

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2 As there have been several studies done regarding contemporary views of western settlement, it is not my intention here to provide a lengthy and detailed history of Canadian immigration policy and its cultural effects; rather I seek to extract what I consider to be certain dominant narratives of western settlement, ones which are most often reproduced in the memoirs which form the focus of this study. For a more detailed analysis of western settlement, see, for example, the following: Jean Bruce, *The Last Best West* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1976); Linda Rasmussen et al., *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976); Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West 1856–1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); R.G. Moyles and Doug Owram, *Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada, 1880–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Ronald Rees, *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home* (Saskatoon, SK: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988); R. Douglas Francis, *Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690–1960* (Saskatoon, SK: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989); and R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan, eds., *The Prairie West as Promised Land* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007).

by the memoirs included in this study is lengthy, ranging from approximately 1870 to the very final stages of land settlement in the western provinces after the Second World War. Although the most intense period of immigration to the Canadian West occurred from 1896 to 1914, it was in the middle of the nineteenth century that the rhetoric surrounding the agricultural potential of the region first became a significant cultural narrative. From the beginning, prairie settlement was conceived of and expressed in large-scale terms: indeed, if we are to believe the back cover commentary for Beulah Baldwin's *The Long Trail: The Story of a Pioneer Family* (1992), the early settlers were filled with "a sense of participation in a huge and magnificent undertaking" (n.p.). One might even say that the ideological magnitude inherent to the hopes and dreams of Canadian expansionists was matched only by the geographic immensity of the prairie region itself, a region constructed as a "New World" Garden of Eden and as the "fount" of both "national and imperial greatness" (Francis, *Images* 73–74).

As a consequence of a series of mid-century expeditions, including those led by Henry Youle Hind and Captain John Palliser, "between 1856 and 1869 the image of the West was transformed in Canadian writings from a semi-arctic wilderness to a fertile garden well adapted to agricultural pursuits," and it was this transformation that "allowed the West to be seen as the means by which Canada could be lifted from colony to nation, and, eventually, to an empire in its own right" (Owram, *Promise of Eden* 3). The domestication of the Canadian west – its transformation into a "promised land, a garden of abundance in which all material wants would be provided and where moral and civic virtues would be perfected" (Francis, *Images* 107) – necessitated a concerted promotional campaign. Enthusiasm for the region grew throughout the 1870s and early 1880s, largely as a result of the writings of John Macoun, a botanist who, "in the spring of 1880," was "ordered by the Department of the Interior to return to the West in order to investigate further the lands of the southern prairies" (Owram, *Promise of Eden* 152). The result of Macoun's trip was that he became an ardent convert to the expansionist cause and in his writings he "romanticized homestead life, minimized problems, and created a utopian vision" (Rollings-Magnusson 224) that became firmly entrenched enough to survive the initial failure of western immigration to match expansionist

expectations. When the largest influx of settlement began around 1896,[3] the explicitly utopian imagery and mythic potential of the region continued to be reproduced. Indeed, settlement literature promoted material success as a seemingly inevitable result of residence in the new Garden of Eden: "It was a 'land of opportunity' where almost anyone and everyone could succeed because the conditions for success were intrinsic to the region" (Francis, Introduction xi). These "conditions for success" were seen by prospective settlers, for example, in the "papers, posters, folders [which] showed men standing in lush wheat fields, amidst grain that rose shoulder-high" (Brown 51).[4]

It was this fertile Garden of the Canadian west which, once populated, would become the "cornerstone in the Confederation scheme" (Conway 12). The mere fact of Confederation in 1867 had not immediately secured

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3 Indeed, during those first decades of western land promotion, settlers merely "trickled" into the prairie region (Rasmussen et al., 12). Gerald Friesen quantifies this "trickle" as follows: "in the thirty-two years from 1867 to 1899, only 1.5 million immigrants entered Canada; by comparison, 5.5 million entered the United States in the 1880s alone and 2.5 million entered Australia between 1879 and 1890" (*The Canadian* 185). At least part of the explanation for this initial lack of interest in prairie settlement was a general economic depression in the West after 1883 and lasting until about the mid-1890s. Nevertheless, says Friesen, "Canada had made a start" and "firm foundations had been established for the flood that was about to commence" (185–86). See Chapter 11 of Friesen's *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) for a more detailed account of the reasons for the largest "infusion of immigrants" in the period 1897–1929.

4 In *Upon a Sagebrush Harp* (1969), Nell Wilson Parsons notes the propaganda "booklets" which "claimed fabulous things for the north," including wheat that "yields sixty bushels to the acre" (5). Perhaps the most hyperbolic image occurs in Donnie M. Ebbers's *Land Across the Border* (1978), in which the author refers to a pamphlet promoting wheat-farming in Canada to potential American immigrants: "Another picture Papa liked, showed John Bull (the man symbol of Canada then) and Uncle Sam standing by a big field of tall wheat, John Bull was asking, 'Well, Sam what do you think of Saskatchewan?' Uncle Sam answering, 'Fine country, John, fine country, good land! But I can't see the land for the wheat!'" (9–10). Sometimes the reality of hard work in achieving economic prosperity was admitted, but still the image of material success remained paramount: "It is true Canada is not exactly a Utopia, Ltd., for there is rough, hard work to be done before homes of comfort or affluence are built. But, on the other hand, the Old World farmer will find … [that] [h]e will be his own landlord, or, if he likes the title better, a lord of lands" (Ferguson, *Janey* 204). In Parsons's *Sagebrush Harp*, too, it is optimistically admitted that "hard work was all that was needed to turn endeavour into success" (106).

Canadian national identity for, even after British Columbia joined the union in 1871, there still remained the "vast underpopulated hinterland" of what was to become the prairie provinces. Importantly, population influx into the western regions would "permit the development of a British North American nation with enough power to withstand any hostile pressures from the south" (Owram, "The Promise" 24). Thus, when combined together, individual farmers and their families were not simply filling a geographic space, but rather were seen as the linchpin to the confederation dream of a new and strong nation arising from sea to shining sea.[5] Prairie agriculture, undertaken at the level of the individual farm, in addition to contributing to the security of the nation against the United States, would also ultimately accrue to the benefit of the larger national economy and would allow Canada to take its place, first as the bulwarks, and later at the masthead, of the British Empire. Variously labelled as "The Granary of the Empire" (Ferguson, *Open* 22–23) and, as the subtitle of a 1903 book published by the Department of the Interior suggests, "The Granary of the World" (Bruce 61),[6] Canada was promoted as being on the stepping stone to becoming an Empire in her own right: "if imperial Rome could have grown sufficient wheat in Italy to feed her legions, she would still be mistress of the world. But her glory has vanished, and the rulers of the world are they who have the mastership of wheat. It is a big bid Canada is making" (Ferguson, *Janey* 146).[7]

5 Indeed, national dreams were concretized in the numerous policies which ensured that the federal government retained control over "prairie land and natural resources," a situation that had not occurred with any other geographic addition to the confederation (Friesen, *The Canadian* 181).

6 In this way did Canadian farming take on mythic proportions in the popular imagination, as seen in a discussion of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange in Douglas Durkin's novel, *The Magpie* (1923): "Here was the great funnel through which a billion bushels of grain passed annually from the broad acres of the Canadian prairies on its way to the nations of the world" (44).

7 Elsewhere, speaking to the state of the Canadian Parliament buildings in 1912, Emily Ferguson (the pseudonymous Janey Canuck) suggested that "changes or additions" would have to be made to the inadequate structure in the near future, for "mayhap, by that time Great Britain will have decided to make the Anglo-Saxon race predominant for the coming centuries by moving the Capital of the Empire from England to Canada" (*Open* 217).

The "big bid" narrative of Empire-building ensured that the Canadian west was also promoted as a human community wherein "moral and civic virtues would be perfected" (Francis, *Images* 107). As Elizabeth Mitchell specified in 1915, the region was meant to provide "a fresh start," a "healthy society" that could only be "successfully erected" by "men of British tradition" (108–9). Indeed, while the reality of western settlement, over time, established a cultural mosaic on the Canadian prairies, the underlining desire for the creation of a distinctly Anglo regional and national identity was early evident.[8] Ideally, whatever the actual cultural backgrounds of immigrants to the Canadian West, the project of prairie settlement was ideologically based on what would be the reconstitution of Anglo norms of "civilization" in a radically different geographic space; it was based on the belief that "the Anglo-Saxon peoples and British principles of government were the apex of both biological evolution and human achievement" and that "Canada's greatness was due in large part to its Anglo-Saxon heritage" (Palmer 311). Indeed, Canada's physical greatness was particularly appropriate to "build up a nation on the British plan" for only "the vast territory of the West offered a canvas large enough to be appropriate for the moral grandeur of British institutions" (Owram, *Promise of Eden* 126).[9]

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8 As Owram suggests about the early expansionist spirit, it "originated in English-speaking circles in Canada West and even after 1870 its strength derived from this particular linguistic-cultural group. In essence, these English-speaking and largely Protestant, enthusiasts sought to shape the West according to their own cultural values and economic aspirations" (*Promise of Eden* 5). The cultural bias of prairie settlement was not simply a facet of the early stages of immigration, either, for even by the 1930s "the cultural standards of prairie society remained British; social and economic leadership rested firmly in the hands of the British Canadian; and, even in politics, where notions such as socialism and social credit were bandied about, British institutions and principles were as yet unshaken" (Friesen, *The Canadian* 273).

9 The sheer numbers required for western settlement necessitated that "other" cultural groups would have to be inspired to emigrate to Canada and then be naturalized to the new society being created. Although Clifford Sifton, who held the position of Minister of the Interior from 1897 to 1905, "was critical of policies since 1905 that had focused more on ethnic compatibility in immigrants and on sheer numbers, rather than on the sort of immigrants who could succeed in settling new and challenging agricultural frontier," and although it was during his time as Minister that "large numbers of immigrants from Scandinavia and eastern Europe began to arrive in Canada" (Hall 90), assimilation was the "one principle" agreed upon by everyone,

The exclusionary nature of the western settlement project can be seen in the fact that "the existing population" of native peoples were "not central to the expansionists' vision for the future" (Owram, "The Promise" 4). Despite the large-scale focus upon the reproduction of "British institutions and principles," however, the everyday reality of prairie settlement would be predicated upon "a North American regard for progress and individual achievement" (Bruce 13).[10] Settlement of the prairie west relied upon the success of independent

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including Sifton (92). Frank Oliver, who succeeded Sifton in 1905, was "staunchly British" in his thinking, and thus "he was more inclined to reduce the recruiting activity in central and eastern Europe and to increase it in Great Britain, including its cities, in order to preserve the 'national fabric' of Canada" (Friesen, *The Canadian* 246). Nowhere is the assimilationist nature of western expansion better expressed than in Ralph Connor's *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan* (New York: George H. Doran, 1909), in which the author provides the following prefatory note:

> In Western Canada there is to be seen to-day that most fascinating of all human phenomena, the making of a nation. Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech, and in manner of life, Saxon and Slav, Teuton, Celt and Gaul, one people is being made. The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all.

This same philosophy is less romantically stated within the text itself, as one of Connor's characters remarks about the presence of a colony of "Galicians" that they "'exist as an undigested foreign mass. They must be digested and absorbed into the body politic. They must be taught our ways of thinking and living, or it will be a mighty bad thing for us in Western Canada'" (255).

10 This regard is evident in Georgina H. Thomson's *Crocus and Meadowlark Country: A Story of an Alberta Family* (1963) when the author refers to a neighbour who liked to speak about socialism and who "found it wasn't a popular subject with the homesteaders who were mostly of the rugged-individual type, and thought socialism meant taking all the wealth in the country and dividing it equally among the people" (65). Writing about homesteading in northern Alberta in the early 1920s, Peggy Holmes states in *It Could Have Been Worse* (1980) that "it was every man for himself, working against time" (90). Ida Scharf Hopkins gives visual reality to individual prominence in the homesteading project when she writes in *To the Peace River Country and On* (1973) that

> a man may become part of a city and not be unduly noticed, but when he plants himself in the middle of a half mile square of land he can't help but become an individual. His qualities or lack of qualities are exposed to the world to see. His ability to stand on his own two feet and yet cooperate with his neighbours could make the difference between success or failure. (73)

landowners, so that the heroic stature of the hardworking farmer would inevitably become the rhetorical norm in representations of land settlement. For those in charge of immigration and land settlement policy, individual character would determine national character, so that, for example, Clifford Sifton was "a true believer in the North American creed of progress through individual achievement" and "also a nationalist" (1). As individual settlers accepted the clarion call of the Canadian government to take up prairie homesteads, they quickly became enveloped in a mantle of extraordinary virtue. Contemporary literature designed chiefly for the promotion of western settlement sought to represent farmers who were in alignment with western notions of material progress in a golden halo; to envelop them in the glow of heroic achievement. As a result, "pioneers were the heroes of the prairie agricultural epic" (Friesen, *The Canadian* 301).

In early historiographical treatments, the heroic renderings of the prairie settlement project were largely maintained, with images of individual farmers out to conquer an untamed landscape for the benefit of national/imperial prosperity. The heroic individual in these early narratives was necessarily masculine while the woman settler was largely absent from most representations. Although referring specifically to the situation of Saskatchewan history, nevertheless the suggestion of Ann Leger Anderson that early provincial histories "rarely mention women" ("Saskatchewan" 66) seems an apt description of early prairie histories in general.[11] Early works were not the only texts to construct a narrative of western settlement that neglected the important role of women, however, as seen most recently in Gerald Friesen's *The Canadian*

11 This "herstorical" lack is by now so well-documented that, since it is beyond the scope of this study to provide any substantial overview, I would suggest that the reader examine the following sources, which, although they purport to be concerned with a Saskatchewan context, nevertheless document a number of general prairie histories which neglect women's presence: Ann Leger Anderson's "Saskatchewan Women, 1880–1920: A Field for Study," *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905–1980*, eds. Howard Palmer and Donald Smith (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1980), 65–90, and Aileen C. Moffatt's "Great Women, Separate Spheres, and Diversity: Comments on Saskatchewan Women's Historiography," *"Other" Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women*, eds. David De Brou and Aileen Moffatt (Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995), 10–26.

Prairies: A History (1987), a seemingly comprehensive text that came under fire from feminist historians concerned with documenting women's lives. For example, Susan Jackel states that Friesen's text is a "major work of historical synthesis" wherein "class, ethnicity, native peoples, urbanization and the arts share the spotlight and attest to the modernizing of the prairie saga, but where women figure fleetingly and infrequently in the narrative and do not even rate an entry in the index" (*Canadian* 3). In a similar vein, Aileen C. Moffatt explains that, "because of Friesen's emphasis on western socioeconomic development, women do not appear as significant actors" (14) in his work. The implications of this lack of attention to gender are vast, suggests Anderson, for Friesen's is "the book most likely to be identified with Prairie West history since its [original] publication in 1984" ("Canadian" 53).

As late as 1992, Friesen himself suggested regarding "the history of women or of relations between the sexes in prairie society" that "these matters have been given very little attention by students of the region" ("Historical" 15). However, he also noted that "the realization that much of this story, typically written by males, created a picture of a male-oriented world, has encouraged a belated rethinking of the prairie past" (12). In noting "the implications of male historians' cultural blindness" towards women's participation in prairie society (15),[12] Friesen neglects to mention the amount of "dramatic revision" of prairie history which had already begun (by the date of his article) to take place in Canadian women's historiography. Indeed, as noted in Chapter One of this study, since the 1970s feminist historians have methodically sifted through the androcentric rubble of traditional historiography in order to examine the lives of prairie women more closely and to reveal the multi-layered reality of settlement life.[13] This is the work that has enabled the deconstruction of those

12 Certainly such a charge can no longer be issued, as attention to the role of women and comments such as the following are increasingly the norm in male historians' treatments of prairie life: "Women were probably more important than any other factor to a homesteader's survival" (Waiser 164).

13 One early example of this archaeological effort was the pioneering text *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (1976), which is presented in a non-traditional format of exploration and discovery, combining snippets of text, photographs, reproductions of old promotional pamphlets, etc. For more information on the study

static images "that obscure differences between individual women's experiences" (Sundberg 71). When prairie women were mentioned within early histories of western settlement, they were often absorbed into the heroic version of the prairie story, the masculinist story, which generally relegated them to a "hagiographic presentation" (Langford, "First Generation" 1) from which it has taken them decades to escape. The only real alternative was the tendency to thrust all women into the other side of the Prairie Woman coin – the image of the reluctant emigrant/drudge.

Early efforts at recovering women's experiences of western settlement tended to re-entrench such static images. As Dave De Brou and Aileen C. Moffatt suggest, Canadian women's history has been characterized by "three historiographical stages," the first of which was the "celebration" stage, wherein the heroics of individual, exceptional women's achievements were recognized; the second of which was the "exploitation" stage, wherein the collective and universal nature of women's victimization was averred (3–4). But De Brou and Moffatt recognize a third stage in Canadian women's historiography, being that which promotes women as "active agents" and rejects the "women as heroines/victims" model as too "limiting" (4–5). In this stage, scholars seek to discover the ways that women "resisted, devised strategies and accomplished much on their own terms" (5). One of the ways in which feminist historians have attempted to get past the false front of the Prairie Woman image is to utilize some previously ignored sources of information about settlement life, such as memoirs, diaries, letters – sources which help us to confront those images which effectively deny the actual physical/emotional presence of women on the prairie landscape and which help us to re-vision mainstream historical narratives. Indeed, it would seem imperative to use these sources, precisely because so many of them were produced prior to or simultaneous with the feminist revolution of historical scholarship in Canada in the 1970s, and thus they represent an early non-academic attempt to insert women's voices into the gender gap of western Canadian history. Sometimes the voices of white, English-speaking women illustrate narrative adherence to official versions of

of prairie women's lives to date, refer to those works noted in Chapter One of this study.

prairie history, but we must also be willing to look for those "undercurrents" of "confrontation" lurking beneath the surface conformity of their texts. While it is certainly true that these women, in the general performance of their domestic responsibilities (including motherhood) were ultimately complicit with the nationalist/imperialist project, it also needs to be recognized that, through their memoir focus upon individual experiences, they allow us the possibility to re-vision key elements of the traditional story of western settlement. Specifically, they allow us to re-vision our focus from the ideological *space* of the Canadian prairies as it was constituted in the heroic and masculinist narratives of western settlement to the specific *place* in which the individual settler woman experienced the daily and not always optimistic reality of life on the Canadian prairies.

Western settlement was dominated by the optimistic ideology of "future plenty and success," an oft-repeated rhetorical credo that underpinned the nationalist/imperialist expectations discussed earlier and that was taken up as an article of faith to be repeated during good times and, most importantly, bad times. The "North West of the expansionist was that of the future" (Owram, *Promise of Eden* 192), as illustrated in the following account given by the Countess of Aberdeen regarding the arrival of Scottish settlers to Manitoba in the late 1880s:

> But the spirit of the country soon fell upon them; there was work and hope in the atmosphere; by the second year actual crops gave earnest for the future, and by the third, with its excellent harvest, indolence and grumbling had been completely pushed aside and forgotten, in habits of hard work and confidence in a future of plenty and success. (105)

The very "atmosphere" of the Canadian west was suffused with the element of "hope"; the very ground in which crops were grown was suffused with the elements of "earnestness" and "confidence" for a better way of life.[14] The use

14 Literary characters in prairie fiction certainly felt this "spirit of the country," as seen in Frederick Philip Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* (1933): arriving in Manitoba in 1900,

of such keywords as "plenty and success" most often denote expectations of material gain, as seen in a 1903 "cartoon book published by the Department of the Interior" to promote immigration to Canada, a book that suggests that potential settlers from the United States were coming to a land "where the crops show large and profitable yields" (qtd. in Bruce 61). At the very beginning of a memoir titled *Upon a Sagebrush Harp* (1969), Nell Wilson Parsons provides a poem titled "Fulfillment" that combines the optimism and economic potential inherent in the earth:

> Listen, in the twilight
> When winds sink to a sigh;
> The murmurs of wealth from golden fields
> Where precious wheat stands high.
> The settler felt the promise,
> Huddled beneath his tattered tarp,
> Hearing siren wind-music
> Strummed upon a sagebrush harp.

This kind of idealization of prairie potential is also reflected in Winnie E. Hutton's memoir titled *No "Coppers" in Saskatchewan!* (1973), which documents her family's move from (ironically) "the Village of Eden" in the "County of Elgin in Ontario" (3) and which also begins with a decidedly critical tone:

> In our family there had long been talk of going to the North West. Brochures we received used flowery language to tell of the "Wonderful West" which was opening up. There were photos of nice homes being built after only a short time, giving the

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Abe Spalding chooses his homestead carefully, motivated in part by the fact that "with his mind's eye he looked upon the district from a point in time twenty years later; and he seemed to see a prosperous settlement there" (16). Similarly, in Sinclair Ross's short story, "The Lamp at Noon," Paul realizes that, in contrast to the experience of his wife, "so vivid was the future of his planning, so real and constant, that often the actual present was but half felt, but half endured. Its difficulties were lessened by a confidence in what lay beyond them" (20).

> impression that we would be rich in a few years. They never mentioned the words drought, frost or hail. (1)

That most settlers believed (in varying degrees) in what they saw and read is suggested in the fact that "virtually all [homesteading] accounts emphasize economic opportunity" (Bennett and Kohl 48) as a primary motivation for settlement upon the Canadian prairies. In *Gully Farm: A Story of Homesteading on the Canadian Prairies* (1955), Mary Hiemstra suggests of the Barr colonists who emigrated to Saskatchewan that "the trip was hard but [the men] seemed to enjoy it, and most of them were still looking forward to the rich land they were going to find, and the fortunes they were going to make" (98).

Unfortunately, the narrative of "future plenty and success," after the harsh realities of prairie life had taken their toll, quickly became translated into the popular contemporary phrase used to describe the region as "Next Year Country."[15] When the women memoirists studied here bring up that phrase, they do so in a deliberately confrontational manner, for it is always clear to the reader that "next year" never comes. In *Upon a Sagebrush Harp*, Parsons speaks directly to the effect on women of the "Next Year" philosophy. Writing about her family's experience homesteading from 1907 near Lang, in south-eastern Saskatchewan, Parsons recognizes the painful reality for her mother Annie Wilson: "Looking back now I understand that Mama's life was a waiting period … waiting for fall and harvest … waiting for next year and a few small luxuries for the shack … lace curtains, perhaps, and a dress length, and a rocking chair" (31). When the family's second crop proves "poor," Parsons's father says with philosophic optimism, "By next year we should begin to see daylight, start cleaning up on our debts" (98). In the third year, the author says, "There had been hail damage to our crop. The yield was poor," and her father's response is more predictable than the weather: "'Next year will be better,' Papa said. 'Hail can't hit us every year'" (110–11). As the author sums

15 As Barry Broadfoot defines it in *Next-Year Country: Voices of Prairie People* (1988): "I found the western farmer and his counterpart in the town to be optimistic. They are firm believers in next-year country, or, in other words, how can it get any worse?" (xii).

up about the "Next Year" philosophy, what she calls the "homesteader's will-o-the-wisp!": "That was a pattern of prairie life … windbreak … firebreak … backbreak … heartbreak. But a homesteader dreamt on. Oh, next year would be great!" (127, 128). Not much had changed for Beulah Baldwin's family homesteading in the Peace River country of Alberta in the 1920s: as she writes in *The Long Trail* about the end of yet another harvest and her father's decision to go away to help build a bridge as a means to "earn extra cash," "Always an optimist, Dad left with a smile and a reassurance that things would be better in the spring. Mother was beginning to appreciate why they called this 'next year country'" (207). Kathleen Strange also discovered the devastating reality of the "Next Year" philosophy when farming near Fenn, Alberta, in the 1920s. After a major hailstorm that ruins the family's entire crop – along with some important personal plans of the author's – Strange writes the following scene that oscillates between stoicism and anger:

> Yes, everything was gone, wiped out as if it had never been.
>
> "What can we do about it?" I asked despairingly, looking at my husband's tragic face with tears in my own eyes.
>
> "There is nothing to do," Harry said. "We just have to start all over again, I guess. I'm afraid, too, you won't be able to go to England – not this year, at any rate."
>
> "Of course not," I agreed, striving to keep the disappointment out of my voice. For I was bitterly disappointed. I had so looked forward to the trip and now, as on many other occasions, this country had crushed my hopes. I felt that I hated it. Sometimes I had imagined myself being drawn to it, but now it had thrust me away again. It was only by a great effort that I kept the bitter, resentful words that surged to my lips from escaping.
>
> Of course, I had to think of Harry. His disappointment, his misfortune, was so much greater than my own. Not only was he facing a complete loss of this year's income, but he was also facing the entire loss of four years' work. The careful, painstaking work of seed selection was ruthlessly undone. Right back to the beginning again for him.

> There was a long silence between us, and then Harry said: "After all, this is a country of 'next years.' That's what we've got to remember. There's always next year and the promise of what next year will bring forth."
>
> Next year! How sick I got of hearing those words. They are a common expression among all Western farmers. Yet perhaps it is because of it that he is able to carry on. Perhaps it is because of his eternal faith in the morrow that there is any West at all. (249–50).

While this passage ends with an optimistic tone and seems to reinforce faith in the very philosophy that frustrates her, as a reader I feel that Strange is ultimately being disingenuous. The scene as narrated illustrates her adherence to cultural norms of stoicism at the time of the hailstorm itself, but in the reminiscent act of writing/representing that scene she reveals that her seeming adherence belies an undercurrent of disappointment and anger. Most tellingly, we see the gap that exists between the image of the author here with "tears in my own eyes" and the title image, the positive image, of the memoir itself – *With the West in Her Eyes*.[16]

Judging from the relative lack of narrative attention paid by women memoirists to documenting agricultural-focused issues, female settlers were apparently unable, unwilling, or uninterested in subscribing wholeheartedly to this "monomaniacal concentration on the future at the expense of the present" (Friesen, *The Canadian* 313). Indeed, rather than adopting a narrative of "future plenty and success" that focuses almost exclusively upon agriculture and its economic remuneration, women memoirists devote more narrative space to the immediate, day to day, physical/psychological survival needs of the familial and local community as opposed to the larger national/imperial/masculinist ones. While men daydreamed about future prosperity, women settlers were of necessity engaged in a very different economy of need and production as they struggled to keep their families comfortable in what for some was a radically foreign environment. In her study of how women in Manitoba

16 For more examples of "next-year" philosophy, see also Bannert 67; Raber 37; Roberts 124; and Scott 9.

"disposed of their labour during the century from 1870–1970," Mary Kinnear uses John Stuart Mill's "definition of domestic economy" as a "useful starting point" in understanding women's daily lives: "Domestic economy, wrote Mill in 1844, was an art: the 'maxims of prudence for keeping the family regularly supplied with what its wants require, and securing, with any given amount of means, the greatest possible quantity of physical comfort and enjoyment'" (*A Female* 4). The prominent place that issues of domestic economy have in white, English-speaking, women's narratives of western settlement is inevitable given what is now widely understood to be the culturally sanctioned position of Anglo women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries within the middle-class ideology of "separate spheres." This ideology deemed woman's proper sphere of activity and influence as being the home place,[17] and the women memoirists studied here certainly, in large part, adhere to that spatial concept. Their attention to domestic detail can thus be read as complicity with the "civilizing" influence that white women were expected/constructed to bring to the western settlement project. As Sarah Carter asserts about contemporary cultural images,

> Both in the press and in the literature of colonial settlement, white women were projected as essential to the creation and reproduction of the community. They were cast as the moral and cultural custodians of the new community. Their influence was clearly to be seen in "brighter and better homes, a higher standard of morality, and the introduction of the refinements of life." (*Capturing* 6)

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17 In an Anglo context the separate spheres ideology manifested itself in the "Angel in the House" image of wife/mother, while in an American context this idea gained expression as "The Cult of Domesticity." For further information regarding these gender constructs, see Chapter 11 of Joan Perkin's *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Lyceum, 1989), Barbara Welter's article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," in *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151–74, and, for a Canadian context, Chapter 6 of Alison Prentice, et al.'s *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988). For a complete discussion of the evolution of the image of "separate spheres," see Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female World, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9–39.

On the other hand, it must be understood that cultural images of white women in western settlement were constructions, and that such images "bore scant resemblance to the real lives of the women" (10). In the detailing of the "domestic economy" of their sometimes quite meagre and usually quite isolated prairie homes, then, these memoirists often serve to undercut cultural images as much as to illustrate adherence to them. In addition, when we keep in mind the larger cultural focus of the prairie settlement project as tending to highlight agricultural production and expectations of monetary reward by male settlers, I would suggest that the women memoirists' attention to daily reality, including the immediate results of female labour that were necessary to survive (physically as well as psychologically) on the prairies, forces us to turn our collective attention inwards; to re-vision from the ideological space of the prairies to "the messiness of real life" (Ryden 37). They illustrate for us that humans cannot exist on mere faith in the future alone; that, "sooner or later, we pull our eyes away from the horizon and turn them to the dirt under our feet and the neighborhood which surrounds us."

One of the most immediate and important domestic issues for the white, English-speaking, female emigrant to the Canadian prairies is contained in the very word "Homestead" itself. This word that dominated the settlement process is a construct composed of two smaller words, very cleverly positioned in an order that conceals what was often the reality of settlement life in favour of a romantic image of domestic contentment. Despite the fact that "Home" comes first in this equation, the focus of the Homesteading project for most male settlers was upon the "stead" – defined as "property or estate in land; a farm" (*OEED*) – portion of prairie life. In both *Janey Canuck in the West* (1910) and *Open Trails* (1912), Emily Ferguson uses the word "stead" (or some derivative of it) frequently, often as a means to distinguish its meaning as a designation solely of land ownership.[18] Ferguson's contemporary, Elizabeth

18 For example, she says that

> these prairie steadings will never be homes in the best sense of the word till tree-planting prevails. Men will rape the soil and pass on, as all nomads do, till they have planted trees and harvested them either in the form of boards, fuelling, or fruit. Then they become bound to the land; they set their stakes well and truly, deep and foursquare. (*Open* 170–71)

Mitchell, also advises her readers about the reality of homestead life when she delineates "what 'a homestead' is in North Saskatchewan – a quarter-square mile of grey-green prairie grass, with a tiny lake perhaps (a 'slough,' pronounced 'slew') and patches of small poplar wood. There may be no road, quite possibly no track, and no neighbours" (25). As Wilfrid Eggleston realistically puts it in his reminiscence of growing up on the prairies, "'Free Land' was, of course, the magnet which drew hundreds of thousands of immigrants to western Canada in the early years of this century" (340). Many of the women memoirists included in this study are acutely aware that, for their husbands and fathers, the true meaning of the word Homestead did, indeed, revolve around the acquisition of landholdings; that the word meant "free land, a quarter section, 160 acres of your choice," and "this was the heart of the matter … owning land was the triumph of it all" (Broadfoot, *Next-Year* ix–x). In Parsons's *Sagebrush*, for example, when her father relates his intention to "homestead" on the Canadian prairies, the then eight-year-old author asks, "What's homestead?," to which her mother knowingly responds, "Free land" (4). Writing about herself in the third person, Donnie M. Ebbers notes in *Land Across the Border* (1978) that, while her father's "conversion" to Baptism made him "less cranky and more considerate," nevertheless "his first consideration still seemed to be for the 'farm work.' Donnie had sometimes thought Papa's first and *only* love was for 'the land'" (94).

This cultural focus upon the "stead" portion of western settlement is reflected in the Dominion Lands Act of 1872. This policy deemed that "to secure their land, prospective homesteaders had to visit the nearest Dominion Lands office, choose their 160 acres, or quarter-section, and pay a ten-dollar registration fee" (Waiser 157). The requirements for "proving up," or taking clear title, or "patent," to one's landholdings, seemed to negate the ultimate importance of the "Home" value of western settlement, in that

> homesteaders had to meet certain basic requirements by the end of three years: they had to live on the land for six months each year, erect a shelter, and cultivate at least fifteen acres. Raising twenty

> head of cattle and constructing a barn for the animals was an acceptable alternative. (158)[19]

The residence requirement, which in the original construction of the policy in 1871 was set at a period of five years, had been reduced to three by the time of the official Act, which already seems to minimize the idea of settled residence by making it feasible to fulfill the cultivation obligations of the federal govern-

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19 As Susan Jackel clarifies in her discussion of the "homesteads-for-women movement" of the early-twentieth century, Section 9 of the Dominion Lands Act of 1872 inherently excluded most women – at least until 1930, when all three prairie provinces took control of their public lands – from taking up homesteads: it read that "'every person who is the sole head of a family' could apply to take up one hundred and sixty acres of homestead land in the surveyed portions of the west, subject to the usual conditions of entry fee, residence, and improvements. Furthermore, any male eighteen years of age or over was similarly entitled to apply" (Introduction xxi). Jackel notes that this left "three categories of women qualified to enter for homestead lands: widows, divorcées, and, in scrupulously documented cases, separated or deserted wives." In 1915, Mitchell felt optimistic about the "homesteads for women movement" on the prairies, a movement that she regarded as being of vital importance to the question of female equality at the level of individual experience: as she states,

> the most interesting suffragists are the prairie women. They have good minds, and they are accustomed to be serious, and they do think about these things, and so there is a very noticeable movement on the prairie, quite free from any exasperation at all, and quite likely, I think, to succeed soon, so far as the Legislatures of the prairie provinces are concerned.… The special trouble which has turned the prairie women's minds to politics is connected with the land. The woman so obviously shares with her husband in making the "improved farm" out of the 160 acres of original prairie that it is felt to be an injustice that this product of their joint labour becomes the sole property of the man, and that he *can*, if he chooses, sell it and break up the home without his wife's consent. (56)

For more on the subject of married women's property rights, see Sheila McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions: Alberta Farm Women," in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History*, eds. Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 123–46, and also Catherine A. Cavanaugh, "'No Place for a Woman': Engendering Western Canadian Settlement," in *The Prairie West as Promised Land*, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 261–90.

ment without actually having to invest one's fulltime attentions to farming as a way of life. In addition, phrases such as "erect a shelter" also seem to minimize attention to "Home"steading, in favour of the cultivation of land, which was a difficult undertaking in and of itself.[20] Some time later, the idea of residence as a primary feature of "settlement" was reduced again:

> Up to 1884 at least six months' residence a year for three years (instead of five, as in the United States) was exacted before title could issue. In that year, however, the concern of both government and railway for settlement at any cost was such that even these meagre requirements were modified. Residence was waived, except for three months preceding the application for patent, while the entry could be "proved" by cultivation, building, or stock. (Martin 405)

This exclusivity of focus upon the agricultural potential of the region was also reflected in the less than stringent regulations of the "Dominion Lands" policy regarding the type of "shelter" required to be built upon the homestead site. Writing about his father, Wilfrid Eggleston states that, "in order to keep his claim alive he had to get down there within a few weeks to begin occupation, to build a residence, to fence it off, and make plans for cultivating part of it" (341). The language here is telling, as he uses the distinctly legal terms "occupation" and "residence" rather than relying upon more nuanced words, such as "living" and "home." Chester Martin quotes a contemporary observer who suggests that often "the 'habitable house' was a shack that could be put on a wagon and drawn any place, one shack would do duty for a dozen different applications for patent" (405–6). Indeed, when "residences" were built by male settlers, it was very often precisely their lack of "home"-iness which attracted the attention of contemporary writers such as Emily Ferguson, who wrote of the "newly-arrived homesteader" that "he is a queer fellow," not the least because "you may readily see that his ill-proportioned house is an after

20 As Bill Waiser notes, "two out of every five homestead applications in the three prairie provinces between 1871 and 1930 were cancelled; the failure rate actually climbed above 50 per cent during the last two decades of the program" (158).

consideration" (*Open* 133).[21] In addition to the rather rudimentary images of what "Home" need look like, the system of land survey chosen for the Canadian west promoted – assumed? – the eventual increase of the settler's landholding:

> If a settler homesteaded an even-numbered section, he would often find an odd-numbered section for sale next door when he wished to expand his operation. From 1872 to 1894, and again after 1908, the land regulations actually encouraged a settler to think in terms of a larger farm by permitting a 'pre-emption' to be filed.… Thus, the systems of pre-emption and sale reinforced the trend to larger farms by making these sale lands readily available to homesteaders. (Friesen, *The Canadian* 184)

This "trend to larger farms" is also present in the women's memoir texts studied here. In *Crocus and Meadowlark Country: A Story of an Alberta Family* (1963), for example, Georgina H. Thomson notes her father's taking advantage of the quarter-section land system when she says, "a few years later Father bought this [adjoining] quarter, which was C.P.R. land, and we called it 'Twin Butte Farm'" (58). Similarly, in *Pioneering in Alberta* (1951), Jessie Browne Raber notes that, after seven years of homesteading, her family's farm "was getting better and bigger. Dad bought a C.P.R. quarter section, next to our place and intended to raise cattle for market" (150).

While the acquisition and cultivation of land was prominent in the male settler's dream of immigration to the Canadian prairies, for many white, English-speaking women the "Home" was the more valuable side of the

21 At face value, the homesteading laws appeared to be more conducive to bachelor immigration to the Canadian West than the settlement of family units intent upon a farming lifestyle. Indeed, as a Department of the Interior pamphlet titled *Twentieth Century Canada* (1906) stated it, "Canada is a man's country, from the fact that all new countries first attract men, because the labour required for early settlement calls for that of man rather than that of woman. In Manitoba there are 21,717 and in Saskatchewan and Alberta 57,851 more males than females" (qtd. in Bruce 22).

"Homestead" coin.[22] In contrast to the male settler's future-oriented vision of the prairie, "for the women, the Garden depended upon its domestic possibilities, its ability to produce a comfortable home that would keep the family together" (Drake 126). While the privileging of domesticity is certainly an adherence to traditional Anglo constructions of appropriate femininity, nevertheless within the heroic and masculinist narrative of white western settlement the detailed documentation in women's memoirs of the expectation of, anxiety about, desire for, and disappointment in achieving a Home on the prairies is a re-visioning of an otherwise "stead"-centred project. This re-visioning begins with the very first glimpse of the new family home, a much-anticipated, although often disappointing, end to the long migratory journey. In a memoir about homesteading outside Carstairs, Alberta, from 1904, Clara Middleton expresses an unusually content reaction to her arrival at the homestead site: as written in *Green Fields Afar: Memories of Alberta Days* (1947):

> I remember thinking, home was never like this, yet I was not depressed. The week of worry and waiting was over. The boys were well again, the air was fresh and sweet, we had 160 acres of good land which would grow anything, and we knew how to work – and like it. So it was in a surge of cheerfulness that I saw beyond a shining slough a tent set on a rise above a little creek bed. (5)

However, several of the memoirists included here, many of whom were children at the time of emigration, explore the question of what exactly constitutes a "Home"-stead and thereby create a cultural-personal confrontation, often by clearly juxtaposing the different visions of fathers and mothers. If the Home

22 It is here interesting to note that, in a recent article by Bill Waiser on the construction of Saskatchewan as a "land of opportunity," when the author speaks to the attraction of promotional materials to prospective settlers, three out of four of the contemporary voices he provides are male (156). When he moves to the moment of arrival on the homestead site, the moment when the "hard reality of the situation started to sink in," however, two of the three voices he provides, the ones that take up the majority of the paragraph, are female (160).

is a sort of custodial centre in and from which white women could launch their moralizing/civilizing influence, then by questioning what constitutes an appropriate Home place these women would seem to expose the gap between cultural images and their real life experiences. After all, as part of the promotional effort to bring male settlers and their wives to Canada, the nation was promoted as a "New Homeland," and a plethora of pamphlets were produced with titles such as *Free homes in Manitoba and the Canadian North West; New homes, free farms in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Western Canada*; and *The new settlements in Canada: homes for millions.* Such pamphlets were often accompanied by idyllic photos of already established farms, images that surely led many hopeful immigrants to believe that physical manifestations of the ideological construct of Home-land would already be present or be achieved with little effort.[23]

Writing in *Pioneering in Alberta* about her childhood experience of immigration to a homestead near Lacombe, Alberta, in 1894, Jessie Raber is able to use her temporal distance to construct a rather comic scene describing her family's first view of their new Home:

> As we jogged along, we children were getting rather tired and restless, riding so long in such cramped conditions. Then, all at once, Daddy called out, 'There! There is our new home.' We got so excited, some of us nearly fell out [of the wagon], trying to stretch our necks to get a glimpse of our new home. And sure enough there it was. That is, Daddy said it was, but all we could see was a little white speck away off in the distance surrounded by green.… We got nearer and could begin to see it really was a house. As we drove up to the door it didn't look much like the houses we had lived in before but it was to be our home. (27)

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23 All of these titles are taken from promotional materials reproduced on the Peel Bibliography website at http://peel.library.ualberta.ca : *Free homes in Manitoba and the Canadian North West* (Winnipeg, s.n., 1886) (Peel #1566), *New homes, free farms in Alberta and Saskatchewan, Western Canada* (Winnipeg: Osler, Hammond & Nanton, 1893) (Peel #2100), and *The new settlements in Canada: homes for millions* (Canada: Government of Canada, 1898) (Peel #10537)

The excitement felt by the children and Mrs. Browne, who is subsumed as part of the arriving "We" in this scene, when the father makes his declaration, "'There is our new home,'" is palpable to the reader. However, the patriarchal authority suggested in the phrase, "Daddy said it was," is clearly undermined here by Raber's description of their "new home" as being "a white speck" and not "much like the houses we had lived in before."

By the time that Marjorie Wilkins Campbell gets to the end of the first chapter of her memoir *The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor* (1983), which represents her mother's sometimes arduous journey to the family homestead in the Qu'Appelle area of Saskatchewan in 1904, the sympathetic reader has become equally anxious as the settler woman to see Home – meaning that the reader is also perhaps equally disappointed by the "agonizing letdown" (24) of the end result. Campbell recreates her mother's and father's arrival as follows:

> It was not yet midday by her watch when he led them away from the rutted trail and its endless blanket stitching of telegraph poles. The sun burned her [Campbell's mother's] back and shoulders, and she longed for a parasol to protect herself and the children from its heat. Her arms ached from the weight of the heavy, whimpering baby. Too weary to regard it as more than a casual repetition of the gesture that usually signalled a stop, she saw father push back his hat. She could see no reason for a stop, and it was still too early for lunch. There was no house, no stable, nothing. To her amazement he halted the oxen, and his "Whoa, there" sounded like a paean of satisfaction and thanksgiving.
>
> We were home. (21–22)

Campbell's sarcasm here – indeed, that small but heavily nuanced phrase "We were home" seems so incredibly vulnerable standing alone – highlights the difference between male and female viewpoints of what makes a Home, for Mary Eleanor's "amazement" at Mr. Wilkins's arrest of their journey suggests her lack of "satisfaction and thanksgiving" at what she actually sees versus how her husband names the empty piece of land. As Campbell begins the next chapter,

> No typical lady of the day would lightly accept a long wearying journey behind a yoke of oxen that ended without a semblance of a house or an excuse for the omission, certainly not mother. Struggling to hold back the tears of fatigue and bewildered disappointment, she asked the simple, halting question that every pioneer woman under similar circumstances has asked.
>
> "Is – is this it?"
>
> "This is it. Welcome home! Down you get.…"
>
> But she did not move. Still struggling for words, almost in a whisper, she asked the next obvious question: How did he know this was home?
>
> Again, as he had done at her immediate lack of approval for the equipage, he faced her, amazed at the dismay she could not disguise. This was the moment he had planned for for so long, the achievement that was all he had hoped for. Eager for her approval, anxious to reassure her, he reached into his vest pocket for his compass and the document stamped by the Department of Immigration, and he compared the two.
>
> "North-west quarter Section 12, Township 25, Range 14, West 2nd Longitude …"
>
> Had she not noticed the surveyor's four holes and the marker? She had not, and if she had recognized the marker she would not then have realized that it constituted the sole means by which a settler identified the acres he had chosen or been alloted by the immigration authorities. (23)

While Campbell suggests that this reaction is "typical," thereby playing into universalized notions of what a Prairie Woman is/does, nevertheless the re-created scene of confrontation between mother and father highlights the facility of the memoir form for re-visioning cultural norms. Specifically, Campbell's mother enters into dialogue with her husband, questions his authority, on the matter of what exactly can be said to constitute a Home, and thereby questions cultural authority as well. When questioned, her husband immediately refers to two items that secure his sense of ownership in the "stead" portion of the

western settlement enterprise – the compass and the document – and begins to read out and refer to the land survey system markers that identify the Wilkins family as participating in a larger cultural movement/moment. Her mother's reaction to this seeming evidence of arrival at the family homestead – she "had not"/"would not" – negates the legitimacy of this vision of Home, so far as the female emigrant is concerned.

In *With the West in Her Eyes*, Kathleen Strange aptly illustrates the discontinuity in men's and women's perceptions of "homesteading" life when she describes her first glimpse of her new prairie dwelling:

> At the top of this hill the farm buildings stood. Before them the car stopped.
>
> My husband jumped out of the car, held out his hand to me, and cried: "We're home, dear!"
>
> Directly in front of me I saw a small wooden shack, unpainted and decidedly weather-beaten, with a door in the centre, and a single plain window at either end, one facing north and the other facing south.
>
> Outside the door was a large, square hole, spanned by a piece of board, across which one had to walk to enter the house. Into this hole had apparently been thrown an accumulation of rubbish. At first it seemed to me to be an extraordinarily unsanitary method of disposing of garbage, but I learned soon afterwards that the hole had been dug with the intention of making a cellar, over which the shack could be pulled. The digging, however, had never been completed and the idea had been discarded altogether when the owner had made up his mind to sell out.
>
> Behind the shack was a row of some five or six granaries – the small, portable wooden buildings which are used for holding threshed grain in the fall. They reminded me of a line of large sentry boxes.
>
> "What are they for?" I asked my husband.
>
> He smiled as he replied:
>
> "Those, my dear, are our bedrooms!" (19)

Despite her husband's exclamatory enthusiasm, Strange appeals to her reader's sympathetic response by stating, "it will surely be understood how difficult it was for me not to feel shocked and repelled at what I saw, particularly as it was in such striking contrast to the pleasant and congenial surroundings I had always enjoyed in my home in England and since coming to America" (20). The author here enunciates a common thread in many of the memoirs gathered here; that is, that the determination of what could appropriately be accepted as Home was largely based on an explicit comparison to what had been experienced prior to emigration to the Prairies. Clearly, for white English-speaking women, there was an expectation of "the importation of 'civilization' intact from the home they have left behind" (Floyd 4). For Strange, a "shack," and especially one that accumulates such descriptive words as "small," "unpainted," "weather-beaten," "plain," "rubbish," "unsanitary," and "discarded," cannot constitute a Home, at least in her culturally specific understanding of that word. Most importantly, Strange repudiates the equation of agricultural, or "stead," purpose with Home, as seen in her abhorrence of her husband's proposal that "the small, portable wooden buildings which are used for holding threshed grain" be used as bedrooms. For Strange, there can be no overlapping purpose to these buildings, especially if one intends to make an actual Home on the prairies. Indeed, she admits that, for their "predecessors," who "had been in the habit … of moving into the near-by town of Stettler for the winter months, and had consequently found the shack adequate for their simple needs during the working season," the shack may well have "become dear to them … since a home, however simple it may be, is treasured because of its associations." However, given that her "more extensive family" – two adults and three young boys – "intended to make the farm [their] permanent quarters the whole year round, the shack was altogether inadequate except as temporary shelter" (21–22). Strange invokes here the painfully conventional sentiment that says, "Home is where the heart is," which would seem to negate her concern for what her new domicile looks like, but then she rather deftlymanages to assert the "inadequacy" of her husband's meagre vision compared to her own.[24]

24 For more examples of the settler woman's eager anticipation for a first glimpse of "home," see also Ebbers 30–31; Gilead 13; Hicks 6–7; Holmes 75–80; Inglis 23- 24; Parsons 18–19; and Thomson 19.

The fact that women's conception of Home so often did not immediately translate to the new space of the Canadian prairies was a potentially frightening prospect, given that "A woman's responsibility was for the comfort of her family. When her home did not permit her to extend that comfort, she would see herself as somehow failing" (Drake 132). Certainly, the loss of one's Old World home at the moment of emigration meant a potential loss of role and function: in effect, a traditional script remained in hand, but there was no longer a familiar stage upon which to perform. Speaking specifically of women settlers, although in the American context of the Overland Trail, John Mack Faragher suggests that "the loss of a sense of home – the inability to 'keep house' on the trail – was perhaps the hardest loss to bear, the thing that drove women closest to desperation" (170). As already noted, western settlement was conceived of as a "civilizing" project, and the women memoirists here seem to illustrate their participation in that project when they document anxiety about a lack of feeling "at Home." As Yi-Fu Tuan suggests, "the built environment clarifies social roles and relations. People know better who they are and how they ought to behave when the arena is humanly designed rather than nature's raw stage" (*Space* 102). While the prairie farmer tended to look at the "empty" landscape around him and eagerly anticipated – indeed, envisioned – "future plenty and success," thereby imaginatively eliding current reality, prairie women seem to have felt reality more intensely, more fearfully even, and they actively attempted to reconstruct the old in the new. We see this, for example, in *Gully Farm*, when Mary Hiemstra's mother finds herself on an isolated homestead in Saskatchewan in 1903 without a "proper" domestic space over which to preside. Feeling fearful about the lack of human presence on the vast prairie landscape, Mrs. Pinder reacts to her husband's enthusiasm as follows:

> … "Just imagine! A hundred and sixty acres, and it's all ours."
> Mother looked at the wide sweep of land around us and sighed. "It's so big it frightens me," she said. "I could do with a hedge here and there, and walls dividing the fields the way it is in England. But all this land without even a cart-track! It's that lonely."

> "There'll be plenty of roads soon, and people, too. Land like this won't be vacant long." Dad untied the horses, and holding a halter rope in each hand he led them to the nearby slough to drink. Between the big dark animals he looked very short and thin, but there was pride in his square shoulders, and exultation in his feet. Mother, always neat, put the tent in order. She hung a clean towel on a nail driven into the tent-pole, put the iron kettle on the back of the stove, and set the box that held the pans behind the stove out of the way, then she began to slice bacon for supper. (109).

The perspective is somewhat split here, with Hiemstra's father face-forward to the future, and her mother both looking back to "the way it is in England" and feeling intensely the lacking state of her present surroundings. Stuck between her loss of the old way and the disconcerting new landscape, we see Mrs. Pinder attempt to re-create "order" by foregrounding, within the very limited space provided to her, two of the main domestic responsibilities of the white, English-speaking lady: cleanliness and the feeding of her family. Home might be where the heart is, but it's also the place in which you have the security of knowing who you are so you can contend with where you are. As Elaine Lindgren writes in an American context regarding female homesteaders, "it would be a mistake to judge the adaptation of settlers to the plains by their initial reaction" (15). Indeed, Mrs. Pinder's seeming capitulation to convention does not necessarily indicate complete hostility towards participation in the new reality of the western settlement project; in fact, the backwards glance of settler women most often resulted in psychological preparation (a sort of shoring up) for the work needed to engage in the work of homesteading. As noted by Sheila McManus, "a desire to reproduce whatever sense of the home she had left behind also gave a woman a familiar base from which to face other challenges" (124). I would suggest that the initial desire to reconstitute Home on the prairies be read as partly ideological adherence and partly an empowering psychological response to a new environment.

The security of having some semblance of a Home place was important for the psychological comfort and security, not only of the prairie woman, but also of her family members, and especially the children, who would lend their

contribution to the new life. For example, in *Land Across the Border*, a memoir of homesteading near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Donnie M. Ebbers writes about a house fire in which her family appears to lose everything and has to move temporarily into a less than ideal place:

> Several years before, Papa had built a one room log house with two small windows, half way between the house and the barn, in which to smoke meat. Though it was seldom used for smoking meat and became a sort of "catch-all store house" it was always called "the smoke-house." Papa and Joe went to work clearing out the tools and whatever else was stored there, cleaned it and set up a small old cook-stove in the north-east corner, built a bedstead of poles and scrap lumber against the west wall and a table in the middle of the room. That was to be "home" until Papa and the boys could get a new house built.
>
> Gertie helped with enough pots and pans for Mama to cook in, and before the middle of April Mama set up house-keeping in "the smoke-house."
>
> When Jackson and Ottie came home from the logging-camp they were shocked to find they had no home, at least there was no house there, and their bed-room would be in the granary for the summer, but Ottie said, "Well, home is where Mother is!" And "Mother" was there! Cooking the same good meals for them, even in the smoke-house, planting garden, and doing all she could with the little she had, to make her family comfortable and happy; as she had always done and would always do, no matter what happened. (82)

Ebbers seems to have considerable play with language in this passage, with "home" having both literal and emotional signification: the "smoke-house" is only re-created as "home" in a theoretical sense, at least until a new "house" is built; the author's brothers come "home" to find they have no "home," or at least not a "house"; in fact, "home" is still present in the person of the Mother,

who can still perform all of the domestic tasks that make manifest the emotional security of being Home.

Sometimes the ill effects on a woman from a lack of domestic comfort and security could not be discerned until that same woman was displaced into a vastly different setting. In *The Maple Leaf for Quite a While* (1967), Heather Gilead writes about a 1960 trip she took with her octogenarian mother to Iowa to visit her mother's dying brother. On the way to the small town in which the brother lives, the two women stop and stay with an Aunt Minnie, who works as a housekeeper for a female doctor, whose home – described as "a substantial white frame house" (113) – is opened to them for the duration of their visit. As Gilead recognizes, her mother's movement to this new place elicits a different way of being than could ever have been achieved in the place provided for her family to live in on an Alberta homestead. Referring to the doctor's home, Gilead writes,

> We set about the business of Making Ourselves at Home. Indeed my mother *was* at home. I have never seen anything like it, and it was not without poignancy. The doctor's house was spacious, correct, impeccable, comfortable even. Nothing ultra modern. It had no graces. Pictures and bric-à-brac, which might have brought the middling good furniture and curtains into line, brought instead the stale odour of air-conditioned department store "galleries." Comfort and decency were necessities, but aesthetics suspect. But it was a much better house than anything my mother had ever had, or could have aspired to even in her moments of extreme optimism on those prairies where so large a fraction of all effort went into just keeping warm seven months of the year. However briefly, my mother simply appropriated this house, revelled in it, assuming a formality and gentility of which I had indeed seen flickerings upon occasion, but which I had never before seen effortlessly sustained. As the days went by in that house I became more and more convinced that given easier circumstances my mother would probably have been infinitely easier to live with; that the thorns and jagged edges with which she seemed to have become afflicted over the

> years were largely barnacle growths – foreign bodies settled upon her from the environment, rather than emanations from herself. She did not appear to pay much attention to what went on around her in the house. She just settled herself somewhere, passive and beatific, radiating a contentment which was pathetic by its rarity. (114–15)

The doctor's house is not tasteful, in the author's assessment. Nevertheless, the words "comfort and decency" loom large as something absent from her mother's experience of prairie life on a homestead "some seventy miles from Red Deer as the crow flies" (11). Earlier in the memoir, Gilead describes the "Home" her mother first came to in Canada from the United States: "The curtainless windows, the walls innocent of paint or paper, the coarse grey blankets (some of which were still extant as saddle blankets in my day), the splintery wooden floors, bare even of linoleum and so cold that the tracked-in snow would just lie there, unmelting" (14). In her childhood, Gilead took a negative view of her mother, whose "thorns and jagged edges" seemed such a contrast to her steadfast father's presence, but in this reflective moment, seeing her mother in a very different domestic environment, the author is able to acknowledge how intimately "Home" affects a woman's emotional well-being.

The "thorns and jagged edges" which "afflicted" Gilead's mother stem not simply from the lack of comfort in the family home, but also from another side effect of the "future plenty and success" narrative that dominated western settlement. Indeed, it has become almost a cliché to say that many prairie women had to wait sometimes interminably for their husbands to turn their attention away from the needs of the "stead" and towards the construction of a more substantial home than was initially provided on arrival at the family property. Most immigrants to the prairies arrived believing that taking up a homestead meant establishing one's roots in the new country – settling down on the landscape, agriculturally and domestically. However, a constant complaint on the part of white, English-speaking prairie women was the constant deferral of settled domestic arrangements. Certainly, this waiting game is well documented in prairie fiction: in Frederick Philip Grove's *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), for example, the reader learns that Abe Spalding's "increased acreage

demanded an ever-rising investment in implements; and [his wife] Ruth was plainly getting impatient about the house" (38). After threshing his first phenomenal profit, Abe finally turns his attention to the new house to be built, realizing that "it was meant as a consolation; as conveying a sense of his own shortcomings; he was sorry that he had left Ruth in such surroundings for so long. He had been an unconscionable time in fulfilling his promise. After all, she had had to live in the place; to him, it had been just a lair to go to at night" (110). In the memoirs written by prairie wives and mothers, and also those written by prairie daughters/grand-daughters, we do not often get to see the regret felt by husbands who failed, for whatever reason, to provide the comfort and security of a "proper" Home. What we do get is an enunciation of either the joy felt by women who were so provided – even if to a lesser degree than what was hoped for – or, more commonly and overwhelmingly, the frustration of those women who learned to live with the lack. In Gilead's text, the author makes the following acknowledgment of the gap between domestic idyll and reality:

> Within a few years two tiny houses which had belonged to departed pioneers were hauled up and tacked on to the existing three rooms. These, which were roofed with tarpaper, would become sieves in a matter of minutes during a brisk hailstorm. It was as well that we lived in a sort of narrow corridor between two hail-prone belts, for although my father always had a vague intention of putting cedar shingles on those roofs in place of the tarpaper, nothing came of it. Indeed for a considerable time he intended, I believe, to build a new house for my mother. When I was very small there was still a book of potted house plans lying around, but I think she was already communing with it more as the reliquary of deceased dreams than as imminent possibility, for 1929 was already past and Hard Times were upon us. I know that her choice had fallen upon one with dormer windows upstairs, and a dining-room separate from the kitchen, and with a proper basement in which a furnace, to heat the whole of the house, could have been installed.

> In 1911 she had probably accepted cheerfully enough all those temporary discomforts, inconveniences and compromise solutions. Forty-five years and seven children later they were still there, grown into her world. (14)

It is painfully inevitable to see Gilead's mother, inhabited in a dwelling that literally reflects/incorporates the false bottom (for so many prairie families) of the "future plenty and success" narrative, have to confront on a daily basis the passing of her dream for domestic comfort. I cannot help but read a change in Gilead's tone when she moves in this passage from her somewhat equivocal "belief" about her father's good "intentions" to provide something better for his wife to her much firmer "knowledge" about her mother's solid and hopeful "choice" of what constituted Home. With her final two small sentences, the daughter-author seems to confront the image of the Prairie Woman as "cheerful helpmate" when she highlights her mother's conformity to idealized gender roles – she does, after all, exist "cheerfully enough" at the beginning, despite the negatives – and then exposes the painful reality behind that image when she so heavily stresses her mother's endurance of a less than utopian reality through "forty-five years and seven children."

When Barbara (Hunter) Anderson and her family arrived in the Saskatchewan Valley in July of 1883, the setting seemed to auger well for the family's comfort and security, as seen in *Two White Oxen: A Perspective of Early Saskatoon 1874–1905* (1972) when the author represents the end point of their journey:

> … The sun was at our backs, a little to the right-hand side and the mist was rolling up from the valley below. It seemed to stand like a wall behind us, shutting out all our past, and before us a beautiful green valley dotted over with sparkling sloughs, full of water in which myriads of ducks and some geese could be seen. Away in the distance we could see the banks of the South Saskatchewan River winding away to the further north. Two little squares of bright green were the growing grain, growing on each of the five acres broken on our homesteads according to homestead regulations. (27)

On the "stead" side of things, all was well for the Hunter families (the author's aunt and uncle were also homesteading). However, in the next chapter – ironically titled "Home" – Anderson begins the much more arduous journey towards achieving a comfortable Home. Their first home would be less than ideal: "Father pointed out to me our home by the one little square of lighter green. There was a black spot and two white tents by it" (29). The "black spot," it turns out, was a shed, which had been made out of "the lumber intended for the floor of our new house." As we learn elsewhere, the Hunter families had emigrated as part of the Temperance Colonization Society,[25] an organization that was supposed to provide homes, "but the lumber did not arrive until November [of 1883] and it was wet and icy when unloaded from the scows" (30), and thus was not immediately useable for the building of a proper Home.

It was quickly determined that tent life was not feasible to endure a Saskatchewan winter: writes Anderson, "the first frosts came on the fourth of September," which made for a "very chilly" time. By October, Mr. Hunter was busy providing a domestic improvement common on the Canadian prairies for settlers from a variety of class and cultural backgrounds – a "sod house":

> Mother and we children had started digging, while Father was away, and he soon made a good sized cellar of the hole where we had started to work. Next he set posts in the ground and put a long plate on them, mortised, to hold them in place and we started sod walls under these plates, in a straight row. Three feet thick at the base. Twelve by twenty-four feet was the size of the room. Walls were seven feet high and tapered to two feet six inches at the top.

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25 Dawson and Younge quote Robert England's *The Colonization of Western Canada* (London: 1936) regarding the origins of the Temperance Colonization Society, which was formed in 1882

> at Ottawa chiefly by capitalists and prominent prospective settlers from Toronto, Hamilton, and the surrounding country. This company purchased from the Dominion Government several townships, comprising one million acres, for one dollar per acre. Saskatoon became the central point, or capital, of this block of land. (13)

> One door and two windows were next put in place and sods built closely around them. (30)

There's something so delightfully ironic about a home built from the very ground that underlay the utopian dream of western settlement; an immediate and practical survival tactic that had nothing whatsoever to do with dreams of "future plenty and success." Although we never hear what the author's mother thinks of her family having moved away from Cayuga, Ontario, to live in a house made of prairie sod, certainly Anderson herself remains philosophical:

> … true the sod walls were rather dark and unattractive, but after living in a tent for five months who would not welcome even a sod house. This one was better than some in that it had two double-sash windows and a real door with knob and lock like real houses had, and the windows could be opened by raising the lower sash, and there were such nice broad window sills for the sod wall was three fee[t] thick at the base. The floor was better, too, than most sod houses for it was covered with lumber, not just the ground, and a real cellar was under the floor that would make more room, but even then it would be a very small residence for seven people to live and work in. Altogether it was a wonderful new house and we were all so thankful to be able to move in. (34)

It is important to note that Anderson's appreciative tone is comparative here – to what they lived in before and to the state of "most sod houses" – but there is no doubt that the new house represents an attempt to re-create a more permanent and proper sense of what Home means, an attempt that is celebrated by the Hunter family in an evening "concert, or 'house warming'" (34).

Nevertheless, the sod house was not the end of the domestic journey, for Anderson, like so many of the memoirists gathered here, spends a great deal of narrative space documenting her family's Home un-settlement. About six years after they arrived at that first homestead site, the family moved once again: in the spring of 1889, says Anderson, "My father was entitled to a second homestead, having completed his duties on the first in the allotted

time. So he took his second six miles north of his first – 4/38/4. The first was on 4/37/4, as it was on the river, and would be near water for the stock at least" (105). In terms of landholdings, this event was a step forward; however, in terms of living standards, it was most decidedly a step back. As the author acknowledges,

> The moving and work to get settled there, took all summer. First, the corral to keep the stock in; the tent house to live in; there was the milk house and pigs' pens to build; then haying. There was plenty of grass to cut but so far to haul it, and when the weather began to grow cold, we had to build a piece on the milk house to live in, as there was not time to build a house, though we had a lot of logs ready. Then there was the stable – a poor affair – but we got by the first two years on the new homestead, and got at building our new log house.

Finally, in "the summer of 1891," with Anderson and her sister Jennie helping, the family built and moved into their new log house. At the time of building, however, Mr. Hunter was quite ill, so that, "when finished, it was a comfortable place, but not as it would have been had [he] been well enough to carry out their plans" (154) for a real Home.

Clearly a major factor in the comfort and security of a prairie home had to do with "a sense of permanency" (Langford, "First Generation" 95). After what was usually an extended journey to the Canadian west, and given the magnitude of what had been left behind in one's country of origin, taking up residence in one single place was needed for an abiding sense of settlement. As with the contentious first sightings of the Homestead site and the sometimes rather rudimentary versions of Home detailed above, some memoirists' documentation of the often arduous journey to obtain a permanent Home seems to actively repudiate the western settlement propaganda materials that not only promised almost instant agricultural success, but also the fixed and stable "New Homeland" image referred to earlier in this chapter. For Jessie Browne Raber's mother, getting a home built is not the difficult task, but rather getting to stay in one for longer than a few months. The Browne family arrive at

their first homestead site near Lacombe, Alberta, in the summer of 1894 and move immediately into their new wood board house, then they build a log house before winter sets in, only to end up moving into the home of a bachelor Englishman, Mr. Folger, who "was to leave and spend the winter in England" (73). The author describes this dwelling in idealistic terms:

> Well, we were all in our new home at last. It was such a pretty place. We could see for miles to the south. The view was beautiful with hills, valleys, trees and fields of grain, which the farmers were cutting as fast as possible for winter was nearing now. Some fields were yellow with the stubble, and dotted with cattle and horses picking up what was left. In the back and west side were woods, but all the underbrush had been cleaned out, which made it look clean. Barns were filled with hay and grain. It was a well sheltered place, so the wind didn't get such a sweep onto us. We all felt at home, as we had visited up there many times. (74)

Despite feeling "at home" in this Home, only pages later Raber notes that yet another move is in the works:

> When we moved up to this place of Mr. Folger's, Dad's intentions were to stay there, pay, in time, for the improvements and raise more cattle. He and Mother talked it over for months, but decided it was too far from school. But Dad had found a nice quarter section, if he could get it, where we could move again to a permanent home. We were rather sorry to hear all this in a way. This was such a pretty place. This new place would be only eight miles from town and one and a half or two miles from the school. (79)

While registering some degree of disappointment over moving to "this new place," the author nevertheless takes the philosophical approach and ends this section of her narrative with a stress on the positive aspects of the move, a fairly typical approach to difficult subjects by the memoirists studied here.

A few pages later, though, an indication of Raber's true feelings about the family's new move breaks the surface narrative of childhood nostalgia:

> Daddy had planned with Mr. Folger to live at this place, make our home here. So we children had planned out what flowers we would plant in the spring, as we liked to live here. Dad changed all our plans when he said we would be moving in early spring. So Dad, Billy and Jack were very busy, going over to this new place, finding the lines and then had to go to Red Deer to file on it. Then the house would be built, and things started for our permanent home at last. (82–83)

The tone here is not excessively critical, but clearly there is frustration over the degree of unsettlement experienced by the author's family. The sense of relief is palpable when, almost three full years after their arrival in Alberta, the Browne family finally appear to have found their place:

> April 15th, 1897, we moved onto our new farm, which was to be a real farm now. It was a warm day and we were all excited, all anxious to see the new home, but it was nearly dark when we arrived so there was no chance to see much. It was some job, even if we didn't have much furniture, getting supper, finding places to sit, then fixing beds for the night. We all slept on the floor that night. Even at that, we had a rather contented feeling, being in our own home. (88)

For Annie Keyes's mother, Anna Schultz, the wait for a stable home is seemingly interminable. In July of 1905, the author's father, whose own family had moved from South Dakota to Saskatchewan in 1901, filed for his own homestead, which was "situated across the North Saskatchewan River…south west of the Petrofka Ferry … now the Petrofka Bridge" (9). Just over a year later, he married a woman from South Dakota and brought her to Canada to live permanently. As the author imagines in her "Forward [*sic*]" to a memoir titled *Down Memory Trails with Jip* (1972), "I am sure their hearts were full

of joy … full of dreams for their future together when they moved to their Homestead. A home and land all their own." From that moment on, however, Keyes documents a series of impractical decisions made by her father, for whom homesteading appeared to centre upon migratory agricultural activities as opposed to the creation of a settled home life. For example, only one page after describing her family's first and rather rudimentary home on the prairies, Keyes ends her first chapter by advising the reader that "Father got an offer, to trade his homestead for a Steam Threshing Outfit, which he did" (11), then begins her next chapter saying, "Now they were without a home" (12). This inauspicious beginning is followed by a seemingly endless state of flux: as Keyes notes, "Living in rented homes now, we had to move quite often" (13). Added to the lack of a constant sense of Home is the fact that the author's father is often "away working, threshing, doing custom work for other farmers." At one point early on, the author reveals that her father's gamble on engaging in agricultural work rather than homesteading is to the detriment of any possibility of settlement for his family:

> Father had made a down payment on this farm. As it happened the steam threshing outfit father got in trade for his homestead had a lot of breakdowns. So that he could not earn enough money to make another payment on the place and THE OWNER FORECLOSED. They lost the place and were forced to move again. (14)

After this loss, there begins for the family a migratory cycle that reminds one of the biblical exodus. After four failed moves, the last of which sees the family living in a granary rather than stay in a house full of bed-bugs, the Schultz family finds itself completely unsettled:

> When fall was drawing closer we knew we could not stay in that granary, and we surely did not feel like moving in with those bed-bugs again. Father was buying a Steam Threshing Outfit from Mr. Ed Ewert who lived between Lockwood and Drake, Sask. With his earnings there, father was paying for the outfit. He had

> threshed in Drake area in the fall of 1915. So in the fall of 1916, after the summer in the granary, he decided to take his family along. (24)

Preparation for the trip is "flurried" and, despite the author's childhood joy at the prospect of "camping out" in October, she is well aware that "for mother this was quite an ordeal" (24).

After the threshing season is over and the family are "on [their] way home" (to no home, really) Keyes provides a narrative contrast between the domestic ideal experienced by some homesteaders and the cold reality of a night camping out on the late fall landscape:

> Having made camp for the night close to a small lake one evening. It was getting dark before they found this place. Arnold the baby, about 18 months old did not like this camping life much, he sure cried that evening. Mother was trying to get things organized to make supper – while the men tended to the chores of the horses. Mother must have been tired from the days journey, then trying to cope with the crying baby, while getting the meal ready. For I'm sure we were all very hungry by that time. All of a sudden, we saw two people coming towards us through the bush carrying a lantern. It was the mother and her grown up daughter from a farm home just beyond the bush. They had heard the baby cry. They insisted that mother bring the children to their house. I was a little past nine years old. I do remember, that we walked to their home, into the kitchen where the lamp was lit. I have a shimmering recollection of their kitchen, but I cannot remember now whether they gave us some supper and bedded us for the night, or whether mother looked after Arnold and fed him … and that then we went back to our wagon for the night? (26)

As a reader of Keyes's text, I cannot help but be disappointed by the memory gap that occurs about what happens for her family that night, but nevertheless it seems significant that it is two women who emerge from the bush to provide

the author's mother and her children with a safe and warm haven, a "shimmering recollection" of what Home should be like – what the author's father can't/won't seem to provide – centred within the domestic space of the kitchen. But the sanctuary is only temporary and the homelessness continues for several more years. As the author states, her "parents were so anxious to get a home of their own again, so we would not always have to move at a moments notice. Mother was so tired of that" (34). Here I see strategic significance in the move from saying her parents are together "anxious" to achieve a stable Home, to the stress on her mother's emotional condition. Finally, sixteen years after Mr. Schultz filed on his original homestead, in the spring of 1921, the author's family found itself renting a farm situated "close to the river, east and north from the Petrofka ferry crossing" – a return back to origins accompanied by a very modified optimism: "We had a hard beginning here. First of all, the house was so very dirty. Mother and I soaked and scrubbed and disinfected the rooms, before they were fit to live in. It was in poor condition. Some of the inner walls only had lath over the studding. In time we could make improvements, and it was quite comfortable" (39–40).[26]

The mere building of a home or the making of "improvements," however, did not guarantee physical or psychological comfort for, "in general, houses are not designed by women.… As a result there is frequently a poor fit between the needs of women and the design of houses. Women must often adapt their behaviour to fit the environment or suffer the costs of 'making do' in a space that makes their work difficult to carry out" (Wekerle et al. 11). As Eileen M. Scott writes in *Porridge and Old Clothes* (1982), a memoir of homesteading life in Manitoba in the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth centuries, her newly wed mother, Jeannie Henderson Thomson Scott, "had designed a step-saving bungalow during her short stay at the Winnipeg Agricultural College, which she dearly wished to have built. However, her father [the author's grandfather] and Ed Gray [a builder] thought they knew best, built a two-storey house

26 For more examples of the sometimes interminable wait for a proper home, see also Baldwin 187–89; Campbell 29–31; Ebbers *passim*; Hewson *passim*; Magill 4–9; Parsons 29; Roberts *passim*; Schultz 61–62, 103; Strange 133; and Thomson 222–23, 274.

with a very inconvenient plan" (19). In most women's memoirs, the major issue regarding home construction has to do with a lack of space and, hence, a lack of privacy. In *No "Coppers" in Saskatchewan!* (1973), a memoir of her homesteading childhood in the Strongfield district of Saskatchewan in 1908, Winnie E. Hutton provides a rather extraordinary – although probably not completely unusual – illustration of how the needs of the agricultural side of the Homestead coin could come into spatial conflict with the privacy needs of women:

> When harvest time arrived I was asked to help Mrs. Kennedy with the feeding of the threshers. The day arrived and Mr. Kennedy came to get me. The threshers were expected for the noon meal and I found every thing pretty well ready. The roast in the oven, vegetables pared, and the long table was set for twenty or more men. That did not leave much room around the outside as it was a typical homesteaders' house, with two small bedrooms roughly partitioned off at one end. My heart missed a beat tho, when I found Mrs. Kennedy in bed with labor pains. Dr. Monkman who had recently come to the country and practiced for a short time in the new town of Hawarden, before settling permanently in Loreburn, was sent for, but did not arrive in time. Here was Mr. Kennedy and myself, who was as green as grass about such matters and scared stiff as well to welcome this new arrival, a little girl who brought a sister along, so here on October 15th, 1908 the first twins were born at Strongfield. Shortly after, Grandpa Kennedy arrived with a dear old lady, Mrs. Taylor, who took over and let me get back to the dinner. (23)

Such an amazing overlap of interests in a farming situation: one of the most vital of agricultural moments (threshing days) and one of the most vital days for the civilizing project of western settlement (childbirth). In the description of this scene, Hutton makes her reader aware of the incredible vulnerability of prairie women who found themselves giving birth in less than safe or

comfortable conditions.[27] But also, in the juxtaposition of male and female labouring in this scene, we see that the female need for domestic privacy is treated as a relatively minor interruption within the larger cultural pattern. The imperative of getting "back to the dinner" becomes most important as the end to this scene plays out as follows:

> The threshers had almost been forgotten in the confusion. Messages had been sent from time to time, to try to keep on threshing as there was a birth taking place in the house and it was not convenient to have the men in then. It was past noon, the men were hungry so finally some of them set their pitch forks in the ground and said, "We have to eat." The thresher came knocking at the door and asked if it was all right to come in for dinner now. It was, so I got the first meal over. There was lunch in the afternoon and supper at night, to look after, and then tomorrow. (24)

Kathleen Strange also relates the less than ideal spatial conditions of childbirth for some prairie women in a chapter purporting to be concerned with paying "tribute" to "the splendid examples of unconscious heroism and courage that go unremarked, unrewarded and unsung" in relation to "the figure of the Canadian country doctor":

> Many farm homes on the prairies are poorly equipped; even the best of them are seldom equipped for the emergency of sickness. The general lack of electricity, running water, and even adequate space, are some of the difficulties with which he has to cope practically all the time.

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27 For a detailed discussion of the experience of childbirth for prairie women, see Nanci L. Langford's "Childbirth on the Canadian Prairies, 1880–1930," in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History*, eds. Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000, 147–73). For a memoir example of the sometimes frightening realities of childbirth in homesteading conditions, see Middleton 48–51.

> I myself was once in a home where there was but one single room, and in this room, in the middle of winter, and in the presence of several other children, a woman was delivered of a baby. It was too cold to send the little ones outside, so they were herded into a corner, as far away from the scene of the birth as possible. There I attempted to hold their attention while the doctor and the woman's husband ministered to her.
>
> The large double bed sagged so badly in the middle that the doctor found it impossible to continue his work properly. Ignoring the husband's protests, he finally had the patient moved onto the kitchen table, where, after an hour or so, she was finally successfully delivered of a husky male child. All her other children, by the way, had been born without the services of either a doctor or a nurse. Two days following this birth, against the doctor's orders, the mother was up and about again. Apparently she suffered no ill effects, either. (175–76)

Although we are ostensibly meant to be focused on the difficult working conditions of the country doctor, nevertheless I cannot but read this passage more for its documentation (confrontational or not) of the incredible gap that exists between the grandiose construct of white women as "reproducers" of British culture (it should be noted that the woman's cultural background is not specified) with the actual and often deplorable conditions in which many women had to literally perform this role. While Strange herself may have attended hospitals for the birth of her children, and thus inhabited a fairly privileged version of the reproductive role, I would suggest that, especially in the litany of amenities lacking in the home at the start of the narrative – the characterization of the "several other children" as being "herded" like animals, the husband's "protests" against the doctor's intervention in the state of affairs, and the wife's rejection of the doctor's order to stay in bed post-partum (a female brand of heroism? or the necessary reality of being a farm wife?) – there exists an "undercurrent" of accusation against a reality that so often precludes respect for, or sharing of, women's labouring.

Lack of space and privacy was not just a concern in the event of childbirth, as there were other, more regular, needs of the female body that had to be met despite the cramped lifestyle, as seen in Marjorie Campbell's memoir *The Silent Song*. Writing about her uncle Leo's and her father's occasional day-long trips "to the Touchwood Hills for pine and other hardwood to burn," the author notes that the absence of men about the homestead provided her mother with the space to attend to certain personal details of female life:

> Most of all during the first winter, she welcomed those relatively few hours that were so comforting to her sense of modesty, the opportunity to wash and dry the neatly hemmed squares of winceyette on which many women depended before the emergence of commercially available sanitary napkins. That feminine chore had been one of her most embarrassing problems ever since the arrival of father's young brother, and even of living in such close quarters with her husband. (39)

As a woman writing the sometimes intimate story of another woman, Campbell has an amazing capacity for understanding/imagining her mother's need for privacy. Indeed, she finishes the above scene saying, "Above all, she welcomed each monthly reminder that she had escaped a pregnancy she dreaded under their present circumstances."

Sometimes married couples and their families were accompanied in the journey westward by other travellers, and the presence of other men could cause issues for prairie women, issues having to do with limited space and limited privacy. For example, despite the fact that Clara Middleton expresses contentment in *Green Fields Afar* about living in a tent when she arrives at her and her husband's homestead site in Alberta in 1904, there are adjustments that need to be made to an originally masculine space:

> While the boys were unhitching I made an inspection. Here was a bell tent, such as the soldiers at home used on Carling Heights, supposed to accommodate eight men, at a pinch. The range had been put up, half in and half out, with the pipe sticking up crazily

> and far enough away from the canvas. A double-bed mattress was supported on a rough frame of two-by-fours and our red couch stood about two feet from it, on the other side of the main pole. I dragged a piece of carpet out of one of the packing cases and pinned it up, separating the bed and the couch. So we had a two-room apartment, suitable for any married couple, with an understanding brother-in-law. And there we slept the sleep of the just and the weary while awaiting the building of a proper house. And the blessed sun shone every day. (5–6)

In *The Long Trail*, Beulah Baldwin offers up a humorous account of the effects of a lack of space/privacy in prairie dwellings when she documents her parents' journey to the Peace River region of northern Alberta in 1913. Staying at a stopping house overnight, Baldwin's mother Olive Freeland, has the following, less than proper, visual experience as a result of the rather cramped space in which human bodies are placed:

> She heard someone struggling into clothes and in the dim light cast by the dying flames recognized Robert Andrews as he approached the fireplace.… She could see him plainly now as he turned to warm his back, and she thought how handsome he looked with the firelight softening his features. It was then she realized he had pulled his woolen shirt over his union suit but had not bothered with his trousers. Suppressing a giggle, she thought how shocked Aunt Em would be if she knew her Ollie was gazing at a man in his underwear. (71)

What is particularly compelling about this scene is that Mrs. Freeland does not recoil at the sight which a lack of privacy provides, but rather takes a light-hearted view of the gap between old world morality and new world reality.

Later in Baldwin's text the author also illustrates that the often rudimentary architecture of the prairie home disallowed "purpose-specific rooms" (Radke 238) and necessitated and made a priority of multi-functionality over any accommodation of personal space:

> I was too young to remember those first winters, but do remember, of later years, our farm kitchen on a winter morning – firewood stacked near the stove, a bucket for slops near the door, coffee perking on the back of the big range, my father shaving at the kitchen table, and I in my petticoat, washing my neck and arms at the corner washstand, while Mother stirred the porridge and eggs sputtered in the frying pan. Farm kitchens had to be functional, not beautiful. Ours was bathroom, dining room, laundry, and in the early days, the dairy. Each in turn and sometimes all at once. (189–90)

Private spaces could be creatively constructed, however, as we saw with Middleton, and as we see when Baldwin notes that "chintz drapes … were strung on wires across the interior and served as room partitions during the first year in the new house" (205). Jessie Raber's mother was similarly creative within a small home:

> All went along well, and on Monday, the twenty-first of October, 1895, we moved into our new house. We found it much warmer and more comfortable. There were a few things to do to finish it and Mother put up the partitions, some of her rugs tacked along the poles. We were all quite proud of our new house, with the sod roof. (44–45)[28]

For many white, English-speaking women, a sense of Home was symbolized by "sacred objects,"[29] or those domestic or personal items that migrated with

28 For more examples of the uncomfortable architecture of first prairie homes, and the creativity of women in dealing with it, see also Middleton 16; Nelson 41; Parsons 21; Schroeder 64; and Thomson 20–21.

29 I borrow this phrase from the autobiography titled *Sketches from Life* (1981) by Canadian artist Annora Brown, who provides a description of a woman named Mrs. Hunt: "a very special kind of person – new to my experience. She was what is commonly called a 'home body'. She gave me the impression that she drew the walls of home about her like a warm cloak, to ward off the tempest outside. Her stove, her table, her china were sacred objects" (150).

them from "back Home." As Kathleen V. Cairns and Eliane Leslau Silverman suggest in their exploration of the kinds of "treasures," or "valued objects," kept by women from a variety of backgrounds, such items provide "meaning and coherence" to women's lives (x). Most significantly, "possessions are a portable self that provides security when the world is in flux" (7), and "flux" is certainly the most unifying experience for women in the early stages of homesteading. On the one hand, the objects that women describe in their memoirs often symbolize or reflect the role of white woman as "civilizer" in the Canadian West, and certainly the use of such objects within the Home suggests a desire to mitigate the perceived threat to domestic purity in the early experience of homesteading, as well as to reassert a woman's adherence to cultural images. On the other hand, these objects often simultaneously reveal to readers that many female emigrants suffered from loneliness and isolation that could only be relieved by surrounding themselves with tangible symbols of connectedness to others. As suggested by Cairns and Silverman, a woman's valued objects usually hold "emotional significance" (xiii), especially in their role in "the preservation of a personal and a family history" (xv). Given that one of the main narratives of western settlement centred on the idea of the prairies as being a land of "new beginnings," or a "fresh start," which in some measure suggests a repudiation of one's past, then the attention paid by women memoirists to "sacred objects" that symbolize the past, continuity and stability, seems to, once again, provide us with a subtle re-vision of such narratives.

In *The Long Trail*, Beulah Baldwin describes the ritual act of unpacking one's sacred objects from "back Home" for placement within the new Home, a "neat cabin, fragrant with the clean odor of new wood and bright with sunshine" (205), as a moment of wonder. Indeed, after nearly seven years of following her husband's migrations, the moment of unpacking for Olive Freeland marks achievement of her own dream, a stable Home for her family:

> Mother's wedding gifts were the first to be unpacked. The most prized was a cut-glass bowl of heavy leaded crystal, a gift from her Aunt Em. We were not supposed to touch it, but we sometimes watched a sunbeam as it caught a point of crystal, setting it afire with brilliant colours. Another possession we children loved was

> a cupid carved from wood, holding a large red heart. Mother said it was a memento from a young man she nearly married. Then there was my father's silver cigarette box. Although he hardly gave it a glance, Mother and we children loved it. Engraved with the Queen's initials, it had been presented to him for outstanding service during the Boer War. (204)

The gifts here delineated are certainly symbolic of Olive Freeland's sense of family connection: the "heavy leaded crystal," a gift from her Aunt Em, a woman who had raised Olive until the age of 16, after the girl's family had broken up, and who represents domestic stability, strength of character and emotional support; the "cupid" (probably from her husband's younger brother, whom she had known first and who was once in love with her) as a reminder of a romantic time of life, and perhaps even of choices freely made; and her husband's "silver cigarette box," a sort of narrative gesture towards dedication to the imperial cause.

While still on the trail to their Saskatchewan homestead site in 1904, we see that Marjorie Wilkins Campbell's parents have together taken care to incorporate their past spiritual life within their dreams of the future:

> Last night they had been within less than a mile of Fort Qu'Appelle and all the usual, usually muffled after-dark sounds of two to three hundred people. Across the Narrows, as dusk fell, the coulees echoed the deep-throated voices of the Oblate Fathers at Lebret as they chanted their vespers, and the high, thin voices of Indian children at one of the earliest residential Indian schools in the West. Incredulous, and awed by what they must have felt to be some sort of omen, father and mother had listened to the "*Kyrie Eleison*" that reminded them poignantly of the summer Sunday a few months after they were married when they visited Ely Cathedral and father had made the photo of the choristers chanting the ancient "Lord Have Mercy Upon Us." They had brought the photo with them, a souvenir of the former home that was to become part of the new. (18)

This initial reflection on a sacred object is optimistic, as it comes as a result of being close to "civilization" in the form of religious ritual. Spiritual comfort is still available to the author's parents as they recognize traces of the old life in the new landscape. However, I cannot help but read the horrific irony of this moment as we see the ideal British emigrants being comforted and soothed on their journey into the "wilderness" of the Saskatchewan prairie by Indian children who are actively being "civilized" by one of the main assimilationist tools, the residential school. The complicity of the Wilkins in the displacement of native peoples as a result of white western settlement cannot be more agonizingly apparent. Nevertheless, throughout Campbell's memoir the author deliberately focuses the reader's attention on the experience of Mrs. Wilkins, who ultimately gains sympathy because she is, after all, only one single woman who is struggling to cope in unfamiliar territory. Later in the journey, in fact, when the family has travelled well beyond the presence of human habitation, Campbell's mother feels so overwhelmed by the unfamiliar vastness that surrounds her that she turns to a sacred object for solace:

> From her high perch, hour after hour, mother had searched the horizon for another settler's shack or another stable that might suggest that they were getting near some sign of civilization. Though she tried not to look at the little garnet-rimmed watch pinned on her blouse, her eyes involuntarily sought it as a relief from so much space, the countless sloughs and poplar bluffs, the ocean of grass, and the rutted Touchwood Trail that threatened to go on to the very end of the world. (21)

Here we see the prairie woman literally re-visioning from the larger "space" of the Saskatchewan prairie, a space that in 1904 had only been ideologically "civilized," to focus upon a "little" but sacred object that she carries on her person as symbol of her former life and that provides her with psychological "relief" as she nears what, for her, feels like "the very end of the world."

Once arrived at the family homestead, the Wilkins family construct a new home and the author represents the moment when her mother unpacks her belongings and rediscovers the means by which she will recreate a Home feeling:

> Seated on the kitchen floor on a hastily unrolled and still unread copy of the overseas edition of the London *Times*, she laughed and cried as box after box revealed familiar treasures, holding each up for their appreciation. She unwrapped the silver cruet and the china pastry cup she used for making beefsteak and kidney pies, sauce pans, and the children's silver mugs.
>
> But she could not stay at any chore for more than a few minutes. Every item roused nostalgic memories, and she wanted to see everything at once. With the baby clutched against her hip, she reached down to a half-emptied crate and found the antelope horn they had used at home for a hat rack; it could be hung near the door beside father's sjambok. From the crate clearly marked *first needed* she lifted carefully wrapped china and cutlery, only momentarily sad when she came on several pieces that had not survived months of handling. (34)

In the process of unpacking, Mary Eleanor finally retrieves some other sacred items that are integral to her stable sense of identity, but items that nonetheless have to be temporarily laid aside as being non-functional in the early days of prairie settlement:

> It was the heavy parcel in the same sturdy crate, also sewn into a sheet, that forced her first, and only, nostalgic cry that day, the heavy parcel of her music, the scores of operas she loved and popular songs, the arias and her favorite piano works. With tears blurring the inscription she had so carefully written to identify the contents, she laid it on the lower shelf of the what-not. Like the leopard skins, music belonged to some future time. Now she must not think about it, nor about her piano. (34–35)

As Campbell later writes about her mother's music, "for her no treasure meant more," and, although "she had no means of playing any of the favorites, merely

to have those sheets and collections eased some of the pangs of nostalgia they evoked" (53).

In Campbell's narrative we can see the "sacred object" as highly ambiguous symbolism, providing both connection to one's past and simultaneous reminder of the loss of that past. For Nell Wilson Parsons's mother, some objects just simply could not be out in the open, although they could not be entirely discarded with either:

> Mama's barrel-topped, iron-bound trunk had arrived six weeks after we were in the new house. She unpacked it to get out the underwear we needed, some extra "pinnies" and our dolls. She removed a few other things from the top of the trunk, then replaced the tray and shut down the lid. There was nowhere to put the things, and most of them left unpacked were of no use on the homestead. "It belongs to another place, another time," Mama would say when we children crowded around asking, "What's that green wool?" and "What's that lace?"
>
> Whenever Mama opened that trunk to get something, she would reach quickly for what she sought, and resolutely close the lid again. (35–36)

The sadness surrounding "sacred objects" is not always about the loss of connectedness to the Old World; rather, those objects that make the journey to the Canadian prairies, or the loss of them during emigration or after arrival, are sometimes used to represent the vulnerability of Home in so isolated a landscape. Writing about the terror of a house fire in *Land Across the Border*, Donnie Ebbers illustrates the emotional importance of certain objects which her mother Nannie Yokley Cummins brought from Missouri to the family homestead, which was located "about thirty miles west and north of Prince Albert – in the Shellbrook area" (21). Desperately trying, and ultimately failing, to save some of her family's belongings while being pulled from the fire by a male neighbour, Mrs. Cummins makes one final effort as she goes out the kitchen door:

> Mama reached back and took the glass sugar bowl, cream-pitcher, and butter-dish off the table. They were only press-cut, in imitation of expensive cut-glass, but Mama had kept them washed and shining so they sparkled like real expensive ones. They were all Mama could reach to save from the flames. She sat them in the snow on a flower bed, but when she went to pick them up the next day, each one was in two pieces, broken by the heat of the fire and the cold of the snow. (80)

Although Ebbers notes that the items held no real material value, she goes on to illustrate the momentous personal significance of such items for her mother's sense of personal history and stability. Noting the family's retreat to the barn for cover from the fire and winter wind, she writes about her mother's reaction to witnessing the shattering of a prairie dream:

> Through the open top-door of the feed-way, Donnie and Mama watched their home burn to the ground and the burning logs and roof fall into the cellar. Then Mama said, "I have seen all I have worked and saved for twenty-five years, *go* in twenty-five minutes." (Mama and Papa had been married twenty-five years the October before). (80–81)[30]

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30 The sacred object as symbolic of a woman's shattered dreams of prairie life is seen in Grove's *Fruits of the Earth*, in which Ruth Spalding's deviance from her husband's settlement plans is represented by her lack of attention to the details of good living:

> she was getting less and less careful with regard to the common amenities of life. At first, she had omitted the white table-cloth only when Abe was absent from a meal. Why go to unnecessary trouble? … she had a good dinner-set; but, when pieces were broken, she replaced them with heavy white crockery, saving her better dishes for social occasions which never came.… Then she left the white table-cloth out altogether, preferring oilcloth. The room took on a dingy appearance. (46)

Annora Brown also documents this loss of vision when she writes about a prairie rock pile, "though this stone pile was not a dumping ground, except for rocks, we often found bits of beautiful old china or glass there – fragments of vase or goblet that had been brought from the Old Country as a special reminder of home and

The treasured "sacred objects" that women so reverently produced when some semblance of a permanent Home had been achieved are part of the process of transformation women engaged in to make "'home' move beyond a merely functional use of space and become a comfortable and attractive place" (McManus 124). Many items could help a woman achieve the standards of "comfortable and attractive," but one of the most frequently noted items are curtains, which were hung over the windows of even the most rudimentary of prairie homes as an attempt to preserve domestic respectability (Radke 234). Indeed, I believe this is one detail of the domestic economy that seems to represent a most unambiguous adherence to cultural constructs of appropriate femininity (especially when it is done even in conditions of extreme isolation), as recognized by both contemporaries of western settlement and the memoir writers studied here. Curtains were a universal marker of female presence on the prairie landscape, as Emily Ferguson suggests when writing about a trip she took outside of Edmonton and noting that "most of the houses we see are inhabited by bachelors. A traveller does not need genius to know this. Where the one Incomparable She holds sway there is a clothesline in the yard and a curtain at the window" (*Open* 7).[31] Ferguson's capitalization of "Incomparable She" here is certainly a manifestation of cultural constructions of white femininity just as the phrase "holds sway" most certainly alludes to the concept of "separate spheres." Elizabeth Lewthwaite assures her readers of her adherence to domestic norms when she writes about visiting her brothers' prairie home in 1901 and staying in a "small building, about twelve feet square, used previously as a granary": as she notes, however, "some curtains, a few photographs I had with me, and a book or two, soon gave the little spot an air of Home" (712). In *Crocus and Meadowlark Country*, a memoir of homesteading "in the Parkland district of Southern Alberta," Georgina H. Thomson makes clear

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that had arrived shattered from the long journey across an ocean and a continent" (41). For more examples of the importance of sacred objects to the settler woman's creation of a Home, see also Magill 11–12 and Thomson 20.

31 In Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), Niels Lindstedt envies the domestic comfort of his friend, Lars Nelson's, house after the latter man's marriage: specifically, "nothing struck Niels so much as the pleasant look of the white-curtained windows in the house" (61).

the difference between a house and a Home when she describes her father's first building as being "a bare, unpainted wooden house" that features "two as yet uncurtained windows above and one window and a door below" (19). Not only could the mere presence of a woman be determined by curtains on the windows, but also a woman's character could be ascertained, as seen in Nellie McClung's *Clearing in the West* (1935) when, at the start of their trip west, the Mooney family stop at Silver Inlet to visit with a female cousin "who had the name of being a bad housekeeper. She read novels, paper-backed novels, day and night and would neither knit nor sew" (42). Thinking that "maybe she had done better in her new home," the family are disappointed to see that little has improved: "We trailed up a long hill, with a narrow sidewalk of two boards and houses standing one above another. We found Lucy's house quite easily. There were no curtains on the windows and boards in the steps were broken" (although that latter sign of neglect of duty is attributed to the husband). In McClung's story, where the woman in question lives in a town environment, we see that adherence to domestic norms was not only a duty of the individual, but also that it was "collectively and strictly enforced by other White women in the area" (McManus 124).

"Comfortable and attractive" could be difficult to achieve in the isolated and often impoverished conditions that many prairie women faced in the early years of settlement. In consequence, a main facet of the principle of domestic economy was "a woman's ability to use whatever resources were at hand, scarce or ample, to create a more pleasant living environment for herself and her family." We see the creativity of women come to the fore in their performance of the domestic role, both as a means to be "appropriately domestic and expressively individual" (Lindgren 84). For example, Beulah Baldwin provides the following scene in *The Long Trail* when depicting her family's journey from Edmonton to Grouard in the Peace River country:

> They left Edmonton behind and soon approached the first farm. Neat white buildings with green roofs stood before a bluff of spruce and birch, protection from the north wind. In a short while they were passing another fine group of buildings. "I've been told," Dad said, "that these well-to-do farmers have homes as fine as

> any in the city." Mother agreed, saying, "You're right Wilbur, I'd never have believed it." Watching her out of the corner of his eye as they approached the next farm, he was not surprised when she exclaimed, "Their first home!" while pointing out a small log cabin with a sod roof. They were soon passing the farms of the more recent settlers. Although they were not as large or elaborate; built mostly of neatly dove-tailed logs, the small windows were bright and clean and hung with gay curtains. These small homes appealed to Mother. Looking up with a bright smile, she said, "Wouldn't it be fun to peek inside and see how these women have managed to create comfortable homes, with very little to work with?"
>
> She glanced proudly at the warm patchwork quilts she had made from clothing left behind by customers at their hotel – woollen jackets and shirts, tossed carelessly aside by men anxious to leave for a warmer climate and an easier way of life. Like many thrifty wives of that era, she cut the material into small squares, creating a checkerboard pattern, and lined the quilts with carded wool that Dad purchased from Father Lacombe's mission. Sewn by hand, the coverings had taken many months to complete. (5)

So much is going on in this passage, illustrating both adherence and confrontation modes. Baldwin begins her reconstruction of this scene by having her father take her mother on a scenic tour of homesteading that seems reminiscent of the promotional pamphlets that brought so many prospective settlers to Canada in the first place. Looking at the homes of farmers who have been successful, the Freelands are able to get a glimpse of the dream of an agricultural life in Canada, something that Mrs. Freeland would "never have believed" had she not seen it with her own eyes. Then they move to the homes of "more recent settlers," where Mrs. Freeland is able to see symbolized, in the form of "gay curtains," the domestic economy which she herself may soon be able to achieve. In fact, the very sight of the curtains inspires her to "peek inside" and see more tangible evidence of female success. In that final paragraph, however, we see Baldwin "proudly" illustrating her own mother's adherence to domestic norms when she reflects on the creatively inspired

"warm patchwork quilts" – both "comfortable and attractive" – that lay in wait in the family wagon. When Baldwin provides an explanation as to the origin of those quilts, I cannot help but read some confrontation happening, for the material used comes from clothing left behind by men, probably single men, who apparently gave up; who repudiated the lifestyle that the Freelands are walking into and that Mrs. Freeland seems particularly capable of succeeding at, thus undercutting the narratives of western settlement that privilege the masculine/heroic role.

Later in the memoir, when the Freelands move into a Home of their own, the author's mother proves up her ability to be domestically successful:

> Waylaying the Aikens on their way to town, Mother asked Beulah Aikens to buy two packages of dye with thread to match. Seeing what Mother was up to, Beulah offered the loan of her treadle sewing machine. After the first lesson, there was no holding Mother. From her stock of white sheets she produced window curtains, a cover for the single bed that served as a couch, and several cushions. She dyed them all a deep forest green and trimmed them with the same flowered chintz she had used for the substitute partitions.
>
> We were no sooner settled in when the Lawrence family dropped by to inspect Dad's straw barn and our new cabin. When they saw Mother's handiwork made from the sheets and drapes Dad had wanted to leave behind, they were impressed. Johnnie said with a laugh, "You're not doing badly for a couple of greenhorns." (205)

In addition to a deliberate memorializing of her mother's obvious ingenuity and artistic talent, I would suggest that Baldwin works here to advance an alternative vision of what makes a homestead. For example, she suggests that the Lawrences came to see both the barn and cabin built by her father, but then she goes on to stress how "impressed" they especially were with "Mother's handiwork," and she takes care to note especially that the handiwork was

achieved only through use of materials that her father has previously seen as expendable to the project of settlement.

One of the domestic objects studied most often by folklore experts and others interested in women's cultural history is the quilt, "an immediate feminine point of reference" by which is "implied the real or imaginary gift of creative power in the face of adversity" (Barnes and Eicher 3). As we saw earlier with Beulah Baldwin's representation of her mother's skill in making quilts, it was "an art of scarcity, ingenuity, conservation, and order" (Showalter 228). As I read through the memoirs gathered for my study, I found that the women have documented several everyday art forms which, like quilting, have the same effect of simultaneously showing feminine adherence to domestic norms while also illustrating that women's domestic labouring was an integral component of survival in often adverse circumstances. Rag-rug-making appears to have been one of the most common household activities which combined economy (everyone, after all, has access to rags), artistry, and a sense of familial community, as seen in Nell Parsons's description in *Upon a Sagebrush Harp* of rug-making during cold winter evenings in Saskatchewan:

> Mama had promptly made over the garments [Papa] had brought home in the fall. In the process she had accumulated a considerable heap of woollen scraps, and in the long evenings we worked at rug making. We all had a hand in it, sitting close around the rectangular rug frame Papa had made to hold the burlap base taut. Three worked with the clumsy, homemade wooden hooks, while the fourth read aloud to the workers. We took turns, hour after hour, while the reader sat where the reflector of the bracket lamp on the wall could be focussed on the pages.
>
> We needed rugs. But the one we children wanted first to finish was the narrow runner to lie between the beds in the crowded bedroom. The floor was always icy, but Mama did not believe prayers effective unless delivered in a degree of discomfort. (80–81)

Annie Wilson's domestic economy here demonstrates the homesteading principal of "making do," for she has taken old clothes given to her by a neighbour

and, after making clothing for her own children, she sees the scraps as an opportunity to provide further items of comfort for her family. This manual and communal activity also supports an intellectual one for the Wilson family, whose "reading was varied" and included "a fabulous family-type weekly called *The Family Herald and Weekly Star*" and a book "on the life and explorations of Kit Carson" (81).

Rag-rug-making and other domestic arts often were particularly conducive to fostering a sense of connection to community, sometimes the one to be left behind, sometimes the one developed during the experience of settlement. As Winnie Hutton describes in *No "Coppers" in Saskatchewan!*, the decision to emigrate could be productive of an artistic housecleaning of sorts: as she notes of her own family's preparation for homesteading life, "Everyone was excited and busy. Property had to be disposed of, decisions made about what to take and what to sell. In the house the women tore up every old garment not fit to take, into long strips for carpet rags. We sewed carpet rags like mad, then took them to a lady in the village who wove them into nice rag carpets to take with us" (2). In this description Hutton displays a conventional division of labour along gender lines, but more importantly she captures a form of domestic production that moves out from the family home and into the larger community of female labour. Towards the end of Donnie Ebbers's *Land Across the Border*, the author provides the following scene showing quilting as a time and space to rejuvenate a sense of community and belonging:

> She and Frances [the author's niece] were glad to be back home with Mama again. On the cold winter days she and Mama pieced quilts and Mama taught her how to quilt them and how to use patterns. They sewed, talked and laughed together. Mama told funny stories of her own girlhood days. They made dresses for themselves and Frances. (98)

What is particularly poignant for the author in this scene is that it represents her arrival home after spending the winter away to attend "the Business College in Prince Albert," which was a life choice made for her by her father and which was in opposition to the career she wanted in education. Her main

supporter for that latter career was her mother, so the return Home and the shared creative moment is emotionally significant.

In spending so much narrative space on the documentation of women's domestic and artistic skills, the memoirists demand equality of attention and valuation in consideration of what "Homesteading" really meant. In answering the related questions, "What criteria should be used to judge a 'real homesteader'? Does doing 'women's work' disqualify one from this distinction?" (221), Elaine Lindgren acknowledges that domestic activities have always been "devalued" and made less important culturally than "men's plowing their fields." Nevertheless, argues Lindgren, settler women were not merely dependents of men, for certainly men relied on the "essential" domestic and other work of women to "sustain" them in the settlement enterprise (223), thus making the work of "Home"-building as important as – as foundational to, really – the work of "stead"-building. This re-valuation of women's domestic productions can be seen, for example, in Mary Hiemstra's *Gully Farm*, as the author gives her mother's lace-making skills narrative value equal to her father's construction of a family home. In the memoir, the author as youngster is clearly in awe of her father's creative abilities, as evidenced by her choice of vocabulary in describing the "new house":

> I, however, was as proud of the new house as Dad was. I thought it the most wonderful house in the world, and I found something new to admire every time I looked at it. The bulges in the walls were perfect shelves for my collection of small stones. I thought it pure magic that the ridge-pole stayed up. As for the door, I opened and closed it so often Mother finally told me to stop or the leather hinges would be worn out.
>
> But the most wonderful thing about the house was the fact that we had built it. Not so long ago there had been nothing at all on this spot, and now our house stood there. We had caused it to grow. With our own hands we had put it together using the things we had found on the prairie, and I had helped. I had held that log while Dad notched it, and I had stuffed clay into that crack near the floor. How smart Dad was to know just how to build such a

> perfect house! I looked at his thin young face, and wonder and pride filled my small chest. My dad, I was sure, knew everything. (171–72)

The repetitive use of the word "house" here is important when leading towards her narrative turn of attention to the Home-making skills of her mother:

> The brown walls and floor were still very drab-looking, and to brighten them Mother brought out a pink and white spread for the bed, and draped an antimacassar over the glassless window. "That does it and no mistake," Dad said when he saw the bed-spread. "Sally, this is the nicest home on the prairie."
>
> When Mrs Metherell saw the antimacassar she said it was far too lovely for a log shack. It ought to be put away and saved for a better house some time in the future. Mother, however, said she had plenty of antimacassars and she was going to enjoy them while she could. The future might never come. And how sensible she was!
>
> Mother had crocheted the antimacassars before she was married. They were a little over a yard long, and about two feet wide, and hours of work had gone into them. I used to marvel at the pattern, and at the number of stitches in them, for though I couldn't crochet I could knit, and knew the tedium of hand work. "How long did it take you to make one?" I asked, and when Mother told me I knew she was just as clever as Dad. Beauty, however, wasn't the antimacassars' only virtue, they were something nobody else had. The Metherells' house had two rooms, and Mr Gardiner's little house had a pole floor, while the Claxtons' house was said to have two windows. None of them, however, had antimacassars, or even curtains. That hand-made lace draped so gracefully over our little window made our house unique, and gave it a touch of elegance even the bachelors noticed. "You have a nice place here, Mrs Pinder," they said, looking around the little room. "It's real homelike." (172–73)

This passage certainly can be read as illustrating Sally Pinder's Home-making skills as an essential part of the "civilizing" project of western settlement (seen in words like "beauty" and "elegance" and also in the response of the bachelors), but I also read here another narrative concern, which is the author's wish to give her mother's "Home"-building "equal footing" (Buss, *Repossessing* xvii) with her father's "stead"-building. Her exclamatory statements of parental worth in each case (her father is "smart" and her mother is "clever") help to rebalance the unequal attention traditionally paid to the respective genders.[32]

Another facet of "domestic economy" that was central to women's contribution to "Home"steading had to do with the more immediate needs of the family unit. It has long been recognized that the prairie Home was not simply decorative; that it in fact constituted an economic centre that could ultimately be the linchpin of a farming family's level of success. Often, cash was in scarce supply while waiting for the production of crops to become a viable income source, a reality that made a woman's presence on the homestead of vital importance. As Susan Armitage asserts in relation to the American "frontier," "household sustenance" was "work which contributed directly to the family economy by making cash expenditure unnecessary" (469). Nell Parsons illustrates the importance of "household sustenance" when she writes about the hardships wrought by successive crop failures and the "Next Year" philosophy that predominated in the face of such failures:

> Next year … homesteader's will-o-the-wisp! Prairie town businessmen understood farmers must pay bills after harvest. Crop failure worked hardship on them, too. And prairie wives tried frantically to keep grocery bills down by exchanging butter and eggs, when they had any. (127)

Similarly, in *Barefoot on the Prairie: Memories of Life on a Prairie Homestead* (1989), a memoir of homesteading near Bruce, Alberta, in the second decade of the twentieth century, Ferne Nelson describes a family trip to the "old-

32 For more examples of women's home craft production, see also Anderson 29; Johannson 107; and Raber 56, 64.

fashioned store" in town where her Mother's productions were given monetary value:

> Russell Kennedy would have totalled up the bill by now, deducting the value of several dozen eggs and several pounds of butter that Mama had brought in. If we had any cash, he would be paid; if not, the bill would be filed on a spike behind the counter. There were lots of bills on the spike to be paid in the fall when the crop came in. (12)

Difficult years for agriculture served to amplify the essential nature of women's domestic contributions, which sometimes could make the difference between survival and foreclosure of the family farm: as Ida Scharf Hopkins remembers in her memoir *To the Peace River Country and On* (1973) about her parents' farm near La Riviere, Manitoba, in the late 1920s,

> Farm crops were on the decline. Yields were down and so were prices. The only cash crops were from products raised on the farm, not from the grain. I know my mother looked after the family and ran the house with the money from the cream cheques, eggs and the turkey sale in the winter. (13)

As can be seen from the passages provided, prairie women contributed as "manufacturers in their own homes" (Sundberg 81) and could even be said to be "more centrally involved in providing subsistence for the farm family than men" (Faragher 50).[33]

We can glimpse women's centrality to the homesteading project in Arthur E. Copping's anecdote about the anonymous pair, Mr. and Mrs. C---, the former of whom "had caught the back-to-the-land fever about as badly as a

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33 Grove's *Settlers of the Marsh* illustrates this point when Ellen Amundsen tells Niels Lindstedt that "during the first few years it is really the woman that makes the living on a pioneer farm. She keeps chickens, cows and pigs. The man makes the land" (74).

man can catch it" and decided that "[he] must at once sell up [his] small possessions and start farming in Canada" (227). Unfortunately, Mr. C--- arrived in Canada with no knowledge of farming, but he also arrived with a "wide-ranging" ambition burning within him, so he "bought a solid square mile of farm land" (229). Predictably, the couple failed miserably, at least until their "grand transformation," "all due to Milly," who took it upon herself to learn butter-making, dairying, and poultry and hog management (230). After Mr. C---'s decision to follow his wife's lead and take up "learning," success was theirs: as Mrs. C--- states it, "'we are beginning to make such a lot of money! We had bumper crops last year; our wheat graded No. 1, and we took a first for oats. I suppose I ought not to say "we,"' she added in a merry parenthesis, 'though I did lend a hand with the stooking'" (231). It is interesting to note that, despite Mr. C---'s admission of his wife's central importance to their eventual success at the business of farming, Mrs. C--- documents that success at the level of agriculture only, and then devalues her own role in achieving that success by questioning her use of the pronoun "we." As this anecdote illustrates, "woman's work was dominated by the omnipresent awareness of the immediate usefulness of her product" (Faragher 64), but there was no publicly available discourse to express the value of that work. Meanwhile, "the flavor of male work was quantitative: acres, fields, bushels – all measured a man's work" (65), so clearly an accounting of how men's work measured up was more immediately recognizable to readers. Historically, the value of women's work in the larger context of the agricultural enterprise has seldom been tallied: the prairie woman's "economic contribution has been ignored, a reflection not of the reality of her work, but of the larger society's view of the role of the housewife as 'non-work' – that is housewives who are not paid do not produce commodities of value to the economy and are dependents of men" (Kohl, "Women's" 52). In fact, speaking of a "social landscape marked by a specific spacing of women and men," Kathleen Storrie notes the private/public dichotomy and some of the "other 'mapping' dichotomies usually intertwined with it," including those of "housework/work," which translates into the binary of "consumption/production" (2–3).

However, the reality was that prairie kitchens routinely functioned as production centres that eased the economic burden of a farm family's

consumption needs. One of the first consumption needs was a physical one, for food. An oft-noted food product manufactured by the settler woman was Home-baked bread, a literal product that served the immediate survival needs of the farm family unit, and sometimes the larger community, and therefore seems to pose a delightful confrontation with more abstract cultural notions of prairie agriculture transforming Canada into "The World's Bread Basket."[34] Not that homemade bread stayed entirely literal; indeed, in the cultural relegation of women to the domestic role, the ability to bake bread took on sometimes symbolic and even mythic proportions. There was even a contemporary verse that ran, "A man well fed/ On Home-made Bread/ Will be proud of his wife/ And love her" (qtd. in Rasmussen et al. 98). No matter what culinary delights the prairie woman produced at table, home-baked bread became a seeming icon of Home on the prairies. Although Marion Cran notes a prairie meal that is "fragrant with the steam of good coffee, the taste of clover honey and wild-strawberry jam, eggs so fresh that they are creamier than cream itself, golden bannocks and home-made bread," it is only the latter to which she ascribes, with emphasis, the valuation of being "the crown of every settler's table!" (133). A prairie man's homestead might well be his castle, but the kingdom, it would appear, gained its value from the presence of a prairie wife who could produce home-baked bread. Annora Brown writes about a woman's successful effort at breadmaking that there is "something so nearly sacred about the achievement, that the cook seems to be bathed in a special radiance as she performs the rite of lifting the fat, golden-crusted loaves from the oven" (151). In such descriptions, we see an almost "hagiographic presentation" (Langford, "First Generation" 1) of Prairie Woman as domestic goddess reinforced. We see this as well in some of the memoirs gathered here, as, for example, in Nell Parsons's *Upon a Sagebrush Harp*, when the author ironically notes that "to the homesteader, the word 'professional' had no meaning. He did everything for *him*self" (emphasis added), then goes

34 Taken from page 8 of a pamphlet titled *The granary of the British Empire: The western provinces of Canada: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia*. Calgary: Canadian Pacific Railway, Department of Natural Resources, 1914. (Peel #3998).

on to indicate how bread-making was a marker, like curtains, of adherence to domestic norms:

> Our distant town had no bakery, but a hard-pressed bachelor could buy bread at the Chinaman's restaurant. Papa had only contempt for baker's bread, and Mama would have scorned being caught short of bread. A housewife who ran out of bread was only slightly less shiftless than the one who could not take needle in hand to mend a garment, to retrim an old hat – or to fashion new garments from old. (30)

Although no direct cultural commentary is made here on the attitude to bread from the "Chinaman's restaurant," the suggestion that only the "hard-pressed bachelor" would buy bread from such a place certainly reinforces that not being such a bachelor was a desirable thing, as underscored by the equation of bread-making with evaluations of female character.

Later in Parsons's memoir, the author also indicates the importance of the discourse of bread-making (as well as domestic culture in general) to the transmission of knowledge as to how to perform the domestic role:

> One feature in the *Weekly Free Press*, which Mrs. Burnside kindly passed on to us when opportunity presented, was a Home Loving Hearts section. It was a section of letters from homesteaders' lonely wives across the land. Some contained recipes, others cherished poems or bits of philosophy from every province in Canada.
>
> Perpetual bread starter was one popular subject, along with ways to keep the week's bread from drying out. (84)

In the naming of such women's sections of the newspaper – "Home Loving Hearts" – there appears to be only a reinforcement of women's domestic role, but the actual function of such sections – to provide an ongoing dialogue with others about the details of domestic life – also provides a means of confrontation with the isolation wrought by the geography of agriculture, an aspect of western settlement that women could not control. The sharing of domestic

experiences/ideas also seems to me to be an acknowledgment that such skills as bread-making are not simply a matter of being female; they are not inherent to female biology. Rather, such skills are usually passed on from generation to generation, as seen in a humourous anecdote from Barry Broadfoot's *The Pioneer Years*. In this story, Mary Watson of Weyburn, Saskatchewan, tells of her inability to make bread, something which her husband said "a family needed" (200). Having written to a farm paper for help, Watson states that,

> Next morning there is a knock on the door and I look out and there's a Mrs. Ratigan on the stoop. I knew her. She was one of the coarse ones. Irish. A big woman and even though I didn't have much to do with her on our street I believed her to be capable.…
>
> When I opened the door she just barged in and said, "Mary Watson. Weyburn. Bread. I read it," and she sat down. Then she said, "Nobody ever learned to make bread out of a book. It takes a mother to teach her daughter. Where's your mother?" I said in Guildford in England and she said, "Fine. Leave her there. I'll be your mother this morning and we'll make bread." (201)

What I particularly like about this kind of presentation of the transmission of knowledge is that it effectively points out gender as a social construct. Women do not necessarily come ready-equipped to bake bread or perform any other domestic task, but rather they learn through trial, and even sometimes error, when society deems it appropriate for them to do so. In fact, stories abound in pioneer culture about male settlers who, out of sheer necessity, managed to become perfectly adequate, even esteemed, bread-makers in the absence of women.

Many of the memoirists gathered here allow us to engage as readers with the idea of gender as social construct. For example, for Katherine Magill, whose family moves in the mid-1940s to the *Back o' Baffuf* (1977) (or near Vermilion, Alberta) as part of the wave of returning WWII veterans, bread-making becomes an act that dominates her sense of herself as a modern Prairie Woman, although in her memoir she chooses to document her initial failure to succeed at this role with characteristic humility and good humour:

> There was the matter of the bread dough. Jim's mother was an excellent cook – a farm wife of many years and much efficiency. Her home-baked bread was a gourmet's delight, light and crisply crusted. This was one standard I would attempt to reach. My first batch of bread just wouldn't rise. Perhaps the yeast had been scalded. Perhaps it became chilled. The dough sat there, sullen and triumphant, a leaden blob.
>
> There could be only one reaction, some loud and lengthy teasing. The boys would join in, and Ron would add his infant glee to the uproar. It was a day of tender easily-bruised moods, fraught with numerous small irritations. This was one mistake I would bury, and make another batch of bread.
>
> I carted the lump out of the edge of the bush, hollowed out a suitable hole deposited the offending object deep, and covered it well. I even, rather cleverly, I thought, scuffled dry leaves over the spot so it might appear undisturbed.
>
> "Rest in Peace," I said with satisfaction, as I gave it a last pat. I made biscuits for supper, and later, loaves risen to a glorious height, I baked the second batch of bread. (14)

The next morning, Magill, who is feeling self-congratulatory, gets a performance review of sorts:

> …I poured myself a reward cup of coffee, and carried it outside. The air was like nectar, a warm fragrant nectar, with faint odors of earth and blossoms, tang of barnyard, rich loam, poplar smoke. From my perch on the back door step, I surveyed my private domain. There had been bonuses this spring. A family of Rocky Mountain bluebirds had moved into a poplar tree, occupying the vacant home of a woodpecker. These are a lovely bird. Unlike the Eastern bluebird, with its rosy breast these birds were truly blue, a clear and vivid azure above, fading to softer shades below. A crazy grouse drummed somewhere in a hidden glade, courting.

> I glanced around the perimeter of the houseyard. I must send to the experimental farm for some evergreens, I thought. They were fresh and pleasant additions to the poplars in many plantings. The grove was fine now, but in winter it added to the greyness of the days, and when winter winds blew, their grey trunks rattled like dry bones. Maybe some blue spruce there, I thought, there a Scotch pine, there --
>
> There where the Scotch pine was programmed, something had been added. A large tannish thing, like a mutant mushroom swelled. There were no rocks in the yard. The ice age had ground everything to silt. This could only be one thing.
>
> My guilty secret was no longer buried. The yeast hadn't been dead, just resting. Warmed by the good earth, it had truly risen.
>
> It became the most buried mistake of the year. I piled fresh dirt on it. Gathering to the challenge, all those yeast spores thrust it upward, to burst forth again. By noon I had decided this was one mistake too funny to conceal. The effect had dimmed a little, as the inevitable collapse came. When the rest of the family had seen it, we buried it again for the last time. (14–15)

This humorous and self-reflective anecdote ultimately contains a revealing lesson for the prairie memoirist who writes about her own experiences against a cultural background that privileges nostalgic narratives and silences "traces of the past that are less than exemplary" (Rukszto 17). What a well-constructed confrontational scene! Magill first makes clear that she is aware of "standards" of femininity in farm culture that need to be adhered to, then she acknowledges that domestic skills such as bread-making are not necessarily inherent to being female by presenting her readers with her initial failure to perform well. On the second try, when she does manage to achieve the "glorious heights" of appropriate femininity, she first toys with the image of herself as domestic goddess in control of her "private domain" (which simply must be read as an allusion to the continued dominance of the separate spheres ideology) and then illustrates the awful reality underpinning those heights as being persistently present and rupturing through the surface idealism.

While everyone was waxing rhapsodic about women who could produce a metaphoric golden loaf, many settler women found it both necessary and personally fulfilling to turn this domestic skill to literal economic advantage. For example, as Nell Parsons notes, "many of the newcomers who settled within a five-mile radius of us were bachelors. Almost at once, Mama had the opportunity to earn a little cash by baking bread for these men. They brought flour in one-hundred-pound sacks, and paid a fixed sum per sack for having the flour converted to loaves over the weeks" (55). Remuneration for this particular female skill becomes much more than mere "pin money," though, as Parsons later acknowledges that her mother's productive abilities in the Home equal greater productive ability on the "stead":

> We were on section thirty, with section twenty-nine east of us. In Canada, sections eleven and twenty-nine are set aside as "school sections" – that is, to provide funds for schools. The fact that section twenty-nine, a school section, adjoined our land, was a lucky circumstance for us. It could not be homesteaded. It was not likely to be sold soon. Therefore it provided good free grazing for our stock. But its real importance came from another detail. There was a lush coulee running the full mile across that section, and good redtop grew there.
>
> Such government land could be leased for a nominal sum. Our first winter the necessary fee was painstakingly saved out of Mama's bread-baking money. In due time the fee was mailed in and the lease came back. Happy day! Now Papa was assured of good hay and might have a surplus to sell. (91)

Mary Hiemstra's mother also turns her bread-making skill to economic advantage for her family by providing for others: as the author writes in *Gully Farm*,

> Now and then new settlers looking for land passed our house, and one day a man asked Mother to sell him some bread. "The children

> haven't had a thing but porridge for a week," he said. Mother gladly sold him a whole batch of bread, and that gave her an idea.
>
> We still had several sacks of flour stacked in the corner, and Mother was afraid they would spoil. Every time it rained water seeped through our sod roof, and though we set pans to catch the drip there was no telling when a new drip would start when we were not looking. But if the flour was made into bread and sold the danger would be over, and there would be a tidy profit to boot. Mother immediately baked a huge batch of bread. Sure enough a bannock-weary bachelor dropped by that afternoon to bring us some mail. Through the open door he eyed the bread standing brown and fragrant on the packing-box table. "Will you sell me a loaf or two?" he asked, licking his lips. Mother disposed of most of our flour that way. She could have sold it all and much more besides, but she had to keep enough to last until fall. (280)

Sally Pinder's decision seems to be merely practical; however, her entrepreneurial undertaking comes at a time when her husband is away "looking for work," looking for a way to provide for his family in the temporal gap between initial settlement and viable agricultural production. Here we see the truth in Bill Waiser's assertion that many farming families "faced the double challenge of bringing the land under cultivation and trying to survive in the meantime" (160). It was so often "in the meantime" that women's domestic productions preceded and provided for the continuance of the agricultural project.[35]

As seen with women's craft skills, cooking, too, often became aligned with social respectability; it was, very often, a scale on which to judge female value within the "civilizing" project of western settlement.[36] Specifically, "setting a

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35 For more examples of the importance of bread-making to prairie life, see also Campbell 35; Hewson 19, 148, 186; Holmes 61, 69–70; Keyes 31; McClung 230; Scott 37; Strange 222; and Thomson 23–24, 52.

36 Contemporary writer Emily Ferguson makes an interesting comparison of public versus private skills of individual achievement when she says, "up to date, I have been president of thirteen women's societies or clubs, but it required infinitely more boldness, more accurate calculation, greater finesse, and deeper insight to tackle the pie art" (*Janey* 32).

magnificent harvest-time table was part of the regional definition of womanliness: a farm wife who did not, observed the Prairie feminist Nellie McClung, was 'almost as low in the social scale as the woman who has not a yard of flannel in the house when the baby comes'" (Thompson, John Herd 82–83).[37] Just as the production of worthwhile (meaning well-graded) crops garnered the prairie farmer social esteem, so too did the settler woman's preceding act of setting a "harvest-time table" to enable that production have social repercussions beyond the confines of the family farm. As McClung remembers in *Clearing in the West*, culinary competition was felt right down to the gustatory details:

> There was considerable friendly rivalry in the matter of feeding the threshers and there were dark stories told of certain places where they got no raisins in their rice pudding and nothing but skim milk to eat with it, and where the pies were made of dried apples even though at that time we were able to get barrels of gravensteins from Nova Scotia and northern spies from Ontario. (368)

In *With the West in Her Eyes*, Kathleen Strange, not yet feeling fully adequate to playing the role of a prairie wife, remembers her first experience of intense social scrutiny:

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37 The meaning of "magnificence" as used here by McClung, of course, refers to the culinary delights presented, but Jessie Raber describes a humorous incident in which some "new neighbors," the Campbells, who were "right from Scotland," gain a "magnificent" reputation "during threshing," although not so much as a result of the food prepared and served:

> the men were rather amused, for Mrs. Campbell had the dinner table laid with beautiful table cloths, all linen, which hung clear to the floor and her best silver and dishes. Someone told her she didn't need to use her best. She said, "Why, I think men that work like these are of the best, so my best is none too good for them." That put the Campbells on the elite list of the neighborhood and they were liked by all. (142)

> One night Harry came in with the tidings: "The threshers will be on our place tomorrow morning. Have plenty of food!"
>
> A neighbour girl had come over to give me a hand and it was under her guidance that I had stocked up with the necessary abundance of food to cope with this anticipated visit. I was decidedly nervous, however, at the prospect of having to feed between twelve to fifteen hungry men three times a day, but I was also determined to go through with it as to the manner born, and to earn, if possible, compliments rather than complaints.
>
> "Yes, I'm ready," I said grimly. "Let 'em come!" (85–86)

It should be noted that in Strange's passage, as with the subject of bread-making earlier, the ability to cook for large gatherings of men is not a skill inherent to being female, as seen in her need to take "guidance" from a neighbour girl who clearly has already been schooled in the domestic arts. Once again, as with Magill's bread-making passage earlier, this kind of narrative humour seems to expose the gap between domestic ideals and individual realities, for Strange definitely gives the impression that she is going to be playing a part – she is, after all, "determined to go through with it as to the manner born" – and that the possibility exists that she might not succeed. In *Of Us and the Oxen* (1968), Sarah Ellen Roberts gives us more than the possibility of failure. In fact, in this memoir of homesteading near Stettler, Alberta, in the first decade of the twentieth century, the author writes fairly explicitly about her failure to adhere to any of the traditional functions of the settler woman. For Roberts, just the prospect of entering into harvest mealtime competitions is daunting enough to make her simply step out of the field, thrusting her incapability to the fore:

> The threshers came early in October. It was my first experience with them and I had been dreading it for days. In Alberta, as in Illinois, each housewife vies with the others in demonstrating her ability as a cook, and I was almost in a panic. I finally decided that I would give them plenty of good food, but would not compete with the other women around in a line of work in which I did not excel. (222)

It did not have to be harvest time for a woman's ability to cook (or inability) to affect her social standing. As Ferne Nelson suggests in *Barefoot on the Prairie*,

> poor cooks were known all over the community. Their lack of skill at the stove was reported by all the bachelors, whose errands to neighbouring farms invariably coincided with mealtime. Mama was a good cook, and we always had lots of these "old batches" dropping by for her fried chicken and country gravy, sopped up with the airiest baking powder biscuits ever. (104)

Nelson does not indicate how her mother felt about all of these "drop-in" customers, but it certainly appears that the daughter-author feels her mother's culinary abilities to be a point of pride. Sometimes seeming narrative compliance with finding pride in maintaining standards of respectability through cooking allows for a reading which is more subtly confrontational with the goals of "future plenty and success." For example, when Jessie Raber notes on page 117 of *Pioneering in Alberta* regarding Christmas of 1899, "with our new kitchen there was so much more room that Mother invited some of the bachelors over. A merry time was had. Plenty of everything to eat: turkey, chicken and pork, pies, fruit cake, cookies, rolls and good homemade bread, also candy and nuts," it is important for the reader to remember that on page 114 the author has told us that, as a result of a lack of ready cash, her father had found it necessary "to work in town for awhile" as a bookkeeper for a store. We are also told that on the farm "there wasn't a great deal of grain" (115), so that perhaps Mrs. Browne's lavish meal is meant as a material banner of her own productive accomplishments, and/or maybe even a cover for the family's continuing state of economic crisis. In any case, by giving us a more total story than that suggested by the well-laden table, Raber is clearly allowing her readers to read beyond cultural narratives of inevitable prosperity. There is certainly a sense of having been cheated palpable in Raber's later statement that "life went along as usual – Dad in town, and the rest of us running the farm" (120).

These passages by Nelson and Raber bring up another myth of prairie life. Considerable nostalgic attention in cultural reminiscences of homesteading

life is given to a special brand of "prairie hospitality" that featured the unannounced arrival of dinner guests, for whom the settler woman would, without complaint, provide culinary delights. I have to admit to a personal sense of mistrust regarding these stories, and a desire to know what the busy prairie woman *really* thought about the unexpected arrival of yet another mouth to feed, the need to peel yet another potato. In her examination of women who farmed in Alberta and Saskatchewan from 1880 to 1930, Nanci Langford alludes to this myth of prairie hospitality:

> The requirement to be the sole food producer and preparer, in combination with the reality that it was the women who stayed on the farm more than the men, inevitably created a new work role for farm women, as a host. The work involved in entertaining visitors, in many cases on a daily basis, was relentless, at times enormous, and often resented. ("First Generation" 60)

In most of the memoirs studied here, prairie hospitality is both mentioned and adhered to with good cheer. However, in Edith Hewson's *We Swept the Cornflakes Out the Door* (1980), a memoir of the author's mother Katie Cameron McDougall and the experience of homesteading in Saskatchewan in the first three decades of the twentieth century, one chapter begins in the following less than nostalgic manner:

> "Drat the luck! There's someone coming in the gate!" Kate put another plate on the table, and another kid shoved over on the bench. These complaints and the ensuing actions were a daily thing in her house. She rarely questioned the "rule of the plains" – "Feed all who come to your door at mealtime". This maxim demanded without saying it that a farm wife must give without question her fresh baked bread, her home-made pies and an open door hospitality, but required nothing from the recipient in return. There was no dearth of recipients at Kate's table. (176–77)

While she insists that her mother "rarely questioned" this "open door" policy of prairie living, nevertheless Hewson very strategically begins this scene with her mother's less than pleased voice and continues on to give a fairly critical reiteration of that policy. Further, Hewson goes on to imply that this policy is only to the benefit of men (and especially unmarried ones) and results in an increased workload for the prairie wife, who is essentially asked to play the wife and mother role on a grand scale:

> The prairies were a man's world. Men poured across the land by the trainload; labourers, harvesters and homesteaders. They came from the "old country" and after a lifetime of seeding and reaping the prairie still spoke with the their Newcastle-on-Tyne drawl, their Yorkshire twang, or their monosyllabic middle European accent. Young marriageable teachers were always well-courted, and lost little time after arrival before they were wooed and carried off by the lucky men who won them. But many men were never quite up to grabbing the pretty prizes, or convincing them that a shack on an undeveloped prairie farm was heaven on earth.
>
> To each farm family came these lonely ones who stopped as regularly as they had to pass by. The hunger in their eyes for human warmth was offset by the satisfied hunger after a meal at their neighbour's. Every Christmas, New Year's, Easter or Thanksgiving found one or more of these bachelors with their feet under the family table. They never left anything behind, like chocolates, perfume, or a gift for Kate; except if they stayed the night. Then often their unwelcome contributions had to be boiled and frozen out of the bedclothes, if Kate was lucky and caught them. (177)

A little bit later, Hewson shows the gap between her mother's surface adherence to the hospitality policy in terms of social niceties and the private reality of her own desire for freedom from the extra work:

> Kate treated them all with the same cordiality she used with her best friends, and demanded the children do the same or she would "know the reason why!" when they were gone.
>
> "I'm so tired of hired men, hired men, hired men! Just for once it would be nice to sit down to a meal with only the family around the table." Kate's wish was never to be granted. The hired man was as much a part of the prairie farm operation as the horses or machinery.

In *Porridge and Old Clothes*, Eileen Scott also writes critically on the topic of prairie hospitality when speaking of the experience and from the perspective of her grandmother Agnes (Agabella) Rutherford Thomson:

> It seemed to Agabella that she never got a rest, not even on the Sabbath, because hoards of friends and neighbours would descend upon her. They would even come for their annual vacations. She didn't have a washing machine at first and everything had to be scrubbed on the scrubbing board. True, some of her visitors would give her a hand but she carried the main load. No wonder she suffered from stomach ulcers. I suppose her cooking was just too good and people from near and far knew it. Even the peddlers stuck their feet under Agabella's table. (10)

In Marjorie Grace Johannson's memoir of homesteading near Elfros, Saskatchewan, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the author incorporates within *The Pink House on the Hill* (1986) actual entries from her mother's diary, some of which make clear the prairie woman's disaffection for impromptu visitors:

> Monday, August 7 –
>
>> "George started to work on the Government road today with his team and plough, $4.00 a day. I preserved my blueberries and a big basin of rhubarb. Mr. Rourke was here for dinner

> and I had to fly all afternoon to get the dishes washed (they were all dirty) and get the house kind of tidy. Rained about 5:30 and old Bellamy came in here. He stayed for tea, then he and George talked reciprocity till after nine. I was nearly batty, then he went home rain and all. It rained all night and the blame roof leaked all night." (30)

As with bread-making, cooking more generally also became a matter of female cultural heritage; an intimate link between generations of female family members who were often separated geographically by the persistently futuristic focus of a masculinist culture. For example, when Ida Hopkins and her husband left southern Manitoba in 1929 to homestead in the Peace River country, as she notes in her memoir *To the Peace River Country and On*, it was only at the final moment of departure that the author realized the magnitude of their undertaking in terms of the familial/cultural community to be left behind:

> Now the goodbyes. We hadn't anticipated how hard this would be. We suddenly realized that we would not be back for many years, and many of our friends would not be there. One final stop was to say goodbye to my ninety year old Grandmother. She walked around the truck with tears streaming down her face saying, "I wish I could come with you, I wish I could come with you". How we would have loved to have taken her. She went into the house and brought out her special cookie recipe, one that she had never shared with anyone and gave it to me. In her Irish Brouge she called them, "Ruzed Cakes". This is still one of my prized possessions. (17)

In lieu of her real presence, then, Hopkins's grandmother provides the young settler woman with a culinary heritage. As suggested by Anne Goldman, women sharing recipes both "provides an apt metaphor for the reproduction of culture from generation to generation" as well as "figure[s] a familial space within which self-articulation can begin to take place" (172). In this case,

Hopkins is enabled to journey to the Peace River country and start a new life, a new "self-articulation" beyond the depressed prairie inheritance of her own and her husband's family farms, precisely because she takes with her a tried and true culinary heritage.

For Judy Schultz, writing a memoir about the experiences of both her grandmother and mother homesteading near Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan, from the second decade of the twentieth century, it is inevitably necessary for her narrative to centre around female cooking. In *Mamie's Children: Three Generations of Prairie Women* (1997), the author notes that her grandmother Mamie once undertook an act that had positive personal significance for the author's own understanding of her maternal heritage:

> She had done the unthinkable for a woman of her day: She'd gone out to work, as a cook on the sprawling Metzger ranch, where two thousand head of cattle roamed the grassland and thirty-five hungry ranch hands pulled up to the table for five meals a day. Depending on the season, she'd feed a few more or a few less – less when they were out on cattle drives, more when everybody was in residence. Her cooking stories were part of my childhood mythology, for she and I both found her tales from a ranch kitchen far more entertaining than *Mother Goose*. *My, but those boys could tuck away the food. Land sakes, I was never finished – hot cakes and ham for early breakfast, steak and eggs for second breakfast, roast for dinner, cakes for afternoon, roast for supper, cakes before bed….* Between regular meals she baked a daily batch of bread and biscuits, made enough cakes and pies and cookies to stock a small bakery, and washed all the dishes by herself. (27–28)

After her grandmother's death, Schultz is able to maintain her connection with this "childhood mythology" through reference to an intimate record of female experience and knowledge, extending even beyond Schultz's own family:

> Mamie's Cash Book was full of recipes. The recipes were a legacy of other women, secrets of flavor and texture, these vital formulae

> that were passed from friend to friend, mother to daughter, one generation of women to another. For many of them, the daily business of cooking was far more than an unavoidable chore. It was part science, part art, possibly the most useful art of all, and there was considerable personal satisfaction in setting a good table and in growing, harvesting and storing what went on it.
>
> Mamie's Cash Book contained her recipe for her most memorable dish – chicken soup with fresh noodles. Years and years later in a kitchen in Bologna, Italy, I watched an Italian chef make noodles exactly the way Mamie had eventually taught me to make them back in Saskatchewan. The chef chattered away while she made a cone of flour on the breadboard, but it was Mamie's voice I heard, talking to my nine-year-old self.
>
> *Start with a good pile of flour*, she'd tell me. *Thump the middle with your elbow to make a hole, just like that volcano in your book. See? Now break in some eggs*. (92–93)

Here, in the use of the familiar agricultural words "grow," "harvest" and "store," we see Schultz begin her literary confrontation, her recuperation of domestic labouring that needs to be privileged alongside the narratives representing the masculine heroics of agricultural life. She represents domestic labouring that makes commitment to the larger project of land settlement possible, for "the kitchen was both heart and nerve center of the rural home, the room you entered cold and left warm, entered hungry and left well-fed, ready to take another run at the world outside" (94). Indeed, Schultz tips the descriptive scale in favour of prairie women's contributions:

> Men might run the farm that produced the grain and livestock – and when called upon, the women would work beside them – but the planting, growing, gathering, cooking and preserving of enormous gardens, the laying of the table, the baking and cooking and serving forth of the feast, and the cleaning up afterward were women's work. Simple things, but not easy.

> The rewards were tangible, and like gardening, cooking had a definite sensual quality. Most women of Mamie's day would have been scandalized if they been described as sensualists, yet nobody knew better than a farm woman the intense pleasure to be found in the smell of rising bread or the little flutter somewhere behind her ribs when the first lettuce made its appearance as a faint green line across the garden on a spring morning, or the deep satisfaction of putting the lid on the last of 120 sealers of wild plum jam. (93)

Unlike the yearly agricultural cycle of hope and, all too often, disappointment – a reality that created the "Next Year" philosophy described earlier – the female labour listed here by Schultz indicates at least the possibility of immediate personal satisfaction, of concrete results, in a world built largely on speculation. Pulling her reader's eyes "away from the horizon" and turning them "to the dirt under our feet," Schultz provides an intimately imaginative account of the settler woman's daily reality.[38]

Another important area of home production undertaken by women in order to control and provide for the consumption needs of the family, and thus avoid economic strain on the family purse, was in their "complete responsibility for all manufacture, care, and repair of family clothing" (Faragher 53). Sewing – as opposed to sowing – is foregrounded as a central factor in the farm economy. As Barbara Burman states, "some historians have regarded clothing as peripheral to historical enquiry, as too ephemeral or too everyday to warrant attention"; however, it is through the efforts of those academics intent on "the enlistment of previously neglected sources" that we can begin to "recover and clarify [home dressmaking's] historical significance" (Introduction 2). On an individual level, certainly for the women memoirists in this study, Burman is accurate in her suggestion that home dressmaking appears to have "special resonance and potency" in terms of "individual memory and life stories" (5).

38 For more examples of the importance of women's cooking to reminiscences of prairie life, see also Baldwin 66; Bannert 86–87; Clark passim; Ebbers 49–54; Hewson passim; Hopkins 10; McClung 107–8; Middleton 18; Moorhouse 18, 21, 29; Nash passim; Parsons 43, 116; Raber 110; Scott 59–60; Strange 128–29; and Thomson 72.

Specific items of Home-made clothing are personal locators of time and place in prairie reminiscences. On a social level, as with other of the domestic arts, "the making, repair and alteration of clothing in the home was a transformative activity crucial to keeping up appearances and to sustaining all the possibilities inherent in the notion of respectability" (11). For example, in *Crocus and Meadowlark Country*, Georgina Thomson remembers a mother who, with "slender resources" to work from, was forced to provide for the material needs of younger children by "making over," making new, the clothing of older members of the family: "Fortunately Mother was a clever dressmaker, and she would rip and make over the clothes of our older sisters for us, adding a touch of velvet or braid for trimming" (169). However, Burman notes that "we cannot assume that home dressmaking always brought pleasure in either its making or its wearing" and that "accounts of childhood are full of instances of the special discomfort which home dressmaking can cause" (Introduction 12). As Jessie Raber notes, the economics of home dressmaking often frustrated her attempts at being seen as an individual as opposed to simply identifying as one of many in the Raber family: "Mother was busy, trying to get some sewing done for us. Every fall, Mother bought a whole bolt of dress goods, so we girls all dressed alike. I was getting old enough to want something a little different, but didn't dare say anything, so took what I got" (110). In Nell Parsons's memoir, we can see the mixture of contempt for and admiration of a settler woman's skill at making clothes for her family members, especially when those clothes were derived from previously worn garments. Home dressmaking "included extensive work to repair and remake clothing for basic needs as part of a fluid clothing survival strategy" (Burman, "Made" 36). As Parsons indicates,

> Mama made all our clothes. We had a remote-control touch with the world of English fashion. The aunts in England sent us, monthly, a fashion magazine known as *Weldon's Ladies Journal.*
>
> It was a miracle magazine, filled with recipes, needlework patterns, homey women's articles. But its most exciting feature was the free pattern each issue contained. In autumn, the pattern was a winter coat or a jacket. The following issue probably contained

> patterns for skirt and blouse. Later would come underwear patterns The spring issues looked toward spring outfits and Easter.
>
> Summer issues brought patterns for challis and voile dresses, with an evening dress thrown in now and then, a dress to be made in rich moire, or even velvet; "This style being worn on the Continent this season," captions informed us. The patterns were always size thirty-six. For sending sixpence, one could obtain other sizes. But who had sixpence?
>
> Indeed, who had new goods from which to create the fashions? Everything we wore was a make-over or a hand-me-down from England or from Iowa.
>
> "We can claim all our garments are original models." Mama would smile in an irrepressible way she had. Original models! Weldon's magazine sometimes mentioned "original models."
>
> "Dressmaking from new material is no trick at all," Mama used to declare. "Anybody can do that. But making something attractive from old garments takes ingenuity and imagination." (116–17)[39]

Here we see the settler woman, rather than simply dreaming of a future in which the family economy would allow for something better (something, one might say, more "civilized," being what's worn "on the Continent"), eschewing

39 In her "Introduction" to an anthology devoted to *The Culture of Sewing*, Barbara Burman notes that

> a recent text on popular magazines dismissed a paper-pattern manufacturer's monthly home dressmaking magazine of the 1920s (Weldon's Ladies' Journal) as "mindless" because it prioritized patterns over editorial, despite the fact that it was a bestseller with a circulation figure of 442,631 a month. The purposes it served for all those readers are not considered. (3)

Certainly it could not have been considered that some of those subscribing readers would have forwarded the magazine on to family members in the colonies as a practical and psychological aide to women's domestic economy.

role models in preference for viewing the situation in a self-reflexively positive light.

In difficult years economically, dressmaking for older girls who wanted something more fashionable meant a considerable level of creativity, especially when using materials which carried the possibility of social embarrassment. For Annie Keyes going *Down Memory Trails*, empty flour sacks evoke remembrance of the poverty of her family's agricultural dreams: as she writes,

> During the first years when we lived down by the river, we really were hard up. No money to buy print for dresses. I wore some that were given to us. The flour at that time came in a light blue fine checked cotton print bags. So mother sewed a dress for me of the flour bags. It was such a light color and soiled so easily. Mother told me later that for six years she had not been able to buy new cloth for any bedding. She sewed all sheets and pillow cases and slips of the white flour bags. Of course that always meant a lot of work before we had them ready for any sewing. The name print on those bags were so hard to get out. (42)

In *We Swept the Cornflakes*, Edith Hewson notes that her parents' "dominant concerns for their family were first food, then shelter" and that "clothing came off a poor third" (166). Like so many of the prairie women represented in these memoirs, Katie Cameron McDougall also finds it necessary to use "empty flour bags" in order to clothe her fourteen children, an economic reality that, as Hewson remembers it, had social implications: ordered to hang flour bags on the clothesline to blow out the excess flour, the young author questions her mother, "Mama! Why don't you buy Five Roses flour, like the Potters do?" (169). Initially "stumped," Kate asks back, "Why don't you like Robin Hood flour?," to which Hewson responds, "It's not exactly the flour, Mama. Frances Potter always has roses on her pants. I just hate Robin Hood on mine!" She then goes on to provide a humorous image to end this story, one which effectively profanes "King Wheat" as icon of prairie culture: "Robin Hood's male proximity to one's backside, and the direction he pointed his bow and arrow were embarrassing."

In the early 1930s, Ida Hopkins found it necessary to economize by learning to spin wool and make clothing for her family. While working with a neighbour homesteader who "was an artisan and should never have been wasting his time trying to farm," Hopkins's husband makes his wife a spinning wheel to set her on her way to home wool production: as she writes in *To the Peace*, "the first efforts were pretty rough, but it was used for socks. I know I made all the mistakes that could be made; such as winding two strands of yarn together the wrong way, and then trying to figure out why it all kinked up instead of lying flat. After many trials and errors I finally ended up making passable yarn" (53). With this "passable yarn," she fills in some crucial gaps in the family wardrobe:

> First I knit socks, mitts, sweaters and vests. Then Bill's [her husband's] underwear was getting thinner and thinner and the weather seemed to be getting colder and colder. There was no money to buy new sets so something had to be done about it. I had knit him long socks, to his knees, and thought perhaps I would knit a long sweater. This seemed a bit silly. Why not join them! I had used the softest wool we had; and spun quite fine wool. Now I cut up the old suit on the seams and laid it flat on the floor. I started at the ankle plaining and pearling in the regular way to form the leg cuff. Then as the leg got bigger I just added on more stitches, kept laying it on the pattern as I went along and measuring so it would not be too sloppy or small. In about three weeks I had knit a darn good pair of "Long Johns". With pure wool mitts, socks, and now underwear, he could now stand almost any amount of cold. They were not as bulky as commercial made underwear. Altogether I knit four suits. (53–54)

Noting that she "did not knit [these suits] for anyone else," nevertheless Hopkins advises that her homemade wool and knit products became a source of extra income, for she "made socks and mitts for the unmarried men" (54). As with women and bread-making, female labour within the domestic sphere so often underscores the larger agricultural project. Like Hopkins, Georgina

Thomson documents in *Crocus and Meadowlark Country* that home clothing manufacture sometimes exceeded domestic boundaries and became an economic survival tactic when the dream of "future plenty and success" had died. Thomson provides us with the image of Mrs. Linton, who "was very skilled with her needle," so much so that "when her husband Ebenezer or Eben, as she preferred to call him, died in his prime and left her four children to support, she started a sewing class for young ladies, teaching them the many beautiful embroidery stitches which she did so expertly herself" (106). Thus, domestic skills were not only a woman's key to survival in "Next Year Country," but also an essential insurance policy when next year failed to arrive.[40]

By thus turning our focus from the relatively undisturbed landscape of traditional narratives of western settlement in order to sift through prairie memoirs written by white, English-speaking women in search of the details, or "the slight events" (Jeffrey 8), of everyday life, we see that the "Home" gains equal ground with an otherwise "stead"-centred project. Faced with a vast and often sparsely populated landscape, such women (re)turned to the domestic routine of the Home not only as a retreat to the safety of clearly defined gender roles, but also as a source of strength and self-knowledge – a personal re-grounding during a time of flux – that would help the individual woman face the challenges about to come her way. In the performance of traditional domestic duties, as well as in the meeting of domestic challenges unique to the prairie environment, the prairie woman and her Home ultimately became the linchpin of a farm family's survival.

Although Gerald Friesen suggests that "the work week of farm women varied so much that normal or typical routines did not exist for them" (*The Canadian* 307), in fact, judging from the memoirs gathered here, a prairie woman's life was a series of cyclical markers: times of day, days of the week, seasons and years, all of which were constant reminders of her investment in her family's daily survival. For women settlers the homesteading experience was punctuated by the (seemingly) trivial and routine activities of everyday

40 For more examples of the economics of women's home clothing productions, see also Baldwin 221–22; McClung 96, 111; Parsons 66; Raber 50; Schroeder 60, 88; Schultz 38, 101–2; and Scott 9–10, 43–44.

life rather than the (supposedly) large-scale heroics of agricultural pursuits; indeed, such activities provided an essential buffer zone for all members of the family unit against the vagaries of an unstable economic enterprise. As Davidoff et al. suggest, "the essence of domesticity in the daily round, the weekly and seasonal rituals within the home, emphasized the cyclical and hence timeless quality of family life in opposition to the sharp disjunctive growth and collapse of commerce and industry" (156). Unfortunately the very words "trivial" and "routine" may suggest experiences which do not merit scholarly attention, but given "the rise of a feminist scholarship that considers the study of women vital rather than trivial" (Kimball 2), we are now able to recover the domestic realities of prairie life as a means to re-vision traditional settlement narratives, and sometimes even to confront ideals of the Prairie Woman herself.