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In Search of a Useful Life: Irene Marryat Parlby, 1868 - 1965

by

Catherine Anne Cavanaugh 

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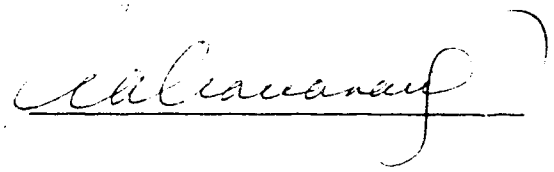

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *In Search of a Useful Life: Irene Marryat Parlby, 1868-1965* submitted by Catherine Anne Cavanaugh in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

"In Search Of A Useful Life" corrects the vague and often misinformed portrayal of Irene Marryat Parlby in the historiography of the agrarian reform movement in Western Canada during the inter-war years. It adds fresh insight into prairie women's immigration and settlement experience while illuminating important relationships within the farmers' campaigns for political, economic and social change. Taking as its central organizing theme Parlby's declaration that in Canada she learned that women could be important and useful, it shows that in her own search for a useful life Parlby was multiply and simultaneously bound and free by race, class and gender.

The daughter of a well-to-do British family, Parlby was born in London on 9 January 1869 and grew up in Victorian England and in British India. She belonged to a generation of British women caught in between two worlds: the unreformed world of 'separate spheres' and the reforming world that created a widening sphere for Britain's 'redundant' upper- and middle-class women. Although Parlby did not benefit from the new educational and employment opportunities that opened to women at the end of the nineteenth century she rebelled against the narrow confines of genteel femininity and chose a life in the supposed wide open society of the Canadian Northwest.

Canada was not all that she imagined it to be but it did provide a space in which Parlby was able to alter her view of herself as a woman and a person. She arrived in the Northwest in the spring of 1896, met and married a young Englishman, Walter Parlby, with whom she had a son and operated a mid-size ranch in central Alberta for about thirty years. In her middle years Parlby's search for a useful life led her into the agrarian reform movement, first as President of the newly formed United Farm Women of Alberta and later as Minister without Portfolio in the United Farmers Government. She served as the 'Woman's Minister' in three successive administrations from 1921 until her retirement in 1934, but "In Search Of A Useful Life" shows that Parlby's ministry had little chance of succeeding as an effective vehicle for change. As Minister without Portfolio she had no department, no budget, and no power or authority to determine government policy or programmes. She was expected to represent women in cabinet but as one woman among seven men she faced an uphill battle.

"In Search Of A Useful Life" illuminates the complexity of the constructions of gender and power at a formative time in Canadian history and shows how one woman negotiated the issue of gender to indeed make for herself a useful life.

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The thing we are really good at as a species is usefulness. If we paid more attention to this biological attribute, we'd get a satisfaction that cannot be attained from goods or knowledge.

Lewis Thomas on the art of living
The Globe and Mail, 11 December 1993

Introduction

Irene Marryat Parlby is little known outside of her home province. Even in Alberta she is most likely to be remembered as one of the 'Famous Five' women associated with the 'Persons Case,' which culminated in 1929 in the recognition of women as persons under the British North America Act and therefore eligible for appointment to the Canadian Senate. However, as Parlby herself pointed out she played a minor role in the case as one of the co-appellants to the action Emily Murphy initiated and pursued, with Canadian government assistance, to the highest court in the British Empire.

I first encountered Parlby when I was investigating the Alberta campaign for 'homestead' dower (the right of the married woman to a portion of the family's assets). With Parlby as President, the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) played a crucial role in the struggle for provincial dower legislation introduced in 1917. They also pushed the campaign further to challenge traditional family relationships. Acting on behalf of the UFWA, Parlby who was then Minister without Portfolio in the Farmers' government introduced a Community of Property Bill in the mid-1920s. Had it been enacted, the legislation would have recognized the economic value of women's domestic labour by establishing their equal rights to property accumulated after marriage. This was a radical idea at the time. It took another fifty-four years before Alberta legislators did what organized farm women had asked them to do in 1925.[1]

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[1]Catherine Anne Cavanaugh, "The Women's Movement in Alberta as seen through the Campaign for dower rights 1909-1928" (MA thesis, University of Alberta, 1986).

A British gentlewoman turned prairie rancher and Alberta legislator, Parlby seemed an unlikely person to head the farm women's organization and represent them in government. Indeed, in recent years she has been dismissed as a privileged, aristocratic English woman, a symbol of Anglo-Canadian Imperialism, whose own life was far removed from the day to day experiences of the majority of Alberta pioneers.[2] This image is graphically illustrated in J.F. Lymburn's foreword to Barbara Villy Cormack's biography of Parlby, Perennials and Politics. A former Attorney General for Alberta, and colleague of Parlby's in the Alberta Legislature, Lymburn describes Parlby as one of a "select band of pioneers." He goes on to say that

> She came [to Alberta] with exceptional qualities of heart, mind and courage [bringing a spirit of adventure with her when she left the] gracious living of her native country to take her place in the struggles of the West. Here she worked to make a home and bring the wilderness into subjection, at the same time preserving the worthwhile values of life and living.[3]

The contradiction between Parlby's genteel image and her political activism sparked my curiosity and led to this biography.

Biography is seen as problematic by both historians and feminists. Because biography focuses on an individual life, to historians it appears to be in opposition to history or, at best, only "a minor part of history."[4] Biography usually emphasizes the importance of a singular individual in changing the course of history. As yet, no Canadian woman has had that much power. However, much of the biography of women in Canada does fall within a variant of the tradition of 'great men in history.' Its purpose is to

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[2]See for example Emma Curtin, "Two British Gentlewomen," Alberta History 38, 4 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 10-19.

[3]Barbara Villy Cormack, Perennials and Politics, (Sherwood Park, Alberta: Villy Cormack, c.1968), p. 5.

[4]James L. Clifford, From Puzzles to Portraits, Problems of a Literary Biographer (Chapel Hill, 1970), p. vii. On biography see also James L. Clifford, ed., Biography as an Art, (London: Oxford University Press, 1962. R. Craig Brown, "Biography in Canadian History," Presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association, June 1980, CHA Historical Papers/Communications historiques , pp. 1-8. John A. Garraty, The Nature of Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knoft, 1957); Leon Edel, Writing Lives Prinicpa Biographica (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984).

valorize the individual lives of successful, elite women.[5] In the main, biography has found little purchase in contemporary women's history which began as part of the revisionist reaction to a tradition that privileged individuals over the majority. As Susan Mann Trofimenkoff points out in her essay on feminist biography, "to feminists biography appears to be a somewhat old fashioned and probably wrong-headed acceptance of male notions of importance."[6] Certainly few people seem less appealing to modern sensibilities than does a privileged Victorian gentlewoman. Neither does Parlby fit easily into the space Trofimenkoff claims for women's biography as important in shedding light on other women about whom little can be known. Trofimenkoff's claim that a biography of a woman is more illustrative of women's situation generally than is a biography of a man illustrative of men's situation does not appear to fit Irene Marryat Parlby.[7]

When Patricia Rooke and R.L. Schnell expanded on Trofimekoff's useful observations on women's biography, they offered another "simpler justification" for making a woman's life the subject of history. Rooke and Schell write that

> Women, whether exceptional or not, have been relegated to historical obscurity. We know little enough about individual women, even the female worthies . . . such women have a legitimate existence, one worthy of study, alongside black women, prostitutes, working class women, and lesbians. . . . until we have an abundant literature base, we cannot afford to exclude any female historical actor from it. This is not, however to lack disciplinary discernment and merely write about women 'just because they did anything at all.' Nevertheless, it is only through studies of individual women

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[5]See for example, Jean Bannerman, Leading Ladies in Canada (Belleville, Ontario; Mika Publishing, 1977) and Grant McEwan, And Mighty Women Too (Saskatoon, Sask.: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1975).

[6]Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "Feminist Biography," Atlantis 10, 2 (Spring, 1985), pp. 1. On women's biography see also Bell Gale Chevigny, "Daughters Writing Toward a Theroy of Women's Biography," Feminist Studies 9,1 (1993), pp. 79-102.

[7]Among the biographies that served as models for this study are Robert Booth Fowler, Carrie Catt Feminist Politician, (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1986), Mary Hill, Charlotte Perkins Gilman (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.), and Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catherine Beecher A Study In American Domesticity (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1973).

> [that] we can understand the life dynamics of women analysed in the aggregate.[8]

As part of the project to 'understand the life dynamics of women,' a biography of Irene Marryat Parlby is interesting simply for the period in which she lived. Born in England in 1868, a year after Confederation, she died in Canada in 1965, just three years before Pierre Elliott Trudeau took office as this country's fifteenth Prime Minister. More importantly for this study she was part of the last and largest migration of white settlers onto the plains of Western Canada. Raised in Victorian England and in India, Parlby belonged to a generation of English men and women who settled British colonies around the world. Yet, as this biography shows she cannot be seen in the unambiguous role of Imperial daughter. Neither does she conform to a simple idea of class. Indeed, she came to Canada and remained here because the West seemed to offer an alternative to the restrictions imposed on her as the daughter of a middle-class Victorian family. In Canada she met and married an English man, Walter Parlby. Together they had a son and operated a mid-size ranch in central Alberta for about thirty years. In her middle years Parlby joined the agrarian reform movement, serving first as President of the UFWA (1916-1920) and then as a cabinet minister in the Farmers' government (1921-1935). Since so few women assumed a public role in this period her biography provides a unique opportunity to examine both the private and public dimension of settlement from the perspective of a woman's life.

This study takes its central organizing theme from Parlby's own assertion that in Canada she found that women were 'useful and important.' Rather than highlight representativeness, it attempts to illuminate 'the life dynamics' that framed Parlby's search for a useful life. If, as Carolyn Heilbrun has argued, we write our individual lives then Parlby substantially 'rewrote' her life in response to the promise of the 'Last Best West.'[9] However, the Canadian West was not all that she imagined it to be. In the

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[8]Patricia T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, "The Making of a Feminist Biography: Relections on a Miniature Passion," Atlantis 15, 1 (Fall 1989), p. 61.

[9]Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Writing A Woman's Life (New York: Ballantine, 1988).

supposed wide open society of turn-of-the-century Alberta the possibilities for women were limited; even for a privileged English woman.

This study would not have been possible only a few years ago. It relies heavily on the current lively and fruitful national and international debates in women's history. Specifically, it draws from recent works that re-evaluate the notion of gender as fixed and immutable binary opposites.[10] Joy Parr summarizes this debate in the introduction to her award winning book, The Gender of Breadwinners, pointing out that

> We come from a long tradition in the west which finds meaning by specifying difference, and clarity by concentrating and amplifying presence and absence. We subordinate continuity and diversity so as to feature our world as a series of fixed oppositions, depending upon the differences between each part of each pair as our way to know the other. Thus . . . 'the epistemological term *woman*' is seen to 'guarantee men's identity only if difference' is 'fixed - only if, that is, the binary opposition between the sexes' is made 'more important than any other kinds of difference.' But fixed oppositions are established contrasts, which distil diversity to dualism rather than inherent antitheses. By the urgency with which we seek our binary oppositions, so as to know private by what is not public, class by what is not gender, manliness by what is not womanliness, we lose sight of the 'the multiple determinants' that constitute any individual's social position and access to power and also of the ways in which social identities are simultaneously formed from a multiplicity of elements. [11]

For women's history it is not enough to restore women to their rightful place in the past, although that is important work. A useful women's history will contribute to our understanding of the shifting meanings of gender, both female and male, as well as the social processes by which that meaning is made but also contested in particular spatial and temporal settings. There is

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[10] See in particular Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988); Denis Riley, "Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988); Joan Wallach Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). For a critical reflection on Riley and Scott see Mariana Valverde, "Poststructuralist Gender Historians: Are We Those Names," Labour/Le Travail, 25 (Spring 1990), pp. 227-236.

[11] Joy Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 9.

nothing natural or universal about gender, nor is a woman ever a 'woman' only: she is always fully human with all the diversity that implies.

A biography of a woman in Western Canada at the turn-of-the century offers a historically unique opportunity to examine women's past experiences. The frontier is heir to the traditions of its home cultures so we need to know something of the society Parlby came from. This is the subject of chapter one which deals with her early years in Victorian England and in British India. At the same time settlers create new social forms typically under dramatic even harsh conditions. The frontier presents opportunities and imposes constraints; often simultaneously. Settlement can lead to social and cultural contests that have long since passed from the scene in older, more settled areas or stimulate new ones. Most importantly it provides the possibility of close examination of the formal and informal processes of social formation from the initial stages of a particular community's development.[12] Thus, the remainder of this study examines Parlby's life in the context of Western settlement and community building. Her own memory that the West changed the way she thought about herself as a woman and a person is explored in the context of her new environment.

Chapter two deals with Parlby's home and family life in the Buffalo Lake district of central Alberta. She arrived in the Northwest in 1896. At the time there were only a few white settlers scattered throughout the area. By 1910 the district had been transformed from a rough frontier to a thriving agricultural community of Anglo-Canadian and American settlers. This chapter explores the links between these developments and Parlby's leadership in the farm movement.

The themes introduced in the first two chapters are expanded in chapter three which examines Parlby's work organizing rural women and her views on female authority in the public sphere. Peggy Pascoe's study of Victorian missionary women in the American West was particularly useful

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[12]On the nature of the frontier I am indebted to Paul Voisey's introduction to his study of Vulcan, The Making of a Prairie Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). Although Voisey is concerned with a single community I have interpreted his comments as applying to the West generally.

in framing the discussion of agrarian women's political activism during the early decades of this century. This section borrows liberally from Pascoe's arguments about women's "search for female morai authority in the American West, 1874-1939," but takes the concept further to explore women active in 'high politics.' Pascoe's insights into the nature of contested authority, and the strengths and weaknesses of "using gender difference to strengthen women's voices in society" were particularly helpful.[13]

Chapter four focuses on Parlby's election as member of the Legislature of Alberta for Lacombe and her career as the 'Woman's Minister' in the UFA government from 1921 to 1935. The question of the Farmer's position on issues of particular concern to women and children is especially relevant because the UFA took a leadership role on social reform. They were among the first all-male organization to support female suffrage and they were one of the few male-dominated political organizations to encourage an active female membership within their ranks.

In order to place Parlby's public career in context chapter five compares her experience with that of Violet McNaughton, agrarian activist and journalist, and Nellie McClung, suffragist, temperance leader, writer and member of the Alberta Legislature (1921-1926). Despite their very different social backgrounds, all three women worked to improve the material conditions of women in Western Canada and to elevate women's status. As politicians they sought to overcome the split between domestic life and public life and to make public institutions accountable to women and children at home.[14]

This study concludes with a brief examination of Parlby's accommodation to her new environment. Chapter six shows that despite her family and class links to Empire building Parlby came to see herself primarily as a Western Canadian. Her settlement experience and fourteen

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[13]Peggy Pascoe, Relations of Rescue (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). I owe a special thank you to Jeremy Mouat for pointing Pascoe's work out to me.

[14]On the private purposes of women's public campaigns in late nineteenth and early twentieth century United States see Delores Hayden, The Grand Domestic Revolution (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981).

years in public service gave Parlby a broader social vision than the one she had learned while growing up in England.

Irene Parlby enjoyed a long and prominent career in public life but the evidence of that is both scant and scattered. Alberta did not begin publishing a record of debates in the Legislature until 1961 and there is no archival material relating to her ministry. Indeed, among the provincial government enquiries listed in the public record there is no mention of the investigation into married women's property rights that Parlby chaired from 1925 until 1928 when she was Minister without Portfolio. Shortly after she retired from office in 19[illegible] by herself destroyed most of her personal papers . Disatisfied with public life she "made a bonfire of all my papers and scrapbooks."[15] Fortunately, she did keep most of her speeches, published articles and a number of letters. She also corresponded with Violet McNaughton from 1916 until the 1960s with the exception of a period of time in the 1930s and 40s. As head of farm women's organizations in their respective provinces they developed a close friendship and Parlby often confided in McNaughton so that her letters are valuable as a record of her activities but also for understanding her motives and private opinions. By weaving together the information that does exist with her own accounts a richer rendering of her public career is possible.

In writing this biography two previous attempts were also useful. Clare Mary McKinlay's 1953 Master's thesis focuses on Parlby's public life. While McKinlay tends to describe rather than analyze this period of Parlby's life her study has the advantage of drawing upon first hand accounts of the people who knew and worked with Parlby at the time.[16] Barbara Villy Cormack's book was essential both for Parlby's public and private life. Because Villy Cormack was writing about a close friend, her biography offers personal insights but it also has the disadvantage of friendship. Villy Cormack idealizes Parlby as a successful person and is primarily concerned with explaining her path to success rather than critically

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[15]Parlby letter to McNaughton, July 1952, SAB, McNaughton's personal papers, A1 D.54 (2).

[16]Clare Mary McKinlay, "The Honorable Irene Parlby" (MA thesis, University of Alberta, 1953).

analyzing, much less probing, her life and work. Where the details of Parlby's early life conflict with Villy Cormack's account I have relied on the diaries of Charles Marryat, Parlby's paternal grandfather, who recorded the highlights in the lives of members of his family.

Parlby's personal papers are stored at her home outside of Alix, Alberta. As a result this biography would not have been possible without the co-operation of her family. Her daughter-in-law Beatrice Buckley Parlby was especially helpful in providing generous access to Irene Parlby's papers but also in welcoming me into her home and spending long hours recounting her memories of their family life. Parlby's niece, Eve Keats, was living at the Parlby home when I last visited Alix in the summer of 1993. Like other members of her family Keats was a gracious host and generous in sharing her family memories. I am also grateful to Parlby's grandson Gerald and his wife Jean for their help and encouragement. The affection and respect of her family have been crucial to the preservation of the record that does exist of Parlby's life and work.

Parlby never kept a diary, or at least none exists now. She did begin to write her autobiography several times, however, and these were another important source in writing this biography. Autobiography presents particular challenges to the biographer since it reflects selective memory and the record of events is usually cast with the reader in mind. This was not the serious problem it might have been had I relied on Parlby for an accurate rendering of events. In attempting to understand her own search for a useful life I was interested in her memory of events; her feelings about them and how she reacted. Her autobiographies are particularly striking for their passivity. When writing about her life Parlby rarely sees herself as active or influencing events. As it unfolds in the telling her life just seems to happen. Even when she writes about her experience as a pioneer she slips from the story to be replaced by 'the men.' Jill Kerr Conway found a similar pattern in her work on Progressive women's autobiography and offers the very useful insight that the problem for "white women writers, social reformers, political leaders, athletes and foreign adventurers" who wrote about their activities was that "[t]here were no conventions setting them outside bourgeois norms. Most, needing an appreciative audience for their

causes to prosper, had to present themselves as the embodiments of romantic femininity, women to whom things happened rather than people who shaped events." As a result,

> The narratives they wrote cultivate the image of the romantic female, nurturant, peace loving, and swayed only by positive emotion, rather then the driven, creative, high achievers we see when we really study their behaviour. By presenting themselves in terms consistent with romantic imagery they created their own myth about female achievement in America. In their stories achievement comes from the intersection of emotionally prepared women with events and causes, to which they respond but which they do not shape. Their stories are about conversion experiences, about being swept along by events as the romantic heroine is swept off her feet by her lover, about being carried by events toward moments of intuitive insight and emotional truth.[17]

This sense of being carried by events is typical of Parlby's accounts of her own life which she often described by referring to Tennyson's "arch" of experience.[18] Life seemed to her an accumulation of experience which "leaves its mark upon us and leads on to yet other experiences, but the horizon is never reached before life's book is closed."[19] Parlby saw herself as most passive when she entered political life. In public life Parlby depended upon the support of men but as a woman she represented a direct challenge to male authority. She reconciles this dichotomy by minimizing her own role in breaching middle-class convention by seeing herself as outside of the events that led to her election. On her entry into public life she wrote, "however selfishly one may love the peaceful security of home; however remote one may feel from the world, it may happen as it did to me,

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[17]Jill Kerr Conway, introduction to Written by Herself (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. x-xi. On women's autobiography see also Sheri Benstock, ed., The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Auto-biographical Writings. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Helen M. Buss, "The Dear Domestic Circle:' Frameworks for the Literary Study of Women's Personal Narratives in Archival Collections," Studies in Canadian Literature, 14, 1 (1989), pp. 1-17; Susan Bunkers, "What Women Were (Not) Saying in the Late 1800s," James Olney, ed., Studies in Autobiograpy.(New York and Oxford: Oxford Univserity Press, 1988), pp. 190-210.

[18]"I am a part of all that I have met/ Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'/ Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades/ For ever and for ever when I move." Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses," Victorian Poetry and Poetics, Walter E. Houghton and G. Robert Stange, ed., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), pp. 31-33.

[19]Parlby, "My Experiences," Parlby's personal papers.

that 'some fell clutch of circumstance' will reach out and drag one, willy-nilly, into a new and strange life and work." Although she dedicated nineteen years of her life to public service, often pushing herself to physical exhaustion she does not see herself as powerful either in shaping her own life or influencing events. "Some people are born with a wonderfully adventurous spirit," she wrote, they "seem to plan and carve out their own paths through life with a definite goal to achieve. Others, like myself, seem to drift along, taking things as they come but able to say towards the end of life 'Much have I seen and known, cities of men and manners, climates, councils, and governments,' having so many experiences given me without the asking or any particular effort."[20] Parlby would never have described this paradox as a problem of gender but the way in which her society made meaning of gender in constructing relationships of power dictated the terms of her search for a useful life. Her experience is not typical of all women but it is illustrative of many women's circumstances.

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[20]Ibid.

Chapter One

The woman in question: growing up in Victorian England and in India

Born 9 January 1868 in London, England, Mary Irene Marryat Parlby belonged to a generation of middle-class Victorian English women caught between two worlds: the old unreformed world of 'separate spheres' for men and women and the new reformed world of a 'widening sphere' for the daughters of the middle classes. The eldest of eight children, she grew up within a closely knit family circle in rural England and in British India.[1] Her father, Ernest Lindsay Marryat, was a career officer in the Royal Engineers employed in railroad construction in India's northern Punjab district. In 1881 he retired from the colonial service with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel to take a position as manager of the Bengal and North-West Railroad, with headquarters in London. Irene Parlby's mother, Elizabeth Lynch Marryat, was also the daughter of a military man, Major General Patrick Lynch of Ballinrobe, County Mayo, Ireland who was Ernest's commanding officer in India. Irene's parent's had met and married at Assagher in 1866. This was Elizabeth's second marriage. Her first husband, Lieutenant Maxwell Graham, had died, leaving her with a young daughter Louisa Charlotte.[2]

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[1]Much of the details of Parlby's early years are taken from Cormack, Perennials And Politics , Parlby's autobiographical notes "My Experiences" (c. 1953) and "Rambling Memories" (c. 1963) and Charles Marryat's diary. The notes and diary are in Parlby's personal papers.

[2]Charles Marryat's diary, 15 February 1866.

In 1867 Ernest Marryat was on leave in England with Elizabeth and Charlotte. During their stay the Marryats lived with Ernest's family at their fashionable London townhouse at 75 Eccleston Square where Irene was born. Following her birth they moved into temporary "loggings" of their own. Ernest, Elizabeth and Charlotte had become seriously ill in November 1867 and had "remained so all winter."[3] Charlotte never recovered. After suffering much pain she died at age four in June 1878, six months after Irene's birth. Before returning to India to resume his commission,[4] Ernest Marryat took his wife and surviving infant daughter to live at Partry, Elizabeth's uncle's estate in County Mayo, Ireland.[5] Mother and daughter remained at Partry throughout the summer of 1868. On 24 October Elizabeth and nine-month-old Irene departed England for India where they joined Ernest Marryat in Rawalpindi, a large military station in the northern Punjab. Irene lived in India for six of the first sixteen years of her life; the remaining ten years were spent in England.

When Ernest Marryat joined the British army in India in 1861 he was following in a long line of Marryats who served British colonial interests overseas. Although the Marryats claimed an ancient lineage dating from William the Conqueror[6] without landed wealth the family's fortunes relied heavily on the individual skill and wit of its sons and daughters.[7] By the early nineteenth century Ernest Marryat's branch of the family had established itself in merchant banking with trade interests in the British West Indies. His father, Charles Marryat, entered the family's banking business, Marryat, Kaye, Price and Company, where he was partner until the bank failed in 1866, two years before Irene was born.[8]

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[3]Irene Parlby was born at her paternal grandfather's home at 4:00 in the morning. According to Charles Marryat's diary, "Lizzie and Ernest" and their two children "went into loggings at 70 Warwick Street" in February. They returned to the Eccletson Square house briefly in June following Charlotte's death.

[4]According to Charles Marryat's diary, Ernest left England on 15 July.

[5]In his diary Charles Marryat describes Partry as "the property of Captain Lynch, Lizzie's uncle."

[6]Villy Cormack, p. 10.

[7]According to family lore , Thomas de Marryat was granted a knighthood for having danced in a masque ball before Queen Elizabeth in 1564. See Villy Cormack, p. 11.

[8]Charles Marryat 's diary.

Earlier in the century Ernest's uncle, Joseph Marryat (1757-1824), had headed the bank and sat in the British House of Commons as the Independent Member for Horsham from 1808 to 1810 and for Sandwich from 1812 to 1824.[9] Joseph's wife, Charlotte von Geyer, was an American of German descent. As a British loyalist during the American War of Independence she is reputed to have narrowly escaped Yankee rebels by fleeing through a window. Of Joseph and Charlotte's ten surviving children, Captain Frederick Marryat (1792-1848) is the most well known.[10] He was a controversial personality and writer of popular fiction which drew heavily on his career in the Royal Navy and his travels in North America.[11] One of his books for children was The Settlers in Canada (1844), a highly romantic tale of the Campbell family and their efforts to establish a farm in Upper Canada in the 1790s. Frederick's youngest daughter, Florence Marryat (1838-1899), also enjoyed literary success on both sides of the Atlantic.[12] In addition to her many novels she published a two-volume biography of her father in 1872 and acted in her own drama, Her World, produced in London in 1881. Florence Marryat's early works included 'Gup': Sketches of Indian Life and Character (1868), an account of her travels in India with her second husband, T. Ross Church, a colonel in the Madras Staff Corps.

Their imperial connections provided the Marryat family's sons and daughters with professional and economic opportunities which took them to colonies around the world. In addition to her father and maternal grandfather who both served in India, one of Irene Parlby's uncles was an ordained minister in the Anglican Church, serving for many years as Dean

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[9]Dictionary of Literary Biography Vol 21, Ira B. Nadel & William E. Fredeman, eds. (Detroit: Bruccoli Clark, 1983), pp. 222-27.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Marryat's most popular adult novels were Peter Simple (1833-34) and Mr. Midshipman Easy (1836).

[12]British Women Writers, Janet Todd, ed. (New York: Unger, 1989). Florence Marryat was the youngest of eleven children. She wrote her first novel, Love's Conflict (1865), while nursing her children who were sick with scarlet fever. She was a prolific writer whose novels were translated into several languages. In addition to writing she performed on stage as an operatic singer, lecturer, and light entertainer in Britain and the United States, including a comic lecture entitled "Women of the Future or 'What Shall We Do Without Men'" and managed a school of journalism. She had eight children. Following the Jeath of her first husband she married Colonel Francis Lean of the Royal Marine Light Infantry in 1890.

of Adelaide, Australia.[13] Her uncle Joseph, Ernest's brother, was an Admiral in the Royal Navy, while the youngest, Arthur, entered the family's banking business and became a successful merchant trader in the British West Indies. Irene Parlby's father also had five sisters. Among them Augusta, the eldest, married Sir Henry E. Fox-Young, Lieutenant Governor of South Australia,[14] another entered an Anglican convent,[15] and a third immigrated to the United States at mid-century, settling in Virginia with her husband, "an Irishman named 'Trench'."[16] Years later when Irene Parlby recalled her family's dispersal beyond England she attributed it to an inherent sense of adventure. "Our branch of the Marryat Clan," she wrote, "seemed to have been born with an inner urge to leave the Homeland, and pursue their lives in . . . far off places."[17]

The Marryat family enjoyed a comfortable position among the upper ranks of the British middle class. Initially, as a young officer in India, Ernest Marryat belonged to the 'middling' position in the strict social hierarchy maintained by the British. According to one source, as an engineer he would have ranked below a missionary but slightly above a police superintendent or a planter.[18] His family's social and economic status would have improved significantly when Ernest was named manager of the Bengal and North-West Railroad in 1881. With this appointment, "the Colonel," as Ernest came to be known, entered the ranks of a small professional and business elite who profited from rising incomes and growing social status throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[19]

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[13]This information is taken from Charles Marryat's diary and Villy Cormack. Using these sources the relationship between Ernest Marryat and the Dean of Adelaide is unclear. Villy Cormack refers to him as Irene's uncle and according to the diary he visited the Marryats at the Eccleston Square house in 1868.

[14]Sir Henry died suddenly in 1870 at age 77. He was the third son of Colonel Sir Arestas William Young who served as Governor of Prince Edward Island. This information is taken from Charles Marryat's diary.

[15]This was probably Gertude who would have entered the convent as an adult after her mother's death and her father's remarriage.

[16]Parlby, "Rambling Memories," p. 1. This was either Caroline or Adelaide. According to Charles Marryat's diary his fifth daughter, Selina, died of typhoid fever in 1863.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Geoffrey Moorhouse, India Britannica (London: Paladin Grafton, 1983), p. 146.

[19]Terrence R. Gourvish, "A British Business Elite: The Chief Executive Managers of the Railway Industry, 1850-1922," Business History Review, vol. 47 (Autumn, 1973), pp. 289-316. According to Gourvish, Marryat's counterpart in England experienced a four-fold

Ernest Marryat's advancement within the colonial administration meant that he could provide his growing family with a comfortable, sheltered life, largely protected from the harsh realities of the subcontinent. By the time their third child, Norah Isabel, was born in 1871 he was sufficiently well-off to establish a second home for his wife and children at Nutfield in the Surrey countryside south-east of London. A second child, Ernest Patrick, was born in Bombay in 1869.[20] With the memory of Charlotte's death still fresh, Ernest and Elizabeth may have thought their children would be safer in England. This decision, however, placed an additional burden on Elizabeth Marryat. For the next ten years she divided her time between her children in England and her husband in India. During this period she also gave birth to three more children: Ruth Beryl, Gladys Eileen and Hugh Dennis. In their mother's absence the Marryat children were placed in the care of the family nanny who quickly became the emotional centre of Irene's young life.

According to Parlby hers was an "entirely happy" childhood, marred only by a brief stay at an Anglican convent school for girls. Shortly after she entered the school, Irene was caught talking after the children had been put to bed. As punishment she was confined to a "small cell with a stone floor" where she became seriously ill.[21] Word of her distress brought the swift intervention of her aunt, Lady Augusta Fox-Young, who returned her to her nanny's care while Elizabeth Marryat was recalled from India.

To Irene, who was known as "Rene" to her family and friends, life at Nutfield seemed idyllic, marked by the "tranquility and serenity" of the unchanging Surrey countryside and a "discipline through which everything seemed to move smoothly."[22] As the eldest child in a large family she never lacked for a companion but developed an especially close bond with her

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increase in salaries and benefits between 1850-1869 and 1910-1922 along with improved pension benefits. During the latter period over a third of the appointments he studied for British railway companies were made at 6,000 pounds or above, significantly higher than the annual earnings of senior civil servants and lawyers at the time.

[20]The Marryat's eldest son died sometime later but he was still living when Norah was born in London on 14 April 1871. Ernest Marryat received his Captaincy in 1870.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 2.

younger sister Norah (Nolly). The girls attended daily lessons together and entertained themselves with a "great deal of dancing, and acting in private theatricals" as well as outdoor sports: "cricket, skating, hockey and tennis."[23] At Nutfield Irene and each of her siblings were given a small garden plot "in which we sowed a wonderful medley of things, and tried many experiments in pulling them up at various stages to see how they were getting along." Her early introduction to gardening developed into a keen, lifelong love of "green things growing."[24]

The organization of Marryat family life was typical of the upper ranks of Britain's colonial families and accurately reflected the domestic ideal proscribed by the Victorian middle class. As such it provided Irene with her first lessons in the social division of labour and "proper femininity."[25] From earliest childhood the "discipline" that marked her young life turned on the clear separation of the world into two distinct realms: the domestic realm occupied by women, children and servants and the public realm of men which was far removed from family life. This domestic ideal was reinforced by the physical separation from her father which was a necessary part of colonial service. Since her mother's first loyalty was to her husband, she too was required to be absent for long periods of time. This domestic pattern was repeated among members of her own family as well as their friends and acquaintances so that Parlby accepted it as normal, part of the natural order of things.

As the daughter of a well-to-do middle class Victorian family it was also normal that Parlby's closest emotional attachment was to her nanny, whom Parlby later recalled as a firm but loving woman; "an unchangeable rock of authority." We are told that she came to the family as a "pretty young girl" and remained for forty years, caring for several generations of Marryat children.[26] Parlby reveals even less about her relationship with her mother

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[23]Villy Cormack, p. 12.
[24]Ibid., p. 14.
[25]See Carol Dyhouse, "First Lessons in Femininity: The Experience of Family Life," Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 3-39, and Dyhouse, Feminism and the Family in England 1880-1939 (London: Blackwell, 1989).
[26]Villy Cormack, p. 13.

whom she describes only as a "very gentle soul."[27] In Parlby's memoirs, Elizabeth Marryat appears as a shadowy figure whose most notable feature is her Irish roots. While in England, the Marryat children often visited Partry, on the shores of Lake Carra near Ballinrobe in east-central Ireland. It seems that much of Elizabeth's own childhood had been spent at Partry and it was here that she retreated in 1868 to recover from Irene's birth and Charlotte's death. Irene's childhood memories of Partry capture the sharp contrasts characteristic of nineteenth century Ireland. On one hand she recalls the gentle beauty of the Irish countryside and what she understood as the affection of the local tenant farmers towards her mother.[28] On the other hand she tells of witnessing the forced eviction of a tenant family from their home. As a child Parlby was deeply disturbed by this injustice. She may even have thought such harsh treatment unique to Ireland since elsewhere she states that "we young people in our sheltered lives did not realize . . . [the] evil conditions" that existed in nineteenth century England.[29]

Next to "old Nanny" the most dominant influence in Irene's young life was her father. Her memory of Ernest Marryat is of a somewhat remote but romantic figure who she describes as liberal in his attitudes but a firm though fair disciplinarian. Despite his long absences from his family, Ernest Marryat maintained close supervision of his children and was consulted on any major decision concerning their welfare. According to Parlby, it was her father who was responsible for the decision to send her to the Anglican girls' school at Nutfield. During the family's second stay in Rawalpindi (1881-1884) he strictly prohibited his eldest daughters from attending social functions at the local "club" and when the family was living together he assumed complete charge of his children's education, including the supervision of their governesses. At the same time, her father encouraged Irene's enthusiasm for "family theatricals," an interest they shared, and he coached her through her first "public speech" to the women of the Primrose League when she was about sixteen years old.

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[27]Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 4.
[28]Villy Cormack, p. 20.
[29]Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 2.

Under her father's direction, Irene's education followed the general pattern that was typical of daughters of upper- and middle-class British families at the time. After her brief and unhappy experience at boarding school, she was taught by a series of governesses at home. The question of Parlby's education is important for two reasons; first, for its formative influence in shaping the woman she became and second, because the Victorian period saw progressive reforms in education which widened opportunities available to women in public and professional life. The educational reform movement of the latter half of the nineteenth century produced new girls' schools and universities to some extent began to admit women.[30] Generally, the new girls' schools did not represent a radical change in the substance of women's education but they did provide a critical alternative to home education.[31] As Carol Dyhouse points out in her study of late-Victorian and Edwardian women, even when the new girls' schools functioned as conservative institutions they still weakened the role of the family as the primary agent of girls' socialization by providing girls with widened reference groups including access to their own peers which allowed them to "choose their associates and mutually to educate one another."[32] Dyhouse makes the important point that professional teachers and headmistresses served as new role models and the school environment constituted a space in which girls learned to see themselves as individuals, not merely as adjuncts to the family.

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[30] Joan N. Burstyn, Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood (London: Croom Helm, 1980) documents the reforms in women's education during the nineteenth century. A central assumption of this and other histories of women's education is that the new girls' schools and colleges placed women's education on an equal footing with men's and represent the achievement of reforms advocated by feminists of the day. Subsequent studies show that in most cases these institutions were conservative and continued to promote a restrictive feminine ideal. Historians generally agree that expansions in women's education was often contradictory and did not proceed in a linear fashion.

[31] On the impact of educational reforms for upper- and middle-class women see Sara Delamont, "The Domestic Ideology and Women's Education," The Nineteenth Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World , S. Delamont and L. Duffin, eds. (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 134-63; Carol Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up in Late Victorian and Edwardian England, especially pp. 40-78, 162 -73; Deborah Gorham, The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal (London: Croom Helm, 1982), pp. 103-20, and M. Jeanne Peterson, Family, Love, And Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press), pp. 34-57.

[32] Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up, p. 173.

In her study of nineteenth-century British feminists Olive Banks found that going out to school could make a radical difference to women's political awareness.[33] Among the ninety-eight women she studied, Banks identifies formal education as one of the distinguishing characteristics that separated early moderate feminists from their younger more radical sisters born in the 1860s and 90s. According to Banks, only the latter group was educated outside the home in significant numbers.

Despite educational reforms, the majority of girls of Parlby's social rank and generation continued to be educated at home.[34] According to the Schools' Inquiry Commission of 1867-68, most of Britain's wealthiest families preferred to keep their daughters at home under close supervision.[35] The effect of home education was to strengthen the power of the family over its female members. In Parlby's case circumstances also conspired to keep her at home. Where girls did go out to boarding school it was usually between the ages of thirteen and seventeen. Irene was living with her family in India during these years, and since a governess was needed for Norah, who was three years younger than Irene, it would have been more convenient and economical to continue the practice of home education for both girls rather than place Irene in school in England. Whatever the reason, the result was the same. For girls growing up in Victorian England the new schools represented the only available alternative to the narrow confines of the family and that alternative was not made available to Irene. By contrast, her youngest sister, Sheila, born in 1890, did attend boarding school in London and graduated from the University of Alberta with a degree in agriculture, reflecting changes in family circumstances as well as assumptions about proper womanhood. Parlby's brothers all received formal education as was common at the time. As James Bryce, Assistant Commissioner to the Schools' Inquiry Commission, pointed out, Victorians educated boys for the world and girls for the drawing room.[36] Boys were expected to become self-sufficient and prepare for an independent career.

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[33] See Olive Banks, Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of 'First Wave' Feminists 1800- 1930 (London: Wheatsheaf, 1986).

[34] Gorham states that up until the 1890s middle-class families who took their daughters' education seriously were considered eccentric. See p.119.

[35] Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up, p. 41.

[36] Ibid., p. 44.

By the end of the nineteenth century education was increasingly seen as a young man's passport to success. Middle-class families like the Marryats began to select their son's schools with great care, considering the expense an investment in a boy's future. It was not the same for girls. In retrospect Parlby regretted this division of educational opportunity but at the time she accepted it as normal.

It would be wrong to assume that because Irene was taught by a governess at home her education was inferior, although by her own admission she was not a serious student. She was an active child with a lively imagination who enjoyed reading and writing and was familiar with classical literature. As a young woman The Thoughts of Marcus Aurelius Antonius was a "constant companions."[37] Parlby describes herself as a naturally curious but "mentally lazy" child who failed to take advantage of the learning opportunities provided to her. While she may have been unduly modest in her assessment of her academic accomplishments, her attitude towards education was at best ambivalent. She admired scholarship in others and even aspired to higher learning later in life but, in her words, "my brain does not work that way."[38]

Parlby's lack of confidence in her intellectual competence was due at least as much to contemporary ideas about girls' education as it was to her own ability. Mid-Victorian education was intended to produce 'womanly' women and 'manly' men.[39] Educators generally agreed that girls should be familiar with intellectual and cultural pursuits but only as preparation for marriage and motherhood. Typically, daughters of the middle classes were encouraged to study many of the same subjects their brothers did such as history, geography and in some cases, even mathematics, but foreign languages and music were emphasized as "showy accomplishments" or "softening influences" which were considered necessary to off-set the "solid branches" of learning that might render a girl's character too masculine. In short, the purpose of education for upper-

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[37]Villy Cormack, p. 21.
[38]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 19 September 1916, SAB Violet McNaughton's Personal Papers A1 D.54.
[39]Gorham, p. 105.

and middle-class girls was to create "decorative, modest, marriageable beings."[40] Like all daughters of the middle classes Parlby was expected to follow her mother's example: to marry, have children of her own and serve as the proper feminine centre of respectable domesticity. As a result her training and education were designed to encourage feminine virtues and promote her marriageability. "In my young days," Parlby wrote, "[g]irls were supposed to be content . . . with . . . social life and were not trained for any job or profession."[41]

Knowing that she was not expected to become self-sufficient and prepare for an independent career outside the home, Irene never took her academic studies seriously. Her ambivalence towards education was further complicated by the contradictions in the status of the governess within the middle class household.[42] Forced to seek employment in other women's homes the governess was generally seen as a 'failed gentlewoman' entirely dependent upon the financial fortunes and good will of her employer family. Further, a governess was typically employed for a relatively brief period. This practice tended to undermine the relationship between student and teacher. For girls, sequestered in the home school, their governess was often the only authority against which they might safely rebel. Generally, Parlby seems to have enjoyed a happy relationship with her teachers but she also was quick to challenge what she considered their unreasonable or unjust treatment. Her disapproval of one "unpopular" governess took an imaginative and unusual form. When the woman married a local parson Irene presented him with a gift of a "large, hideous wooden idol of an Indian god. . . . partly because she had taken a great liking to the gentleman [and] partly . . . because he was releasing [her] from the rule of the bride."[43] On another occasion Irene directly challenged her governess's criticism of Elizabeth Marryat which caused a serious rift

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[40] Dyhouse, p. 43. This same point is also made by Gorham, pp. 43-45.
[41] Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 5.
[42] See M. Jeanne Peterson, "The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society," Suffer And Be Still, Sara Delamont and Lorna Duffin (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp. 3-19.
[43] Villy Cormack, p. 14.

between student and teacher. Although she was "the best teacher [Irene] had had," the governess was eventually dismissed.[44]

Irene was thirteen years old when her father retired from the colonial service to become manager of the Bengal and North-West Railroad. The appointment made it necessary for Elizabeth Marryat to remain in India year round in order that she fulfill her attendant responsibilities as his official hostess. To accommodate her father's new circumstances, Irene, her siblings, their nanny, and an English governess were resettled in Rawalpindi where they remained until the Colonel's retirement in 1884. Parlby's own memories of her India days date primarily from this period. Particularly striking in her account of life in Rawalpindi is the extent to which the children's domestic routine established in England was preserved in India. Isolated within the British compound and protected by their father's status, life for Irene continued much as it had at Nutfield. Their only direct contact with the native population was with the Indian servants employed by the Marryats and other British families. Moreover, the familiar divisions along gender lines were reinforced by conditions in Imperial India.

By the 1880s there were a large number of British women and children living permanently in India. From mid-century onwards travel to the subcontinent was made easier by extensive railroad construction, the introduction of steamships and the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. The primitive bachelor conditions typical of earlier years gradually gave way to a more self-sufficient, settled domesticity. Still, on the more remote military stations such as Rawalpindi, life for the wives and daughters of British officials remained a peculiar mixture of advantage and deprivation.[45]

The countless perquisites and privileges available to the English rulers and their families often provided a higher standard of living than they would have had at home. An over-abundance of cheap Indian labour meant that even a young Lieutenant could provide ample servants to lighten

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[44]Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 3.

[45]See Margaret MacMillan, Women of the Raj (New York: Thomas and Hudson, 1988) and Pat Barr, Memsahibs (London: Secker & Warburg, 1976). This contradiction is graphically illustrated by Harriet Tytler's memoirs, An Englishwoman in India 1828-1858, Anthony Sattin, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

his wife's domestic load. Housing was provided, though it was often rudimentary by English standards. Each military station of middle size was equipped with a hospital, court-room and church. Local merchants provided a wide variety of goods at low prices. In addition to their English nanny and governess, each of the Marryat children had a personal Indian servant or *ayah*. Irene was given her own horse and became an accomplished rider while living in India.

At the same time, an unfamiliar diet, tropical diseases such as malaria, poisonous snakes and scorpions presented constant health hazards. As an infant Irene suffered from a life-threatening overdose of a "native sedative" which was apparently administered by her *ayah* in an attempt to silence her cries.[46] The extreme heat of the country also proved a hardship to those accustomed to England's temperate climate. It was widely believed that growing children in particular suffered physical damage as a result of high temperatures and from the mid-nineteenth century onwards women and children sought relief by retreating to the Himalayas, or "the Hills" as they were known to the British. Here, too, the Marryats were no exception, alternating between 'Pindi' and the hill-station at Muree depending upon the season.

The pseudo-military conditions of Imperial India reinforced Victorian notions of separate spheres. Without an occupation and with more than enough servants to attend to her household's needs, Anglo-Indian women frequently reported that their greatest burden was inactivity. As one woman described it: "In her drawing-room for the chief part of her day, [the English woman] is as much a prisoner by reason of the heat as the zenana women is by custom. She is by herself all day long and thrown on her own resources."[47] According to another, "every sun set as it rose, and left a feeling behind it of an utterly wasted day."[48] For the majority of British women life in India during the late nineteenth century followed much the same routine as Irene's cousin Florence Marryat had encountered at mid-century:

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[46] Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 2.
[47] Barr, p. 148.
[48] Ibid.

> Up at five o'clock, a ride on horseback till seven, 'little breakfast' on the verandah, a cold bath and dress ready to receive visitors. They came. . . between ten and two o'clock. . . . Then it was tiffin-time, followed by the siesta hour, 'drowsy, heavy, the sun at his meridian; every living creature out of doors has crept under shelter and a great silence pervades the whole cantonment'. [The afternoon was spent in] bed with a book till it was time to bath again, dress again, ride out again along the race-course and 'then to the band where, everyone being present, I could gossip to my heart's content until night-fall.' Then there was the gallop home in the dark, and, if there was any party to attend, dressing to be once more gone through; if not, a few songs sung, a good many yawns yawned and then bed until five the next morning when the whole business recommenced.[49]

In India, Marryat family life centred on the cantonment bungalow. According to Barr, this standard structure was a simple "rectangular block of rooms, each leading into the next, with concrete floors and whitewashed walls, usually with wire-netted slits cut high in them to let in some light and keep out the mosquitoes."[50] Flora Annie Steel, in The Complete Indian Housekeeper and Cook, described the typical bungalow kitchen as a "black hole, the pantry a sink."[51] The building's exterior was "all pillars, plaster and peagreen paint" surrounded by a verandah which offered protection from the extreme heat.[52] On such a verandah Irene watched British troops parading on the big plain immediately in front of the bungalow where she and Norah took their daily lessons. Other young companions, daughters of a neighbouring English family, shared the Marryat schoolroom. Together, the girls wrote and performed plays for the benefit of family and friends and produced a magazine "filled with original poems and 'penny dreadfuls'" which they printed with soap tablets and purple ink.[53]

Rarely was Irene permitted to venture beyond the protective walls of the family bungalow. A week before leaving India she and Norah were

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[49]Florence Marryat, 'Gup': Sketches of Indian Life and Character (1868) cited in Barr, p. 148.
[50]Ibid., p. 153. See also MacMillan, pp. 77-78.
[51]Barr, p. 153.
[52]Ibid., p. 147.
[53]Ibid., pp.15-16.

allowed to visit the local recreation and social club for the first and only time. Travel outside the confines of the British compound was strictly forbidden except on family holidays or when she was permitted to join her father on his regular inspection tours of the railroad. The trip took them from Lahore to Peshawar in the north-east. At Peshawar she was taken to the local bazaar where she encountered the "fierce" but "magnificent" looking tribesmen who came down from the mountains to trade with the local merchants.[54] From there the party travelled on horseback to Yumrood, "the mud walled most northerly of British forts" within sight of the famed Khyber Pass.[55] On another occasion the family visited the Taj Mahal, "a vision of such beauty and glorious craftmanship" that it remained a fond memory years later.[56] Travel beyond Rawalpindi must have seemed high adventure indeed for a young English girl growing into womanhood at the height of Queen Victoria's reign. Years later, these trips stood out in her memory largely for their contrast to the unrelieved routine of cantonment life.

In 1884 Colonel Marryat resigned his position as manager of the Bengal and North-West Railroad and returned permanently to England. The family settled at Horley, an agricultural district south of London, where Ernest experimented briefly with life as a gentleman farmer. At Horley, Irene, now sixteen years old, began to show signs of discontent. She thought the farm a "most dismal place." There was no village close by and she missed the company of other girls her own age. To her, life seemed to be "reduced to a succession of days in the schoolroom with only the diversion of music and singing lessons from a visiting German master."[57] A welcome break in her daily routine came when the Colonel supervised a family production of Oliver Goldsmith's eighteenth century comedy, She Stoops To Conquer, in support of the local Philanthropic Farm School for Boys, a reformatory for delinquent boys. Ernest Marryat played the part of Squire Hardcastle, a jovial country gentleman of the old school. Irene was given the part of Miss Hardcastle, the squire's daughter who "stoops" to a trifling deceit "to conquer" the young Marlow's bashfulness and win him,

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[54] Parlby, "Rambling Memories, p. 3.
[55] Villy Cormack, p. 16 and Parlby, "Rambling Memories," p. 3.
[56] Parlby, "Rambling Memories," p. 3..
[57] Villy Cormack, p. 17

while Norah played Miss Neville, Kate Hardcastle's companion. Following the school performance the company took their play to Reigate, a neighbouring town, where they "had a good house, made a nice little sum of money for the school and got a good write up in [a] London theatrical paper."[58] At about this time Irene's father also arranged for her first "public speech" to the members of a local women's club. The Colonel "wrote the speech" for her, she memorized it, and "delivered it with shaking knees."[59]

Periodic diversions such as these provided temporary relief from the routine of Horley but Irene grew increasingly restless with the limitations of farm life. Her discontent spilled over into the family schoolroom where Irene's confrontation with her governess led to a "knock-down family row." When her governess refused to continue in the family's employ so long as Irene remained in her charge Colonel Marryat sent his daughter to Freiburg um Baden in Germany to stay with the Byng Halls, family friends from India. He intended that while in Germany Irene was "to study language and do further work in music."[60] By sending Irene to Germany Ernest Marryat was able to restore domestic peace to his household and, temporarily at least, avoid losing the family's governess. He may also have realized that his eldest daughter had outgrown the household schoolroom.

By her own admission Parlby accomplished very little serious work during her stay in Germany. She eagerly renewed her friendship with Amy Hall who had shared the Marryat family schoolroom in Rawalpindi. Away from the watchful eye of her governess and the protective supervision of her parents for the first time in her life, Parlby happily abandoned her studies for the social activities offered by the Halls, including "lovely walks from the old cathedral town up into the Black Forest" and a military ball where the young Irene "danced . . . a few turns . . . with Prince Max of Baden."[61]

Six months later she was back in England. The "unpopular" governess with whom she had quarrelled had been dismissed and her

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid, p. 4.
[61] Parlby, "Rambling Memories," p. 2.

parents were preparing to move to their new home in suburban Limpsfield on the outskirts of London. Having failed to make a profit of the Horley farm, Ernest Marryat was forced to end his retirement and return to his former profession. He was appointed London manager of the Delta Light Railroad of Egypt and joined the Board of the Bengal and North-West Railroad where he later became chairman. With his family established in their new home the Colonel was able to commute daily to the companies' headquarters in the city while enjoying the amenities of country living including a "glorious view of the weald of Sussex." [62]

According to Parlby, Limpsfield also provided an "excellent preparatory school for the boys."[63] A second son, John Rudolph, arrived the year of Irene's "coming out" in 1886, followed by Ulric Graham two years later. Dorothy Sheila, the Marryat's eighth child, was born here in 1890. At Limpsfield Irene and her sister Norah continued their studies at home. When they were barely out of the family schoolroom themselves, they were placed in charge of the education of their younger sisters, Ruth and Gladys, and continued to assist Nanny in caring for the youngest children.

Irene's childhood officially ended with her "coming out" party at the age of eighteen in 1886. The coming out party was considered mandatory among the "best circles" of Victorian society and according to Lenore Davidoff entailed considerable expense.[64] It celebrated a young woman's entry into adult society and served as a public declaration of her marriageability. To mark their passage "hair was put up, hems came down and young girls were initiated into the complex rituals of Victorian social life. . . . how to fill in dance-cards, how to respond when asked for more than one dance by the same partner, how to address those of higher or lower rank, how to enter the dining room and [generally] how to conduct oneself . . . ."[65]

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[62]Ibid., p. 3.
[63]Ibid., p. 2. The Marryat's eldest son Dennis never attended the Limpsfield school. He entered the Royal Navy as a midshipman at about the age of thirteen.
[64]Leonore Davidoff, The Best Circles Society Etiquette and the Season (London: Croom Helm, 1973).
[65]Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up, p. 24. According to Dyhouse, these elaborate social rituals were seen as a young woman's duty and "[i]t was considered right and proper that girls should rank the claims of social life, the whole business of maintaining the family's

The circumstances of Irene's initiation into adult society provides insight into the complexity of late Victorian class culture and the Marryat's place in it. Lacking direct connections to London society, Irene was sponsored by Lady Augusta Fox-Young, the aunt who had rescued her from convent school years earlier. The failure of the Horley farm precluded the kinds of costs described by Davidoff, however, with the aid of his sister the Colonel was able to provide his eldest daughter with a proper initiation into society while avoiding excessive expenditures. The festivities were held at the Fox-Young's fashionable London home at the same time as Irene's cousin's coming out. In her account of this singularly important event in her young life Parlby makes no mention of her secondary status, commenting only that the two young women, dressed in identical white tulle and satin ball gowns, "passed a very enjoyable evening with no lack of good dancing partners."[66]

While she had welcomed these social occassions in Germany, Irene became increasingly dissatisfied with her life of enforced leisure at Limpsfield. The 'timeless rhythms' of the English countryside, welcomed in childhood, began to chafe as she entered womanhood. The literature on Victorian femininity focuses on its implications for adult women, however, as Deborah Gorham points out, the feminine ideal of the "angel in the home" was probably most persuasive as it was applied to the "good daughter," the "sunbeam" who made "everything glad" by serving as her father's "greatest comfort" and her brother's "moral guide."[67] According to Gorham, girls reared for domesticity were prepared during adolescence to accept severe limits and restraints on their personal freedom which were deemed appropriate to their future adult role.[68] With the onset of puberty and the physical changes that went with it, parents, and mothers in particular were encouraged to constrain their daughters' physical, emotional and

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reputation in society, high among their obligations." Ibid., p. 25. According to Mrs. Ellis,a popular social commentator on proper womanhood, "Society is to the daughters of a family, what business is to the son." Quoted in Davidoff, p. 109, ft. 40.

[66]Villy Cormack, p. 20.

[67]Gorham, pp. 38-40.

[68]Gorham, p. 97. See also, Lorna Duffin, "The Conspicuous Consumptive: Woman As an Invalid," The 19th Century Woman (City: Publisher, year), pp. 26-56 and Dyhouse, Girls Growing Up, pp. 115-8.

intellectual behaviour. A widely held belief was that any overexertion might compromise a girl's femininity and jeopardize her future ability to bear children. Victorian proscriptions for proper adolescent behaviour were clear, but the girl's social function was profoundly ambiguous.[69] Encouraged to remain at home and dependent upon her father or another male relative, as the "daughter-at-home" a girl or unmarried woman had no official social place; she did not fit into ideal domesticity.[70] Much of Irene's growing restlessness must be seen in this context. Consciously or unconsciously she sensed the ambiguity of her position. The resulting anxiety could have only contributed to the tensions between Irene and her teacher referred to earlier. The contradictions that marked this period of her life are reflected in Parlby's accounts of Limpsfield which she describes as "pleasant enough." She enjoyed the social life at Limpsfield; occasional dances and trips into the city to shop or attend the theatre. There was "much tennis" during the summer months and field hockey in the winter as well as her favourite "amateur theatricals."[71] At the same time, she recalls her growing dissatisfaction with an "aimless sort of life" which seemed to offer her little that was of any particular use in the world.[72]

Parlby's discontent was made even more acute when her sister Norah married a young Irishman, Walter Thaddeus McDonnell, and moved to the north of England. Shortly after Norah's departure Irene fell ill. She was ordered to take a rest cure at St. Moritz in Switzerland. Although she quickly recovered and was soon back in Engiand she continued to "drift along, taking things as they [came]" but without any sense of real purpose.[73] When she later recalled her this period in her life Parlby attributed her unhappiness to simple boredom. This may be a partial explanation but her younger sister's marriage also served as clear reminder to Irene of her own failure to secure an appropriate husband. As she approached her mid-

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[69]According to Gorham, the usual tension and ambiguity surrounding female adolescence was exacerbated by Victorian medical and scientific opinion which exaggerated the risks of puberty as a period that could be "fatal to [a woman's] sex." See Gorham, pp. 85-122.
[70]The social ambiguity of the position of the unmarried daughter-at-home is illustrated by the common practice of printing the daughter's name on her mother's calling card under her mother's name. See Davidoff, pp. 51-52.
[71]Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 5.
[72]Ibid.
[73]Ibid., p. 4.

twenties she certainly would have been seen by others as a spinster and a 'failure' as a woman.[74]

Parlby's growing unhappiness did not go unnoticed by her father who suggested that she enter medical school. Apart from fatherly concern, it is difficult to explain Ernest Marryat's sudden interest in having his daughter enter the professions. It is possible that the idea was prompted by the publicity given to those few women who chose to defy middle-class convention and follow independent careers. It may also reflect a shift in his attitude towards female education since it was at about this time that Irene's youngest sister Sheila was sent out to school. Certainly, as Parlby notes, at the time it was an unusually liberal notion. Though she does not acknowledge it, the idea was also singularly unhelpful and entirely unrealistic. Whatever the quality of her home education it was clearly insufficient preparation for medical training.[75] More importantly, Irene had no desire to become a doctor. When she declined her father's suggestion "he looked disappointed but offered no alternative."[76] Years later, she confessed to a secret wish to become an actress, an occupation she would have been more suited to by training and interest. Although her cousin

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[74]Opinion as to when an unmarried women was labelled a spinster varies from twenty-five to thirty. Davidoff suggests that a young woman was generally expected to marry within two to three seasons of her coming out; "after that, if she were not at least engaged, she was, for the most part, written off as a failure." P. 52.

[75]In the battle to gain entrance to medical school women faced extreme opposition from doctors and male students who saw medicine as a male prerogative. When Elizabeth Garret Anderson pioneered British women's right to become medical practitioners by passing the apothecaries' examination in the 1860s, members changed the regulations. Sophia Jex-Blake organized a group of seven other women to attend medical school at the University of Edinburgh in 1869-70. When they attempted to enter a required anatomy class male students barricaded the entrance to the lecture hall, threw mud at the women, shouted obscenities, and brought a sheep into the classroom, protesting that "inferior animals" were being allowed into the school. Cited in Ray Strachey, The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britan (London: Virago, 1978 [1928]), p. 181. See also A History of Their Own, Vol. 2, Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 188-89. Nineteenth century notions of female modesty and delicacy were seen as ultimately excluding women from medical training which would fatally compromise their femininity. Higher education in general and medical training in particular was perceived as 'unsexing' women. Miss Garret, it was argued, could not be "one of the ladies of England nor represent them" for they do not wish to "encarnalise their spirits" by medical education. Duffin, p. 47. Widespread, vociferous disapproval of women in medicine meant that there were fewer than 50 women practitioners in England in the 1880s and only 202 out of 22,000 doctors in England and Wales in 1901. Harrison, p. 167.

[76]Parlby, "Rambling Memories," p. 2.

Florence Marryat had launched herself on a stage career some years earlier Irene believed that such a suggestion would meet with firm disapproval.[77] Neither did she consider following in the footsteps of her famous uncle, Captain Frederick Marryat, and embarking on a literary career despite her literary interests. Her father's apparent confidence in her abilities notwithstanding, in the 1890s Irene was unprepared to violate middle class norms of genteel femininity. Still, her discontent suggests that she was equally unwilling to silently accept them.

By 1896 Irene Marryat was living with her parents at Limpsfield. She was twenty-nine years old, single, unemployed and without prospects. That spring a family friend, Alice Westhead, travelled from Ireland to her home in the Buffalo Lake district of the Canadian North-West. To break her long journey Westhead visited briefly with the Marryat family. During her stay she suggested that Irene join her and her companions on the return voyage to Canada.[78] The alacrity with which Parlby accepted Westhead's invitation underscores the ennui that marked this period of her life. The chance of an extended stay in the Canadian West seemed fortuitous; while it did not provide a complete answer to the problem of Irene's future it did offer a temporary and welcome diversion. Her decision to visit Canada would dramatically alter the course of Irene's life.

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[77]Although Florence Marryat was appearing on stage in her own play at about this time Parlby never mentions her. Christopher Kent, in "Image and Reality: The Actress and Society, " A Widening Sphere, Martha Vicinus, ed. (Bloominton: Indiana University Press, 1977) p. 94-116, argues that acting gained increased acceptance as an appropriate career for middle class women but only at the cost of much prized Victorian respectability. Pp. 94 -116. Lilly Langtry was forced into a career in the theatre by sudden bankruptcy and desperate need of money. According to Davidoff members of the upper and middle class were fascinated by her in large part because she "had crossed this social rubicon." P. 81.

[78]Ibid., p. 3.

Chapter Two

In search of a useful life: a British gentlewoman in the Canadian North-West

Irene Marryat arrived in Canada in May 1896. The thirteen-day Atlantic crossing was made miserable by cold weather and rough seas. Off the coast of Newfoundland the passenger ship she was travelling on ran into large ice fields and dense fog and was forced to "lay to" for several days until the fog lifted.[1] Relieved to finally dock at Quebec City, Irene and her companions toured the old city before boarding the train for the North-West. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1885 had made travel to western Canada much easier. The trip took four days with a brief stop in Winnipeg before arriving in Calgary: "a jolly little town which only lately had picked up its houses and conveyed them to the opposite side of the [Elbow] river" to make way for the Calgary and Edmonton Railroad.[2] Under Westhead's chaperonage Irene Marryat was introduced to the town's "frontier society" which was dominated by a small, tightly knit group of politically powerful and often wealthy Canadian and British ranch families.[3]

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[1]Parlby, "My Experiences", p. 5.

[2]Villy Cormack, p. 26. The Calgary and Edmonton Railroad was completed to Strathcona, south of the North Saskatchewan River at Edmonton, in July 1891.

[3]British interests in western Canadian ranching firms was led by Sir John Walrond, a former Conservative Member of Parliament, but included smaller owners with close connections to Ottawa and London such as Sir Francis de Winton, the Marquis of Lorne, Canada's Governor General, Sir F.F. Mackenzie, Viscount Boyle, and Lord Castleton as well as numerous members of Britain's lesser landed gentry and military men like Charles Westhead. See David Breen, The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier 1874-1924 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 29. See also Sheilagh S. Jameson, "The Social Elite Of The Ranch Community And Calgary," Frontier Calgary Town, City, and Region 1874-1914, Anthony W. Rasporich and Henry C. Klassen, eds.

Westhead and her husband Charles were not cattle ranchers but their social connections to the cattle fraternity in southern Alberta gave them an important entree into Western Canadian society.[4] As their guest, Irene was assured ready acceptance by this "frontier elite."

In 1896 Calgary was in the midst of a Territorial election campaign and the Westhead party were invited to attend a dinner hosted by candidate Rear Admiral Thomas Cochrane and Lady Adelaide Cochrane, prominent local ranchers. Irene was delighted by the informality of the affair which seemed to her unlike anything she had experienced in England. Cautioned by their hosts to forego formal evening dress, the visitors "toed and heeled it until the wee hours of the morning" when they boarded the train for Lacombe, about one hundred miles north of Calgary.[5] Once again Westhead's social connections eased the way. On board they met Charles McIntosh, Lieutenant Governor of the North-West Territories, who offered his company and the comfort of his private railway car for the remainder of the journey.

Six and one half hours later the women disembarked at siding 12, where Alix Westhead's husband Charles met them with a horse drawn democrat, wagon and mules driven by Jim Gadsby. Gadsby was a veteran freighter, well known in the district. He also worked on the Westhead ranch and served as guide on the return trip to the ranch over the Lacombe-Buffalo Lake trail.[6] The rough terrain was made more difficult than usual by

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(Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1975), pp. 58-70, and Lewis G. Thomas, "The Rancher and the City: Calgary and the Cattlemen, 1883-1914," Ranchers' Legacy, Patrick A. Dunae , ed. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986), pp. 41-59.

[4].The 1890s marked the high point of this Canadian and British ranching elite whose power and influence rested on the economic boom created by the "beef bonanza" of the 1880s and early 90s. Its regional hegemony declined rapidly under the pressure of agricultural settlement after 1900 and as a result of the Boer War and especially World War 1 which drew many English sons back to Britain. See Breen, esp. pp. 93-98. See also Lewis G. Thomas, "The Shires Transplanted - Millarville" and "A Ranchers' Community - Okotoks," Ranchers' Legacy, pp. 83-97 & pp. 101-16.

[5]Villy Cormack, p. 27.

[6]Jim Gadsby is mentioned frequently in Walter Parlby's diaries. He came West from Ontario via the United States in the 1880s and accompanied Edward Parlby on his first trip to the area east of Lacombe in 1887. In addition to hunting, trapping and freighting goods across the country Gadsby worked for the Parlbys and the Westheads as well as other ranch families. See Pioneers and Progress (The Alix Clive Historical Club, 1974), pp. 850-52.

recent flooding. According to Parlby the group relied on Gadsby's experience as well as the horses' instincts to negotiate the mud filled gullies and swollen creeks:

> We bumped along through one mudhole after another . . . unhitching the mules when we got stuck and hitching them on in front of the horses; there were many yells & cracking of whips, a rocking & shaking & always the thought of being upset into that bottomless mud, we finally pulled out and travelled along until we got to the next one, when the process was repeated. . . .
>
> Finally we reached the flooded creek and splashed through to where the bridge was supposed to be . . . . There was nothing to be seen but I suppose the horses had some instinct as to where to make the plunge, because finally they seemed to find a footing and we got across - the worst was over.[7]

The following morning Irene looked out on the wooded prairie parkland stretching miles beyong the Westhead ranch, "Prospect Hill". It was early June and

> . . . the trees were all out in their fresh greens, and the cherry trees and Saskatoons in bloom — the view from the [ranch]house was lovely - the house was built on a hill overlooking a very large flat[land], through which ran a creek like a silver ribbon - the beauty of the whole view was breathtaking! What a wonderful land it seemed to me, and what a lucky girl I thought myself to be given the opportunity to see it.[8]

Irene Marryat does not fit readily into the categories of emigrant British gentlewomen available in the literature.[9] She was not among those upper- and middle-class Victorian women forced by impoverished circumstances to seek paid employment in the New World as a guard

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[7]Parlby, "I Shall Never Forget" CBC radio broadcast (c. 1936), Parlby's personal papers.
[8]Parlby, "Rambling Memories," p. 5.
[9]See A. James Hammerton, Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914 (London: Croom Helm, 1978). On British female emigration in the imperial context see R.G. Moyles and Doug Owram, Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities British View of Canada 1880-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 187-211 and Barbara Roberts, "'A Work of Empire': Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration," A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s, Linda Kealey, ed. (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 185-201.

against a loss of social rank in the Old. Neither was she one of the many privileged women travellers to distant parts of the British Empire who collected adventures and wrote of them for an eager public in England, nor a "reluctant pioneer" uprooted from her home and compelled to follow her husband on a "civilizing mission" to the frontier. Rather, she sought escape from the narrow confines of genteel Victorian society and the aimlessness it forced on unmarried women. Her father, apparently, had once speculated about a move to Canada and, since reading Frederick Marryat's The Settlers in Canada she had hoped to visit the country. She welcomed the promise of adventure it held. More important was the prospect of "useful" work: "[t]he idea," according to Parlby, was that in addition to seeing Canada, she would "at least be useful . . . in helping [her] hostess on [the] ranch."[10]

In his study of the rise and fall of American feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, William O'Neill argues that their desire to be useful to others and to their communities militated against women's full emancipation. O'Neill, who coined the phrase "social feminist," examined the volunteer work of ten American feminists and concluded that their "benevolent enterprises met women's desire for useful and satisfying work without touching the sources of their inequality."[11] For O'Neill, women's desire to be useful perpetuated women's subordination and acted as an impediment rather than a spur to renegotiate gender relations along more equitable lines. He concludes that in their search for productive lives, women reformers merely extended their domestic role into the public sphere without challenging predominant assumptions about their inequality. While it is true that most of those who participated in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century reform movement worked within the dominant proscriptions of proper womanhood and manhood they also contested the ground upon which these gender roles were constructed. Initially daughters-at-home rebelled against imposed "idleness," what one

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[10] Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 5.
[11] William L. O'Neill, Everyone Was Brave: The Rise and Fall of Feminism in America (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1969), p. 143.

historian has called "the revolt against redundancy," in a bid for independent and purposeful lives.[12]

Leaving home and coming to Canada was Parlby's silent rebellion against the "aimless sort of life" she had been living in the "old country."[13] In the North-West the realization that she could be "useful" opened possibilities that had previously seemed unattainable. In the spring of 1896 her sense of new opportunities took the form of useful domestic work which was a marked departure from the lessons in proper femininity that she had learned from childhood. Ultimately, the knowledge that in Canada "women were useful and important" would prompt her to join the agrarian reform movement and eventually lead her into public life.[14]

During her early months in the Canadian North-West, Irene "revelled" in her new found freedom. She gladly took on the range of domestic tasks expected of women on the frontier, working with her hands cooking, cleaning, washing and mending clothes. Years later she recalled the excitement of her first months in the North-West and her growing sense of new possibilities in a new land where the crust had not yet settled: "First of all I think came the exhilarating feeling of living where the world was really young, where there were no people crowding in on you with their miserable, silly little conventions and pettinesses and prejudices, and all the other barnacles people grow when they congregate together in community." What she remembered most was the country's "freshness, the spaciousness, the extraordinary quietness."[15] Much of her initial enthusiasm for the relative freedom of the West persisted throughout her life.

Like the British emigrant gentlewomen examined by Susan Jackel in A Flannel Shirt & Liberty, Parlby experienced the Canadian Prairies as liberation from the restrictions imposed by Victorian England.[16] While

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[12]Martha Vicinus, Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920 (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
[13]Parlby, "My Experiences," p. 5.
[14]Parlby, "The Milestones Of My Life," Canadian Magazine, (June 1928).
[15]Parlby, "I Shall Never Forget," CJCA radio broadcast, Edmonton (February 1938), Parlby's personal papers.
[16]Susan Jackel, A Flannel Shirt & Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914 (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1982).

emigration did not represent a complete break with her past it did open new spaces from which she began to see herself as separate from her family. In the West she was able to move beyond proscriptions of the dutiful daughter-at-home to become capable and independent.

Parlby's early memories of Western Canada reflect her love of the country, the pleasure she found in what she called her "domestic education" as well as her courtship and marriage to Walter Parlby. Walter and his brother Edward were friends and neighbours of the Westheads. The Parlby brothers' ranch straddled the Lacombe and Buffalo Lake Trail and had been pointed out to Irene on the trip in from Lacombe. According to Walter's diary, he and Irene met shortly after her arrival. Throughout that summer Walter was a frequent visitor to the Westheads and "Miss Marryat's" constant companion. In addition to dinners at the Westheads, the the couple spent long hours together exploring the country on horseback, camping out and picnicking on the prairie. Beatrice Hickling Brealey[17] described a four day excursion around Buffalo Lake that took place at the end of July. The party was a large one including Beatrice, Dick and Emma Hickling (Beatrice's brother and sister-in-law), Mary and Jean Pinkham (the daughters of Bishop Pinkham of Calgary), Walter Parlby, Irene Marryat, Joe Brealey, and the Westheads.[18] "Dick and Emma drove a democrat with the tent and supplies, and the rest rode horseback." Hickling Brealey recalled that after days of roughing it on the prairie, they arrived back at the Westheads exhausted and irritated; "barely speaking to each other . . . except Walter and Rene who were courting and hardly knew the rest of us were there."[19] Later that fall a group of nine, including Irene and Walter, travelled to the Hickling ranch, north-east of Calgary and into town to attend a production of H.M.S. Pinafore. That October Irene and Walter announced their intention to marry.

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[17]Hickling Brealey arrived in the North-West in July 1896 from Suffolk. She and Parlby met shortly afterwards, probably at the Westhead ranch, and maintained a close friendship throughout their lives. Hickling Brealey was also single and was living with her brother and sister-in-law at their ranch near Cochrane, west of Calgary. They moved to Alix in 1902 and Beatrice married Henry (Joe) Brealey in Alix in 1907. See Pioneers and Progress (Alix Clive Historical Club, 1974), p. 177-78.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid.

Walter was thirty-four years old when he and Irene met. Photographs taken at the turn of the century show that he was a lean man, of medium height and fine features. He was a keen sportsman and his extensive personal library suggests that he shared Irene's love of books. Walter wrote to Irene's parents to ask for their daughter's hand in marriage and received their reply by return mail on 18 November; apparently approving. As the son of minor English gentry Walter certainly would have been considered an appropriate marriage partner.[20] He was born 31 May 1862 at Manadon, the Parlby family estate at Crownhill near Plymouth in Devonshire. After graduating from Oxford with a degree in classics, Walter had considered a career in the ministry but his father, the Reverend John Hall Parlby, objected to the "High Church tendencies of the college."[21] Instead, he spent several years working on a tea plantation in Assam, Egypt, before joining his elder brother Edward in Western Canada in 1890.

Walter arrived in Canada just in time to help his brother move to a new ranch site. Edward's original ranch near present-day Ponoka was threatened by the construction of the Calgary-Edmonton railroad. As a result, he decided to relocate thirty miles south-east to the Buffalo Lake district which offered "good hay flats" and "unlimited range."[22] Giles Estelle, an American who settled in the area in 1903, described the country as

> . . . somewhat rolling, with a dark loam soil, just sandy enough to make it fine for agricultural purposes. There are a number of lakes, but especially Buffalo Lake, which is noted for its size and beauty. There are all kinds of fish to be caught in this lake, even suckers. . . . There is lots of fishing through the ice. . . . There is lots of game birds and other small game. As for the coyotes; I am lulled to sleep at night by their [y]odelling. There are a few eagles here and numerous pelican at Buffalo Lake.[23]

Walter apparently did not share his brother's unqualified enthusiasm for the Canadian West but the two lived together, operating the ranch jointly, until Edward's marriage to Anne Morison Wilkins of Red Deer in

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[20] Walter and Edward were their father's fourteenth and thirteenth youngest sons.
[21] McKinlay, p. 11.
[22] Pioneers and Progress, p. 200.
[23] "To the Future," Mirror and District Museum, Acc. No. 85.115.4.

1895.[24] That year the brothers dissolved their partnership and Walter moved to the north shore of "Parlby Lake" (named by the Federal government surveyors in 1893-94)) where he established his own ranch, named "Dartmoor" for the moors near his family home in Devonshire.

The Parlby brothers were remittance men. They established and operated their ranching enterprises with the financial support of their family in England. Initially, 'remittances' from Manadon arrived on a regular basis and then more sporadically as the need arose until about the time of their father's death in 1899. This was a common and accepted practice among British ranchers in the Canadian North-West. The advantage of financial support was an important factor in the success of British ranchers in Canada. Younger sons were able to gain the experience they often lacked as well as the capital necessary for purchasing stock of their own.[25]

The surveyor's map of 1893-94 shows that together the Parlby brothers owned two and one quarter sections, or 1,440 acres, including 101 acres of their original homestead which lay underneath Parlby Lake. According to the map, Walter owned four quarter sections in addition to the lake land as well as a partial section south of Mirror Bay. In all, Dartmoor consisted of about 780 acres, almost five times larger than the standard 160 acre homestead and significantly larger than most other ranches in the district, with the exception of his brother Edward's ranch which was about the same size.[26]

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[24]Anne Morison Wilkins was the only daughter of Francis Wilkins, British Vice-Consul, and Jean Wilkins of Chicago and Red Deer. Pioneers and Progress, p. 194.

[25]As Sheilagh S. Jameson points out ,the social stigma attached to the "remittance man" in Canadian folklore did not reflect reality in the majority of cases. While they may have been among the least experienced agricultural settlers they were typically working ranchers and farmers and often assumed leadership roles in their local communities. This was true in the case of the Parlby brothers but also for many of the British bachelors who followed them. Usually they received regular payments from home for one or two years while working on larger ranches and more sporadically after that when they went into the business themselves. Larry A. McFarlane, "British Remittance Men As Ranchers: The Case of Coutts Marjoribanks and Edmund Thursby, 1884-95," Great Plains Quarterly 11 (Winter 1991), pp. 53-69 describes a pattern of settlement very similar to that of the Parlby brothers. See also Paul Voisey, Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), esp. pp. 230-31.

[26]Dartmoor was similar in size to the small ranches established in the foothills region of the south-west after 1887, but enjoyed the advantages of the more temperate park belt region which could support a higher ratio of stock per acre of land. For a discussion of the foothills ranch lands see Simon Evans, "Spatial Aspects of the Cattle Kingdom: The

It is more difficult to determine the number of cattle Walter owned; however, the evidence that does exist suggests that it was never large. The brothers maintained both horses and cattle "with a few acres of oats."[27] In August and September a work crew was hired from the Indian reservation at Hobbema to assist in staking hay harvested by horse-drawn mower and a "dump rake."[28] After 1900 both ranches were gradually converted to mixed farms with some cattle. The size of the Parlby land holdings probably became more critical after 1900 when they converted to mixed farming. In this new agricultural economy they would have had an advantage that they never enjoyed as small ranchers. At the same time, a large mixed farm required additional labour and capital investment in seed and equipment. The evidence suggests that neither ranch was highly profitable but did provided adequately for the needs of both Parlby families.

In the spring of 1896, when Irene Marryat arrived in the Buffalo Lake district, Walter had just begun construction on a log cabin at Dartmoor. It is noteworthy that following their engagement he added a separate kitchen to the back of the original two room house. Clearly, Walter expected that marriage would alter the material conditions of ranch production as well as improve the quality of his life on the Canadian frontier. Indeed, they had originally planned to marry in February 1897, but when the kitchen was still incomplete they delayed their wedding until March. Then, on the appointed day, extreme cold and a heavy snowfall made it impossible for the wedding party to reach the church. At the last moment it was decided to hold the service at the Westhead ranch with Bishop Pinkham of Calgary officiating. For her wedding Irene chose a practical navy blue velvet dress trimmed with fur which was "pretty and warm, and lasted . . . for years."[29] Among

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First Decade, 1882-1892," Frontier Calgary, pp. 41-56. David H. Breen, The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier 1874-1924 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 62-63, rightly points out that ranch profitability is more appropriately determined by the number of cattle owned rather than the amount of land held. In the conversion to farming, however, acreage becomes a significant factor along with capital; two advantages the Parlbys enjoyed.

[27] Pioneers and Progress, p. 200.

[28] A dump rake was a two wheeled machine with semi-circular tines hauled by a team of horses, which was used for gathering hay. The operator released the hay by applying pressure to a foot pedal which dumped the hay.

[29] Villy Cormack, p. 30.

their wedding gifts the Parlbys received a "magnificent" cake sent by the Marryats from Fortnum and Mason's department store in London. It lent a touch of old world elegance to the hastily arranged ceremony. According to Parlby her father-in-law had objected to the home wedding and never considered his son and daughter-in-law properly married. They never met and she regretted that she did not have an opportunity to explain the circumstances to him.

Despite the senior Parlby's misgivings, Irene Marryat and Walter Parlby were officially married in law and in the eyes of the Anglican church on 15 March 1897. Following the wedding they settled into married life at Dartmoor where their nearest neighbours were Walter's brother Edward, his wife Anne and their infant son John. Built on a gentle rise on the north shore of Parlby Lake their modest log cabin offered a spectacular view of the lake and the wooded parkland beyond. Their home consisted of two main rooms, a sitting room and bedroom, at the front of the house and a small kitchen at the back. An unfinished attic served during the early years as guests' quarters.

For Irene, marriage conferred the adult status that had eluded her as a single woman in England. It also happily and appropriately resolved the immediate question of her future. Moreover, as the wife of one of the ranking English settlers in the district she enjoyed a privileged position within the social hierarchy of the Anglo-Canadian community that grew up along the west shore of Buffalo Lake.

White settlers did not begin to arrive in the Buffalo Lake area until the 1880s and 90s;[30] however, the region had long provided the native population with fertile hunting and fishing grounds and was well known as a central meeting place for traders in furs.[31] An independent trading post,

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[30]Edward and Walter Parlby have been described as the first white settlers east of Lacombe; however, there were several Englishmen already living in the area including the fur trader Matthew Cook who freighted goods between Edmonton and Winnipeg, James (Jim) Gadsby and Billy Magee. See Land of the Lakes (Lamerton Historical Society, 1974), pp. 58-62.

[31]For a discussion of the status of the native population at the onset of white settlement see William C Wonders, "Far Corner of the Strange Empire: Central Alberta on the Eve of Homestead Settlement," Great Plains Quarterly 3, 2 (1983), pp. 92-108.

located at the junction of Fish-trap and Tail creeks, was still operating in 1890 when Walter Parlby and his brother Edward arrived in the district. In 1892, the free trader, Fletcher Bredin, opened the Lamerton Post Office at the trading post where he received mail twice weekly from Lacombe. According to one early settler, "ranchers from as far as seventy miles, got their mail here".[32] A North West Mounted Police detachment established at Lamerton in 1895 operated sporadically until 1903.

Together with Jim Gadsby, the Parlby brothers cleared a trail west to Lacombe in 1891, opening the area to further white settlement. The earliest arrivals were primarily British settlers who were scattered throughout the district but concentrated at the south end of the lake. Among the most prominent members of this group were Alice and Charles Westhead who took up a military homestead in 1892, raising saddle horses and polo ponies for sale in England.[33] According to the surveyor's report, Westhead and his partner Rowe "had done a great deal of fencing and were actively engaged in ranching" by 1893. They had already completed the construction of "a large log house at an estimated cost of $2,500.00."[34] It was here that Irene Marryat spent her first ten months in Canada. With the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899 Westhead rejoined his old regiment in South Africa and never returned to Canada. Alice Westhead continued to manage the ranch on her own until 1912 when she too returned to England. During their stay in Canada the Westheads employed local settlers as occasional ranch hands and domestic servants or "home help" as they were known in the West. In addition they usually employed one or two young English men interested in farming in the Canadian North-West who worked as an "apprentice" for a fee of four hundred dollars. A number of these young men quickly took up homesteads of their own, married and remained in the area.

By 1895 the English population in the district was sufficiently large to support the building of St. Monica's Anglican church, where Irene and Walter had planned to marry. Walter Parlby applied for and received a

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[32] Ibid., p.65.
[33] A military homestead or "soldier's settlement" was a land grant available to members of the British army.
[34] The Land of the Lakes, (Lamerton Historical Society, 1974), p. 48.

mission grant of forty acres. The Parlby brother, Charles Westhead, Jim Gadsby and other settlers of various faiths, built the church which became known locally as the "Lamerton Mission" or "the English settlement." Much of the community's early social and cultural life centred on the church until about 1905 when the railroad arrived at the town of Toddville (renamed Alix).[35] Like their counterparts in the south, the English at Buffalo Lake were primarily of middle- and upper-class origin. Their social links to the larger ranching community in Alberta and their close family and professional ties gave the "English settlement" more influence in the district than their small numbers might suggest. For example, the Parlby brothers' cousin, Louis Mott, operated a horse ranch in the district from 1903 to 1907. At about the same time Arthur Wright, "a Devonshire man," came out from the Assam tea platation where he and Walter had first met and worked together. He bought property from William Trevenan, another Englishman who moved to Calgary where he took up his appointment as Provincial Mange Inspector. Wright sold the "Trevenan ranch" in 1908 to Major Charles Amphlett who continued to operate it until returning to Britain at the beginning of the First World War.

The English settlers gave the area a distinctive character. When J. Burgon Bickersteth, an Anglican lay missionary from England, travelled in the district in 1914 he thought that the settlement was unique for its "highly civilized character . . . quite different from anything I had as yet had the opportunity of seeing in the West."[36] The rolling, lightly treed countryside itself was "much like English park-land" but Bickersteth was particularly struck by the extent to which the settlers had reconstructed an "English country-gentleman's life" on the Canadian frontier. Signs of their origins could be found in the district's large, often luxurious homes, extensive flower gardens and such old country sporting activities as polo, horse

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[35]The town of Alix is located about five miles south-east of the Parlby ranch. It was apparently named for Alice Westhead. According to local historians Westhead had met William Van Horne, President of the CPR, during a voyage to England at about the time the railroad was under construction.

[36]J. Burgon Bickersteth, The Land of Open Doors (1914; reprint, Toronto: University of Toronto Press,1976), pp. 232-33. Bickersteth was a recent Oxford graduate who was recruited to a two-year term as an Anglican lay missionary as part of an organized initiative of the Church in England to minister to the large British population in the Canadian West.

racing, coyote hunts and clay bird shoots which were held regularly at various ranches followed by tea parties.

Walter Parlby was an active participant in many of these sporting events and a founding member of the Haunted Lake Polo Club. The club met every Saturday afternoon at the Westhead or the Hickling ranch. Occasionally members competed against Southern Alberta clubs. In September 1905 the Haunted Lake Polo Club was invited to offical ceremonies were held in Edmonton marking Alberta's entrance into Confederation. As part of the inauguration day celebrations, attended by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Lord Grey, they played against teams from Millarville and Calgary. The occassion also marked Irene Parlby's first visit to the new "capital city." Years later, when she was as a member of the provincial government Parlby enjoyed telling the story of attending the inauguration ceremonies as the wife of a polo player.[37]

The second largest group of settlers to the Buffalo Lake district were Americans.[38] By 1897 it was reported that seven hundred American families had settled within a fifty mile radius of Buffalo Lake.[39] The largest single group of American settlers mentioned in the literature arrived in 1899 from Sioux County, Nebraska.[40] Driven from their farms by severe drought, rising land prices and increases in tenancy and mortgage rates, the Americans migrated north in an effort to save themselves from economic disaster.[41] The group that left Crawford, Nebraska, on 1 May consisted of

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[37] Parlby, "I Shall Never Forget," p. 18.

[38] A much more detailed study of migration is necessary to determine the origins of arrivals to the Buffalo Lake district, however, the anecdotal evidence suggests that British and American settlers outnumbered the Canadian-born during these early years. On the problems of tracing migration of Canadian and American settlers, "the 'invisible' group" see Randy William Widdis, "Saskatchewan Bound Migration to a New Canadian Frontier," Great Plains Quarterly, 12 (Fall 1992), pp. 254-68.

[39] "To the Future," p. 13.

[40] The American character of migration into the district is reflected in place names. For example, the area north and west of Buffalo Lake where the majority of these families settled was later named the Nebraska District. A number of the settlers had originated in Ontario before migrating to the American North-west in the 1880s. Although most of the Nebraska settlers remained in Canada several families returned to the U.S. over a period of years.

[41] K. Bicha, "The North Dakota Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914," North Dakota History 29 (1962), pp. 297-302.

"21 wagons, 78 people, about 75 horses and 40 head of cattle."[42] They travelled overland as far as the Canadian border where they boarded an immigrant train to Lacombe. This was one of the last wagon trains to cross the prairies and is not entirely representative of American migration during the period which saw a dramatic increase in railway construction. It does, however, graphically illustrate the marked difference between the migration experience of many American and British settlers to the district. According to Henry Clough, a member of the Nebraska group:

> After travelling for ten days some of the party thought we were going too slow and wanted us, who had cattle, to sell them so we could travel faster. We refused, so we divided and they pulled out. We left Rapid City, [South Dakota] on the morning of May 10 and travelled straight north, arriving at Dickenson, N.D. at noon May 26 where we learned the other party had preceded us by only a few days. [Clough's group reached the Missouri River on June 1 where they negotiated with a local Indian band to escort them across the river arriving at the border town of Portal on June 13.] . . . where we found some of the other party waiting for us. We loaded everything onto freight cars with attendants to care for the stock and . . . boarded slat seated immigrant coaches. . . . The freight cars landed in Lacombe about 10 o'clock in the morning of June 17. . . . After getting our families settled in tents and warehouses that the railway kindly placed at our disposal, we men came out to our claims and started to build log houses. . . . By helping each other we built seven houses, barns and sheds, put up hay which we found in abundance, and started to break 7 to 10 acres apiece.[43]

As news from the Nebraska settlers filtered back to friends and family in the United States other settlers followed. In February 1904, Giles Estelle was able to report from Lamerton to the Union paper in Lake Crystal, Minnesota, that Americans outnumbered both the English and eastern Canadians: "There are quite a few English people in this part, but mostly they are from the States; Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska and Michigan."[44] These early settlement patterns had a lasting effect on the community as English and American families each

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[42] Land of the Lakes, p. 95.
[43] Land of the Lakes, pp. 95-96.
[44] Ibid., p. 27.

claimed social ascendancy over the other. As one local historian expressed it; "A lot was at stake. They thought they were competing with everyone else to become the largest urban centre in the new province [Alberta]."[45] This friendly rivalry inevitably coloured social and political alignments within the district and would affect Parlby's political career as well as the perception of her influence and importance as a leader in the community.

The influx of American farmers into the Buffalo Lake district coincided with a new emphasis on agricultural settlement in the West generally. During the early period of British migration in the 1890s cattle and horse ranching along with some hay production was the principal economic activity in the district. According to the American Estelle, in 1904 it was "great stock country and that is all that is raised here, excepting what feed a rancher wants for his own use. I saw cattle on the range last fall as fat as cattle would have been if fed on corn for six months. The grass here seems more fattening after the frost than before. It also makes fine hay if put up in time."[46] The surveyors' reports of the district, while more restrained, draw a similar conclusion. When J. McAree surveyed the Parlby land in 1893 he determined that it was "suited to grazing rather than to general farming" since it consisted largely of hard clay and gravel with only a thin layer of good topsoil.[47] Although the land was well irrigated by an abundance of streams and lakes it was also heavily treed and broken by steep knolls which made cultivation difficult. "Taken together," McAree concluded, the area offered "many opportunities for the establishment of stock farms proper, viz. farms combining a cultivated portion whereon to raise food for stock in winter and also grazing for the summer . . ." While he thought that the township would be "not an unimportant one among the townships of the Red Deer and Buffalo Lake country . . ." he cautioned that "Owing . . . to its physical characteristic, timbered and somewhat broken - its early settlement to any great extent is not to be looked for."

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[45] Interview with Vera R. Barritt, Mirror, Alberta (October 1989).
[46] Vera Renetta Barritt, "To the Future," (np), p. 25.
[47] Land Of The Lakes, p. 48-50.

During her early years in Canada Irene Parlby devoted much of her time to mastering the challenges of domestic life under the rough conditions of the western frontier. Inexperienced and without the aid of domestic servants or a "home help" she learned to bake bread and make her own butter.[48] Almost all of her work was confined to the home, however, like other farm women she kept chickens for home consumption, and harvested wild fruits and berries in season or learned to trade for them with the local native population. Managing a frontier home required a good deal of planning since staples such as flour, sugar and canned goods had to be ordered every six months in bulk from the Hudson's Bay Store in Calgary or brought in by wagon from Lacombe. During the summer months there was an abundance of fish augmented with pickled beef and dried salt bacon. In the fall she relied on game birds as a staple meat and in winter the ranch provided a ready supply of fresh frozen beef.

For her wedding Parlby had received a copy of Mrs. Beeton's cookbook which became her constant companion, gaining a reputation as an accomplished cook and hostess. She also received a sewing machine and in addition to making her own clothes she took pride in creating a comfortable, attractive home for herself and her husband.

Among Parlby's most prized possessions was a piano purchased with funds sent by friends and family at the time of her marriage. In The Land of Open Doors, J. Burgon Bickersteth provides a description of the Parlby home as it appeared in 1914. A new wing had been added to the two room log cabin about ten years earlier. At one end of the main parlor there was "a big open fireplace with huge logs burning on it, and in front a comfortable fender seat; big arm chairs and soft carpets, china and brass and a first class piano; a table littered with reviews; on the book shelves Walter Pater's works, Browning, William Morris, Rudyard Kipling and Maeterlinck."[49] Reading was an important activity in the Parlby household particularly

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[48]During these early years it was difficult if not impossible to attract domestic servants to remote areas such as Buffalo Lake. Later Parlby relied on her sisters for help in the home. During her term in office when she was away from the ranch for long periods of time Mrs. Archie Whitford worked for the Parlbys. Irene's daughter-in-law, Bee, described Whitford as a "very careful worker" and "a great comfort in her dependability." See Pioneers and Progress, p. 210.

[49]Bickersteth, pp. 233-34.

during the long Alberta winters. Irene and Walter also subscribed to a number of English periodicals and newspapers as a means of keeping abreast of events back home. Parlby's first love, however, was gardening. In the spring of 1897, immediately following her marriage, she set about building the garden that would eventually become an important source of personal satisfaction as well as a crucial retreat from the demands of public life.

For Parlby a garden, "however small," was "much more . . . than just a piece of ground where you can grow things." It was a place "where nature may heal and cheer, and give strength to body and soul alike."[50] She had learned to garden as a child in England but quickly realized that the familiar perennials that had flourished in the temperate climate of Surrey had to be adapted to the harsh conditions of the Canadian prairie. To prepare the garden she had to trench the entire area, remove "the good top soil and put it aside and [take] out also the next layer to discard as it was all stone boulders and pebbles, and then [brake up] the subsoil which was a stiff clay."[51] During long periods of drought she learned to bury an empty tin can beneath each plant to hold the water hauled from the lake in order to ensure adequate moisture.

With the birth of her son Humphrey (Hum) on 15 March 1899, life for Parlby "seemed completely filled."[52] In the tradition of middle-class British women overseas she returned to England to give birth to her first, and only, child. During the election campaign of 1921 this decision would be used to challenge her loyalty to her adopted country. In the fall of 1898, however, Parlby feared the possible risks to herself and her unborn child if she remained on the ranch without access to modern medical care. Pregnancy also provided the first opportunity to return home to visit her family and to meet Walter's relatives at Manadon in Devonshire. As it happened, Walter's father died before he and Irene arrived in England but that Christmas a large Marryat family reunion was held in London in honour of the newlyweds.

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[50] Parlby, "Gardeners All" (c. 1936), Parlby's personal papers.
[51] Parlby, untitled (c. 1940), Parlby's personal papers.
[52] Villy Cormack, p. 38.

Walter returned to Canada in March, immediately following Humphrey's birth. Irene remained in England until she and her infant son were strong enough to travel. They arrived home in May accompanied by Gladys Marryat, Irene's sister, to help care for the baby and assist the family at home.

Just as Parlby had learned to manage a household on her own, she now assumed primary responsibility for the care of her infant son. With the exception of a brief period in 1906-07, she was the first woman in her family to raise a child without the aid of a nanny or governess. As a child Humphrey suffered from recurring bouts of pneumonia and pleurisy. As a result, his health was a constant concern to his mother. His delicate health seems to be the primary reason why Humphrey was educated at home. The district's first public school opened in 1906 but going out to school meant travelling several miles on horseback, a trip his parents feared would increase the risk of illness particularly during the cold winter months. Instead, they kept him at home and except when they employed a governess briefly in 1906-07 Irene and Walter taught Humphrey themselves. As a young adolescent he also attended a private boarding school in Calgary for several months until illness forced his to return to Dartmoor.

It is noteworthy that Parlby chose to educate her only child at home since she was cognizant of the limitations of her own home education. In later years she was a strong advocate of rural schools, campaigned for improvements in provincial education and was a member of the University of Alberta Board of Governors. Home education was not solely a question of confidence in Canada's early rural schools, it was also a question of class. British ranching families typically continued the well established practice of educating their children at home before sending them out to private schools. Humphrey seems not to have suffered any adverse effects as a result of his home education. Both of his parents valued learning, they owned an extensive personal library and Walter's Oxford education meant he was probably at least as was well qualified to teach his son as the local school teacher would have been. Nor did home education prevent Humphrey from

making a living. In 1924 he joined is father as a partner in the family ranch which he operated until his death in 1976.[53]

When Gladys Marryat arrived in Canada with her sister Irene and her infant son Humphrey in the spring of 1899 neither woman realized that, with the exception of their two eldest brothers whe were in active service in the British navy and army, the rest of their family would soon follow. Gladys responded to the Canadian West in much the same way as Irene had before her. Her enthusiastic reports back to England prompted Norah, her husband Walter (Mac) McDonnell, and their three children to emigrate in 1901. Irene in particular must have welcomed Norah's arrival since they had been especially close during their early years. With three children of her own, Norah could also provide Irene with the benefit of her experience. The pleasure of their reunion was soon clouded by illness, however, as all three McDonnell children, Humphrey and Gladys were infected with measles within a month of their arrival. According to Walter's diary, illness did not prevent him from attending the regular Saturday afternoon polo match at the Westheads although the MacDonnell's put off moving into their new home bordering Buffalo Lake until the children were fully recovered.

Irene's parents, younger brothers and sisters arrived in Alberta in May 1905. Ernest Marryat was now in his mid-sixties. He had prospered in the intervening years and remained a vigorous, energetic man and may have decided to immigrate when he visited the Parlbys in 1901. He was clearly impressed with the potential of the area and its future economic prospects as the newest of Canada's provinces. He seems to have arrived in Canada more determinted than ever to realize his long held ambition of country retirement which had eluded him nineteen years earlier at Horley. Almost immediately upon his arrival Colonel Marryat began construction on his luxurious Haunted Lakes home, modelled after a chateau he had once seen in Brittany.[54] Dubbed "the Colonel's Folly," for its prolonged construction and great expense, the house consisted of thirteen rooms, each with its own coal stove, and a great hall with an open beamed ceiling dominated at one end by a massive fireplace made of stones hauled from

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[53]Dartmoor is now owned and operated by the Parlby's grandchildren.
[54]Villy Cormack, p. 39; Parlby, Pioneers and Progress, pp. 188-89.

Tail Creek. The entire home was surrounded by perennial gardens and carefully tended lawns leading down to the lake shore. The family's main business, Haunted Lakes Poultry Farm, was operated by Irene's youngest sister, Sheila and her partner Jean Reed.[55]

Surrounded by family and friends Irene's life at Dartmoor took on a happy if hectic pace. The routine demands of the ranch life, a home and a growing child, were lightened by family visits and home entertainments. In addition to the regular Saturday afternoon polo matches, there were gymkhanas, house parties, dances, singalongs, and Irene's favourite, amateur theatricals. The diary of a young Marryat cousin, Nora Trench, who visited the family in 1901 captures the informal atmosphere that prevailed at Dartmoor. Describing an impromptu game of field hockey, she wrote:

> We mustered eight a side and had a very good game for a first attempt. The men all play well, especially Leslie Gay and Mr. Brealy, our Captains. Irene, Glad, Norah and Daisy all are good, - the other ladies rather hopeless, but it was huge sport. . . . Various incidents such as perambulators upsetting and fond mothers flying to the rescue, made pleasant diversions, as the heat was terrific and we could hardly last out the last half.[56]

On another occasion the group organized a coyote hunt which, according to Trench, "is not quite like fox hunting, but it is great sport with good dogs." In the midst of one afternoon's activities a "C.P.R. inspector appeared to ask for a night's lodging. There was no alternative and he had to dine with us," which, in her opinion "spoiled our evening." Irene seems to have been most relaxed on these occasions. Pictures taken about this time show an attractive, slender woman with dark hair gathered up into a fashionable knot, surrounded by friends and family. She obviously enjoyed their company as well as the activity, whether it was a picnic, a play, or just taking tea in the garden.

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[55]Sheila Marryat attended Olds Agricultural College in 1918 and the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Alberta, graduating with a B.S.A. in 1923. She went on to a career in radio broadcasting and worked as a producer for CBC Winnipeg during the 1930s before retiring to Victoria, B.C., with Jean Reed in 1940. Parlby, Pioneers and Progress, pp. 90-91. The Marryat family home was destroyed by fire in 1937.

[56]Villy Cormack, p. 41.

Irene and Walter Parlby enjoyed a relatively privileged life but they were not wealthy. Irene's daughter-in-law Bee once described the family as "land rich and money poor." Walter was reputed to be a "good stockman," but his father's initial financial support as well as the early establishment of the ranch on good land were also crucial to his success. If Dartmoor did not generate a large income it did provided a secure living and sufficient profit to allow the Parlbys to hire additional workers as required. When other homesteaders in the district sought off-farm work as a means of raising much needed cash, they often found it at Dartmoor. During planting and harvest seasons the Parlbys recruited Indians from nearby reserves and occasionally employed young bachelors from England who intended to establish their own ranch in the Canadian West.

Among the young Englishmen who worked at Dartmoor in 1906-07, two later married Irene's sisters, Gladys and Beryl and settled in the district but neither family succeeded at homesteading. Gladys' son, Richard Yerburgh, paints a grim picture of his family's efforts to establish a farm at "The Hill" which was named for his father's old school at Harrow.

> Like a lot of other people, [he writes] we were chronically hard up, and one year about all the meat we had was that of rabbits which Dad shot. The next year came the disease that killed off the rabbits every few years. That year there was very little meat. I remember my father spotting a partridge or a prairie chicken, and to make sure he got it he stalked it, but got too close and blew it to pieces.[57]

The problem, according to Yerburgh, was lack of water:

> One well was drilled on top of the hill beside the house with a windmill attached, but I think it silted up. There was a well near the barn, but we did not use the water from it for ourselves. . . . My last remembrance was of water being hauled from a well dug close to a small slough on the way to Dartmoor.

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[57] Parlby, Pioneers and Progress , p. 213.

In 1910 the family was struck by tragedy when Irene's sister, Gladys, died in childbirth. Her husband, Richard (Dick) Yerburgh, remarried five years later, sold his farm and and moved with his family to British Columbia in 1916. Beryl and her husband, Robert (Bob) Lambarde, were already living at the coast, as were Norah and her family, who had moved to Mission, British Columbia in 1908.

The early decades of the twentieth century brought dramatic changes to the lives of the early settlers in the Buffalo Lake district. The first harbinger of change was the coming of the railroad to Alix in 1905, followed by a rapid increase in population. In 1910-11, the Grand Trunk Pacific built the third railroad into the area in twenty years. The Grand Trunk ran from Edmonton to Calgary along the west shore of Buffalo Lake setting off the largest land boom the district would witness. With the arrival of the Grand Trunk the town of Mirror was created just north of Alix. An aggressive advertising campaign promoting the town claimed that within the next few years the area could expect to see a population of "fifty million people."[58] Speculators and hopeful settlers flocked to Mirror to attend land auctions which saw unprecedented sales. According to one account published in the London Daily Mirror, the town's namesake, in one day "577 lots in different parts of the town were bought in 660 minutes." Although some lots sold for as high as $1,500.00, the average price was just over $400.00. With the influx of settlers land was rapidly fenced, cutting off the open range available to ranchers such as the Parlbys. In the farm and ranch struggle that followed even the political intervention of the powerful Western Stock Growers' Association was insufficient to stem the tide.[59] The days when cattle was king were past.

In 1910 Edward Parlby, who had been forced off his original homestead by the construction of the Calgary and Edmonton Railroad in

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[58]The Land of the Lakes, pp. 398-99.

[59]Breen, esp. ch. 5, "The Struggle for Survival: The Dark Years 1905-11," pp.136-62. Despite the tensions that Breen identifies between the British ranchers and the newly arrived American farmers, the struggle in the Canadian West never took on the violence of the "range wars" south of the border. Generally, Canadians chose to mediate the transition from cattle to wheat through exisiting institutions.

1890, captured this passing of a way of life in a letter written at the request of the Alix Board of Trade:

> Coming to this north country in 1887, driving up the old Edmonton Trail from Calgary, as in those days there was no C. and E. Railway, I lived for a couple of years close to the old Hudson Bay Post on the Battle River. . . . In 1890 the C. and E. Railroad was started, and, finding that that part of the country was not suitable for ranching, I moved with my brother who had just joined me, to my present abode, which I discovered in 1888.
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> Here we engaged in ranching, but latterly, since settlement has progressed so, gradually drifted into mixed farming. . . . Only a few short years ago cattle ranged across the open country of which Alix is now the centre; we little thought to see a flourishing town of three railways running through it, and the country surrounding all fenced and well farmed. This summer. . . . while other parts were parched and brown, here it was fresh and green. That looks like an assured future.[60]

Edward seems to have accepted as inevitable the changes he had witnessed over the previous twenty-three years. He and Walter took an increasingly active role in the promotion and development of the Alix district. In 1910 the brothers donated land for the construction of St. Pancras Anglican Church which was partially equipped by donations from family and friends in England.[61] Edward was President of the Alix Board of Trade, of the Agricultural Society, and the local Red Cross Society, as well as a school trustee and councillor of the Municipal District of Lamerton.[62] Walter served as Justice of the Peace and game warden at Alix and was an original member of the Alberta Wheat Pool and the Central Alberta Dairy Pool.[63]

While the arrival of the railroad marks an important transition in the development of central Alberta, for the English settlement at Buffalo Lake the war of 1914-1918 brought a much more profound and long-lasting

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[60] Land of the Lakes, p. 390.
[61] Alix Free Press (21 Sept. 1911); Parlby, Pioneers and Progress, pp.40-43.
[62] Land of the Lakes, p. 371.
[63] The Alix Free Press (24 January 1952).

change. In its broadest sense the war seriously weakened British Imperial hegemony around the world, more importantly and more immediately for the English settlement, it drew loyal British subjects off the land and into the ranks of the military. It was not just the young men who took up arms and never returned to the district but English women left as well to wait out the crisis at home in Britain.

The effects of the First War are dramatically illustrated by its impact on the Parlby and Marryat families. Irene's eldest brothers, Rudolph (Rudie) and Dennis, both saw active service as career officers in the British army and the navy. Her youngest brother Ulric (U.G.) who had married in 1911 and established his own homestead just east of the Parlbys, enlisted in 1917 and fought in France. In August of that year Walter's nephew, Aleck Parlby, Edward and Jean Parlby's youngest son, was killed at Lens, France. Norah Marryat McDonnell's son Ronald had returned to Alberta from British Columbia to take up his family's old homestead in 1913. He joined the 31st Battalion along with James Rennie Allan, a young Scotsman who had arrived in the district in 1910, and went overseas in the spring of 1915. Ronald McDonnell was seriously wounded before returning home in 1919. After the war James Allan married Norah's daughter, Olive, and together they farmed in the district north of Alix. Among the other men of the district who served in Europe were Tristram (TIP) Willett, the Westhead's long-time foreman; Oswin S. Creighton, the first rector of St. Pancras church who served as a volunteer chaplain at Gallipolli and was killed in April 1918; Harry Hickling who left a widow, Cecilia Eccleshall Hickling and infant son when he was killed in action; Arthur Hunt who died at Vimy Ridge; and John Trevenan, son of William Trevenan, a founding member of the Haunted Lake Polo Club and the Lamerton Gun Club, who also died in France.

Irene supported the war effort as a necessary evil in the face of German aggression. In her view the real problem was the "competition in armaments" which had led to the outbreak of hostilities in Europe.[64] The "only hope for world peace," she wrote, was an "international court of

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[64]Parlby's letter to MacNaughton, 19 September 1916.

justice" supported by "peace loving powers." Her immediate concern, however, was for her family members fighting in the war as well as for those who had been left at home; Ulric's wife Katherine and their two children Dennis (b. 1912) and Peter (b. 1914) in particular. During the war years she also became involved in the politics of agrarian reform.

Since coming to Canada in 1896 Irene Parlby had matured into a confident woman whose life centred on her husband and son and her extended family. Under Alice Westhead's tutelage she had gained ready access to the ranks of a small but influential local elite which connected her to some of the province's leading families. She had arrived in the North-West a young, inexperienced woman and had successfully met the challenges of frontier domesticity. In motherhood, in particular, she found a useful and rewarding life. "Never for a moment was I troubled with homesickness," she wrote, "I loved every moment of it and felt that at last I really was of some use in the world even if only in a very limited sphere."[65] The tightly knit English community of the Alix district in which she had found a home provided a comfortable familiarity without the rigidity of the Victorian society in which she had grown up. From this secure base she was able to assume the conventional role that was expected of her as a member of one of the district's largest ranching families and wife of one of its senior ranchers. Parlby took an active role in church activities and presided over local social events as well as serving as hostess to visiting dignitaries and other travellers to the area.

Among the guests to Dartmoor during the immediate pre-World War period was Elizabeth Mitchell who was touring the Canadian West from Stirling, Scotland.[66] Mitchell had arrived in Alberta from Saskatchewan where she had attended a meeting of the Homemakers Club and she encouraged the women of Alix to follow the Saskatchewan women's lead.[67] As a result, in February 1914 a meeting was held at St. Pancras church rectory and the Alix Country Women's Club was formed with Leona Barritt

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[65] Speech to Lacombe I.O.D.E. (n.d.), Parlby's personal papers.
[66] Elizabeth B. Mitchell, In Western Canada Before the War: Impression of Early Twentieth Century Prairies Communities, Susan Jackel, intro. (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981).
[67] See Pioneers and Progess, p. 77.

as President and Irene Parlby as Secretary-Treasurer. Within a year of organizing, Barritt, a former school teacher, and Parlby, a life-long reader, launched a drive to build a local library. In addition to her many individual appeals for donations, Parlby placed an advertisement in the London Spectator which brought immediate responses from England and from as far away as South Africa and Japan. The collection of books generated by this project formed the basis of the town's public library which continued to be owned and operated by the women of the district for many years.

In January 1915 the Alix Country Women's Club was invited to send delegates to the annual convention of the United Farmers of Alberta in Edmonton. It was at this meeting that the Women's Auxiliary of the United Farmers of Alberta was formed with Jean Reed, Sheila Marryat's partner in the poultry business, as its first President. The Alix Country Women's Club was named Local No. 1 of the farm women's organization which Parlby would lead from 1916 to 1920 before she was recruited to political office.

Chapter Three

Partners in Eden: building up the farm women's organization

In January 1916 Irene Parlby was a delegate to the United Farmer's annual meeting in Edmonton. Sudden illness had prevented her from attending the founding convention of the women's auxillary the previous year but her work in her home district had convinced her of the pressing need for a farm women's organization. Still, when she travelled to Edmonton in the winter of 1916 she apparently had no intention of seeking a larger role at the provincial level. But, in her words, "fate [took] a hand in pushing me in another direction . . . and [I] was nominated for President" of the UFWA. Initially, she "tried vigorously to get out of it."[1] She reluctantly agreed to allow her name to stand only after she was urged to do so by a number of influential newspaper women present at the convention, including Francis Beynon, Women's Editor of the Grain Growers' Guide (GGG) and May

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[1]Parlby, "I Shall Never Forget," Parlby's personal papers. Published accounts of the UFWA founding convention give a similar interpretation. Parlby's standing in the farm community seems to have made her the favoured candidate but there is no explanation for Jean Reed's retirement. As a close personal friend of the Parlbys and Marryats it seems unlikely that she would have contested the election. Reed attended the 1915 convention as Vice-President of the Alix club. According to Leona Barritt's brief History of United Farm Women (1943), Parlby was then President of the Alix club and on that basis was elected a delegate to the 1915 meeting. When Parlby became ill at the last moment Barritt, who was also a member of the executive, stepped in as a replacement delegate. In Parlby's absence, Reed may have accepted the presidency in 1915 with the expectation that Parlby would assume the office at the next convention. Parlby undoubted knew that she was seen as a likely candidate but by her own account had decided not to accept the nomination should it be forthcoming. This interpretation is consistent with her conflict over whether or not she should enter the election campaign in 1921.

Clendennan, Beynon's counterpart at the Farmer's Advocate.[2] And "so began what turned out to be a really interesting experience - the building up of the Farm Women's organization. . . ."[3]

Organized farm women in Alberta have been variously seen as feminist, reformist or essentially conservative. Early scholarship emphasized the radical aims of the agrarian reform movement and assumed that prairie women, like their male counterparts, were in the vanguard of social and political change. According to this view the frontier experience created a different kind of reformer; one who championed individual rights and whose special affinity for equality was born out of the shared burden of settlement work.[4] In the same way that the gospel of the 'New Jerusalem' promised a realignment of class relations along more Christian lines so too did it hold out a vision of partnership between the sexes. In this view western feminism was an inevitable product of western culture.

It is true, of course, that in their attempts to determine what the West would become farm women (and men) frequently drew upon the notion of a "pioneering partnership" which was rapidly becoming a staple of western folklore.[5] In the struggle for reform farm men and women both pointed to their

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[2]On Beynon see Anne Hick, "Francis Beynon and the Guide," First Days Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History, Mary Kinnear, ed. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1987), pp. ; Ramsay Cook, "Francis Marion Beynon and the Crisis of Christian Reformism, " The West and the Nation, Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 187-208; and on the influence of press women Western Canadian reform see Susan Jackel, "First Days, Fighting Days: Prairie Presswomen and Suffrage Activism, 1906-16," First Days Fighting Days , pp.53-75.

[3]Parlby, "I Shall Never Forget."

[4]This argument is most explicit in Catherine L. Cleverdon, The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950) but is implied by other historians of the Canadian West such as W.L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950) and Richard Allan, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971). In his introduction to the 1974 reprint of Cleverdon's book Ramsay Cook argues that women's role as "equal partners in pioneering conditions" weakened separate spheres ideology in the West making it difficult for men to deny women the franchise (p. xvi). Among those who have argued for a unique Western feminist see Carol Bacchi, Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadain Suffragists, 1877-1918 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), and Veronica Strong-Boag, The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, The National Museum of Man, 1976. This idea persists in recent works as well. See for example Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984).

[5]See Joanne Stiles, "Descended from Heroes" 2, 2 Alberta (1990), p. 38.

shared labour in settling the West as the basis of a new progressive politics. Women activists confronted the limits of the "pioneering partnership" when their bid for change brought them into conflict with entrenched male interests. In the resulting struggles women discovered that they had influence but they did not have the political authority to implement change.

The notion of a "pioneering partnership" between men and women who settled the West has persisted in the literature but a new generation of scholars has given it a very different interpretation. They argue that for women in agricultural societies the bonds of family and community were stronger than the bonds of sex. Mutuality of interests with their husbands overrode their solidarity with other women. Since their first loyalty was to the family farm women failed to challenge traditional gender stereotypes.[6] Their interest in the suffrage movement and women's rights was secondary to their concern to preserve the home, community and nation. In their view, despite the advances the farm women's movement won for women it was fundamentally conservative precisely because of the pioneering partnership. Far from advancing the individual rights of women, activists reinforced "separate spheres" ideology by claiming special protections for women based on their maternal status and "female moral superiority."

The language of moral motherhood was commonplace in the discourse of agrarian reform and agrarian activists did see themselves as "cleaning up" the West. However, as Peggy Pascoe has pointed out in her book Relations of Rescue, the term "moral superiority" needs serious reconsideration. She explains that:

> The phrase itself distorts understanding by playing into contemporary stereotypes; for few people seem less appealing to modern sensibilities than the self-righteous women too frequently equated with Victorian moral reformers. Much more important, the use of the

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[6]This argument is made by Nancy Grey Osterud, Bonds of Community: The lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Paul Voisey, Vulcan, The Making of a Prairie Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), and Leslie May Robinson, "Agrarian Reformers: Women and the Farm Movement in Alberta 1909-1925" (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1979). Barbara Nicholson, "Feminism in the Prairie Provinces to 1916" (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary,) attributes prairie women's failure to move beyond the promise of suffrage to achieve real equality to their conservative attitudes toward gender roles.

> term superiority encourages contemporary readers to exaggerate Victorian women's social power. Even when Victorian women argued that they were morally "superior" to men it is by no means clear that Victorian society as a whole accepted their claims.[7]

If the terms pioneering partnership and moral motherhood will no longer suffice, the notion of fixed and immutable gender roles has also been put in question. In their work on gender in history, Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments, Joan Scott, Gender and the Politics of History, and Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?" have convincingly argued that gender meanings are not fixed. What is stable is the definition of difference as a binary opposite that turns on sex. Thus, as Poovey suggests, "the epistemological term 'women'" is seen to "guarantee men's identity."[8] By this analysis gender identity is most in flux where gender ideology is most urgently pursued. Moreover, as Robert L. Griswold points out in his study of domestic ideology in the American West, "[t]he fact that domesticity arose in the East as part of the complex shift from a corporate household economy to a nascent urban, industrial economy would suggest that domestic ideology might have had trouble establishing firm roots in the West."[9]

The current state of the debate is reason enough to reconsider the politics of organized farm women in Alberta. Irene Parlby's personal vision offers a useful starting point since as President of the United Farm Women's organization and its chief spokesperson during its formative years she was primarily responsible for articulating women's role in the agrarian movement. She was also seen as a role model for other farm women. According to one longtime activist in the farm movement, Parlby was chosen as President in large part because she was seen as poised and confident at a time when farm women were taking their first tentative steps into the public world of politics.[10]

During her years as President, Parlby wrote regularly for the popular farm presses and her public addresses were often reproduced by the

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[7]Peggy Pascoe, , p. xvi.
[8]Poovey, p. 80.
[9]Robert L. Griswold, "Anglo Women and Domestic Ideology in the American West in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives, Lillian Schlissel, Vicki L. Ruiz & Janice Monk, eds. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988), pp. 17-18.
[10]E. Zella Spencer, unpublished letter, 5 August 1952, quoted in KcKinlay, p. 43.

Farmer's in the form of official UFA pamphlets. Her ideas received wide circulation and were readily available to the rank-and-file members in Alberta as well as the other prairie provinces. During this period Parlby corresponded regularly with Violet McNaughton, agrarian activist and President of the Saskatchewan Women Grain Growers. The two women met in 1913 and developed a close and lasting friendship. Over the years Parlby relied on McNaughton's initmate knowledge of the farm movement, her critical analysis and executive experience. They frequently consulted each other on the major debates of their day, particularly on issues concerning women and children.[11] Another important influence on the development of Parlby's ideas was Henry Wise Wood, the American populist whose career as leader of the UFA from 1916 to 1931 paralleled her own. She shared Wood's Social Darwinist view of man's animal selfishness and the redemptive power of the Christian ideal in transforming human relationships.[12]

The farm movement in Western Canada grew out of the historical tensions between the independent farmers and the commercial and financial interests associated with nineteenth century industrialization. Conflict between these two groups accelerated as eastern based industrial interests gained ascendancy over western wheat growers. Other factors contributed to the "agrarian revolt," but initially farm grievances focused on the National Policy of 1878, which they saw as protecting central Canadian industrialization at the expense of farm interests. In Alberta agrarian discontent led to the merger of the American based Society of Equity and the Alberta Farmers' Association in 1909.[13] Renamed the United Farmers of Alberta, the new organization operated as a lobby group to secure profitable farm prices and improved transportation and marketing of all agriculatural products. Like its predecessors, the UFA was deliberately

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[11] For a detailed discussion of McNaughton's views see Sheilagh L. Steir, "The Beliefs of Violet McNaughton" (M. Ed. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1979).

[12] On Henry Wise Wood W. K. Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950); W. L. Morton, "The Social Philosophy of Henry Wise Wood," Contexts of Canada's Past Selected Essays of W.L. Morton, A. B. McKillop, ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 131-48; William Irvine, The Farmers in Politics, Reginald Whitaker, intro. (1920; rpt., Toronto: McClelland, 1976).

[13] For a discussion of the events leading up to the formation of the UFA see David G. Embree, "The Rise of the United Farmers of Alberta" (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1956).

non-partisan and opposed to what it called the "old line parties," and the institutions they dominated.

Parlby entered farm politics as a novice. She favoured women's suffrage but did not take an active part in the provincial campaign.[14] She was also a relative late-comer to organized farm protest. Women were first admitted as members of the UFA in 1913 but it was another two years before Parlby joined the organization. She was introduced to the agrarian movement by her husband and her father who were both early and enthusiastic supporters.[15] Walter Parlby was the first president of the Alix UFA local and Colonel Marryat was instrumental in forming the district's first dairy co-operative.[16] By 1915, when she was approached to serve on the executive of the Alix Women's Auxiliary, the UFA was already well established in the district. Initially at least Parlby's involvement in the local organization arose as a result of her social position as a leading citizen and wife of the President of the district local. "It was my first experience of organized activity," she wrote, "and I revelled in it...."[17] In particular she welcomed the opportunity to meet women outside of her immediate family and social circle and she took pride in her role in establishing the first public library in the Alix district.

Her experience as Secretary-Treasurer of the Alix branch of the UFA women's Auxiliary, lead Parlby to conclude that the Auxiliary's primary importance as social; that is, it provided a central meeting place for rural women who were isolated on scattered and remote homesteads where they "remained, to a large extent, strangers to each other."[18] She also understood that this social function was vital to the organization's broader political aims to strengthen community ties, foster self-education on issues of importance to farm women, and build common cause in the agrarian

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[14]Women were granted the vote in Alberta in April 1916. The partial federal enfranchisement of women under the "War Times Election Act" of 1917 was extended to all Canadian women in 1918. On the suffrage campaign in Alberta see Cleverdon, pp. 73, 129 and 136.
[15]McKinlay, p. 32.
[16]Villy Cormack, p. 56.
[17]Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And To-day! The Story of Women's Struggle Toward Self-Government in Alberta," The Canadian Magazine, (July 1928).
[18]Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And To-day!"

movement. Following from the United Farmers' call to "organize, educate, co-operate," she believed that in its social, educational and political function a farm women's organization could serve as an important vehicle for women's direct participation in the farm movement and the future development of the province generally. Indeed, during the period of her presidency she became increasingly convinced "that women had a service to perform, a contribution to make, not alone to the communities from which we came, but to the Farmers' organization, and to our Provincial life."[19]

As head of the farm women's organization Parlby emphasized the importance of women's leadership role in advancing reforms which were consistent with agrarian aims while reflecting the specific concerns of farm women. At the same time she believed that membership in the farm movement enhanced the political influence of the new woman voter. In 1917 she argued that although female suffrage had "materially increased . . . [t]he power of women [working for] the improvement of local conditions" women's ability to influence public policy would only be fully realised through sustained, organized and informed action.[20] As a founding member and President of the UFWA, Parlby's objective was to strengthen the voice of farm women through their full inclusion in what she called "our Great Farm Union."

At first the task ahead of her seemed daunting. In 1916, as newly elected president of the Women's Auxiliary she set herself three objectives: first, to organize district locals across the province and increase membership; second, to develop policies in areas of particular concern to women; and third, to provide inspirational leadership. The job was made more difficult by her own inexperience and the fact that the women's organization had "no money to work with [apart from the modest funds provided by the UFA and what was raised through memberships], no prestige, and were to co-operate with a men's group which, while outwardly polite," resisted the inclusion of women in their ranks.[21] In addition, while attempting to attract farm women the UFWA found itself in direct competition

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[19] Ibid.
[20] UFA Annual Report, 1917, p. 35.
[21] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And Today!"

with the popular Women's Institutes (WI) which were introduced to Alberta in 1909.[22] Early success winning WI members to the farm movement led Parlby to conclude that the opposition of farm men was the most significant obstacle facing the fledgling organization.[23] In 1916 she optimistically reported that "some of the men anyway are beginning to realize that our organization is a help to theirs & when they all get to see that, we shall go ahead quicker."[24] Her strategy for building up the farm women's organization was, first, to place the UFWA on a firm footing and second, to prove its value to the movement as a whole. "Enthusiasm," she wrote, "is not enough. We must have careful building; the foundations must be well and truly laid."[25]

The first challenge facing the farm women's organization was the question of its relationship to the male-dominated UFA. Much has been made of the fact that the initial impetus to organize farm women in Alberta came from the men, the assumption being that the men's support compromised the farm women from the outset. The situation was not that simple. It is true that some social progressives such as W.J. Tregillus, President of the UFA, Rice Sheppard, P.P. Woodbridge, and George Chipman, editor of the farmers' newspaper the Grain Growers' Guide, who was also instrumental in establishing the Women Grain Growers in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, advocated opening membership to farmers' wives and daughters.[26] Indeed, in 1912 they backed a successful call to organize a women's auxiliary "along the lines of the UFA."[27] When no steps were taken to recruit women, George Chipman insisted that a second resolution be placed before the 1913 annual meeting.[28] This time Chipman

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[22]On The Women's Institutes in Alberta see Shelley Anne Marie Bosetti, "The Rural Women's University: Women's Institutes in Alberta from 1909 to 1940" (M. A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1983).

[23]For example, the first Women's Institute in Alberta, The Lea Park Branch, voted to join the ranks of the UFWA in 1915, Bosetti, p. 40.

[24]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 2 July 1916.

[25]Parlby, "The Great Adventure," The Grain Growers' Guide, (1 April 1927), p. 47.

[26]For a more detailed discussion on the role of these men in the farm movement in Alberta see Robinson, pp. 47-49.

[27]United Farmers of Alberta, Official Minutes and Reports of the 1912 Annual Convention, Glenbow Museum Archives, p. 56.

[28]In addition the convention of 1913 approved a resolution admitting women as "wives and daughters" of farmers into membership in the UFA. In 1914 women attended the

backed up his motion with a specific direction that the UFA Executive Board take the necessary measures to ensure that a delegation of women attend the Lethbridge convention in 1914. Despite Chipman's attempt to prod the organization no action was taken during the following year. Then, just weeks before the opening of the seventh annual convention in 1915, P.P. Woodbridge, UFA Secretary-Treasurer, took matters into his own hands. Fearing further foot dragging on the part of some members of the Board, Woodbridge wrote to Irma Stocking, his counterpart in the Saskatchewan Women Grain Growers' Association, (WGGA) asking if she or Violet McNaughton as President, would attend the Edmonton meeting to provide the "practical leadership" necessary to organize the Alberta women.[29] The WGGA had been active in Saskatchewan for less than a year but McNaughton had already gained a reputation as a skilled leader and organizer. Woodbridge believed that without the experience and expertise of the Saskatchewan women the UFA was in danger of failing yet again "to get the thing started" in Alberta. With only several weeks' notice McNaughton readily agreed to travel to Edmonton. Meeting with the fifty-eight women delegates and UFA observers she not only succeeded in organizing the Women's Auxiliary but continued to nurture the organization directly and indirectly during its formative years and under the farmers' government from 1921 to 1935.[30] Following the WGGA's example, membership in the Women's Auxiliary was restricted to farmers' wives and daughters and the UFA agreed to underwrite the women's organization to the amount of one hundred dollars.

According to Leona Barritt much of the debate in 1915 centred on whether or not Alberta farm women would concentrate their efforts within the

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UFA convention for the first time. Nanci Langford, A History of the United Farm Women of Alberta (u.p.)

[29]Letter to Irma Stocking, 4 January 1915, SAB McNaughton personal papers, A1 E. 78.

[30]The cross fertilization of ideas and experience also benefited Saskatchewan farm women. In 1918 the WGGA followed the example of the Alberta women and officially separated from the men. The following year the Interprovincial Council of Farm Women was formed under McNaughton's leadership consisting of representatives of the United Farm Women of Ontario, the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, the Women Grain Growers Association of Saskatchewan, the United Farm Women of Alberta, and the Grain Growers' Guide. See Sheilagh L. Steir, "The Beliefs of Violet McNaughton" (MEd. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1979), pp. 103-4.

Women's Institutes or associate with the men.[31] The majority chose to join the agrarian reform movement. At the same time they were well aware of the risk of being subsumed by the male dominated UFA. Fearing that their status as an adjunct to the men's organization would prevent their full participation they took immediate steps to redefine their relationship to the UFA. At their second annual meeting in 1916 a majority of the women voted to constitutionally separate themselves from the men and to open membership in the newly named United Farm Women of Alberta to all women as individuals rather than as wives and daughters of farmers. According to Parlby, this change was intended to place women on an equal footing with the men. The women rejected their auxiliary status because it implied "an inferior, 'tagged on,' relationship."[32] Beyond its symbolic significance the new organizational relationship was an important step towards establishing a forum for independent action by the women. It also opened the way to building coalitions with urban women, and labour women in particular.[33] In addition to declaring itself independent of the men's organization, the UFWA also negotiated representation on the UFA Executive Board and a five hundred percent increase in the UFA grant to the women's organization. The move to separate from the men would have failed without the support of the UFA male leadership; however, Parlby later recalled the kind of pressure exerted by the women in order to achieve the men's agreement. Reorganization "did not occur as a natural sequence of events nor as part of ordinary procedure," she said, "but required a great deal of persistence and patience on the part of the Auxiliary before the men realized the value of accepting the women's branch as an integral part of their organization with equal privileges."[34]

Constitutional change was an important first step if women were to achieve integration into the agrarian reform movement on an equal basis with the men. In addition to a voice on the UFA Executive Board the newly

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[31] Barritt, "History of United Farm Women."
[32] Taped interview with Parlby, 1958, PAA 67.218.
[33] On the relationship between farm and labour women see Patricia Roome, "Amelia Turner and Calgary Labour Women, 1919-1935," Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics, Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), esp. p. 104.
[34] McKinlay, p. 34.

formed UFWA won the right to meet separately from the men, to set its own agenda and initiate resolutions. In practice, however, the two organizations continued to meet in simultaneous conventions held each year on the last week-end in January. During the convention the women held meetings apart from the general membership but resolutions passed by the UFWA were routinely brought to the joint UFA meeting for debate and ratification. In this process UFWA initiatives could be altered or defeated by the larger, predominantly male UFA as occurred during the campaign for married women's dower rights.[35] Furthermore, although the women had clearly rejected an auxiliary or adjunct status the relationship between the UFWA and the UFA remained ambiguous. When the Executive Board of the UFA was asked to rule on this question in 1920 it determined that the UFWA was "a committee of Section the U.F.A. proper."[36] William Irvine's account of the movement in The Farmers in Politics (first published in 1920) was less definite. He describes the UFWA as "properly speaking, a section of the United Farmers' movement." However, he goes on to suggest a separation between the two organizations that was more consistent with the aims of the women than it was with the views of the Board when he states that "[a]lthough there are two organizations, the movement is one."[37]

Despite their formal separation from the men, the ability of the UFWA to act independently was limited by their dependence on UFA financial and organizational support. In addition, as the debate over the status of the UFWA suggests, their association with the men tended to reinforce traditional family relationships and the assumption that women would take a supportive if not subordinate position within the movement. The limits of UFWA independence was graphically illustrated during the campaign for married women's property rights in the 1920s. After several years of debating their proposal for legislation guaranteeing an equitable division of family assets the UFWA's call for community of property legislation or joint ownership of matrimonial property was eventually altered to allow for the

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[35]Catherine Anne Cavanaugh, "The Women's Movement in Alberta As Seen Through the Campaign For Dower Rights 1909-1928" (M.A. thesis, University of Alberta, 1986), p. 48.

[36]UFA Annual Report, 1920, p. 57.

[37]William Irvine, The Farmers in Politics, Reginald Whitaker, intro. (1920; rpt. Ottawa: Carleton University, 1976), p. 123.

recognition of the husband as "head of the community" and "manager" of family property.[38] Still, by choosing to remain within the agrarian reform movement while constitutionally separating themselves from the men, Alberta farm women gained access to the most powerful farm lobby in existence at the time. They also established an important forum for building provincial and interprovincial alliances and promoting debate on issues of particular concern to them as women and farmers.[39] In January 1919 the Alberta women joined the Interprovincial Council of Farm Women, formed in Brandon, Manitoba.[40] When the Council became part of the Canadian Council of Agriculture the following year the UFWA gained representation at the national level.[41]

Parlby viewed membership as the crucial first test in the UFWA's effort to win "prestige" or status necessary to the women's full participation within the farm movement. She was often discouraged by the continued opposition of some of the men but persisted in the belief that once enough women were recruited to the UFWA the UFA would be forced to recognize the "added strength which the women would lend to their own organization."[42] During these early years she focused much of her efforts on increasing membership in the organization. When she assumed the presidency of the UFA Women's Auxiliary there were 745 members. Four years later, when she stepped down, the UFWA could boast a membership of just under 4,000 in 293 locals across the province as well as 62 Junior locals with 1,551 members.[43]

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[38]The Bill was ultimately defeated, however, under the proposed legislation the wife would only have had what in effect was the right to veto her husband's decision to sell or encumber family property. See Cavanaugh, "The Women's Movement in Alberta," p. 71.

[39]For example, the UFWA played a crucial role in the campaign for married women's property rights both in expanding the substance of the debate and in lobbying successfully for legislative reforms; see Catherine A. Cavanaugh, "The Limitations of the Pioneering Partnership: The Alberta Campaign for Homestead Dower, 1920-25," Canadian Historical Review, 74, 2 (June 1993), pp. 198-225.

[40]Steir, pp. 47-48.

[41]The Canadian Council of Agriculture served as the national voice of the the farm movement from 1909-1923; see W. L. Morton, The Progessive Party, esp. pp. 14, 21, 62-66, 92-95, 164-66, and 173-75.

[42]Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And Today!"

[43]UFA Annual Report, 1935, p. 37. At its peak in 1921 membership in the UFWA reached 4,536 or about 13% of the total adult membership. Women could and did join the UFA, however, records do not distinquish membership by sex, making it impossible to determine the percentage of female members.

Building up the farm women's organization required long absences from home and extensive travel throughout the province as well as interprovincially, often under difficult circumstances. The first organizational tour which she undertook in June 1916 with Leona Barritt, UFWA Secretary-Treasurer, included Calgary, Blackie, High River, Cayley, Nanton, Macleod, Craigmyle, Delia and Stettler.[44] Recent railroad construction had made travel to Alberta's main urban centres relatively easy, but access to more remote districts remained difficult and time-consuming so that Parlby soon came to dread these "awful country trips and drives."[45] The difficulties of organizing during these early years were exacerbated by the climate of crisis created by the First World War combined with drought in southern Alberta. With men away at the front farm women took up a larger portion of outdoor work in addition to their regular domestic responsibilities, leaving them with little time for politics. In addition, as Leona Barritt recalled, "the necessity of building a provincial organization from the ground up on very slender finances" was made more onerous by the "tremendous amount of relief work" they were forced to take on "due to successive crop failures in the southern part of the province."[46] Moreover, there were no funds to cover the cost of organizing and Parlby was required to pay her own travel expenses.[47]

Parlby had just turned forty-eight years old when she was elected President of the UFWA. She was beyond child bearing years and her son Humphrey was an independent seventeen year old. Nevertheless, she was still primarily responsible for the domestic responsibilities associated with a working ranch. The support of her husband Walter was crucial to Parlby's work. In addition to agreeing to the payment of her expenses, he encouraged the employment of a home help whenever possible. And when domestic help was unavailable in 1918 the Parlbys reduced their living space to three rooms in order to accommodate Irene's frequent absences

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[44]Mrs. R. W. [Leona] Barritt, "History of United Farm Women" (December 1934). p. 5.
[45]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 10 February 1917.
[46]Barritt.
[47]Ibid. On the agricultural crisis in Southern Alberta see David C. Jones, Empire of Dust, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1989).

and alleviate the physical demands housework placed on her.[48] Parlby also had family responsibilities as the eldest Marryat daughter. She assisted various members of her large extended family as the need arose. In addition to helping Ulric Marryat's family while he was overseas in 1917-18, when Ernest Marryat died in April 1916 she also invited her mother to move into Dartmoor.[49] Two months later Parlby launched the first of a series of organizing campaigns.

The demands on Parlby's time and energy began to take their toll on her physical health. She had long suffered from chronic abdominal pain and in September 1916 her condition suddenly deteriorated. At the Lacombe hospital the doctor diagnosed chronic appendicitis and recommended immediate surgery. No sooner had she recovered from surgery than Barritt announced that she would be forced to give up organizational work temporarily due to pregnancy. Parlby accepted Barritt's resignation as Secretary-Treasurer with regret. She considered Barritt's leaving a "great loss" to the movement. It also meant an increase in her own workload.[50] As a result she spent much of December 1916 at UFA headquarters in Calgary preparing for the upcoming annual meetings. After celebrating Christmas with her family at Dartmoor she left for the UFWA convention in Edmonton where she remained for several days attending a regular meeting of the UFA Board followed by an "interview" with provincial government leaders. Back at Dartmoor she "went to bed for a day" then travelled to Calgary for two weeks of work and to Edmonton for "another interview with the government and speaking at [the] University [of Alberta] [Sunday] morning service." She had also "promised 12 articles to N. Home Monthly - two to Mary P. besides my little paragraphs [in the Grain Growers' Guide] - Lord knows when I am going to do them as from now to the end of March it looks like being on the trail most of the time."[51]

As the organization grew and the pace of work continued unabated Parlby became increasingly concerned for her own health and worried that

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[48] Parlby letter to McNaughton, 26 December 1918.
[49] Elizabeth Marryat later moved to B.C. where she died in 1928.
[50] Parlby letter to McNaughton, 1 December 1916.
[51] Parlby letter to McNaughton, 10 February 1917.

she was neglecting her husband and son. Then in April 1918 as she was speaking to the Calgary Girls Conference she began to hemorrhage. Although she managed to "get through" her speech she was admitted to hospital in Calgary where she underwent an emergency hysterectomy. Over the next several years Parlby suffered from surgically induced menopause and was forced to cut back on her public work as her health dictated. Following a brief stay with her sister Beryl in Mission City, British Columbia, she was back "on the trail" again in July and August. By September she was "in my bed" and being pressed by her doctor to resign her position. Increasingly frustrated by her deteriorating physical condition she wrote, "Is not one's body a sickening thing - if one could only get outside it - & do one's work - am having a bad go - with awful pain at base of spine & down both legs - kept me awake for several nights & no relief. . . . I suppose it will wear itself out sometime."[52]

Parlby continued as President of the UFWA despite repeated bouts of ill health and conflict over the time spent away from her home and family because of her commitment to the farm movement but also to her growing sense that the vitality of the organization depended upon a strong and active UFWA. While the original drive to organize farm women in Alberta was underwritten by the men, according to Parlby farm women "were feeling the need to organize quite as keenly as the men, for the same and yet for more reasons."[53] As farmers, women shared a concern for the economic conditions facing the family farm and were prepared to take up the work of lobbying for better prices, improved transportation and an end to trade tariffs. However, Parlby believed that the goal of improved profits was insufficient in itself to sustain political movement over time. Responding to the concerns of rural women she argued that the Farmers' economic goals must be translated into improvements in the condition of the rural home and farm communities generally.

Farm women's firsts priorities were to ensure the survival of their children into adulthood while securing their future through improved rural education, and to win formal recognition of farm women's labour through

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[52]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 12 September 1918.
[53]Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And Today!"

reform of matrimonial property legislation.[54] Maternal and infant health care was a particularly pressing concern for rural women. High infant and maternal mortality rates in Alberta meant that few farm families were left untouched by tragedy - either as a result of childbirth or through farm accidents.[55] There are no statistics on infant mortality rates in Alberta for this period, however, the anecdotal evidence supports farm women's concern that the absense of adequate medical placed mothers and their infants at high risk. The personal histories of the members of the Alix delegation to the founding convention of the UFWA are a case in point. Parlby's sister Gladys had died in 1910 giving birth to her son Robert who later died at six weeks of age. Mary Belle Stone's husband, Charles, had lost his first wife when she gave birth to twin daughters who also died in infancy.[56] Margaret Semple had trained as a nurse in Scotland. Her work as a district midwife gave her first-hand experience of the dangers women faced giving birth under the rough conditions that prevailed throughout the prairie provinces.[57]

Farm women argued that infant and maternal mortality could only be reduced if increased medical services were made available to women in remote rural areas. Based on information she received from Violet McNaughton, Parlby reported to the UFWA convention in 1917 that out of the total number of births in Saskatchewan in 1915 only "1 out of every 13" received medical assistance in a hospital setting. As more facilities were built these numbers were reduced to 1:11 in 1916 and 1:8 in 1917. Alberta had fewer hospitals than Saskatchewan and there were no comparable statistics but according to Parlby's report of the 5,400 rural births that occurred in 1917, "4,942 had no medical attention."[58] The situation had improved only slightly by 1924. Of the 14,241 births in Alberta that year over 10,000 had taken place without the assistance of a doctor or nurse.[59]

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[54]On the social reform objectives of the UFWA see Robinson, esp. pp. 57-72 and 90-99.
[55]On pregnancy and childbirth on the prairies see Nanci Langford, "First Generation and Lasting Impressions: The Gendered Indentities of Prairie Homestead Women," PhD. dissertation University of Alberta (1994), pp. 111-128.
[56]Pioneers and Progress, p. 766.
[57]Ibid., p. 763.
[58]UFA Annual Report, 1919.
[59]Alberta: Journals of the Legislative Assembly, 25 March 1924.

Their personal experiences only added to the Farm women's determination to make public institutions accountable to them by providing rural healthcare, hospitals and trained midwives. The UFWA campaign to improve rural schools was also informed by demonstrated need as well as personal experience. Both Leona Barritt, convener of the Rural Schools Committee, and Mary Belle Stone, for example, were both teachers before they became farm wives and brought their professional expertise to the debate. Among the improvements sought by rural women were married women's property rights, community kitchens to relieve women who in addition to their standard domestic work were forced to take on a larger portion of outdoor work during wartime, naturalization, mothers' pensions, and child custody rights for mothers excluded under the current legislation. Much of the UFWA reform agenda reflected its members' status as married women and mothers. But the farm women also actively promoted the economic interests of women as workers and agricultural producers. They succeeded in establishing an egg and poultry pool to ensure fair prices. They also agitated for homesteads for women without regard to their family status, for wages for farm women, and for equal wages for women working outside the home. They founded day hostels to assist women on business in town and residential hostels for "country girls" seeking jobs in the cities.

While reflecting the specific needs of rural women this wide ranging reform programme was also a direct response to the UFA's emphasis on the farm family and home protection as essential to social improvement.[60] The centrality of the home in the defence of agrarian values was often implied rather than stated openly, however, in his speech to the UFA convention in 1916 Samuel S. Dunham, second Vice-President, drew a direct link between the rural home and the UFA's political and social reform goals. Noting the intimate relationship between the farm home and the farm business Dunham emphasized the partnership of husband and wife and identified "the welfare, the enlightenment, the improvement of the rural home" as a primary concern of the UFA. He declared that "[h]ome, children, education, the problems of the family and the community . . . [were]

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[60]Robinson makes a similar point but she argues that the integration of home and business formed the basis of an effective if unequal partnership between farm men and women rather than creating tension between them. See pp. 90-93.

the legitimate atmosphere of the local U.F.A."[61] Dunham was speaking to the convention that voted to accept constitutional changes to the UFWA and must be seen as an endorsement of the women whose particular jurisdiction was seen to be home and family. Farm women and men generally agreed on the pressing need to improve the conditions of the rural home. Problems arose when they differed on the pace and direction of reform, as they did, for example, on the question of matrimonial property.

Parlby realised that building up membership in the UFWA would not in itself win the reforms farm women sought. She believed that the route to change was through the agrarian movement. She certainly understood the obstacles women faced but experience taught her that without the support of progressive men the women's reform agenda would fail. In order for women to achieve the influence necessary to win the men's approval the UFWA needed to establish itself as a credible partner with a leadership function in the movement or, in Parlby's words, to win "prestige." Farm women had moral influence in the home but this would have to be translated into political authority exercised in the public sphere. In this search for public female authority Parlby articulated a view of women's leadership that drew from existing progressive discourse and agrarianism in particular.

A single, comprehensive study of the Farmers' social ideas has yet to be written, but the literature shows that agrarian discourse borrowed heavily from a variety of intellectual currents of the day, both secular and religious. These included elements of British Utopian socialism, Social Darwinism, the Christian humanism of the Social Gospel, American progressivism (particularly its vision of a new stage in human emancipation based on co-operation), and its variant the "country life" movement which promised moral and spiritual renewal through a return to "rural values."[62]

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[61] United Farmers of Alberta, 1916 Annual Report, p. 143.

[62] W.L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada, was the first to draw attention to the social reform goals of the agrarian movement. For more recent studies that explore this theme see Richard Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-28 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Allen, "The Social Gospel as the Religion of the Agrarian Revolt," The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W.L. Morton, C. Berger and R. Cook, eds. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp. 174-86; David C. Jones, "'There is Some Power About the Land' - The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology," Journal of Canadian Studies, 17,3 (Fall 1982), pp. 99-123; Ian

Western Canadian settlement occurred at a time when rural life was being held out as the antidote against the corrupting influences of the modern city. This idea reinforced the pioneers' sense of their place in society and informed much of the rhetoric of agrarian protest against eastern industrial capitalists as well as their vision of the "New Community" towards which they were striving. In the battle to win the hearts and minds of Canadians, and westerners in particular, farmers waged a crusade against old values, old parties and old traditions. In their place they called for a new order in which co-operation would bring about social justice for all, occupational representation along class lines would restore democratic principals; and morality would triumph over greed, profit, materialism and self-interest.[63]

To date scholarly interest in the "agrarian revolt" has emphasized its regional nature and economic aims, casting the movement as primarily a bid by farmers for a larger piece of the economic pie.[64] Much less is understood about the place of the farm movement in the struggles for social authority that characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Canada.[65] In his study of the Progressive Party in Canada,

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MacPherson, "Selected Borrowings: The American Impact upon the Prairies Co-operative Movement, 1920-1939," Canadian Review of American Studies 10,2 (Fall 1979), pp. 137-151.

[63]Farmers were not united on strategies for achieving social reform. For example, while Henry Wise Wood in Alberta advocated "group" or class solidarity, Thomas Crerar of Saskatchewan counselled against against this seeing it as a divisive politics. While no biography of Crerar has been written, for works on the views of other farm leaders see Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta; Anthony Mardiros, William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical (Toronto: Lorimer, 1979); K. Murray Knuttila, "E.A. Partridge: The Farmers' Intellectual," Prairie Forum 14, 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 59-74; Allen Mills, "The Later Thought of J. S. Woodsworth, 1918-1942: An Essay in Revision," Journal of Canadian Studies 17, 3 (Fall 1982), pp. 75-95; Howard Palmer, "William Irvine and the Emergence of Political Radicalism in Calgary, 1916-1921," Fort Calgary Quarterly 7, 2 (Spring 1987), 2-19; David Walden, "'Following the Gleam': The Political Philosophy of J. S. Woodsworth," 'Building the Co-operative Commonwealth': Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada, J. William Brennan, ed. (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1984), pp. 43-56; Reginald Whitaker's introduction to.William Irvine, The Farmers in Politics (1920 rpt., Ottawa: Carletion University Press, 1976).

[64]W.L. Morton, "The Western Progressive Movement," traces the origins of agrarian protest in organized resistance to the National Policy of 1878 and to regional discontent, concluding that "[t]he sectional corn develops where the national shoe pinches," p. 113.

[65]The standard analysis of the farm "revolt" emphasizes its regional character, however, farm discontent was also part of a broader national struggle for political realignment that has been described as "The Great Transformation." In the transition from a dependent, primarily agricultural, colony to an independent industrialized nation state, various groups contested for power to determine the future directions of the country. Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed (Toronto:

W.L. Morton linked farm protest to other social reform movements such as prohibition, women's suffrage, health, labour, child welfare and civil service reform.[66] Walter Young in Democracy and Discontent characterizes the farmers' social reform vision as based on "a faith in democracy, a hatred of corporate wealth and a distrust of the prevailing political system."[67] In 1910 the farmers' newspaper, the Grain Growers' Guide, drew a direct link between the existing economic system and social inequalities when it summarized the problem as follows:

> The root of the evil lies largely in our economic system. It corrupts our political system, our political system corrupts and degrades the public administration, and the corroding influence extends to the social system and business life till the disease pervades the whole community.[68]

In Alberta Henry Wise Wood offered group organization and class co-operation as the means to social harmony. Addressing the UFA convention in 1917 Wood identified the root cause of social conflict as competition between classes of unequal political and economic power. In his view, farmers were the "basic class" (the primary food producers) yet "[i]n this competition of class with class," he stated:

> ours is the losing class at every turn, because we are the least organized, the least co-operative, consequently the weakest. . . . It is feared by some that when we get this power [which organization bestows] we will use it to wrong other classes. . . . [But] we cultivate an ambition to re-adjust all class relationships."[69]

McClelland and Stewart, 1974); Ramsay Cook, The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) offers a useful analysis of the religious influences on social criticism for the early years; for an overview of the progressive debate during the 1910s and 20s see Gregory Baum, Catholics and Canadian Socialism: Political Thought in the Thirties and Forties (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1980), esp. pp. 13-70.

[66]W. L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada; esp. pp. 266-69.

[67]Walter D. Young. Democracy and Discontent (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson), p. 9.

[68]Ibid. quoting from The Grain Growers' Guide, (2 November 1910), p. 11.

[69]Quoted in Morton, "The Social Philosophy of Henry Wise Wood," p. 137, from the Edmonton Daily Bulletin (23 January 1917).

At the interstice of the national social question and the Farmers' political revolt the agrarian movement opened a pathway for women to intervene directly to renegotiate gender relations.[70]

In the struggle to establish their moral authority to determine the future direction of the province the UFA, particularly its progressive wing, actively recruited the support of farm women. At its most pragmatic the campaign to enlist women was a bid to expand their ranks and increase their influence as a lobby group. At the very least, as official UFA opinion argued, so long as women remained outside of the movement the farmers were drawing on only part of their "pulling force." If on the other hand men and women "pulled together" they would increase their strength and realise their goals more quickly. In addition, the achievement of female suffrage in 1916-17 leant a new urgency to the call to organize the women. The new woman voter became a "bigger woman than ever before in the eyes of the politicians." Unorganized she was a potential "danger" to the movement. In answer to the question "Why It Is Just As Important For Farm Women To Organize As For Men?" the UFA responded that "unorganized, the farm women, like the farm men hitherto, will simply be the prey of the politician who will pander to them for their votes and serve the big interests when elected." Women voters who supported either of the two traditional parties would counteract the men's vote and it "might be better . . . that [women] did not have the vote at all than that they be left to the subtle scheming of the politicians when they come to exercise their power."[71]

Sensitive to the farm women's demands for full and equal participation, UFA leadership cautioned that women should be seen as "an active, necessary part" of the movement and not "merely. . . . lending their silent moral support" to the men.[72] Nevertheless, even the progressive wing

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[70]As events were to prove, the 'social question' was unreliable as a direct route to high politics. For a particularly useful discussion of the link between women's activism and social reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century see Riley, ch. 2 "'The Social', 'Women', and Sociological Feminism." Riley argues that the problem was not that women had been excluded from the public sphere but that they were so thoroughly included in what she calls "the Social" (a space that opens in the nineteenth century between the domestic and the public spheres), p. 48.

[71]UFA Bulletin No. 5 A (c.1918) Violet MacNaughton Personal Papers SAB. G 291.7.

[72]Ibid.

of the organization assumed that women would play a role in the movement appropriate to their sex. As William Irvine expressed it, the women and the men "approached the same problems from different angles."[73] According to Irvine, men were primarily concerned with "commercial values" while women focused on "human values." In the effort to achieve "that fuller life after which humanity is reaching to-day," he argued, farm women were "in the van[guard]."[74]

From the outset the call to organize farm women rested upon the twin notions of the separate but complementary interests of farm men and women and the moral influence of domestic femininity as an improving force. There is nothing innovative about the concept of women as improvers. What changed was the idea that women's "improving" influence should be exercised outside of the home.[75] In his original motion to organize farm women in 1912, W.J. Tregillus, UFA President, highlighted the partnership of men and women in the farm family and then located the struggle "for the improvement of rural conditions, morally, intellectually and socially" within the family itself. It states that:

> Whereas the women in the rural homes of Alberta are sharing equally with the men the burden of the struggle for better conditions and equal rights; and whereas, we believe that under the law our women should enjoy equal privileges with the men; therefore, be it resolved, that we believe that the wives and daughters of our farmers should organize locally and provincially . . .[76]

Tregillus' resolution does two things: first, it implies a mutuality of interest between women and men that turned on family relationships; and second, it assumes that it is not enough that farm men serve as women's representatives in the agrarian movement. Rather, it proposes that women represent themselves. As grounds for their inclusion, Tregillus offers women's moral influence at home. By recruiting women's moral influence to the Farmer's movement he intended to reinforce the men's claim to political leadership.

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[73] The Farmers in Politics, p. 123.
[74] Irvine, p. 118-34.
[75] On this point see Riley, pp. 48-49.
[76] UFA Annual Report, 1912.

Parlby also believed in the Victorian concept of the improving influence of ideal femininity. In her first speech to the UFA in 1916 she asserted that the crucial role of women in the life of the nation was as "mothers of the race." Addressing the question of "Women's Place In The Nation," she stated that:

> 'biologically the woman not only typifies the race . . . she is the race.' Each generation is born anew to woman, and the woman has the moulding of it and determines the race characteristics that shall be transmitted to the future, - and right here we see the vital importance of the womankind of our nation, for as its women are, so will the nation be. The finer, the nobler, the more spiritual our mothers, the greater our nation in the generations to come. . . . Next in importance comes the maker of the home. Mother and home; the two terms should be synonymous.[77]

Over the course of her public life Parlby became a strong advocate of the right of women to "claim all fields of labour as their own" according to their individual talents[78]. However, like most of her generation, she believed that feminine virtue rested on women's domestic function: "the making of the home and the bearing and rearing of children."

For Parlby the feminine ideal was exemplified by "British motherhood" which served as the guardian of "the spirit of the British Nations, the spirit of freedom and justice and honor" backed up by "duty and self-discipline." The ideal family was to be found in the rural family whose "co-operative relationships" serve as a bulwark against the corrupting influences of modern materialism and "gross individualism." As spiritual head of the farm family and guardian of "the old time ideal," rural women set the moral standard "of what the larger community life should be."[79]

Parlby believed that women had a special role to play in the work of moral and social uplift. Social reform, she argued, was rooted in "spiritual qualities," what today we would call values, and "because these qualities

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[77] McNaughton Papers, SAB A1 D. 54 (3).
[78] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And Today!"
[79] Ibid.

are born in . . . the home, there guarded and tenderly nourished by the wise mother who understands their divine purpose, I say with all the emphasis I can, that the home is [agrarianism's] strongest ally . . . that the movement is neither an economic movement alone, nor a movement which concerns man alone."[80] By emphasizing the moral and social reform goals of the agrarian movement Parlby intended to establish a space for women's participation. She supported the "dollars and cents" side of the Farmers' platform but argued that it was short-sighted to define the UFA as purely economic in its aims. Economic reform was important not as an end in itself but as a means to achieving the more fundamental objective of social reconstruction through co-operation. As necessary as a new economic order was to the future of the farmers and other workers, she argued that the goal of material improvement alone could not sustain the movement for:

> if the seed of co-operation has been sown on the stony ground of economics alone it will wither up and die; in other words the man who has no deeper conception of co-operation than as a movement to bring in greater profits than he would other wise receive, will be liable to fall by the wayside in his disappointment at its temporary failure to live up to his expectations.[81]

In her view, success depended upon providing a "higher ideal" that was "sufficiently powerful" to hold such a large diverse group together. As Irvine put it, "How am I to live?" may be the first question but it is not the only question. "There is another even greater [question], 'Why am I living?'"[82] Like Irvine and Wood, Parlby argued that the answer lay in reformed social relationships. They called on farmers to replace competition with co-operation not solely as a strategy for improving their material conditions but as a "philosophy," or "way of life" which had its "roots in the things of the spirit; . . . . love, service, loyalty, honour." Just as Wood emphasized the transformative power of co-operation as a Christian ideal, Parlby argued that social relations based on co-operation had the power to "transform a world made hideous by the competitive system, into a democracy of hope, justice, happiness for all."[83]

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[80] Parlby. "The Great Adventure."
[81] Ibid., UFA Annual Report, 1917, p. 85.
[82] Irvine, p. 124.
[83] Parlby, "The Great Adventure."

The necessity of replacing old values seemed particularly urgent to Parlby in 1917. With the western world locked in mortal combat and "bleeding to death in its efforts to conquer a false ideal of nationalism" she called for a new "spirit of mutual sympathy and understanding among all people." If order was to be restored out of the chaos of war then individual and national self-interest must give way to a "spirit of unselfishness," which, she declared, "was the essence of this thing we call co-operation."[84] Elsewhere, she referred to the meaning of co-operation as a "common sense, practical Christian ideal." [85]

With the crisis of war-time Parlby's vision of the transforming powers of the co-operative ideal sometimes assumed millenarian proportions. In a speech before the United Farmers' convention in 1917 she appeared to see the dawn of a new age of peace and harmony based on reformed social relations. Drawing on powerful images of a world struggling to give birth to a new age, to hope born of the ravages of war, she looked into the future and saw:

> Civilization . . . standing at the cross-roads; in every heart there is a barely conscious feeling of expectancy. In the silences it seems to us as though great things were stirring in the womb of time; we almost seem to hear the rustle of great events rushing to us through space. What is this old world about to bring forth? What part shall we shortly be called upon to play in this unknown future which is even now about to be born?[86]

Parlby's belief in the goals of the agrarian movement and the higher ideals towards which it was striving never wavered. As late as 1927, she saw agrarian reformers as embarked on a "Great Adventure" of social reconstruction which was limited only by their own imagination and willingness to see into the future. "We are only at the beginning," she wrote, "our imagination is not yet sensing the vast development that is possible . . . as a consequence we do not begin to realize the power which [co-operation] has . . . in transforming the life of the people." Her hope was that

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[84]UFA Annual Report, 1917, p. 85.
[85]Parlby, "The Great Adventure."
[86]UFA Annual Report, 1917, p. 85.

all disadvantaged groups, "the manual workers, the clerks and small business men, the farmers, the foreign born, the salaried men," united in a spirit of co-operation would defeat the vested interests that had distorted human relationships and brought the world to the brink of destruction.[87]

Although Parlby often minimized the differences between men and women, arguing that the "socially minded man and woman will think almost identical thoughts" she also argued that men had forfeited their right to leadership by their moral failure.[88] Drawing heavily on Social Darwinists like Benjamin Kidd, she argued that men were by their very nature "fighting pagans" who only recognized a single law; "the law of force." As a result, male-built institutions reflected male concepts of power and force. Quoting from Kidd, The Science of Power, she maintained that the fighting male "despised the emotion of the ideal." The civilization he had built was based on force and "all the institutions he [had] created carried the spirit of war and the belief in force as the ultimate principle." The ultimate proof of the failure of male moral authority lay in the death and destruction of "world" war. For this reason, "in the interest of civilization the future centre of power must rest not in the fighting male of the race but in woman."[89]

Parlby's vision of female moral authority reflected the Victorian notion of 'separate spheres' for men and women and its assumption of women's 'superior' moral influence but it also looked forward to an active female leadership in the public sphere. She argued that women were specially equipped to take up positions of power within the "New Community" advocated by the farmers. Whereas men would have to learn to overcome their "natural" inclination to selfishness, women were by their nature and experience "greater co-operators." Farm women in particular had learned "how to serve and work with others in a hard school." Thus, she argued that "co-operation need[ed] women. . . . it needs their intuition, their idealism, their willingness to sacrifice their individual interests, their willingness to give service without thought of personal gain." She believed that by

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[87] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And Today!"
[88] Parlby, "The Great Adventure."
[89] Ibid.

women's example men would come to realise the reforming power of the "co-operative spirit."[90]

Once the social question was joined to the struggle for political power it became crucial that the Farmers enlisted women as partners in the task of building a new Eden in the agrarian West. This view is stated most fully by William Irvine in his history of the UFA. According to Irvine the UFWA under Parlby's leadership extended the agrarian debate to include the social question and thereby strengthened the moral authority of the movement. Under the influence of their sex farm women had inspired men to move beyond base economic concerns to strive for a higher ideal:

> the farmers' organization was primarily economic in origin and aim. In the earlier stage, it did not see much beyond the price of wheat, the lowering of freight rates, and the abolition of the tariff. But men, in their struggle against the evils of commercialism have been commercialized. . . . Plutocratic organizations are dominated by the desire for higher profit, labor organizations concentrate on higher wages, and farmer organizations, too, began by seeking higher prices. . . .[Since organizing] the United Farm Women have helped greatly to save the United Farmers' movement from the usual fate of male movements. The male mind, during the individualistic system of society, went to seed on commercialism; and the human values. . . . have been choked out. . . . To remedy this state of affairs was the work which the United Farm Women undertook. . . . [t]heir organization was a revolt against the drab existence which was their lot.[91]

By identifying social needs and recommending solutions for "community improvement" the UFWA was responsible for moving the UFA beyond the question of wheat prices "into a larger world of thought and action, where it is not only possible to [earn a living], but to make life worth the living." Irvine saw the "synthesis" of these two "angles" on the question of rural life as forming the basis of a necessary partnership between farm women and men. In his view, only if the "farmer and his partner stand shoulder to shoulder in the great political and economic struggle that is ahead" would the agrarian vision of a nobler, more moral, future be realised.

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[90] Pariby, "The Great Adventure."
[91] Irvine, p.p. 123-24.

Parlby advocated a leadership role for women in the farm movement based on their moral influence in the home. She also saw their inclusion in the movement as a continuation of the pioneering partnership. Just as women had been prepared to "follow their men into the wilderness, to share with them its privations, so they were prepared to take their part actively, in the new work to be done."[92] The goals of the agrarian movement itself, in her view, arose "naturally" out of the past and "[c]ultivation of the land must be followed by the cultivation of a worthy social and economic system of living." Although Parlby frequently spoke out against "the tyranny of the [traditional] party Machine" and the monopoly of Eastern interests, as the farm women's representative she was more inclined to emphasise gender rather than class in her social critique. In her view, the main obstacle to necessary social reform was "male selfishness" and "drive to dominate." She was critical of what she saw as women's lack of interest in the pressing political questions of the day but she considered men "the hardest piece of work." "Men," she wrote, "find it terribly difficult to slough off that superiority complex, which they have carried around with them for so many centuries." The time had come, however, when women were no longer prepared to serve a subordinate role "as a kind of eternal Ladies Aid," rather, they sought inclusion as full partners in building the future of the province.[93]

In organizational terms Parlby's presidency met with significant success both in attracting new members and establishing a firm foundation for advancing the work of the women's branch. By 1920 Parlby believed that the UFWA had been placed on a firm foundation. Memberships had increased steadily and she had articulated a role for women in the farm movement generally. While some men continued to resist partnership with the women her vision of women's place in the movement was officially recognized by Irvine in 1920 with the publication of The Farmers in Politics.

Through her term as president Parlby suffered from repeated bouts of ill health. Again, in 1919, she was struck by a series of "very severe attack[s]" of tonsillitis. This crisis lead to her decision not to run for re-

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[92] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And To-day!"
[93] Parlby, "The Great Adventure."

election.[94] Following a hotly contested leadership campaign, Marion Sears was elected as her successor in January 1920. With Sears' appointment Parlby welcomed the prospect of returning to a quiet life, satisfied that she was leaving the organization she had helped to build in capable hands. Although she retired from her official position as head of the farm women's organization she continued to write and speak on behalf of the UFA and took an active role in the Federal by-election campaign of 1921.

Alberta farmers had traditionally eschewed party politics, choosing instead to work indirectly as an organized farm lobby. However, after much heated debate, the UFA took the decision to enter electoral politics in July 1919 when it established a provincial political association. Parlby supported direct action but only reluctantly, still, she saw the development of a third party as consistent with British democratic tradition. During the Medicine Hat federal by-election in June 1921 she argued that the central issue before the voters was the future of democratic government. "We are watching in this contest a further development of Government," she declared, "the representation in Parliament of an economic group." With the future of group government at stake, she called on "all other workers [to] join forces with the farmers in the fight for sending real representatives of their own to Ottawa."[95]

In response to the Farmers' critics, Parlby argued that the UFA's fight for group government represented a continuation of the original struggle of "independent-minded barons of Old England . . . against the tyranny of the crown." In its current manifestation Canadian farmers sought freedom from the "tyranny of the Party Machine and the Government Invisible." She charged Mackenzie King's Liberal government with excessive spending on railways and a merchant marine while on the prairies "the granaries [were] overflowing, the packing houses overpacked, the farms overstocked, industrial plants and warehouses overflowing. . . ." The plight of the farmers, she argued, was the result of "Party politics, political greeds, lavish patronage" and government by a small "clique" of self-seeking men. The

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[94]Parlby letters to McNaughton, 4 August 1918; 28 December 1919; 3 February 1920.
[95]Parlby, "Progress or Reaction?" United Farmers of Alberta, 1921, SAB MacNaughton personal papers, G291. 17.

solution lay with the Progressive Party and people of common economic interests working in co-operation to defeat the old order. "In these days," she stated, "there is no getting away from the fundamental fact of community of interests."[96]

Parlby's view of community of interest extended beyond purely economic issues to the broader social questions of home, family and community. By defining politics as essentially a sociological debate she created a space which allowed for the inclusion of women. However, she also believed that women would have to prove themselves in the political realm. Her presidency was an example of the patience, dedication and hard work she believed was necessary to gain full acceptance within the farm movement. Her greatest frustration was the slowness with which that acceptance was extended to her as President of the UFWA and to the farm women she represented. Yet in 1920 she believed that much of the essential work had been done; the UFWA had demonstrated its importance to the farm movement. With its "usefulness established" she felt that "it was permissible, without shirking, to return to the quiet life . . . My home and garden, my music and books and leisure to enjoy them to the full again, seemed the most desirable things in the world."[97] Her retirement was to be short lived. The following year she was urged to run as a UFA candidate in the provincial election campaign. The idealism which guided her during her four years as President of the UFWA would be seriously challenged during her subsequent fourteen years as a member of the United Farmers' government. In government she was forced to confront the limits of the agrarian partnership she had worked so hard to build.

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[96] Ibid.
[97] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And To-day!"

Chapter Four

The Woman's Minister: "a strange life and work"

Having achieved much of what she had set out to do following her election as President of the UFWA in 1916, Parlby was content to return to the domestic routine of ranch life in 1920. That spring she wrote to Violet McNaughton, saying "[I] Am thoroughly domesticated again & enjoying it more than I can tell you - making cotton frocks, mending & darning & having time to go out for hay[ing] with the men & making great plans for my garden."[1]

For the Parlbys, now in their middle years, the business of ranching became an increased burden. War-time labour shortages had made it difficult to find the help necessary to operate a mid-sized ranch and several years of drought had brought a succession of poor harvests. In March Parlby told McNaughton that she and Walter intended to "sell all our cattle - put crop out on shares . . . & start again on a 1/2 section."[2] The following year they moved into a modern, two-storey house on the outskirts of Alix built by another Englishman, Major C.E. Amphlett, at the height of the boom in 1910. The Parlbys named their new home "Manadon" after Walter's family estate in Devonshire and Irene set to work building an

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[1]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 10 March 1920.
[2]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 3 February 1920.

"English" perennial garden complete with a lychgate entering onto a "long green strip of lawn leading to [a] garden seat at the opposite end."[3]

Although Parlby had resigned her official position with the UFWA the new executive continued to consult her and she remained keenly interested in the progress of the Farmers' organization. The economic expansion of the immediate post-war period was already beginning to show signs of weakening, adding to the general climate of political uncertainty created by peace-time reconstruction which favoured the Farmers over the traditional two parties. The relative pace of UFA growth slowed in 1920 compared to the previous year, but by the beginning of 1921 they could boast 219 new locals with almost 1,000 new adult members, pushing their numbers to about 30,000 province wide.[4]

Much of this interest was generated by the Farmers' decision to enter electoral politics. The vote to take direct action had threatened to split the UFA in 1919 but the organization quickly recovered with its leadership under Henry Wise Wood and his concept of group government intact. Parlby had serious reservations about the UFA entering electoral politics, concerned that it would further divide the men's and women's organizations. "The men are working for their own ends," she told McNaughton.[5] Like Wood, she also feared that the move threatened UFA independence, weakening their ability to effectively represent agricultural interests. In the short term at least these apprehensions proved unfounded. Between 1919 and 1921 the UFA continued to work closely with the incumbent Liberals.[6] Although Parlby remained staunchly non-partisan she did vote with the majority in favour of entering electoral politics. In 1919 she campaigned on behalf of UFA candidate Alex Moore, who succeeded in unseating the

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[3]Pioneers and Progress, p. 81.

[4]At the height of their political popularity in 1921 adult membership reached 36,044 in 1,367 locals. Following their election UFA/UFWA memberships fell off by 49 percent but the number of locals continued to grow, reaching their peak of 1,424 in January 1922. See UFA Annual Report, 1935, p. 37.

[5]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 26 September 1918.

[6]On the relationship between the provincial Liberals and the UFA see L.G. Thomas, The Liberal Party in Alberta (University of Toronto Press, 1959), pp. 195-204. As Thomas points out there was no open breach between the two groups, and Liberal attempts to contain the farm movement by bringing prominant UFA members into the cabinet were the subject of discussions as late as May 1921. See Thomas, p. 195 and Betke, p. 38.

Liberals in the crucial by-election in Cochrane and she was again on the hustings to support the federal Progressives in Medicine Hat in June 1921.[7] Before the Farmers' victory in the Medicine Hat by-election was known Liberal Premier Charles Stewart called a provincial election to be held on July 18.

Parlby always maintained that her political career occurred "out of the blue." As she tells it, a telephone call from the local UFA executive announcing that her name had been put forward for nomination as the Farmers' candidate unexpectedly drew her into "a new and strange life and work."[8] While she did not actively seek the nomination, that her name was placed among the contenders could have been no surprise. The idea was first suggested immediately following the founding of the UFA Political Association. In August 1919 Parlby told Violet McNaughton that "some of the men want to nominate me."[9] She may have been considering the possibility even earlier. When she anticipated resigning as President of the UFWA in 1918, she confided to McNaughton that should she continue in public life it would be to help "the men's end."[10] Although Parlby was persuaded to stay on in office, by 1919 she was more determined than ever to quit public life altogether, "otherwise," she wrote, "my head will [quit] & I shall arrive at Ponoka [Alberta Hospital for the Insane]."[11]

Pressed to reconsider her decision not to run as a candidate in the upcoming election, Parlby continued to vacillate throughout 1920-21. Torn between her desire for a quiet, private life and her commitment to the farm movement she turned to McNaughton for advice, asking "what am I to do about this beastly nomination?. . . . Mr. [Henry Wise] Wood says I am not to refuse and I am afraid they are going to drive me to it"; adding, "I do not feel confident in any way."[12] McNaughton was sympathetic but she believed

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[7]According to Thomas the UFA victory in Cochrane was "the critical event in the political life of Alberta between 1918 and 1921." He argues that it cooled relations between the government and the farmers, fueled support for direct action and signaled a shift in public opinion in favour of the UFA. See p. 195.
[8]Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And To-day!"
[9]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 28 August 1919.
[10]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 26 September 1918.
[11]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 28 August 1919.
[12]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 17 October 1920.

that Parlby's candidacy would help the UFA at the polls and she encouraged her to accept the nomination. Nevertheless, by February 1921, Parlby concluded that "home is where I belong and not in public life - I am too lazy mentally." She told McNaughton that Walter had informed the local executive that she "would not stand."[13]

When Premier Charles Stewart announced the election on 23 June the UFA had fielded only a dozen candidates. Ten days later that number was pushed to forty-four by a flurry of local nominating conventions held in the wake of the Farmers' victory at Medicine Hat.[14] Parlby was among the list of candidates. Under the pressure of an impending election she apparently gave way and reluctantly agreed to run. She explained her sudden reversal by pointing out that since "[a] few of the men were hunting hard for the nomination," she expected that "one of them would win [over a woman candidate]."[15]

The expectation that she would lose the nomination to a man was not the only factor behind Parlby's decision to enter the race. By the summer of 1921 her was again in good health allowing for the possibiblity of a return to public life. She still felt that she lacked the training and background necessary for the job, but she was prepared to work hard to inform herself on the relevant issues. For example, in 1917, when she was appointed to the Provincial Food Control Board, she enrolled in an economics course at the University of Alberta hoping to improve her knowledge of the subject which she described as "meagre." Over the winter months she read widely in political economy so that she would be better equipped to defend the Farmers' position and "argue with a protectionist - be sure of [the] facts & figures."[16] Much of her ambivalence sprang from a lack of confidence rather than an aversion to public life. Elected office may not have been

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[13]Parlby letter to McNaughton, February 1921.
[14]Betke, p.40.
[15]Parlby letter to McNaughton, February 1921.
[16]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 29 October 1918. Parlby may also have been anxious to avoid the embarrassment that McNaughton had experienced several years earlier when she was accused by the Saskatchewan Department of Health of misleading the public on health care, and "slandering the province," in the process. According to Steir the incident had a lasting effect on McNaughton who was afterwards always cautious to ensure her information was correct. See p. 94-95.

her first choice as a vehicle for participating in the political life of the province but it did offer her an opportunity to make a contribution to her adopted community at a crucial time in its history. Being at the centre of farm politics was also stimulating, and she felt that she could use her "influence with the men" to advance the women's aims.[17] Finally, she believed that women should take a "a larger place in public affairs." "After some hard thinking," she wrote, "I decided that it was my duty to allow my name to go up, just to make the men realize that women are . . . an important section of our population."[18] Still, it was with mixed emotions that she received the news that the Lacombe Farmers had chosen her to represent them in the upcoming election.

Parlby was an attractive political candidate. During her four years as President of the UFWA she had won the respect of many within the Farmers' organization. As early as 1919 the Farmers' newspaper, The Grain Growers' Guide, praised her loyalty and hard work, stating that she was "perhaps the most devoted exponent of the farmers' movement that the movement possesses."[19] Even after stepping down as President she was much sought after as a public speaker and was recognized for her work throughout the province. John Brownlee, UFA solicitor, would later recall that by 1921 her work with the farm women had made Parlby "one of the best known women in Alberta."[20]

In the years immediately following the granting of female suffrage Parlby's prominence was a political asset to the Farmers . Their reputation as a reformist alternative was based in part at least on their progressive position on the 'woman question.' The UFA was among the first all-male organizations to support votes for women and officially advocated women's full participation in the farm movement. The governing Liberals were also running as the party of reform backed up by their record on suffrage and temperance. In the competition for the female vote they recruited the well-know feminist, Nellie McClung. McClung successfully contested one of the

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[17]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 26 September 1918.
[18]Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And To-day!"
[19]The Grain Growers' Guide, (20 March 1919).
[20]McKinlay, p. 60.

five seats in the city of Edmonton.[21] A total of eight women ran in the 1921 election.[22] Of these, only two represented the UFA: Parlby and Louise Crummy McKinney, who was first elected as a member of the Non-Partisan League for Claresholm in 1917.[23]

In the Lacombe consituency the race was a two-way contest and, according to Parlby, a particularly bitter one. The Conservative Party, which was all but invisible in the election, failed to to mount a campaign in her riding so that Parlby's only opponent was the veteran candidate and Laurier Liberal William F. Puffer, a local rancher and businessman. In addition to the standard attack on the Farmers' representative as a "red" and a "Bolshevik sympathizer," and that perennial political chestnut, that the opposition candidate suffered "chronically f[rom] alcoholic poisoning," Puffer appealed directly to the anti-British, anti-woman sentiment in Lacombe. He challenged Parlby's loyalty to Canada, claiming that she had chosen to give birth to her son in England "so that [Humphrey] could not be called Canadian." He also dismissed her candidacy on the grounds that she was a woman and therefore not qualified to hold public office.[24] But Puffer's attacks proved insufficient to stem the tide. When the final votes were counted they showed Parlby ahead of her opponent by more than one thousand votes.[25]

Despite her experience campaigning for others, Parlby was unprepared for the personal nature of Puffer's attacks. Their sting was still

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[21] Mary Hallet and Marilyn Davis, Firing the Heather: The Life and Times of Nellie McClung, (Saskatoon, Fifth House, 1993), pp. 173-75.

[22] All of the parties contesting the election ran at least one woman candidate. McClung's counterpart in Calgary was Mrs. Langford. The Conservatives only fielded fifteen candidates province wide including Elizabeth Grace Ferris in Edmonton. The other women candidates were Mrs. Gale, Independent, Calgary; Mary Agnes Cantin, Independent Labour, Edmonton; and Marie Mellard, Socialist Party of Canada, Edmonton. Edmonton Bulletin (13 July 1921).

[23] McKinney ran as the UFA candidate as a result of the alliance between the The Non-Partisan League and the UFA Political Association in 1919 but she lost her bid for re-election in 1921 by 37 votes. Parlby considered McKinney's defeat a personal loss since it meant she was the only woman on the government side of the House and she was counting on McKinney's advice and experience to help her as a novice legislator. Parlby letter to McNaughton, 22 July 1921.

[24] Parlby letter to McNaughton, 22 July 1921.

[25] The final count showed Parlby ahead with 2,941 votes to Puffer's 1,413. Edmonton Bulletin (20 July 1921).

fresh when she wrote to McNaughton the day after the election saying that it had been the "dirtiest possible fight," leaving her feeling as though she had been through "rivers of mud and could never be clean again or trust anyone again."[26] Six years and one election later she still felt violated by her initial foray into partisan politics. Given her own doubts about her abilities, Parlby was most vulnerable to the charge that as a woman she was not fit to sit in the Legislature. In 1927, when she rose in the House in defence of the Farmers' legislation on behalf of women, Parlby reminded the Liberal Leader of the Opposition that far from supporting women his party had "waged a political campaign against a woman on the one and only ground that the candidate, being a woman, was neither a responsible citizen nor a fit representative of the people."[27]

Parlby entered the campaign certain of defeat at the hands of her male opponent and representative of the governing party. But like other Albertans the rural voters of Lacombe were in the mood for a change, electing the first third party administration to govern the young province. Since the results were unexpected the UFA was suddenly faced with having to choose a House leader as well as members of Cabinet. Their first choice for Premier was Henry Wise Wood but he was opposed to direct action, had not run in the election and declined to take on the position. The task eventually fell to Herbert Greenfield, a Westlock farmer and member of the UFA executive.[28] Once Greenfield's leadership was settled, there was much speculation about who he would appoint as members of his cabinet. In the days leading up to his announcement on 12 August it was widely rumoured that Parlby would be named Minister of Health.[29] Speculation was fueled by the fact that organized farm women were widely recognized as leaders in health care reform which was hotly debated during the election campaign. The Farmers had run on a promise to make health care

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[26]Parlby Letter to McNaughton, (22 July 1921).
[27]Scrapbook Hansard (1927) PAA, acc. 46,427/7, p. 14.
[28]Like Wood, Greenfield had not run in the election campaign and was also reluctant to accept the role of government leader but was eventually persuaded to assume the office of Premier. He served until 1924 when he was replaced by the lawyer John Brownlee, the UFA Attorney General. For a more detailed account see Betke, pp. 47-49, and 79-81.
[29]Edmonton Journal (19 July 1921).

a priority of their administration should they form the next government.[30] When the Greenfield cabinet was announced, however, Parlby's name appeared as Minister without Portfolio. The announcement of her appointment made vague references to her cabinet responsibilities but several of her male colleagues later confirmed that they expected her to "bring the woman's view point to the discussion of governmental affairs."[31] By including a woman in the cabinet Greenfield and his colleagues were clearly responding to the expressed expectations of rural women in the immediate post-suffrage period. Parlby's presence also helped to reinforce the popular perception of the Farmers as a reformist government. However, her appointment was not as radical as it might have seemed at the time.

As a popular farm leader and the only woman among the thirty-eight UFA legislators it is not particularly surprising that Parlby was invited to join the government's inner circle. What is noteworthy is that she was not given a portfolio.[32] Her past service to the UFA in itself would seem to have qualified her for serious consideration for any one of the available seven cabinet positions. Nor was experience a bar. With the exception of George Hoadley, the former leader of the Conservative Party, all of the UFA appointees were novice legislators. Year later, when he was questioned on the subject of Parlby's appointment, Greenfield explained that he had wished to spare her the necessity of having to face the electorate in a by-election. Under the then existing rules of the legislature ministers with a portfolio were required to be confirmed by their constituents. Greenfield said that he knew the Lacombe campaign had been particularly difficult. By appointing her Minister without Portfolio he was able to protect Parlby from having to repeat the experience.[33] This was clearly a bit of pseudo-chivalry

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[30]The UFA's "Reconstructive Legislative Programe" listed "Improvements to public health care" and the "Representation of all classes in the community in the Legislature" as the goverment's "duty." See the Edmonton Bulletin (12 July 1916).

[31]McKinney, p. 60.

[32]There was a precedent for Parlby's appointment. Mary Ellen Smith, elected to the B.C. Legislature in 1918, was named Minister without Portfolio in 1920 but she was quickly disillusioned with the post and, feeling a "fifth wheel," resigned before the end of the year. See Elizabeth Norcross, "Mary Ellen Smith: The Right Woman in the Right Place at the Right Time." Not Just Pin Money, Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdra, eds. (Victoria: Camosun College Press, 1984), pp. 357-364. It was fifty years before another woman entered the ranks of cabinet minister. That was Tilly Rolston who became British Columbia's Minister of Education in 1952.

[33]This rule was eliminated in 1932. See Mckinley, p. 59 and p. 79, note 29.

since ministers rarely if ever faced opposition in such by-elections which in practice amounted to a confirmation. Parlby had won the election by a comfortable majority and there is no reason to believe that she would have been opposed or that a by-election would have resulted in a different outcome.[34] By creating a special "Woman's Minister" the administration could appear reformist without seriously compromising the long-standing tradition of male privilege in government.

Ministers without Portfolio are commonly assigned today when an administration wishes to avail itself of an individual's particular experience or expertise but the title had not been used in Alberta before 1921.[35] The office carried no budget or ministerial salary. As a temporary measure the UFA paid Parlby's expenses but were told by the office of the Secretary of State that to do more than that might be a "violation of the Independence of Parliament Act" and result in the minister's "disqualification as a Member" of the government. Ottawa advised that the issue had never arisen at the national level since ministers without portfolio were usually "men of wealth" and "the expense bill would not be of much importance . . . although as a rule the average man takes all that is coming to him."[36] Parlby had paid her own way as president of the UFWA but to continue to do so as a cabinet minister was beyond her family's means. It took several months before a solution was found in the form of an order in council granting "all Ministers without Portfolio" an allowance of fifteen dollars "for attendance at each and every meeting of the Executive Council" in lieu of regular salary paid to other ministers as well as the standard travel and living allowance they received.[37] Areas of ambiguity remained and Parlby continued to submit her expenses to the Clerk of the Executive Council so that she would "make no further mistakes."[38]

Parlby's appointment as Minister without Portfolio is central to understanding her position in the UFA cabinet and the limits it placed on her

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[34] I am grateful to Alvin Finkle who clarified the details of this rule of the Legislature.
[35] Linda Trimble pointed out the current practice to me.
[36] Attorney General's Papers, PAA, 88.553/15.
[37] Orders in Council Re Subsistence Allowance of Members of Executive Council, ibid.
[38] Ibid.

ability to act on behalf of women and children.[39] As a minister she had influence at the table but no direct power or authority. Without separate departmental responsibility or the budget that went with it she did not have the means of initiating programmes or determining government policy. Constrained by the rules of cabinet solidarity she was compelled to support the government and lacked even the limited power available to all private members to introduce legislation. Her mandate was to represent women yet the UFA had no specific programme for advancing the farm women's reform agenda. As the only woman among seven men Parlby faced an uphill battle. Her designation as the "Woman's Minister" gave her broad, general responsibilities without clearly defined goals. Organizationally she was subordinate to her male colleagues and was expected to provide support to those ministers whose portfolio bore most directly on issues of particular concern to women and children. During her first term in office Parlby worked most closely with the province's chief law maker, Attorney-General John Brownlee, and the Minister of Agriculture, George Hoadley, who was also responsible for education, including women's voluntary organizations. Parlby knew Brownlee, a former Ontarian and UFA solicitor, and had worked with him on a variety of legislative reforms brought by the farm women. She may also have known the English-born Hoadley since she and Walter had long-time friends who lived in his constituency of Okotoks in southern Alberta's ranching district.

Publicly, Parlby accepted her appointment with grace. She may even have been somewhat relieved, assuming that her duties as Minister without Portfolio would be less onerous and less disruptive of her family life than would have been the case otherwise. Years later when she was asked to speculate as to whether or not she would have accepted a government department she concluded that she was "not at all sure [she] would have sacrificed [her] home life for the sake of a portfolio." However, as she tactfully pointed out, she "did not have the necessity of facing that problem"

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[39] It is interesting to speculate on what Parlby's position in government might have been had Henry Wise Wood accepted the Farmers' invitation to head their administration. It was Wood after all who had encouraged her to run for office and he was among those progressives who consistently backed women's participation in the farm movement on an equal basis with the men.

since she was not asked.[40] At the time, Parlby did express her disappointment at not being invited to join the cabinet on an equal footing with the men, complaining in her private correspondence that "Minister without Portfolio is a stupid position."[41]

While Parlby often advocated women supporting women in politics, she believed that in office, and particluarly as a member of the government, legislators had a responsibility to represent all of their constituents regardless of their sex. Her appointment as the 'Woman's minister' prevented her from doing the work she was elected to do. "I was elected with a comfortable majority," she wrote, "not by women as a woman's representative but by [the farm] people, men and women, who felt that I understood something of their problems; something also of the ideals for which they stood."[42]

Many provincial women, especially rural women, viewed the election of a UFA government with considerable optimism. The campaign had generated unprecedented interest throughout Alberta, increasing by more than 150 percent the number of votes cast over the 1917 total although the population of Alberta remained static during this same period.[43] Although the Liberal vote doubled, the UFA gained the most, winning sixty-two percent of the rural vote and a commanding majority of thirty-eight members in the sixty-one member Legislature.[44] While the Farmers' victory at the polls came as a surprise to most observers, almost all Albertans, supporters and non-supporters, greeted it as ushering in a new era of radical social and political restructuring. Indeed, during the campaign some in the Liberal press went so far as to raise the spectre of "Bolshevism," threatening that the UFA would "deliver the farmers' property to be administered by a Soviet under the Lenin system."[45] Farm women welcomed the election results, and the appointment of a woman minister in particular, because they saw it as ensuring them a sympathetic hearing at

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[40] McKinley, p. 59.
[41] Letter to McNaughton, 13 October 1921.
[42] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - And To-day!"
[43] Betke, p. 45.
[44] For a detailed discussion of the 1921 election see Betke, pp. 38-46.
[45] Ibid., p. 41.

the highest levels of government. Looking back on the "long and bitter" struggle for "just laws" waged in "older more settled regions" of the country, Marion Sears summed up women's optimism when she declared that in Alberta women could expect a very different result from a Farmers government. She looked for greater co-operation between the new administration and provincial women because "[p]ioneering on the prairie [gave] men and women a mutual regard for the rights and privileges of one another."[46] Sears anticipated a more sympathetic hearing from the Farmers but knowing that reforms would not automatically follow she called on all organized women to "strengthen their forces so that they will have an influence on the legislation of the country." Armed with the vote, she urged provincial women "to make that enfranchisement of real value and something that will be of real service to our country and the good of humanity."[47]

This spirit of co-operation between the sexes was tested within months of the election only to founder on the shoals of political partisanship. Among its first official acts the UFA dismissed Mary MacIsaac, superintendent of the Alberta Women's Institute (AWI), and proposed that WI funding be opened to all provincial women's organizations. As was the case elsewhere in Canada the AWIs were organized under the Department of Agriculture. During the first session of the new Legislature in February 1922 the relationship between the government and the Institutes came under attack. In response to questions from a UFA member, Hoadley revealed that the total cost to government of the AWI in 1921 was $21,138.64, an increase of $6,201.04 over the previous year and $4,648,59 more than had been spent in 1919. A portion of the total AWI grant was paid by the federal government but the largest share was paid by the province. In 1921 the provincial grant amounted to $11,469.27. Arguing that this was a burden on Alberta taxpayers the government introduced amendments to the WI Act intended to extend to all "qualified" women's clubs what was currently available to the Institutes. The amendments further contemplated the appointment of a "supervisor of women's societies . . . to assist the department [of agriculture] in the

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[46]UFA Annual Report , 1923.
[47]Alberta Labour News (11 June 1921).

allocation and payment of grants under . . . the act."[48] Attorney General Brownlee stated that by changing the Act the government "merely wished to give to all societies the right to secure the lectures and short courses that had been given previously to the Women's Institutes only."[49]

The Farmers' proposals brought an immediate response from the opposition benches. At the second reading of the bill on 3 March 1922 the public galleries were "fairly well filled, women predominating" when Nellie McClung rose to the AWI's defence. Speaking to the government's claim that its amendments were intended to make the organization "wider and freer," McClung argued that this was impossible. She pointed out that the current fee of twenty-five cents was not an effective bar against membership which was open to all provincial women regardless of "race, creed, place of birth, or belief, or place of residence or occupation." She went on to say that the Alberta branch of the WIs was already the second largest in Canada with a total of 15,300 adult members and 900 girls' club members, arguing that the institutes had "paid their way." If the government had spent $20,000.00 on the institutes in 1921, she said Albertans "had earned $10,000" in free services provided by WI members to rural and urban communities.[50] She chided the UFA for their parsimony, saying that it was only responsible to expect that the Farmers', "who know so well the hardness of the lives of many of the women on the farms," would be more generous towards rural women than their Liberal predecessors had been.[51]

During the debate on the WI Act Parlby defended the government's position arguing that their proposed amendments would make public education available to all women's organizations not just the WIs. But she also called for an end to public funding for voluntary organizations, claiming that "many members of the Women's Institute" favoured such a move. And the "United Farm Women of Alberta had long gone on record as opposed" to

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[48] Scrapbook Hansard (11 March 1922), p. 42.
[49] Ibid., 18 March 1922, p. 56.
[50] McClung was referring to the relief work performed by the members of the Institutes in response to the drought crisis in southern Alberta. Between December 1919 and May 1920 they had distributed over 50,000 second-hand garments to 3,784 individuals or 686 families in addition to raising $9, 012.10 for private relief. Alberta, Journals of the Legislative Assembly (1923), p. 110.
[51] Ibid.

government grants.[52] Parlby might have added that the issue of WI funding was a long standing grievance of the farm women who saw the Institutes as their primary rival.

At their founding convention the United Farm women had debated their reltionship to the WI's, ultimately choosing to organize with the men. Still, in the beginning at least, the two organizations had co-existed on relatively friendly terms, sharing information and exchanging guest speakers for their respective meetings and conventions. As President of the UFWA Parlby had spoken to the WIs on several occasions, although in general she thought there was "too much of the housekeeping business about [the organization]."[53] Despite this cooperation, tensions first arose when the UFWA began recruiting members and found themselves in direct competition with the rural WIs. An accommodation was found in cases where the existing WIs were reconstituted as UFWA locals or where women belonged to both organizations. According to Parlby, however, the AWI was generally opposed to the UFWA organizing in areas where an Institute already existed. This, together with the close relationship between the WIs and the government led the Farmers to suspect that the women were part of the Liberal Party's attempts to block further UFA organizing. As early as 1916 Parlby wrote to McNaughton asking if she had "ever had any friction with [the] government as between your locals & the Homemakers?" She reported that the farm women were "in disfavor with the Minister of Agriculture. . .[and] Mr. Wood like myself says he is absolutely convinced that somewhere, some unseen hand is working for our extinction." They had no firm evidence of cooperation between the AWI and the Liberals, "only impressions and intuitions to go upon."[54] Parlby's suspicions deepened the following year when an Institute was established in Alix. She thought it was "rather significant" that the executive was made up of "wives of good active liberals."[55] In fact the AWI did register remarkable growth rates during the years leading up to the 1921 election. Between 1915 and

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[52]Ibid., p. 43. It is worth noting that the UFWA , including the Alix and Lacombe Locals, participated in government programmes for the first time in 1921. See Alberta, Journals of the Legislative Assembly (21 March 1922).
[53]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 14 March 1915.
[54]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 19 September 1916.
[55]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 23 September 1917.

1921 adult memberships increased from 1,400 in 42 locals to 15,330 in 330 locals. The largest increase took place during Parlby's presidency when the number of locals went from 42 in 1915 to 265 in 1919 and memberships rose from 1,400 to 13,150.[56] The challenge from the UFA may have contributed to this growth but similar patterns of expansion in other voluntary organizations during this same period suggest that the primary reason was that the clubs became the main vehicle for women's patriotic war work during the military crisis in Europe.

The dispute between the UFWA and the AWI might appear petty, even silly, if it did not underscore the dependent relationship of most women who derived their status from their husband. Neither group was independent enough to chart its own course, certainly not in high politics which remained almost exclusively a man's world. Indeed, when the UFA declared its political intentions openly in 1919 the gap between the women's groups widened. That spring Violet McNaughton suggested to Parlby that she might follow the example of the Ontario farm women and "find out what the Institutes cost the country."[57]

The long-standing rivalry between the AWIs and the UFWA spilled over onto the floor of the Legislature during the debate on the government's proposed amendments to the WI Act. Recognizing an opportunity to attack the Farmers who had promised to set a new standard of democracy by placing themselves above partisan politics and old style cronyism, the opposition was quick to charge them with mishandling public funds. Liberal Leader J.R. Boyle led the attack, accusing the government of "unsportsmanlike" behaviour. According to Boyle the Farmers' real intention was to use public money to finance their own political association. If the government wished to end funding to the WIs, he said, "all they had to do was cut that grant out of the [budget] estimates." If they did so, he promised, the government could look to the opposition benches for co-operation. Following Boyle's charges of pork barreling, debate rapidly degenerated into charges and counter charges with members from both sides of the House accusing each other of using public funds to advance

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[56] Alberta, Journals of the Legislative Assembly (21 March 1922).
[57] McNaughton letter to Parlby, 21 March 1919.

party interests. R.C. Marshal, Liberal member from Calgary, declared that "[t]he selfishness of group government was written through the bill from one end to the other," while A.M. Matheson, UFA member from Vegreville, claimed that a member of the Women's Institute in his riding "had, in her official capacity worked against his election." During the protracted debate Brownlee protested that the UFWA was "distinct from the UFA" and was not a political organization. The Minister of Education, Perren Baker, was less certain as to the status of the women's organization, conceding that it did have a "political complexion" but politics was not its "primary purpose though he could not blame the opposition for thinking so." In a rare break with her colleagues, the Woman's Minister offered a contrary view. In her opinion the UFWA was "decidedly political." Stepping into the fray, Parlby declared that the farm women "hoped to defeat a lot of Liberal members yet." But she dismissed suggestions by the Leader of the Opposition that the government intended to use the farm women's organizations for its own political ends as "much ado about nothing." [58]

There was no official relationship between the women's organization and the Liberal party although some WI members may well have opposed UFA candidates. What the debate over changes to the WI Act shows is the extent to which women's organizations became entangled in party politics. The women's official affiliation or lack of it was not the central issue. Rather, the Farmers' claims that the Liberals used the Institutes for its own political aims was based on an assumed relationship between the sexes. Because the WI was funded by the Liberal government it was thought the women would follow the party's bidding. Similar assumptions were made about the United Farm women. However, as Parlby acknowledged, the UFWA's political status was far less ambiguous. Certainly once the Farmers entered party politics the moral high ground of non-partisanship was effectively removed from both the men and the women, although this did not prevent either of them from continuing to claim otherwise. In government the Farmers showed that they were as likely as either of the "old-line" parties to use their power against their political rivals. Caught in the midst of the resulting political wrangle the AWI lost its funding. At McClung's insistence,

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[58] Scrapbook Hansard (March 1922).

however, the new Act guaranteed the Institutes seven of the eight positions on an advisory board established under the new legislation to oversee future grants (the eighth member was the Deputy Minister of Agriculture).[59]

The public debate over provincial funding for Alberta Women's Institutes not only exposed the tensions between Farm and Institute women it also strained the good relationship between Parlby and McClung. They clearly disagreed on the appropriate method of support to voluntary organizations, however, they were in general agreement on the overall goal of improving the condition of provincial women and children. According to Parlby, their differences were exaggerated by the government's efforts to manage debate in the House. Uncertain as to how to react to the presence of female legislators within their ranks, particularly one as popular and outspoken as McClung, the men assigned Parlby the task of responding to the other "lady member." Parlby regretted that "it always fell to her lot to reply in the house to attacks by Mrs. McClung against the government," but she cooperated with what she described as the "chivalrous" intentions of the UFA men who were reluctant to respond to McClung "as they would answer a man."[60]

From her position in the opposition McClung was often willing to go much further than was Parlby in pressing women's reform agenda. For example, in response to the government's proposed amendments to the WI Act she rightly pointed out that the changes singled out women. "[I]t was rather cheap of the government," she said, "to start cutting down on the women" so long as funding for men's organizations continued.[61] Still, as both women noted, while they differed in their approach they represented the same cause. Their shared commitment to reforms for women meant that they were more often allies than they were opponents.

The debate over the "liquor question" provides a more typical example of the working relationship between Parlby and McClung as the only two women in the Legislature between 1921 and 1926. The UFA

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[59]Ibid., p. 56.
[60]Scrapbook Hansard (1924), p. 12-13.
[61]Scrapbook Hansard (1922), p. 59.

government had inherited the difficult problem of enforcing prohibition, established in 1916 under the previous Liberal administration. Failure to stem the illegal liquor trade had largely discredited the legislation and led to a growing demand for a more liberal approach to the problem.[62] Moderation leagues advocated the establishment of government-run liquor stores that would also redirect revenue from the illegal traffic to the state. The leagues also joined the Hotelmen's Association to press for legal beer sales. Temperance advocates were strongly opposed to any change in the existing legislation and demanded stronger enforcement. In January 1922 the UFA, which had always been staunchly dry, waded into the escalating debate. Meeting in Convention, the organization reaffirmed its stand on prohibition, recommending that the government crack down on bootleggers and rumrunners.

One month later debate erupted in the Legislature when the UFA member for Olds, N. S. Smith, rose to accuse "this government as well as the old one" of encouraging the criminal trade by failing to impose sufficiently harsh penalties and maintaining legal sales at high prices. Smith's comments were quickly followed from the opposite side of the House with calls for a referendum on the liquor question. In an effort to contain the debate Attorney General Brownlee promised greater restrictions and other "drastic changes" currently under consideration by the government. "I believe the liquor problem to be the biggest one this government has to face," he said, as if anticipating the acrimonious debate that followed.

Women were at the forefront of the temperance campaign both nationally and in Alberta, where Nellie McClung rose to prominence as a suffragist and outspoken prohibitionist. Drawing upon her experience and considerable rhetorical skills she led the opposition to the government's proposed changes to the Liquor Act chiding, provoking and strategizing in defence of a dry Alberta. In vintage McClung style she opened with a challenge to "[e]very member of the legislature" to demonstrate their

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[62]On the serious problems of enforcement see Howard Palmer with Tamara Palmer, Alberta A New History (Edmonton: Hertig, 1990), pp. 212-214; Steven Boddington, "The Alberta Liquor Control Board, 1924-1935," MA thesis University of Alberta (1990); and Sean Moir, The Alberta Provincial Police, 1917-1932," MA thesis University of Alberta (1992).

"support [of] the Liquor Act by personal example."[63] Responding to the critics of the Act, McClung stated that "personally she regarded [it] as . . . a great success, because now people knew they were doing wrong when they drank liquor." A referendum was not necessary, she argued, since one had already been held in 1915, reminding the House that "that was a man's vote" and the majority "did not want liquor sold for beverage purposes."[64]

Parlby had not participated in the campaign to end liquor sales but following the prohibitionist stand taken by the UFWA she firmly opposed any change to the existing legislation. Once the reforms passed, however, she called on all Albertans to accept the will of the majority and expressed her belief that the "lightening" of the law would lead to improved enforcement. She remained opposed to the creation of "beer bars" but stood with the government when it agreed to a referendum as the only acceptable way out of what was proving to be an increasingly divisive debate. Speaking on behalf of the government, Parlby argued that organized prohibitionists should easily defeat a referendum whereas any attempts to "bottle up the clamor of a group of the people . . . the worse it would prove for [their] cause . . . ."[65] Parlby saw a referendum as a compromise solution which would settle the question and allow the government to move on to other more pressing issues. Responding to A.L. Marks, defeated prohibition candidate and lawyer for the Social Service Council of Edmonton who said that the government had deliberately mismanaged the entire debate in order to defeat prohibition, dismissing his remarks as "amazing ignorance" and "unwarranted." As for his claim that the Farmers would be defeated at the next election for their failure to defend the liquor law, she said that neither she nor any government member would respond to threats of "political extinction." She had made her opinions known to her constituents and was prepared to let them decide her political future.[66]

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[63] Scrapbook Hansard (1922), p. 51.
[64] Ibid., p. 62.
[65] Ibid., 1923, p. 98.
[66] Ibid., 1923, p. 159.

When the "liquor ballot" was finally approved at the final sitting of the third session of the fifth legislature on 27 April 1923, it included the establishment of government-run liquor stores as well as "beer bars."[67] Both won voter approval, ending the provinces eight year experiment with prohibition. The debate had placed Parlby in an awkward position. Her personal opposition to changes in the Liquor Act as well as that of the people she represented placed her at odds with the administration. By supporting a referendum, and the democratic right of the people to determine the outcome, she was able to negotiate these differences without openly breaking with the government.[68] Once the vote was taken she accepted the majority decision but she did not give up her opposition to the sale of alcohol. In 1925 she joined McClung in voting against an amendment to extend the provisions allowing for beer parlours on the grounds that it "was only a part of the general pressure to widen out the [liquor] act," which if passed would encourage further erosion of government control.[69] However, she was again on the side of the minority and the amendment passed.

By opposing the dismantling of prohibition Parlby showed that she was more willing than her cabinet colleagues to represent organized Farmers' expressed view in government. At the same time her failure to prevent the liberalization of the Liquor Act illustrates the limits of her influence with her male colleagues. The UFA's retreat from group government, combined with Parlby's weak position in the cabinet, meant that while farm women received a sympathetic hearing they were unable to achieve significant gains under the new administration. Indeed, where the UFA did introduce reforms for women they seldom went beyond what any Liberal government might have done. Indeed, changes to married women's property rights and increases in the minimum wage for women introduced early in the Farmer's mandate were hangovers from the previous administration. The introduction of the Married Women's Act sparked little

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[67] Ibid., 28 April 1923, p. 17.
[68] Parlby was not alone in her dilemma. A number of UFA backbenchers were particularly outspoken in their opposition to liberalizing liquor sales in the province. In the end the government had very little choice in the matter as prohibition proved impossible to enforce throughout Canada and in the United States.
[69] Ibid., 1925, p. 42.

debate in the Legislature since it merely gave the same property rights to married women in Alberta that existed in other provinces. Alberta was the first province to provide a minimum wage for women in 1917 but then fell behind developments elsewhere in Canada. The amendments introduced by the UFA, particularly the establishment of a permanent wage board in 1924, merely brought Alberta up to the national standard.[70] Furthermore, in introducing amendments to the Factory Act in 1922, the UFA was following the recommendations of an earlier board of inquiry into working conditions in the province appointed by their Liberal predecessors. The new Act was not significantly different from an earlier Liberal version.[71] It assumbed a gender-based division of labour based on the standard of single women worker's needs but left the pressumption that men should earn a family wasge. As Linda Kealey has pointed out for Manitoba, the acceptance of the minimum wage also reinforced the notion of women as a "transitory and low-skilled reserve of labour."[72]

When she introduced the legislation, Parlby saw it as responding to the immediate need of unprotected women workers who were particularly vulnable in a climate in which "the general tendency was to depress wages." A minimum wage, she said, "was essential for the welfare of women."[73] Women made up about thirteen percent of paid labour force in Alberta at the time but only a small portion was actually covered under the Act. It only applied to the province's main urban centres and excluded areas of high female employment such as domestic service, banking, teaching and nursing as well as agriculture. The minimum wage of $12.50 a week provided under the Act was higher than in the other prairie provinces and was comparable to the most highly industrialized province, Ontario.[74] The legislation also guaranteed that women would make up the majority of the members of the board charged with overseeing the Act.

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[70] For a discussion of minimum wages for women see Canadian Women A History, Alison Prentice et al . eds. (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988), pp. 226-29.
[71] Scrapbook Hansard (17 February 1922), p. 17.
[72] Linda Kealey, "Women and Laour during WWI: Women Workers and Minimum Wage in Manitoba," First Days, Fighting Days, pp. 76-99.
[73] Ibid., p. 22.
[74] Prentice et al., p. 228.

The most contentious issue surrounding the UFA changes was its perceived effect on male employment. Some critics argued that a minimum wage for women placed them in a better position than men who would suffer as a result. Others made the opposite argument, anticipating that employers would hire men over expensive female labour. In fact, a segregated work force meant that men and women seldom competed for the same jobs. Nevertheless, to guarantee men's jobs and guard against a sudden influx of women into the paid work force Dr. J.S. Stewart, the Conservative member from Calgary, urged that the Act include measures "to prevent married women whose husbands were working from taking positions [leaving] married men with families out of work." This suggestion was strongly opposed by both Parlby and McClung on the grounds that it was contrary to the principle of equality. Parlby opposed such a move, saying that "in a free country no man should be allowed to legislate in such a discriminating way against women." McClung agreed, adding that all women should be allowed to choose whether to work or not; "it is strange," she said, " that in spite of the progress of the last few years the impression still exists among men that every women should be a housekeeper." In an effort to reassure critics of the bill, she argued that increased wages would not attract a significantly larger number of women into the paid labour force since "ninety per cent want to be housekeepers."[75]

Having led the country on legal reforms for women early in the decade, under the UFA Alberta fell behind the rest of the nation. The Farmers' record is not only slim it is also conservative. It tended to extend legal rights to the province's women which were already available elsewhere in Canada or in Britain. Overall, legislation passed during the 1920s and 30s focused on protecting women as wives and mothers. Where the Farm Women advocated such reforms they usually went beyond protection, demanding legal recognition of women's domestic labour in the home. For example, UFWA resolutions calling for an equal division of matrimonial property and joint child custody were based on women's economic contribution to building up the family farm.[76]

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[75]Scrapbook Hansard (1922), p. 27.
[76]Calgary Herald (21 January 1920).

Among the first tasks Parlby set herself as the Woman's Minister was a thorough investigation into the conditions of "women's work lives," in factories as well as in the home. She believed that recognition of the economic value of women's work at home was necessary to the improvement of women's economic position generally, arguing that "[b]ecause the work of the married woman, in caring for her household was supposed to be a labour of love, & of no economic value, women had bred into them the idea that their labour was of an inferior economic value." When women put in "as long a day's work as any man on the farm," common sense alone dictated the injustice of the existing legal bar to sharing equally in family assets. Business and professional women were equally disadvantaged as they too were placed in the "humiliating" position of economic dependence on their husband following marriage.[77]

In 1925, with Parlby's co-operation, the UFWA succeeded in pushing married women's equal property rights onto the legislative agenda. That year Parlby introduced a Community of Property Bill which, had it been enacted would have provided married women with legal rights far in excess of other Canadians. The government agreed to present the farm women's Bill with the understanding that it would only be allowed to go to first reading. Following that it would be turned over to a legislative committee for further investigation. As head of that committee Parlby favoured legislation won by Swedish feminists. Recent legislation in that country deemed all matrimonial property to be common property and specifically recognized the economic value of women's domestic labour.[78] However, she was unable to win the support of her cabinet colleagues. After working on the question for three years her committee recommended against any radical changes to the existing legislation.[79]

Far from placing family relations on a more equal footing, as the women wanted, the Farmers reinforced the traditional role of the father when they introduced legislation enforcing paternal support of children born

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[77] Parlby, notes on the economic status of the married woman for an article published in the Labour Annual (5 September 1925), Parlby's personal papers.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Cavanaugh, "The Dower.Campaign"

outside of marriage. Doubtless, The Act for the Protection of Children of Unmarried Parents, passed in 1923, did offer some relief to single women with dependent children.[80] Particularly when taken in combination with improvements in women's wages the Act could be seen as supportive of women. Indeed, when Parlby introduced the proposed legislation she argued that it redressed the historical burden placed upon women whose children were born outside of marriage. "Any girl who has the moral courage to bear the social stigma to face the world and keep her child," she argued, "merits our support."[81] The main focus of the Act, however, was the father. Its purpose was to ensure that he provide financial support to his illegitimate child "until the child attains the age of sixteen years." In addition, it compelled him to maintain the mother "during the three months preceding the birth of the child, at the birth and during such period after the birth as may have been necessary." Also, he was to be held responsible for any costs which might arise out of the mother's death in childbirth. The provisions of the Act did not rely upon the mother's claim alone but could be invoked by a "friend or guardian of the child, doctor or nurse, the [provincial] superintendent [or] anyone who had incurred a debt in aid of an unmarried mother or her child."[82] As Parlby stated, the government's intention was to make "the men realize that they have to shoulder the responsibility of their own acts" and provide adequate maintenance.[83]

Similar legislation had been introduced elsewhere in Canada and for the same reason that it was passed in Alberta. According to Brownlee, the government wanted to reduce the number of children who were supported as wards of the State. They may also have acted to forestall growing demands by the government's own members to extend the benefits of the Mother's Allowance Act of 1909 to include deserted wives, war widows and other "women whose husbands were permanently incapacitated."[84] The reason that many women were unable to support themselves and their

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[80] Scrapbook Hansard (1923), p. 51. Also see S.A. 1923, c. 50. Similar provisions had been available in Alberta under the North-west Territories Ordinance of 1903. See Olive Stone, "Canadian women As Legal Persons," Alberta Law Review 17, 2 (1979), p. 357.
[81] Scrapbook Hansard, 1923, p. 51.
[82] Ibid., p. 195.
[83] Ibid., p. 51.
[84] Scrapbook Hansard (1923), p. 108.

children was that few could earn an independent living. In the case of the farm woman, discriminatory property laws barred the married woman from ownership of family assets so that marriage breakdown or the death of the husband had the effect of depriving her of an income. In these circumstances public relief did offer temporary respite but it did not address the larger issue of women's economic dependence. The "Unmarried Parents Act" went even further. By placing the responsibility for pregnant women and new mothers on men it imposed a traditional family order even where there was no marriage.

The Act did not alter the unmarried woman's status as the sole legal guardian of her children. One unintended outcome of the legislation and the publicity it attracted was that it drew attention to the contradiction in the status of unmarried and married women. While the former had sole rights as the legal guardian of her children the latter forfeited her rights following marriage. This inequality between two groups of women is at least as important as the inequality between men and women in explaining the government's decision to grant married women custody of their children in 1927. That year the Farmers replaced the Infants Act of 1913 with a dramatically different Domestic Relations Act, abolishing the feudal rights of the father and establishing his joint guardianship with the mother. Under the Act the single mother retained sole custody of her illegitimate child.[85]

Farm women also sought improvements in rural health care. Access to modern medical services was particularly crucial in Alberta where the majority of women were in their childbearing years or mothers of young children who were especially vulnerable to disease or at risk as a result of farm accidents. As a result women were often in the forefront of local efforts to establish a district hospital or nursing station. Each year, beginning in 1916, the UFWA called for improved hospital services, more doctors and nurses, and provincial programmes aimed at the "prevention of infant mortality."[86] As President Parlby undertook an investigation of medical

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[85] Statutes of Alberta, 1927, c. 5. For a discussion of child custody laws in Alberta see Stone, pp. 358-63.

[86] UFA Annual Report, 1917, p. 319. The H. MacMurchy Report on Maternal Mortality in Canada published by the Federal Department of Health (1928) showed 111 maternal deaths recorded in Alberta in 1922. Of these 84 occured in rural areas or 6.3 maternal

services available to mothers and children elsewhere in Canada and asked Locals to collect information on conditions in their local districts.[87] With the outbreak of the Influenza epidemic in 1918 the situation became even more urgent. That year, Parlby called for a state system of public health care. In the same way that the country had responded with public tax dollars to fight the war in Europe which had just ended, she argued, the province needed a "civil force to fight disease."[88] In addition, the UFWA sought the legal recognition of midwives and a guarantee that all public health nurses be trained in obstetrics.[89]

Although the Farmers promised to make public health care a priority of their government, "not only from the prevention but from the curative standpoint [as well]," they tended to follow the limited policies established under the previous Liberal administration. Publicly funded hospitals and medical services continued to be concentrated in urban centres. Rural districts did receive aid, most notably in the form of the district health nurse,[90] however, programmes continued to emphasize education and

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deaths for every live birth which was the highest in the country. The report prepared for the Dominion Bureau of statistics suggested that the incidence of maternal deaths could be as much as 25% greater than the figures reported. Infant deaths from premature births, injuries at birth, congenital debility and congenital malformation constituted 44.6% of all infants who died under the age of one in Alberta in 1921. This number increased in the second part of the decade as did the number of recorded still births. See Langford, "First Generation and Lasting Impressions." pp. 114; 183, note 6; 184, note 8.

[87]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 17 April 1916.

[88]UFA Annual Report , 1918, p. 12.

[89]The conditions women faced on the prairies led the National Council of Women of Canada to first raise the issue of the maternity nurse in the 1890s. Although women were assisting other women in childbirth at the time they did so illegally. In 1885 an Ordinance of the North-West Territories had granted doctors the exclusive right to practice midwifery, drawing the criticism of the Editor of the Edmonton Bulletin who protested that "An ordinance which gives seven men a monopoly of the medical practice of the North-West is a case of law-making run wild." Heber Jamieson, The Medical History of Edmonton (Edmonton: Academy of Medicine, 1939), p. 7. For a discussion of the public health nurse in Canada see Suzann Buckley, "Ladies or Midwives? Efforts to Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality," A Not Unreasonable Claim, Linda Kealey, ed. (Toronto, The Women's Press, 1979), pp.131-49. Also, for Alberta, see Those Were Our Yesterdays A History of District Nursing in Alberta, Irene Stewart , ed. (Calgary: Stewart, c.1979).

[90]Public health nurses were established in Alberta in 1918. The first district nurses were Miss de Turberville and Miss Conlin, graduates of New York's Roosevelt and Sloane Maternity Hospitals, who practiced in the Peace River district beginning in 1919. See These Were Our Yesterdays. By 1928 there were nine full-time and six part-time public health nurses working in Alberta: three were employed in municipalities; three doing child welfare work in the cities; one working with immigrants and two with the travelling clinic

training for women who remained the primary providers of care.[91] Despite Local demands, the UFA was generally reluctant to expand the health care budget and under John Brownlee, who succeeded Greenfield as Premier in 1924, they retreated fully from state medicine.[92] At the urging of the UFWA the government did pursue the question of midwives briefly in 1927, but backed away from legislation in the face of strong opposition from the medical profession, including nurses who were still struggling to win recognition within the hospital setting.[93]

Overall, farm women benefited very little from the election of the UFA. Despite the fact that the Farmers were only the second government in Canada to appoint a woman to cabinet rank, their legislative record stands in marked contrast to their actions and rhetoric leading up to 1921. They may have thought that the creation of a Woman's Minister was in itself a complete response to farm women's demands. As a symbolic gesture it did make it more difficult for women to challenge government inaction. Carl Betke has argued that the reform impulse that swept the UFA into office in Alberta was overwhelmed first by the Farmers' willingness to defer to a new professional elite, and second, by the dominant influence of the lawyer John Brownlee. Once Henry Wise Wood, the architect of group government and a staunch promoter of equality between farm men and women, declined to enter the Legislature at the head of the new administration it was unlikely that his ideas would continue to guide them. Between the second election in 1926 and their defeat by William Aberhart's Social Credit Party in 1935, the UFA governed at a growing distance from its organizational wing. During these years UFA principles gave way to balanced budgets as the government's primary preoccupation.[94] Some male members of the government did push for reforms for women, particularly during the UFA's first term in office. However, these efforts were sporadic and in the face of cabinet opposition individual members were

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for school children instituted in 1927. Alberta, Journals of the Legislative Assembly (1928), p. 89.

[91] These programmes where delivered primarily through the University of Alberta Department of Extension in conjunction with the AWI. See Bosetti.

[92] For a more complete discussion of the UFA government and health care see Lysne, pp. 104-8.

[93] The Grain Growers' Guide (22 January 1919).

[94] Betke, pp. 85, 109.

easily overruled. Most telling of all was the government's failure to develop a comprehensive social policy. As a result, it was unable to respond adequately to the extreme hardships imposed by the twin disasters of depression and drought that descended on the province in the late 1920s, causing a final, fatal rift within its membership.

Although Parlby's ministry won few concrete gains for women she was handily re-elected in 1926 and again in 1930, although in her third bid for office she was returned with a much reduced majority.[95] Generally, neither campaign sparked the interest or the acrimonious debate that marked the 1921 election. Since Parlby ran on the government's record, UFA inaction on women's issues during these years only underscores her observation that she was elected as a member of the Farmers' Party not as women's representative.

There is some irony in the fact that as the Woman's Minister she was so effectively isolated in government yet her public reputation rested on her status as a woman legislator and Minister of the Crown. In 1927, for example, she was invited to join four other prominent Alberta women in an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada for an interpretation of the meaning of the word "person" in section 24 of the British North America Act. Parlby is perhaps most often remembered as a co-appellant in the "Persons Case" but Provincial Court Judge Emily Murphy initiated the action in order to establish women's eligibility for appointment to public office. The implications of the legal recognition of women as persons went beyond the specific issue of Senate appointments. It was also important on human rights grounds. Victory, when it came in 1929 following an appeal to the Privy Council in England, marked women's entrance into the constitutional life of the nation.[96]

Parlby received the news of the Privy Council decision at home in Alix. She was one of the few people in the district with a telephone in her

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[95] In 1930 Parlby was opposed by J.R. Mackie, the popular mayor of Alix, running as an Independent. The result of that election was so close a recount was held, however, Parlby's majority of 102 votes held. Villy Cormack, p. 126.

[96] For a more detailed discussion of the case see Ruby G. Marchildon, "The 'Persons' Controversy: The legal Aspects of the Fight Women Senators," Atlantis 6, 2 (Spring 1981) pp. 99-113, and Erminia R. Bossio, "Beyond A Simple Goal: The Persons' Case," Honours Essay, University of Alberta, 1993.

home and she invited a group of women to gather at Manadon to await the promised call from Ottawa. According to Barbara Villy Cormack who was one of the group, Parlby accepted the victory with her "usual quiet dignity." The other women were "very excited; it was a great accomplishment but we also thought it was a little silly." Canadian women did not need the British judiciary to tell them they were persons; "We knew what women had been doing for years."[97] Nevertheless, with the Persons Case women in Canada received official recognition of their right to appointment to public office. The Alberta Supreme Court had confirmed women's status as persons in law twelve years earlier in Rex v. Cyr,[98] however, the decision in that case was codified in 1930 when the government introduced a Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act which specifically removed "sex or marriage" as a bar to public office.[99]

Parlby's public profile as a woman politician also gained her an appointment as a Canadian delegate to the Eleventh Assembly League of Nations in 1930. On her way to Geneva Parlby stopped in Toronto and Ottawa where she spoke to the National Council of Women and the Women's Canadian Club on international peace and relations between Ontario and Western Canada. She arrived on the morning of 7 September to join the other delegates, former Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden and Senator Thomas Chapais, historian and former Quebec Minister without Portfolio in the Taillon government.

As Robert Bothwell et al. have pointed out, in 1930 Canadians were largely unaware of the mounting international tensions that culminated in the outbreak of a second war in Europe only nine years later. For Canadians, and certainly for Alberta's governing Farmers, "the Great Depression was the over-whelming fact of the decade."[100] Parlby was no exception. Her appointment was unexpected and, although she had attended the Women's

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[97] Interview with Barbara Villy Cormack at her home in Edmonton. March 1989.
[98] In part Rex v. Cyr concerned a challange to judge Alice J. Jamieson's right to exercise her judical authority on the grounds that she was a woman. See Alberta Law Reports, 12 (1917), p. 320.
[99] Statutes of Alberta (1936) c. 62.
[100] Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, John English, Canada 1900 - 1945. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) p. 295.

War Conference in Ottawa in 1918, she was not been active in national or international affairs. Her appointment seems to have been a Federal Government courtesy to the Alberta Farmers. It was in Geneva that she became familiar with the nature of the growing threat to the League's search for "collective security." As a result of her experience she became a strong defender of the League and its aims. During the 1930s she accepted frequent invitations to speak on the mounting crisis and the role of the League. Following the outbreak of hostilities between China and Japan in 1931 she warned of "ominous . . . possibilities," calling on all Canadians to support the League and the ideals for which it stood. "If we are really dedicated to . . . International Peace and Security," she argued, "nothing shall daunt our high faith in the League . . . and we will devote ourselves to its service." As a witness to the members' failure to win agreement to amend Article 16 of the League's Covenant (which still recognized war as an acceptable solution to international disagreements) she was aware of the challenges facing the organization as well as the urgency of its work. Any progress towards greater co-operation "is necessarily a slow process," she cautioned, "for fifty-four or so [member] nations must have many different viewpoints." These internal challenges, in her view, made the "mere fact that the League of Nations exists . . . an outstanding achievement."[101]

Parlby's defence of the League was based on the same liberal idealism that had led her into the ranks of the UFA. She saw it as the international embodiment of that same "spirit of co-operation" that had inspired the agrarian movement and served as a "higher ideal" toward which all human beings must strive. Even when support for the League crumbled rapidly in the mid-thirties Parlby saw its survival as crucial to world peace and Canada's national security. "The habit of . . . old methods" in international relations could only lead in her view to "antagonistic blocs of nations or alliances . . . [and] merely nourish war." She warned that Canada was ill-equipped to fight a "modern war." Should such a war break out the nation would be forced to turn to the United States for military protection, forfeiting its economic independence in the process. The "sense of unrest and apprehension abroad is keener than ever it was prior

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[101]UFA Annual Report , 1932, pp. 65-71.

to 1914," she said and the moment had come when Canadians would "have to choose between the new ideals and practices of collective action and the old theory of 'Might is Right.'" Only by continuing on the course set by the League of Nations could war be avoided and Canada's future prosperity be secured.[102]

On her way home from Geneva in 1930 Parlby fell seriously ill. When the ship she was travelling on docked at Montreal she was rushed to hospital where her doctor, Sir Herbert Grey, advised complete rest. She would have to retire from public life in order to ensure a complete recovery. At home in Alix word of her illness brought messages of condolence from across Canada. Many encouraged her to remain in politics. Henry Wise Wood wrote to say that her leaving "would be an irreparable loss to the [Farmers'] organization. No one else could make the contribution you have done. No one else could fill your place." Nellie McClung, who had sat across from her in the Legislature from 1921 to 1925, wrote: "Dear Mrs. Parlby, . . . we do depend on you. We know we have an able and loyal advocate in you." And from Emily Murphy the most direct appeal of all: "Dear, dear lady, we cannot possibly spare you, so please agree to stand once more. There will be a multitude of disappointed women if you don't."[103]

At age sixty-two Parlby recovered her health more slowly than she had in the past. She did not retire from politics although she was absent from the Legislature throughout 1931. She spent the winter recuperating at home in Alix. When her son Humphrey married Beatrice Buckley in January she was still too ill to attend their wedding in Gleichen. She did return to public life in 1932, but by then the government was in full retreat from reform and she was rarely called upon to provide the 'woman's view.' Two years later, in July 1934 she announced that she would not seek another term in office. Although a provincial election was still a year away, she made her intentions known so that her successor could get "into the field as the opposition candidates are already busy."[104] At the time of her

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[102]The Edmonton Journal (19 February 1934).
[103]Villy Cormack, p. 132.
[104]Parlby letter to McNaughton, July 1934.

resignation support for the UFA was declining sharply. During that "horrible" year "Poor Mr. Brownlee," UFA Premier, was entangled in a paternity suit, deepening depression increased divisions within the UFA and memberships slipped from a high of over 36,000 in 1921 to about 10,000 in 1935. But Parlby remained loyal. Her belief in the co-operative ideals of the UFA never wavered. Even as she prepared to leave public office she pledged to "continue to be a member of the organization . . . as long as I live." The following summer she fought her last political campaign for her successor in Lacombe, Cyril Ironside.[105] The results of the 1935 election are well known. Drained by the socialist challenge of the newly formed Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) on the left and overwhelmed by the promise of Social Credit, led by the charismatic William Aberhart, on the right, the Farmers were swept from office, losing every seat they had held at dissolution.

Following the UFA's crushing defeat, Parlby was invited to join the new Alberta Premier to discuss the topic of the future of democracy on CBC radio series "Whither Democracy" broadcast on 27 March 1938. She told listeners that the future of democracy was not just a problem of the rise of European dictators, it was also a serious issue at home, especially in Alberta. Other Canadians, she said, were often too quick to dismiss the province as the home of "extreme radicals and peculiar political phenomena," ignoring the underlying causes of western discontent. Economic hardship and the failure of the central government to respond effectively to the needs of western farmers, particularly during the crisis of a "disastrous depression," were at the root of Alberta politics.

Critical of Aberhart's money policies, Parlby argued that had Alberta farmers' been "given the choice of good solid purchasing power coming in from the successful marketing of the product of their labour on the land, or in the feed lot, or a nebulous purchasing power derived from a government source under the name of social credit, they would choose the former." The problem was that farm families were unable to earn a living at the current prices. Skirting the issue of the UFA's record as contributing to their defeat,

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[105]McKinley, p. 74.

she accused Aberhart of making "empty promises." Albertans had elected him, she said, not because they had lost faith in democratic principles but because they had lost patience with Ottawa. She welcomed new ideas but warned that democracy was being threatened in Alberta by the Social Credit-led "drift towards defiance of constitutional authority." Social Credit "attempts to curtail the civil rights of our people," restrict the press, and claim status as a "sovereign state," she said, would weaken democratic institutions and "should provide food for thought for the rest of Canada."[106] In 1930 Parlby had told her Ottawa audience that all Canadians, East and West, must be able to look to the nation's capital not only as their political capital but as their "spiritual home" as well; where they could be confident of finding "human understanding and sympathy with their aspirations, their sorrows and their joys."[107] Eight years later she continued to see national co-operation and reconciliation as the only route to a peaceful and prosperous future for all Canadians.

By 1940 Parlby was even more critical of the new regime in place in Alberta. "The light of truth in public affairs has been blacked out," she told her local radio audience. With another provincial election in the offing she called upon the women of the province to set aside party affiliations to preserve the "valuable services" that had been built up over many years, "often at the insistent demand of the women." Provincial education was being threatened by cuts to school grants, and it was "harder to run . . . hospitals because hospital grants too have been cut." Women's proudest achievement, the "travelling medical and dental clinic" was also in jeopardy. Under Social Credit, she declared, Alberta had lost its once "proud position . . . as the most progressive province in the Dominion."[108]

Historians continue to debate the place of the UFA in the progressive movement of the 1910s and 20s. What seems clear is that the UFA found it was easier to call for reform than, once in government, to implement it. Certainly the Farmers' record on reforms for women was meagre. Buoyed

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[106]"Whither Democracy," transcript, CBC Ottawa, 1938, CBC programme archives, Toronto.
[107]Parlby, "When East And West Meet," notes from a speech delivered to the Women's Canadian Club, Ottawa, 1930.
[108]Campaign Speech (c. 1940), Parlby's personal papers.

by the achievement of suffrage, women at the local level continued to press for change throughout the 1920s. Where they won the support of the Woman's Minister, their concerns were often placed on the public agenda. This happened, for example, with married women's property rights and midwifery, but without the backing of the cabinet Parlby's efforts proved stillborn. With no direct authority she had little influence in shaping the Farmers' legislative programme. Matrimonial property only lived long enough to enter the record in the form of a Bill drafted by the UFWA. Its final defeat by the committee she chaired as the Woman's Minister aptly characterizes Parlby's unsatisfactory experience in government, graphically illustrating why she found it 'a strange life and work.'

Chapter Five

Women in politics: a widening sphere?

One of Parlby's first official acts as president of the UFWA was to attend the second reading of Alberta's equal franchise legislation on 1 March 1916. From her seat in the crowded public gallery she watched as Liveral Premier Arthur Sifton rose to address the Legislative Assembly on the question of the woman's vote.[1] In his opening remarks Sifton paid tribute to the province's pioneer women. By their shared labour in settling the West, he said, women had earned "an unalterable right by eternal justice to be placed on an equality with men."[2] Parlby also saw the legislation as confirmation of the pioneering partnership between the sexes. Unlike Sifton she viewed votes for women not as a reward for services rendered but as recognition of women's basic right to full citizenship. As women, she later wrote, "[w]e value our privilege of working on equal terms with men . . . the two points of view are necessary for sanity and wisdom in all things."[3]

The extension of the franchise seemed to open a widening sphere for women who had previously been excluded from the most basic right of

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[1]Parlby letter to McNaughton, March 14, 1916.
[2]On the suffrage debate see Alberta, Journals of the Legislative Assembly, 1916, pp. 9, 13, 16, 18, 135; Statutes of Alberta, 1916, ch. 5; The Daily Bulletin (1 March 1916).
[3]Villy Cormack, p. 63.

citizenship on the basis of their sex alone.[4] Their official inclusion in the political life of the province appeared to guarantee women an equal voice in determining their future. As Parlby put it, women now had a "share in the building up of . . . [the] country."[5] One immediate result of female suffrage was the election of the first women legislators in Alberta and the appointment of its first female Minister of the Crown.[6] These achievements, however, did not bring the lasting results they seemed to presage in 1916. Indeed, Parlby's claim to partnership in government may have appeared more elusive than ever when she retired from public office in 1935. As one woman among seven men she discovered that she could not set the legislative agenda.[7] The limitations inherent in the symbolic nature of her appointment as women's representative further marginalized her in cabinet.[8]

Other women who pioneered as politicians in the immediate post-suffrage years faced similar ambiguities and contradictions in their bid to

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[4]On the immediate post-suffrage period see Nanci Langford, "'All That Glitters' The Political Apprenticeship of Alberta Women, 1916-1930," Standing On New Ground: Women in Alberta, Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi Warne, eds. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993), pp. 71-85; Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women: Work Feminism on the Canadian Prairie," Journal of Canadian Studies 1,3 (Fall, 1986) pp. 32-52; and Mary Kinnear, "Post-Suffrage Prairie Politics: Women Candidates in Winnipeg Municipal Elections, 1918-1938, Prairie Forum16, 1 (Spring, 1991), pp. 41-58.

[5]UFA Annual Report , 1916, p. 23.

[6]The first women elected as members of the Alberta Legislative Assembly were Louise Crummy McKinney, who sat for Claresholm from 1917 until her defeat in 1918, and Roberta McAdams Price, who was the soldier's representative during the same period.

[7]This point is also made by Veronica Strong-Boag, "Ever A Crusader: Nellie McClung, First-Wave Feminist," Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History, Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, eds. (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1986), p. 186. Recent studies on women in politics suggest that a "critical mass" of women are necessary before they begin to influence public policy. Jill Bystydzienski, "Influence of Women's Culture on Public Politics in Norway," Women Transforming Politics, J. Bystydzienski, ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 11-13, argues that for Norway it was necessary that women represent fifteen percent of the legislature in order to make a difference. Similar results are found for Alberta by Linda Trimble, "A Few Good Women: Female Legislators in Alberta, 1972-1991," Standing on New Ground, pp. 87-118.

[8]Other women office-holders found similar constraints as pioneers in male-dominated assemblies. See for example, Terry Crowley, Agnes MacPhail and the Politics of Equality (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1990); Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "Therese Casgrain and the CCF in Quebec," Linda Dealey and Joan Sangster, eds., Beyond the Vote Canadian Women and Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 139-168; Franca Iacovetta, "The Political Career of Senator Cairine Wilson, 1921-62," Atlantis, 11,1 (Fall 1985), pp. 108-123; and Judy LaMarsh, Memoirs of a Bird in a Gilded Cage (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969).

assert female political authority in the public sphere. A comparison of Parlby's experience with that of Violet McNaughton and Nellie McClung, women whose public lives most closely paralleled her own, illustrates the difficulties they faced equally but negotiated differently based on their individual experience and background. While they sometimes differed on the most appropriate strategies, they shared a common purpose. Working in their own way, they sought to make women's concerns a public priority.

This comparison immediately runs up against several obstacles. First, our perception of these women is distorted by inherited stereotyped images. Created during their lifetimes, these stereotypes have entered the literature and persist to this day as part of the folklore of the Canadian frontier. The "low born" McNaughton is typically portrayed as the "mother" of the farm movement in Saskatchewan in particular, and the prairies generally.[9] McClung, Canadian born and prairie raised, is most often cast as frontier suffragist and temperance crusader.[10] while Canadian assumptions about Parlby's genteel English background led to an image of her as the "Lady of Light."[11] These caricatures are variants of the dominant middle-class proscription of women as civilizers of a wild and barbarous West.[12] To the extent that they were prepared to carry the burden of

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[9]For example, Myrtle Hayes Wright, "Mothering the Prairie," Maclean's Magazine (April 1926), describes McNaughton's role in the amalgamation of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association and the Farmers' Union of Canada as that of a "matchmaker" and "mother." Wright ascribes almost miraculous powers to McNaughton when she concludes: "I prefer to think of her as the bride who built mansions on a sod house."

[10]This image is captured, for example, in her popular epithet "Windy" Nellie. All three women used their public image to win support for their reform aims. McClung, for example, adopted the slogan attributed to the American businessman turned publisher, Elbert Hubbard, "Get the thing done, and let them howl." See McClung, The Stream Runs Fast, (Toronto: Richard Allen), p. 154.

[11]Cultural stereotypes of women pioneers have received relatively little attention from Canadian scholars. The categories used here draw upon the women as "gentle tamers" debate in American history. For a fuller discussion of these stereotypes in the literature of the American West see Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to Women in the American West," Pacific Historical Review 49, 2 (1980), pp. 173-21; Beverly J. Stoeltje, "'Helpmate for Man Indeed': The Image of the Frontier Woman," Journal of American Folklore 88 (January/March 1975), pp. 25-41; Glenda Riley, "Images of the Frontierswoman: Iowa as a Case Study," Western Historical Quarterly 8, 2 (April 1977), pp. 182-202; Women in the West," Journal of American Culture 3 (Summer 1980), pp. 311-29; and "Women on the Great Plains," Great Plains Quarterly 5, 2 (Spring 1985), pp. 81-92.

[12]For Canada see R.G. Moyles and Doug Owram, Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada 1880-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp.

civilizer, they did so in order to improve the status of women and the conditions of their lives.

A related but distinct problem arises from the term "maternal feminism" which has been used by historians to distinguish inter-war reformers from an earlier generation of so-called equal rights feminists.[13] As Joy Parr has commented, the term has become an obsession of Canadian history, which may explain why it continues to appear in the literature even though it has long since outlived its usefulness. These categorizations draw a false distinction which women activists themselves rarely made.[14] Rather, they advocated a variety of reforms. The adjective "maternal" as it is used to describe women activists between the wars tends to trivialize the work they did to improve the material conditions of women's lives and labour and elevate women's status.

187-211. On the limitations of the idea of women as civilizers see Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, intro., The Women's West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), pp. 13-14; Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," ibid., pp. 145-64; and Sara Brooks Sundberg, "Farm Women on the Canadian Prairie Frontier: The Helpmate Image," Rethinking Canada, pp. 95-106.

[13]Like the American historian William O'Neill who first proposed the term "social feminism," Wayne Roberts first used the term to distinguish what he describes as a radical equal rights feminism and a "moralistic and maternal tangent of the new women's reform thinking (which) became aligned with conservative notions of social order in conjunction with another social process conversion of the lives of upper-class matrons from ones of ostentatious idleness to ones of a social spring cleaning." From "'Rocking the Cradle for the World:' The New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto 1877-1914," A Not Unreasonable Claim, , pp. 15-45.

[14]Variously referred to as "maternal feminism," "social feminism" or, in the British literature, "mission feminism," the term has been used to describe women's club members, temperance workers and moral reformers. Finding these catagories inadequate, scholars have sought alternative interpretations (p. xviii-xix). In addition to Pascoe's work see in particular, Barbara Epstein, The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press., 1981), pp. 128-37; Ruth Bordin Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900 (Philadelphia, 1981); Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada 1885-1915 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); Jack Blocker, "Separate Pathers: Suffragists and the Women's Temperance Crusade," Signs 10 (Spring 1985), pp. 460-76; Katherine Harris, "Feminism and Temperance Reform in the Boulder WCTW," Frontiers 4 (Summer 1979), pp. 19-24; Nancy Sheehan, "'Women Helping Women: The WCTU and the 'Foreign Problem' in the West," International Journal of Women's Studies 6, 5 (November 1983), pp. 395-411; and Christina Simmons, "'Helping the Poorer Sister:' The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945," Acadiensis 14, 1 (Autumn 1984), pp. 3-27.

A third problem is related to the first two but is specific to historical interpretation of women's agrarian reform activities. Assumptions about prairie radicalism have led some scholars to differentiate organized farm women from their urban, middle-class sisters on the basis of class. According to this argument rural women's inclusion in the male-dominated farm movement tended to reinforce class over gender identity. Although cause and effect are often unclear, the underlying assumption in this interpretation is that family and kinship ties weakened farm women's gender consciousness.[15] As Veronica Strong-Boag has pointed out, this argument ignores the evidence of a "strong, even passionate, sense of same sex identification" that prompted prairie women to demand homesteading rights, to call for equal pay for equal work, to petition for the franchise and to agitate for the legal recognition of women's farm labour, and the mother's right to child custody.[16] The difficulty here is rooted in the pervasive influence of social historians' use of social control theory and the equally dominant view in feminist scholarship that middle-class women were inevitably conpromised by their family and class ties.[17] These interpretations have provided some useful insights into nineteenth and early twentieth century reform, particularly as it expressed relationships of power. However, by seeking to renegotiate gender relationships to establish female authority in the public realm, women in politics challenged ideas about gender and power. They were active in the spaces that exist between the categories created by these frameworks. The interstitial nature of their experience suggests a closer examination of this experience is necessary before drawing firm conclusions about its historical meaning.

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[15]This idea was first raised by Bacchi, Liberation Deferred?, who argued that farm women saw themselves as no more oppressed than their husbands, with whom they faced a common oppressor, "the Eastern interests." Also see Bacchi's article "Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage," A Not Unreasonable Claim," pp., 89-107. More recently a similar argument has been made by Nancy Grey Osterud, Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991). See also J. Menzies, "Votes for Saskatchewan Women," Politics in Saskatchewan, Norman Ward and Duff Spafford, eds. (Don Mills, Ont: Longmans, 1968), pp. 78-92, and Susan Mahood, "The Women's Suffrage Movement in Canada and Saskatchewan," Women Unite! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement , J. Action et al eds, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), pp. 21-30.

[16]Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," pp. 34-35.

[17]For a fuller discussion of the impact of social control theory on historical interpretations of nineteenth and twentieth century reform see Pascoe, pp. xix-xx.

Parlby and McNaughton first met at the Grain Growers' Association Convention in Regina in February 1913. From that brief encounter their relationship quickly developed into a close and enduring friendship based on their shared commitment to agrarian reform and their common nationality. Both were English women, which, on the Canadian prairies, served as a social bond despite the very different worlds into which they were born.[18] McNaughton was the daughter of an illiterate labourer turned grocer, William Jackson, and his wife, Sedelia Spittle.[19] Nine years younger than Parlby, she was born on 13 December 1879 at her family's home in Wive's Lane, Borden, Kent. The eldest of three Jackson children, McNaughton grew up with the knowledge that work, at least as much as marriage, would determine her future. At age seventeen, without the benefit of formal training, she borrowed five hundred dollars to purchase the private school she had attended as a young girl. For the next thirteen years McNaughton taught school in rural England while periodically working to improve her credentials. Her experience gave her first-hand knowledge of the conditions facing the working-class in Victorian England, prompting an early interest in social reform and the British co-operative movement.

In 1909, McNaughton was teaching in the village school at Leysdowne on the Isle of Sheppey. Her mother had died six years earlier. In 1908, when his manufacturing business failed, her father immigrated to Western Canada where Violet's brother, Delamark, had gone to homestead in 1905. Then in May 1909, Violet's fiancé of nine years, Frank Anderson, died after a long and painful battle with tuberculosis. Following Frank's death, her future in England suddenly seemed less promising.[20] That

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[18]Susan Jackel makes a similar point in her introduction to Flannel Shirt and Liberty. Lewis G. Thomas also explores what he calls the "social contiguity" of British settlers in Alberta although he draws attention to the bonds of class as the basis of community among these "gentle pioneers."

[19]For details of McNaughton's life I am indebted to the generous assistance of Georgina Taylor who is currently completing a Ph.D. dissertation on McNaughton. Taylor's lively articles on McNaughton published as a ten-part series in the Western Producer, January to March 1991, have been especially helpful. Sheilagh Steir, "The Beliefs of Violet McNaughton" (M.Ed. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1979) was also very useful.

[20]Had McNaughton remained in England, and continued to teach, she would have had to have a permanent teaching certificate. She had already started the process required under new qualifying regulations but the double burden of working and studying may have contributed to her decision to leave England at this point. See Steir, pp. 1-2.

October she sailed for Canada. The Jackson homestead near Harris, Saskatchewan, was only partially constructed when Violet joined her father and brother that autumn. During her first winter in Canada McNaughton slept in a hastily constructed addition which also served the farm as a granary. This hardship, however, did not dampen her enthusiasm for her new home. "I took to the Prairies from the first," she later recalled, "despite the inconvenience of having my room full of wheat and my nose in a continual state of freezing and thawing." Like Parlby, she welcomed the individual freedom the West seemed to represent. In England, she had felt "stifled." Looking back on this period in her life, McNaughton said: "I seemed to be completely out of harmony with my surroundings. Things were so settled. There was nothing to be done." By contrast, "there was breathing space" on the Canadian prairies.[21]

Shortly after her arrival in Harris, Violet met her neighbour and future husband, Glasgow-born John McNaughton, who had immigrated to Saskatchewan from New Zealand and South Africa. The two were married on 3[illegible] May 1910. The following year McNaughton was found to be suffering from a rapidly growing pelvic tumor necessitating a hysterectomy at age thirty-one. The tumor was benign but surgery ended any possibility that she and John might have children of their own.

Opposition to women in public life was based on notions of ideal femininity as naturally domestic and essentially maternal. McNaughton's childless marriage violated this concept of ideal womanhood, prompting a contemporary view of her as "mother of the Canadian West." This image was intended to reassure the public of McNaughton's femininity, notwithstanding her childlessness, while minimizing the implied challenge to male authority that she represented as a woman in public life.

Her childless marriage may have been seen by some as a political liability for a woman but, together with the close companionship of her "friend husband," it also free McNaughton for a life of public service. Her career would ultimately span four decades. Between 1911 and 1925 she

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[21] Wright, p. 22.

focused her efforts on organizing to win "better conditions" for women and "the plain common people." From 1926 until 1950 she continued this work as women's editor for the popular farm newspaper, The Western Producer.

McNaughton, like Parlby, entered public life through the agrarian reform movement. She and her husband, John, joined their local branch of the Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) in 1911. Two years later, she organized a Women's Section, later known as the Women Grain Growers (WGG), serving as its first President. As a result of her success in Saskatchewan McNaughton was called upon to help establish farm women's organizations in Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario. Recognizing that organization alone would not bring the changes farm women sought, McNaughton proposed that a provincial women's suffrage federation be established to consolidate the various groups calling for votes for women. Her action brought immediate results in the form of Provincial Equal Franchise Board (PEFB) which was formed in 1915 and successfully spearheaded the campaign in Saskatchewan.[22]

McNaughton viewed woman suffrage as "a necessary equipment" to bring about social and economic reform.[23] Once women had the vote she encouraged them to organize and work co-operatively to ensure that they were represented in every influential forum in the country. She envisaged "an army of women workers . . . women on every executive and every committee . . . women organizers and women speakers. . . ."[24] So, for example, in 1919 she worked with Mary McCallum, associate editor of the Grain Growers' Guide, to establish the Interprovincial Council of Farm Women. McNaughton felt that by "getting in on the ground floor" activists would be more effective in shaping the social policies of the Canadian Council of Agriculture (CCA), the farmers' national organization which was developing the "New National Policy" at the time.[25] She also saw the Interprovincial Council as crucial to actively shaping "public opinion on matters especially connected with women and children."[26] McNaughton's

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[22]Equal Franchise legislation was passed in Saskatchewan in March 1916.
[23]Steir, p. 81; quoting from McNaughton, "How the Social Lives of Farmers' Wives Can Be Improved."
[24]Steir, p. 115.
[25]Ibid.
[26]Women Grain Growers' Association, Year Book, 1920, p. 15.

efforts to establish working partnerships between rural and urban women on a national scale were less successful. Regional and class differences led to the withdrawal of the WGG from the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), an umbrella organization of women's reform organizations, and McNaughton rejected the Women's Party formed in Toronto in 1918 because she felt it was not representative of women and working people in every national region.

The most radically democratic of the three women studied here, McNaughton sought to make all Canadian institutions more responsive to women and other "common people." This objective motivated much of her organizational work and led her to support the Progressive Party under its New National Policy of 1918. As much as McNaughton had hoped to advance "women's emancipation" through their association with the Canadian Council of Agriculture, she also believed that organized farm women could further the aims of the Progressive wing of the farm movement. This would ensure that women's interests were advanced and rural conditions improved generally.

McNaughton's hopes for an effective partnership between farm women and men were never fully realized. As an auxiliary of the men's organization, the Women Grain Growers' could not claim even the limited independence of their counterpart in Alberta. Within a year of its founding, the women's Interprovincial Council was converted to the Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, making it subordinate to the male-dominated council. Publicly, McNaughton remained optimistic about what the farm women might achieve on a national level. But privately she expressed her opinion that this change was a setback, worrying that farm women would lose their leadership role in social reform.[27] Disheartened, she attended her last meeting of the CCA in 1923 and turned her attention to the upcoming federal election.

Unlike the UFA, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers did not enter politics directly although they did run independents under the banner of the

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[27] Steir, p. 48; and Taylor, "Pushing for Equity for Farm Women," The Western Producer (24 January 1991), p. 13.

Progressive's New National Policy. The Policy repudiated the National Policy of 1879, urging an end to protective tariffs and a "fair deal" for agriculture. Under the leadership of the breakaway Unionist, T.A. Crerar, former President of the UGG, the Progressives won sixty-five seats in the federal election of 1921, the majority in Western Canada. McNaughton was the only woman on the executive of the Canadian Council of Agriculture when it issued its New Policy in 1918. This close association with the "Farmer's Platform" made her a likely candidate in 1921. The invitation to stand came not from the men but from the Dinsmore WGGA. Parlby, who was being pressed to enter the race in Alberta, urged McNaughton to accept the nomination. Together they could give each other the mutual support they would need as women in a man's world. "If I stand," Parlby, wrote to her friend, "you must as I have not the courage to go alone."[28] But McNaughton declined. In her reply to the Dinsmore executive she offers no clear reason for her decision. Apparently she had not ruled out the possibility some time in the future. While turning down the invitation she did draw the executive's attention to her qualifications for the job. She had spent a great deal of time in public service and was intimately aware of the problems facing prairie farmers, "all of which has been very thorough training."[29] It is difficult to explain why McNaughton chose not to run in 1921, particularly given her encouragement of Parlby's candidacy and the fact that support for the Progressives was running high in Saskatchewan. Fearing, perhaps, that as a woman she might lose a seat which was seen as safe for the Progressives she chose instead to campaign with Crerar.[30]

McNaughton again declined the Progressive nomination in 1925, but this is more understandable. The Progressives were already beginning to crumble, McNaughton had just started to work with the Grain Growers' newspaper, The Western Producer, and she was solely responsible for her seriously ailing father. The prospect of a political career in Ottawa must have seemed an impossibility as long as her father was dependent upon her. But McNaughton also saw herself primarily as a teacher. She had spent thirteen years as a school teacher in England and always

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[28] Parlby letter to McNaughton, 17 October 1920. Emphasis is in the original.
[29] Steir, p. 125 quoting McNaughton letter to Mary Falk, 26 September 1921.
[30] Georgina Taylor pointed this out.

emphasized education as crucial to effective, democratic political action. When the editor of The Progressive, which later became The Western Producer, suggested that she edit a women's column for the newspaper, she accepted readily. Working from her farm home in Harris, she began on a voluntary, part-time basis before moving into a permanent position at the paper in 1926.[31]

McNaughton's final official act as Secretary of the SGGA was to work to ensure the successful amalgamation of the declining Grain Growers and the rival Farmers' Union of Canada (UFC); a move that was intended to ensure the future of organized farmers in Saskatchewan. Amalgamation raised the question of women's participation in the new organization. Once again McNaughton fought to secure women a leadership function. This time, however, her efforts seemed to lack the conviction of her earlier campaigns. Ever the pragmatist, perhaps she had lost too many battles to pursue the issue vigorously. Together with Annie Hollis of the WGG, McNaughton drafted a "Memorandum of Suggestion" about the role women should take in the new UFC. They rejected the old Grain Growers' model of an auxilary, arguing instead for a constitutional guarantee of women's leadership on the executive and at least two women directors of the Board.[32]

McNaughton did not serve on the executive of the UFC. Following amalgamation she also resigned her official position with the Progressive Association. For the next quarter century she concentrated her efforts for "better conditions" on her newspaper column, "Mainly for Women." As the title suggests, McNaughton focused on "women's questions" but she was "very anxious that this page should not have the appearance of segregation." Apart from "a small domestic section," she felt that all other topics covered in the column, from music to immigration to poultry pools, should be of "equal interest to men and women." She encouraged all

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[31] On McNaughton's career as a journalist see Taylor, "Violet Begins Her Career with *The Western Producer*, " The Western Producer (31 January 1991), pp. 12-13, and "Violet's Life As a Journalist," ibid. (7 February 1991), pp. 10-11.
[32] Taylor, "Violet Begins Her Career with *The Western Producer*," p. 12.

opinions in the belief that "[t]his would be carrying out the idea of unity and co-operation," which organized farmers had always stood for.[33]

Nellie McClung also saw herself primarily as a teacher and writer. She had already carved out an independent career as an author, public speaker, suffragist and social reformer when Parlby was elected President of the UFWA in 1916. Her first novel Sowing Seeds in Danny, published in 1908 was a runaway best seller, but it was her suffrage and prohibition speeches, published in 1915 under the title In Times Like These, that thrust McClung onto the national and international stage. In the spring of 1916 she was invited to speak to the Mississippi Valley Suffrage Conference in Minneapolis where she shared the platform with leading American suffragists, including Carrie Chapman Catt, President of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA).[34] That meeting led to the first of two highly successful U.S. tours, sponsored by Catt's organization, which took McClung to thirteen states in just over two months.[35]

Born Nellie Mooney on 20 October 1873, in Grey County, Ontario, McClung was the youngest of John and Letitia McCurdy Mooney's six surviving children. In 1880 the family joined the westward migration of Ontario farm families in search of improved opportunities on the new frontier. Travelling by steamship, ox-cart, and on foot they joined McClung's eldest brother, Will, on his Souris River Valley homestead near Millford in south-

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[33]Taylor, "Violet's Life As a Journalist," p. 11.

[34]McClung was well received by her American audience. According to Thomas Johnson, the Manitoba legislator who had introduced the suffrage bill in that province, and who attended the Minneapolis conference she " was 'up against' the leading women of the U.S. and I tell you honestly there were only one or two in her class. Everybody was raving about her. She is certainly doing Canada some good. I don't know of any better advertising that Canada could get than she is giving us." See Hallett and Davis, Firing the Heather, p. 156.

[35]McClung returned to the United States in 1917 and again, briefly, in 1918. During this period she also travelled widely in Canada. For a fuller discussion of her national and international activities see Hallet and Davis, pp. 154-59. As Randi Warne points out in her introduction to McClung's novel Purple Springs (1921; reprint Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), she was much sought after by American suffragists who considered her presence crucial to winning the vote south of the border (p.xl, note 46). Long a curious lacuna in the literature, the international dimensions of turn-of-the-century social reform is only now being explored. See Judith Allen, "Contexualizing Late-Nineteenth-Century Feminism: Problems and Comparisons," Journal of the Canadian Historical Association 1 (1990), pp. 17-36.

western Manitoba.[36] Like McNaughton, McClung was a school teacher. The family's move west delayed her formal education but at sixteen she was one of the youngest students to graduate from Winnipeg Normal School in 1889. For McClung, a "license to teach" opened the door to independence, teaching at four schools in five years in south-central Manitoba. An appointment in Manitou found her living with the local Methodist minister, Reverend J.A. McClung, and his wife, Annie. Under Mrs. McClung's influence the young school teacher was easily won over to temperance and suffrage. Later Nellie made the unusual claim that she was so impressed by Mrs. Mooney that she determined to have her as a mother-in-law. In 1896 she married the McClung's eldest son, Wesley, a recent graduate of the Toronto College of Pharmacy.

Four of the McClung's five children were born in Manitou. Mark, her youngest son, was born shortly after the family moved to Winnipeg in 1911. Suffering from "nervous exhaustion," Wes McClung sold his drug stores in Manitou to take up a sales position in the city with the Manufacturers' Life Insurance Company. With increased pressure to earn an income as a writer, McClung began to actively pursue publishing opportunities. She continued her work with the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Methodist Woman's Missionary Society begun in Manitou, but, according to McClung's biographers Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis, it was her association with the Winnipeg branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club that launched her career as a writer and public speaker.[37] The club was headed by McClung's friend E. Cora Hind, the internationally noted commercial and agricultural editor of the Winnipeg Free Press. Other club members included Lillian Beynon and her sister Francis Beynon Thomas, Genevieve Lipsett-Skinner, and Kennethe Haig. All were actively involved in women's reform activities across the prairie provinces.

The Winnipeg press women provided an important nucleus to a far-flung network of prairie women social reform activists. Through her

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[36]The Mooney family's westward trek is one of the best known stories of migration from Ontario and is described by McClung in her popular autobiography, Clearing In The West (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1935), pp. 26-74. Also see Hallett and Davis, pp. 11-15.
[37]Hallet and Davis, p. 107.

membership in the Press Club, the Local Council of Women, and the Political Equality League (PEL), McClung quickly assumed a leadership role in the Manitoba campaign for married women's dower rights, homesteads for women, the mother's right to guardianship of her children, improved working conditions for women, temperance and suffrage. Her years in rural Manitoba had taught her much about the hardships faced by the province's farming population. In Winnipeg she learned of the plight of the urban working poor and immigrant population through her association with Reverend J.S. Woodsworth and his All People's Mission. But temperance and "votes for women" remained McClung's central concern. Drawing upon her Methodist background she used literature as a pulpit, from which she preached the gospel of social reform and women's emancipation.[38] Her many articles and sixteen books received a wide readership throughout Canada and in the United States, making her one of the most influential popular writers of the period.

McClung's celebrity reached a high point in the winter of 1914 when she and other members of the Manitoba PEL staged a wildly successful "Women's Parliament" at Winnipeg's Walker Theater. Mock parliaments were a popular form of political theatre widely used to dramatize the suffrage issue. Male and female roles were reversed so that a delegation of men appealed to a government of women for the vote. The women rejected the men on the grounds that their sex disqualified them from participating fully in public life. By turning their own anti-suffrage rhetoric against the men the play made their position ridiculous. To prepare for her performance McClung studied Manitoba's Conservative Premier Sir Rodmond Palen Roblin closely. She apparently captured his pompous manner so well that the overflow audience immediately recognized her humorous but pointed impersonation. Even the conservative Winnipeg Telegram acknowledged that the PEL's tactics were a stunning success, singling out McClung's unscripted performance as "the choicest piece of sarcasm that has ever

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[38] Randi Warne, Literature As Pulpit, (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1993).

been heard locally ... [it was] purely and simply a burlesque of a recent speech made in reply to the [suffrage] bill of the women."[39]

McClung's intelligence and ready wit won her a large and faithful following in Manitoba. Women in particular were anxious to have her attend their meetings, knowing that her presence alone would ensure its success. According to Lillian Beynon Thomas "[o]ne of the most astonishing things about Mrs. McClung's campaign . . . was that people paid for admission to her meetings to hear her talk politics. . . . women's organizations all over the province begged her to go to them and give them an address . . . when they were anxious to make some money."[40]

In the four short years since moving to Winnipeg McClung had established herself as one of Manitoba's leading reformers. When her husband, Wes, accepted an appointment as Manufacturers' Life manager for the northern Alberta area and the family relocated to Edmonton in December 1914, she feared that the move might end her public career. Her concerns proved unfounded. Her reputation as a dedicated reformer and skilled public speaker preceded her and within months of her arrival in the capital city McClung was invited to address the members of the Alberta Legislature on the question of female suffrage. During her first year in Alberta she spent six weeks touring the province in support of temperance.[41]

Even after women won the vote, McClung urged that they maintain their position independent of party politics that had served them so well in their pre-suffrage campaigns. Without "any political past to bind them," she argued, new women voters would have the greatest impact on public policy if they rejected party loyalty, supporting instead those whose policies and platforms advanced the aims of social reform. Only by their collective action could women hope to effectively counter male "sex prejudice" and "become a factor in shaping the policies of governments, or in forming the

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[39]The Winnipeg Telegram (January 1916); reproduced in McClung, The Stream Runs Fast (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1945), p. 118. On the "Women's Parliament," see Hallet and Davis, pp. 123-127.

[40]Warne, introduction to Purple Springs, p. xxv.

[41]On McClung's years in Alberta see Hallett and Davis, pp. 142-227.

platforms of oppositions."[42] When she entered electoral politics in 1921, however, she was forced to choose between the three parties contesting the election.[43] Running as an independent woman at the time would have been political suicide. Although she had close contact with the Women Grain Growers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, in Alberta she was associated primarily with city club women. Few, if any, contemporary observers would have predicted the dramatic collapse of the governing Liberals, the party that McClung allied herself with against her nemesis, Sir Rodmond Roblin. She received a more sympathetic hearing from Alberta's Premier Sifton and in 1917 campaigned on behalf of his Liberal Party which had passed suffrage and prohibition legislation the previous year. It was not surprising then that when she ran as a candidate in the riding of Edmonton she did so as a Liberal.[44]

Parlby, McNaughton and McClung entered public life as veterans of women's reform campaigns waged on the prairies during the 1910s. Only McNaughton and McClung identified themselves as feminists but all three worked to ensure women's legal equality and to elevate their social, economic and political status. They disagreed, sometimes sharply, on how best to achieve these aims, but they all felt the urgency of women's needs. They believed that further progress depended upon women exercising direct power through public office.

During the suffrage campaign women developed a critique of male-dominated government, arguing that women in politics was necessary for justice in social relationships. In Western Canada women also drew upon changing notions of democratic citizenship and the progressive view of the

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[42] The Edmonton Journal (19 March 1916).

[43] McClung might have followed the example of Louise McKinney and run as an independent member of the Non-Partisan League but the League joined forces with the UFA in 1921 so the choice was not open to her.

[44] Of the fifteen Liberals elected, five were in Edmonton. According to her biographers Hallet and Davis she placed third in the city race. However, the final results published in the Edmonton Bulletin on 13 August 1921 show her as fifth among the victorious Liberals with fewer than 50 votes separating her and the fourth-placed candidate and just over 1,000 votes behind the front runner in an election in which 31,000 people were eligible to vote. McClung campaigned on the Liberal government's record of reforms for women and temperance. In her victory speech she attributed the Liberal's defeat to the public's "short lived memory for services rendered," suggesting that she also felt compelled to support the party out of a sense of gratitude. See Hallett and Davis, p. 175.

role of the state as mediating public and private relationships. In his study of dominant and popular ideologues in early twentieth-century Manitoba, Jeff Taylor shows that "[t]he most significant change in the political language of the Manitoba farm movement between the 1890s and the 1920s was the transformation of . . . non-partisanship into the citizenship of the UFM [United Farmers of Manitoba]."[45] In the new analysis, "[c]itizenship was the political equivalent of economic cooperation and social community." According to the President of the UFM the new politics made it the duty of "every citizen" to

> set himself to live for a citizenship of intelligent and conscientious participation in public life, and every group must devote itself to co-operation and sympathetic investigation of conditions and discussion of principles and methods by which evils may be averted and the people's true well-being promoted.[46]

In the immediate post-suffrage period, non-partisanship as the basis of community and good citizenship held a strong appeal for women reformers across the West. Newly enfranchised and previously unallied, farm women saw economic co-operation along non-partisan lines as the means of improving both their class and gender position. Although they are usually seen as adopting the male defined discourse of agrarian reform, the evidence suggests that influence worked both ways. Seeking to advance a view of female authority in the public realm women embraced the new vision of a broader, more democratic citizenship. They also made it their own by arguing for the rights and privileges of female citizenship.

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[45]Jeffrey M. Taylor, "Dominant and Popular Ideologies in the Making Of Rural Manitobans, 1890 - 1925" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1988), p. 303. Taylor documents the changes in the use of non-partisanship from its original apolitical meaning in Brackenism to its intensely political meaning as the rallying call of the Patrons of Industry. With the decline of patronism at the end of the nineteenth century, it entered the discourse of agrarian reform where it stood for the rejection of traditional political practices. Taylor's argument that non-partisanship made class rather than party loyalty the key to the new politics of progressivism is convincing as he applies it to men. He extends his analysis of men's experience to include women, concluding that "[f]emale agrarianism . . . in Manitoba was primarily a product of the main (by which he means male-dominated) body of the agrarian movement." (p. 337) This work is useful but would be even more so by not assuming that women's experience was either the same as or different from men. In particular see pp. 93-98, 289-95, and 319-37.

[46]Ibid., p. 304.

By their presence in public life Parlby, McNaughton and McClung challenged the dominant notion that high politics was no place for a woman. They also spoke out against the idea of politics as the preserve of an elite group of men. Rather, as McClung put it, "politics simply means public affairs - yours and mine, everybody's."[47] Like McClung, Parlby argued that politics was as much women's work as it was men's, saying that

> Politics means . . . the effort to secure, through legislative action, better conditions of life for the people, greater opportunities for our children and other people's children through more forward-looking educational and public health activities, general social legislation for the more unfortunate among us, regulation of those powerful enough to exploit our people and general leadership in ideals of progress.[48]

She sometimes criticized women for what she saw as their lack of interest in politics but also recognized that official equality was not enough to ensure their full inclusion in the political life of the nation. Despite Canada's "Liberal . . . Franchise" legislation, she argued, women were given "little opportunity to take any active or responsible part . . . in public affairs."[49] While women had entered other professions and occupations they were generally barred from politics. It was still "a difficult thing for a woman to get a nomination at a political convention . . . however great her qualifications."[50] "[T]he election of a man," on the other hand, was a "comparatively simple matter. He may not be a particularly good man. . . . in the social sense [by which she meant socially-minded] - he need not even have unusually good judgment or business acumen, but he is a man among men . . . and can generally rally enough voters to elect him."[51] Only when women, who were "approximately half the population," could enter politics on the same basis as men, did Parlby see a truly free and democratic Canada.[52]

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[47] McClung, In Times Like These, p. 64.
[48] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - and Today!"
[49] Parlby, "What Business Have Women in Politics?" Parlby's personal papers.
[50] Parlby, "The Position of Women in Canada," notes on CBC radio broadcast, 1938, Parlby's personal papers.
[51] Parlby, "Awhile Ago - and Today!"
[52] Parlby, "What Business Have Women in Politics?"

Although they claimed the political field as their democratic right, Parlby and McClung also knew that as politicians they had to negotiate the sexual politics of a male dominated occupation. During her second term in office Parlby wrote that, "[t]o-day women are on trial in the political field; few have entered it. Every false step they take, every little remark which may sound foolish, is eagerly discussed, and widely heralded abroad with the cynical sneer: 'What else can you expect of a woman?!'"[53] With a lifetime of experience behind her McClung summed up the challenges facing the first women recruited to elected office in her autobiography. She first contemplated the possibility of a political career in 1914. With woman suffrage all but realized in Manitoba she felt certain that she could win an election. The Liberal Party seemed poised to take over the government, leading her to speculate that a victory at the polls would in all likelihood result in a cabinet appointment. "[A]ll of which was very exciting," she wrote:

> but I also knew the whole situation was fraught with danger for if I, as the first woman to hold a Cabinet position failed, it would be a blow to women everywhere. I could easily undo all I had done for I knew the world would be critical of women for a long time. If a woman succeeded, her success would belong to her as an individual. People would say she was an exceptional women. She has a 'masculine' mind. Her success belonged to her alone, but if she failed, she failed for all women everywhere.[54]

McClung realized that although the new woman voter was about to become a reality, public acceptance of the new woman legislator remained problematic. Politics was deemed to be a masculine preserve and female authority was still widely seen as properly contained within the home and family. Even though she believed she was eminently qualified for the job, able to "make a good speech" and "persuade people" to her point of view, the risks seemed to outweigh the advantages. In 1914 leaving Manitoba was preferable to a career in public office.[55]

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[53] Ibid.
[54] McClung, The Stream Runs Fast, p. 143.
[55] Ibid.

How much more daunting it must have been for Parlby who did not share McClung's skill or confidence as a public speaker. "I do hate this speaking & shall never be any good at it," she wrote to McNaughton in 1916.[56] Feeling "an awful ignoramus," she asked McNaughton's advice: "Please tell me how you managed speaking in public when you started. I do not feel I could ever make an impromptu speech, the only way to me is to write everything down and commit it to memory."[57] To the public Parlby appeared poised and confident, but her early correspondence with McNaughton contradicts this image. Before appearing in public she often sought reassurance from McNaughton as she did, for example, in 1919 when she was about to address a meeting of municipal leaders in Calgary: "am rather scared to tackle it," she wrote, "do you think I could?"[58] With experience Parlby's apprehension lessened but she never completely overcame her fear of public appearances. After her election she complained that "people seem to think . . . you immediately became a sort of free for all talking machine - able to spout on every subject under the sun!! Am going to learn to say no."[59] Refusing invitations remained difficult but she did develop a strategy for coping with her anxiety. Restraint became an important protective strategy for Parlby who announced in her first speech in the Legislature that she would not engage in the usual "battledore and shuttlecock game of political debating."[60]

This stance combined with her "genteel" English accent contributed to a public perception of Parlby as distant and aloof. Reporters nicknamed her "Serene Irene," making a caricature of her patrician image. When she did engage in heated debate the press was quick to draw public attention to her less than ladylike behaviour. For example, her reply to criticism directed at her by A.L. Mark, Social Service Council solicitor, during the debate on the liquor laws in 1923, brought headlines in the Edmonton Bulletin describing her as "severe" and "caustic."[61] Aware that their public careers made them ready targets for reporters, Parlby and McClung were

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[56]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 1 December 1 1916.
[57]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 24 February 1916.
[58]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 17 November 1919.
[59]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 13 October (c. 1921).
[60]The Edmonton Bulletin, 10 February 1922.
[61]The Edmonton Bulletin, 15 March 1923.

particularly careful to show themselves as united on most issues. This strategy was generally successful although when they differed on the government's approach to the 'Beer Plebiscite' reporters emphasized their differences while overlooking their common opposition to the vote itself. McClung had been deeply disappointed by the results of the plebiscite which effectively ended prohibition. Rising in the Legislature, she criticized the UFA for failing to live up to its promise to maintain a dry Alberta. At the same time she warmly acknowledged the support of the "lady member of the cabinet" and the other members on the government's side who had remained faithful to the Farmers' election platform. The real story was the split in the government ranks created by the liquor question. But roused by the spectacle of two women at odds reporters focused on the clash between Parlby and McClung. Under the bold headline "Two Lady Members Cross Swords in Legislature," one report read as follows:

> While Mrs. McClung scorched the government with acidulated and bitter tongue, . . . holding them up to scorn . . . Hon. Mrs. Parlby' reply was cold and snappy as the tinkling of ice in a glass . . . the honorable lady . . . didn't even thank Mrs. McClung for the undying love and admiration, either. Rather did she express regret that the lady prohibitionist had dragged her name into the argument at all.

By excluding Parlby from her criticisms McClung meant to commend her work for temperance. But she inadvertently drew attention to the fact that Parlby had broken ranks with the government over the liquor question. Not surprisingly this provoked an angry response from the Minister. In her reply Parlby carefully reassured the House (and her Cabinet colleagues) of her loyalty without compromising her own position on temperance. While acknowledging McClung's good intention toward her, Parlby criticized her for continuing to attack the government after the question had been decided. "I personally regret that the vote went as it did," she concluded, but she also thought that McClung had gone too far and advised her that "there is no use in wasting time upbraiding anybody or crying over spilt milk. Let us accept the verdict of the people, and give them a liquor law which will at least create as little harm as possible."[62]

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[62] Scrapbook Hansard (1924), pp. 12-13.

Parlby's ready dismissal of years of sustained effort must have shaken McClung. But her response did have the result she was looking for. Much to the chagrin of the reporter, debate was brought to an abrupt end and the House quickly returned to other business. According to the newspaper report "the rapidity with which the crowded galleries emptied immediately after the duel between the two ladies bore eloquent witness to the regret of the spectators the duel was not of longer duration."[63]

McClung's skill at the political joist made her a particularly effective member of the Opposition. Quick on her feet and always ready to disarm her opponent with well placed humour, she was easily among the most effective debaters in the Legislature. Both Parlby and McNaughton advocated the politics of persuasion over confrontation. Parlby particularly objected to what she saw as McClung's tendency to "flay those who disagree with her," especially when her criticism were turned against members of the government.[64] At the same time, she took care to point out that they differed in form rather than substance. "Mrs. McClung and I are agreed on the same principles, but we approach the principles in a different manner," she told her colleagues in the Legislature.[65]

The differences between Parlby and McClung have been interpreted as a fundamental division within the ranks of organized women in Western Canada. According to this view, McClung was closer to urban middle-class feminists who emphasized gender difference, arguing for women's moral values as necessary to the goals of social regeneration. Like Parlby and McNaughton, farm women, on the other hand, are seen to rely on an

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Parlby was not alone in her criticism of McClung's contentious style. When asked to comment on McClung's reply to "a group of some obstreperous women" Louise McKinney advised that " you've certainly demolished [the women's] arguments, but you have made them ridiculous and there is no need to do this. . . . It is never wise to kill your enemy, even if you can do it and get away with it. It's better to kill enmity, and then you have acquired a friend." Although McClung had expected praise for the "neat piece of business" she had performed, upon receiving McKinney's reply she "knew in a flash [Louise] was right . . . and did not forget her gentle rebuke." The Stream Runs Fast, p. 174.

[65] Scrapbook Hansard (24 February 1923), pp. 12-13.

economic interpretation of discrimination, stressing their mutual interests with farm men over differences in gender.

There is some truth to this generalization. Parlby, for example, declared that, "[f]irst and foremost as organized farm women we stand shoulder to shoulder with the men's organization in the demand for a reconstruction of our economic system."[66] Similarly, McNaughton argued that "economic change had to precede general social improvement." And she urged farm women and men to study co-operation "to gain a greater share of the wealth" they produced.[67] But they also developed a critique of sex discrimination, or as Parlby put it, "excessive masculinity," that did not rely solely on urban based feminism. Rather, it arose out of the conditions women faced on isolated prairie farms. This is most graphically illustrated by the reasons behind McNaughton's long struggle for rural health care. Her commitment to improve health care for women and children began in hospital in Saskatoon in 1911. Alone, recovering from surgery she listened to "the echoes of the real estate boom" in the city, and thought of "the only solid thing back of the boom, the homesteads of Saskatchewan. Back of these homesteads were the frozen noses, long travail on the trail, the grain in the bedrooms. Here was I, a part of this one solid thing - and I had to come 65 miles for medical treatment."[68] By 1916 the unnecessary deaths of rural mothers and their babies doubled her resolve to see rural nursing care established in the districts. "I am going right after this medical aid question," she wrote, "I am going to make it my subject. . . . governments should consider the real value of the human being, particularly women and children, in equal degree to that of property."[69] Similarly her experience of hauling water "which is so much a part of the burden of country women that it burned into my mind . . . very deeply," led to her agitating for improved water and sewage facilities in rural homes.[70]

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[66] Grain Growers' Guide (4 December 1918).
[67] Ibid. (11 December 1918).
[68] Taylor, "A Personal Tragedy Shapes the Future," The Western Producer (10 January 1991), p. 11.
[69] Steir, quoting from McNaughton, "The Need of Nursing Care for Women on the Prairies," p. 92;
[70] Taylor, "Pushing for Equity for Farm Women," pp. 12-13.

Their economic critique led McNaughton and Parlby to view social inequity as a problem of wealth distribution but they both argued that the resulting hardships effected farm men and women differently. As Parlby put it, "no group of women [worked] so hard so ungrudgingly and so unselfishly. And yet we know for a fact that in many instances, not even the produce that they raise by their own labor, can be sold and claimed as their own."[71] In their adult lives Parlby and McClung both enjoyed positions of relative privilege which protected them from the extreme hardships suffered by many rural women. Neither had experienced the harsh conditions McNaughton faced when she first arrived in Canada. But all three felt the particular injustice of the devaluation of women's work and women's lives. In public life they made common cause to redress the imbalance.

As members of the Alberta legislature, McClung wrote, she and Parlby "united our forces when questions relating to women were under discussion."[72] Their ability to work together was enhanced by McClung's independent stand. Although she sat as a member of the Liberal Party, by experience and inclination, she was not a good party person. When she agreed with the UFA she never hesitated to vote with the government. "Our business in the legislature," she declared, is to "get together and give the very best that is in us to formulate policies where by we can handle the big problems before us."[73] This view of political leadership combined with her own willingness to break party ranks made McClung an effective advocate for all provincial women. Given the absence of a government policy to address women's reform agenda, McClung's most important contribution to women was her repeated insistence that women be placed in positions of authority on all government boards and agencies. Overall, her voting record is remarkably similar to Parlby's. They sat on many of the same committees of the Legislature and despite their party differences held each other in high regard. Their co-operation usually depended upon McClung's support of the government, or of Parlby as minister. But there were also occasions when Parlby was able to demonstrate her solidarity with McClung as well. For example, she seconded McClung's motions to reform

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[71] Alberta Labour Annual (5 September 1915).
[72] McClung, The Stream Runs Fast, p. 175.
[73] Hallett and Davis, p. 177.

legislation to provide women with equal access to divorce and to ensure that a woman retained her citizenship following marriage.[74] Both of these matters fell under federal jurisdiction and were unanimously approved by the Alberta Legislature so that Parlby's support did not compromise her within the cabinet.

Working in their own ways Parlby, McNaughton and McClung acted out of a vision of citizenship that encompassed female political authority. By exploring both its moral and economic dimensions they succeeded in demonstrating that women could serve their community outside of a purely domestic sphere. The problem arose when they confronted male privilege in the public realm. Finding herself isolated and alone Parlby tended to turn her frustration inward, often despairing of ever mastering politics. Writing in the pages of the UFA, she confessed that "seen through a woman's eyes . . . much of . . . the old political game," as men played it, "seemed tiresome and time wasting."[75] Just two years into her first term in office she wrote to McNaughton saying "I am an absolute failure as a politician and am counting the days until my term in jail is over."[76] The extroverted McClung took much more naturally to public life, but recognized the limitations imposed on women. Although she later claimed to have enjoyed her term in office, her autobiographical account of this period in her life is uncharacteristically brief, suggesting that she too found it unsatisfactory. Following her defeat in 1926 she welcomed a return to writing. Always her first passion, writing also provided her an independent platform from which she could continue to influence public debate. McNaughton also turned to journalism after her attempts to include women in the ranks of the Progressive Party failed in the mid-twenties. Only Parlby continued in government. But, as McClung pointed out, by the mid-nineteen twenties "the centre of gravity had shifted," away from social reform.[77] As the UFA turned their attention to economic issues and political scandals the space that had opened to women began to close. Opposition to women in politics persisted. Indeed, in 1930 McClung remarked to Parlby that "[i]t seems that

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[74]Alberta: Journals of the Legislative Assembly, 1924, pp. 99-100.
[75]Parlby, "The New Legislature Seen Through A Woman's Eyes," The UFA (1 March 1922).
[76]Parlby letter to McNaughton, December 1923.
[77]McClung, The Stream Runs Fast, p. 177.

the hostility to women in public life is not lessening, but rather growing."[78] Despite these setbacks Parlby never gave up on the vision of women's equality in public life. If their battle against "narrowness, prejudice and hostility" had not brought all the results women sought neither had their work been wasted. She remained confident that "future generations would "reap the harvest" of the farm women's struggle.[79]

The achievement of women's suffrage did open a widening sphere for women in public life but it proved an ambiguous, even contradictory sphere. This was not primarily because of their conflicted loyalties or divisions over strategies or solutions. Given their very different social backgrounds and experience, the similarities among Parlby, McClung and McNaughton are striking. In their search for social justice for women they allied themselves with 'socially minded' men but they also knew that their political aims often differed. Their understanding of that difference moved them to claim a space for female authority in the public sphere. Once in office they discovered the limits of formal equality and the problem of partnerships in a male dominated political arena.

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[78]McClung letter to Parlby, 1 May, 1930, Glenbow Museum Archives, Irene Parlby Papers.
[79]Parlby, "Farm Women And The Co-operative Movement," Radio Address, 19 December 1934, Parlby's personal papers.

Chapter Six

From 'Imperial Daughter' to Western Canadian

Parlby was born, raised and grew to maturity in the era known to history as the Age of Empire (1875-1914).[1] By class, social background, and family ties she belonged to that group of English men and women who colonized British possessions overseas. Indeed, in her autobiographical notes she states that her view of herself as part of a far flung community of English overseas was established early in life.[2] Her experience in Canada must be assessed, then, in the context of Empire building. Parlby brought ideas about gender, class and nationality with her when she came West but these were altered as she adapted to her new environment.

British territorial expansion did not begin, of course, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It occurred haphazardly, over a long period. However, a clear shift in government policy to purposeful Empire building was marked by Benjamin Disraeli's so-called Crystal Palace speech of 1872, setting out his intention to 'reconstruct our Colonial Empire.' In the race for Empire, Britain took the lion's share. By 1897 Queen Victoria ruled as sovereign over an Empire that encompassed a quarter of the earth's land surface, and nearly a quarter of the world's people. The new colonialism was much more than a systematic economic and political conquest. It was a

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[1]E.J. Hobsbawm, The Age Of Empire 1874-1914 (London: Cardinal, 1989).
[2]Parlby, "Rambling Memories."

cultural phenomenon as well, "transforming images, ideas and aspirations, both by force and institutions, by example and by social transformation."[3]

Officially, at least, Imperialism was deemed to be an exclusively male enterprise. Colonial administrators generally saw women as destructive to men's aims.[4] When women were grafted onto the Imperial mission in the 1880s they were included in the cultural or social side of conquest. In the closing decades of the century female emigration came to be seen as the vanguard of what Hobsbawm calls cultural Imperialism.[5] Advocates of female emigration argued that the colonies needed women of high moral character and cultural refinement to rescue British men from the barbarizing influence of alien races, maintain racial and cultural purity, and further the aims of Empire. This female "civilizing mission" is rarely seen as active. Indeed, it is remarkable for its passivity. Women did not have to do anything. Their presence alone was seen as sufficient to tame men, to make them think of polite behaviour and building civilized institutions.[6] As Margaret Strobel has noted, by combining the idea of Imperial destiny with Victorian gender imperatives, the concept served both Imperial and patriarchal aims.[7]

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[3]Hobsbawm, p. 76.

[4]Margaret Strobel summarizes what she calls the "myth of the destructive female" as the belief that "'vulnerable' European women provoked the sexual appetites of indigenous men, while as wives they replaced indigenous concubines (from whom male administrators had previously learned much about society and culture) and drew the attention of the men away from their official responsibilities." See her article "Gender and Race in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire," Becoming Visible Women in European History, Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, eds. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 377.

[5]On gender and Imperialism see Janice Brownfoot, "Memsahibs in Colonial Malaya: A Study of European Wives in a British Colony and Protectorate 1900-1940," The Incorporated Wife, Hillary Callan and Shirley Ardener, eds. (London: Croom Helm, 1984); Helen Callaway, Gender, Culture and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria (London: Macmillan Press); Ann Laura Stoler, "Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power," Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge: Feminist Anthropology in the Postmodern Era, Micaela di Leonardo, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Women and Colonization, Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock, eds. (New York: Praeger, 1980); "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in 20th Century Colonial Cultures," American Ethnologist 16, 4 (1989), pp. 634-60.

[6]Susan Armitage makes this point in her critique of the mythological American West, "Through Women's Eyes: A New View of the West," Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, eds., The Women's West (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), p. 13.

[7]Strobel, p. 383.

The reasons for female emigration did not lie in the colonies. Rather they arose out of the demographic imbalance between the sexes and limited employment for single women in Britain.[8] Fuelled by Imperial enthusiasm and alarm over the increasing number of 'surplus' or 'redundant' women in Britain, female emigration societies promoted resettlement in the colonies as a social duty.[9] And the idea of women's "civilizing mission" found its fullest expression in the female emigration literature of the late nineteenth century. It stressed the possibilities for genteel domestic service, potential marriage, civilizing the world, and promoting British values in the colonies.[10] In one typical example published in The Imperial Colonist in 1911, an anonymous writer stated:

> The Empire's call to the women of our race is clear, urgent, and inspiring; never before so insistent as it is today. Our young men want mates of their blood in the great, sunny uplands of the Empire where they have found the homing space they lacked in these crowded islands. The Dominions need wives, sisters, mothers, teachers, nurses, domestic helpers, and home-makers of the old stock, the true stock, from the land of their Fathers. And it is no empty or unsubstantial welcome which they offer; but warm hearts, homes of the best, and prospects the most attractive.[11]

The demographic "crisis" in England was never as serious as contemporaries thought.[12] Neither did single women respond to the Imperial

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[8]The liberal manufacturer, W.R. Greg, first recommended female emigration as a solution to the demographic imbalance in Britain. In his influential essay, published in the National Review in 1896, "Why Are Women Redundant?," Greg saw the "enormous and increasing number of single women in the nation" as a social and moral threat because they were deprived of the "natural duties and labours of wives and mothers," by having to earn their own living "instead of spending and husbanding the earnings of men." Rather than "fulfill their natural duty by completing, sweetening and embellishing the existence of others," single women were forced to "carve out artificial and painfully sought sought occupations for themselves." Quoted in Poovey, p. 1. Because they sought to relieve the financial distress of single gentlewomen the female emigration societies of the late nineteenth century emphasized employment and marriage opportunities in the colonies.

[9]On female emigration societies see James Hammerton, Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration 1830-1914 (London: Croom Helm, 1979), and "Feminism and Female Emigration, 1861-1886," A Widening Sphere, pp. 53-71.

[10]On British women's civilizing mission in Canada see R.G. Moyles and Doug Owram, Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 187-211.

[11]The Imperial Colonist, quoted in ibid ,p. 194.

[12]The ratio of women to men in Great Britain increased from the mid-nineteenth century, from 1042:1000 in 1851 to 1068:1000 in 1911. Strobel, p. 383. For a more detailed

call in the large numbers emigration societies had hoped to attract. Those who did immigrate to Canada were from the lower-middle and lower-class ranks of society; not the Imperial daughters of a 'high stamp' promoted in the literature.

Irene Parlby did not immigrate to Canada but came on an adventure, married and remained in the country. Still, as a well-educated daughter of a professional man she was precisely the kind of British gentlewoman Imperialist writers deemed ideally suited to the "civilizing mission." Raised to the ideals of genteel Victorian womanhood, she was also well versed in Imperial values. In Canada she married a son of Devonshire gentry and settled in a small but prominent community of Anglo-Albertans. Moreover, her position as a leading public figure made her influential beyond her own family and community.

Certainly when she came to Canada Parlby brought with her ideas about gender, class and race learned as a young girl growing up in Victorian England and among the British in India. In 1910 she joined those loyal voices of English women overseas, urging British settlers to take up homesteads in Canada. Writing in the pages of the Calgary Daily Herald, she warned that by failing to heed the call of the West they allowed its "unbounded prosperity" and unlimited opportunities to "fall into the hands of every nationality but ours."[13] As we have already seen, Parlby saw the destiny of Western Canada as properly British and she also adhered to the dominant view of middle-class femininity as naturally domestic and morally pure.

On first reading it seems that Parlby readily conforms to the stereotypical image of a daughter of Empire. The problem is that that image itself is a distorted one. It exaggerates women's power while perpetuating Victorian assumptions about gender roles - that women civilized while men conquered. It also prevents us from seeing the ways in which women and

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demographic breakdown see Hammerton, p. 29. Also, Elaine Showalter, Sexual Anarchy (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), pp. 19-58, provides a useful discussion of the public response to the 'redundant' woman at the fin de siecle.

[13]Parlby, "Canada - the Hope of the World: An English Lady's Opinion of the Opportunities of the West," Calgary Daily Herald, June 1910.

men adapted to their changed circumstances, thus obscuring the very process we are attempting to examine.

It would be equally wrong to see the frontier as only a liberating force, or a place where established cultural practices and beliefs were easily abandoned. Still, middle-class British women who settled the West at the turn of the century frequently saw it as freeing or, at least, as allowing them greater opportunity to realize themselves as fully human. To paraphrase Violet McNaughton, in the West there was breathing space and work to be done. In Nellie McClung's 'Land of the Second Chance,' Parlby learned that women could make a useful contribution to their family and community. This evidence cannot be ignored, or dismissed as naive romanticism. Not all women found a 'flannel shirt and liberty' in the rough domesticity that was the prairie homestead. Elizabeth Hanson, who emigrated from Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1911, remembered it as "a wild country" where "nothing was completed ... a raw, man's world, not for women."[14] For some women, perhaps, just being in a world where they did not belong was sufficient to move them to other forms of rebellion. For others, with even a small amount of capital, the West held the promise of economic independence. In 1910 Parlby advised single women in Britain that even though the government did not allow women to homestead, "a comparatively small sum would suffice to buy a home and a few acres ... [to] set up a small poultry farm or other paying hobby," as her sister Sheila did.[15]

While middle-class British women immigrants to Western Canada brought traditional ideas about women's place in society, they also came with a competing vision of the new "emancipated" woman.[16] Indeed, much of the female emigration literature was written against a background of mounting anxiety over the future of the Empire, labour unrest and the revolt of a small but influential group of women who challenged dominant notions

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[14]Elaine Leslau Siverman, The Last Best West (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984), p. 7.
[15]Parlby, "Canada - the Hope of the World."
[16]On the changes in women's lives at this time see David Rubinstein, Before the Suffragettes: Women's Emancipation in the 1890s ((London: The Harvester Press, 1986); Jill Liddington and Jill Norris, One Hand Tied Behind Us ((London: Virago Press, 1978); and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly Conduct (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

of marriage, work and the family. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out, "both women and 'natives' simultaneously began to manifest frightening drives toward independence just as England's great century of empire drew to its uneasy close. . . ."[17] Many Victorians shared Karl Pearson's opinion that the "two great problems of modern social life," were "the problem of women and the problem of labour."[18] Later, when Parlby recalled the way in which the "woman question" played itself out in her own life, she saw it as the central dilemma of her early adulthood, a dilemma she negotiated by remaining in Canada.

Like most other women active in the reform movement in Western Canada, Parlby rejected the radical tactics of her British sisters. As early as 1910 she believed that justice and fairness for women would be easier to achieve in the West where "equality of opportunity [was] the common birthright of all. . . ."[19] Canadian feminism differed in important ways from its British counterpart, but it was informed by a similar vision of a reordering of gender relationships. In the West, where reform was linked to agrarian political revolt, activists combined women's aims with a new, more broadly based vision of citizenship. Just as the beginnings of the revolt of labour can be found in earlier decades in England, so too can we find the seeds of women's rebellion. The difference, as Parlby saw it, was that change occurred more rapidly and less violently in a country where women had shouldered the "hardships and privations of the pioneer" to become equal economic partners with men.[20]

There were limits to this view, but in agitating for change women focused on the possibilities they saw as inherent in the frontier itself. Like other Prograssives, Parlby believed that a new accommodation between the sexes was possible because in the West "we set no limits to our imaginings, to our ambitions."[21] She maintained that if she had come to

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[17] Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Sexchanges (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), quoted in Showalter, p. 6.
[18] Karl Pearson, "Woman and Labour," Fortnightly Review 129 (May 1894); quoted in Showalter, p. 7.
[19] Ibid.
[20] The Edmonton Journal (10 September 1928).
[21] Parlby, "Canada - the Hope of the World."

Eastern Canada she never would have stayed. Alberta in particular won her. When she visited her sisters in Victoria, she claimed that Walter worried that she would want to move to the coast. But she found it too much "like living in a little English village . . . moss grown and hide bound." She longed for a "whiff of invigorating Alberta air."[22] She always saw Western Canadians as an optimistic, forward looking people. Speaking to the Ottawa Women's Canadian Club in 1930, she said that the single most important thing that distinguished Westerners from other Canadians was that on the prairies people's "faces are turned more to the future than to the past . . . they believe rather in the God of things as they ought to be, rather than in the God of things as they are. Their chief interest is not in the traditions and conventions of the past so much as in a wise development of the future." And in her opinion a wiser, more sane future could only be achieved through the collective wisdom of both men and women exercising power in the public sphere.

As Gerald Friesen has noted, the myth of the West as free, not bound by convention was crucial to sustain faith in the pioneering enterprise and the work of settlement.[23] It was equally central to women imagining themselves as full participants in the life of the prairies. It moved them to sign temperance petitions, to agitate for the vote, to press for legal recognition of their domestic labour, to enter the professions, to organize for better wages and working conditions and to dare to assume public office. It is important to attend more closely to the stories they told in order to better understand their aspirations and the ways in which they reinvented themselves as women in the West.[24]

The myth of the West, Parlby's own experience in mastering the rough domesticity of the frontier, and the hardships of other women around her led Parlby to question traditional gender roles. Rather than reinforce her middle-class values and attitudes, her private and public life in Canada led

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[22]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 12 June 1918.
[23]Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 304.
[24]Elizabeth Jameson, "Searching for Caroline Quiner Ingalls: Women's Lives and Frontier Narratives," unpublished paper delivered at the Canadian Studies Conference, Vancouver, February 1994. I am grateful to Jameson for our lengthy conversations on this subject.

her to a broader social vision. As a representative of a prairie government, at a time when nativism was on the rise nationally and internationally, she argued for racial and ethnic tolerance. Western Canada, with its "many races," set an example for others to follow. "I do not believe," she said, that "there is any other place in the world where there is such a wide tolerance of ways and customs. I have always hated the standardization of human material that goes on in our schools and I believe that one of the great problems of the future is to find a way of education in which the potentialities of the individual . . . should be given a chance to develop." She advocated the use of radio as an instrument to work against "human standardization" and to promote respect for racial and ethnic difference. Anglo-Canadians should be taught through public education to appreciate the "problems, characteristics and aspirations" of others and Canadians of all nationalities should be encouraged to value and preserve their unique heritage. She thought that this was particularly urgent in the case of non-Anglo children since they were often the first to turn away from their cultural traditions in order to be like other Canadian boys and girls. "Canadianization" should not mean conforming to "what we [Anglo-Canadians] in our wisdom or lack of wisdom may consider the right pattern for everybody." Pride in her own British traditions did not make her "any worse a Canadian" and, she argued, "the same thing applies to those other nationalities."[25]

Parlby believed that all Canadians had a role to play in the institutional life of the country and that in order for them to "wisely play their part . . . the variety they bring us in the things of the spirit, in the genius of their different races [should] be preserved to enrich our national life."[26] Generally, she remained a staunch defender of liberal democratic institutions "which generations of British people have fought to develop and through which they have demanded and protected the rights of a free people."[27] Despite her advocacy of Wood's theory of group government, in 1952 she argued that legislators are representatives of all the people. Although she had retired from office eighteen years earlier, she seems to

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[25]Parlby, "When East and West Meet," Address to Ottawa Women's Canadian Club, 1930, Parlby's personal papers.
[26]Ibid.
[27]Parlby, notes from a campaign speech, 1940, Parlby's personal papers..

have been thinking of the Farmers' record in office when she says, "we have to survey the good of the whole, as well as the interests of any particular group."[28] As Women's Minister she had felt prevented from fulfilling this democratic responsibility. At the same time, she believed that full democratic freedom was undermined by sex-inequality. She did not believe that reform should necessarily follow a British model, however. In the search for sex equality, for example she advocated legal principles developed and in 1925 recommended a community of property law based on the Swedish model.

For Parlby, mastering a rough frontier domesticity was also important to building the confidence to challenge Victorian middle-class gender stereotypes. She was the first woman in her family to manage her home and family primarily on her own. In other ways her domestic life did reflect a British ideal of country life. She was widely known for her English perennial gardens and her homes were named for her husband's family estate in Devonshire. At least one visitor, Burgon Birkersteth, saw her home as an oasis of civilization in an untamed wildness; but he was only visiting.[29] Canada, in her words, was "the home of my choice."

In can be argued that for an English woman living in Britain's most loyal colony the question of national identity could be readily negotiated. Indeed, Parlby's emotional attachment to her home country remained strong. On Empire Day, 6 May 1935 while listening to King George V's radio address to the nation and the Dominions overseas, the geographical distance seemed to melt away. The programme, "London Calling," ended with a celebration service at St. Paul's in honour of the King's jubilee, "and as the last fanfare of the trumpets and the wild cheering of the crowds died away the radio was shut off, and silence fell." From her home on the Canadian prairie Parlby felt "the strong emotional pull of English soil, irresistible apparently, as the pull of the tides."[30] Forty years in Canada had

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[28]Parlby, notes for radio broadcast, "On The Farm Front," CFCN, Calgary, March 1952, Parlby's personal papers.

[29]This view of British frontier domesticity is typical of the female emigration literature and accounts of other visitors to the West at this time. A notable exception is Ella Sykes, A Home-Help in Canada (London: Smith, Elder, 1912).

[30]Parlby, "Forty Years Back," 1935, Parlby's personal papers.

not dulled her affection for England but she now considered herself Canadian.

In the process of adaptation she came to value a view of society that was much more egalitarian than the one she had known growing up in England and in India. Equally striking is the position she took in the 1930s on Canada's colonial relationship to Britain. In an article in the Edmonton Journal in February 1934, she urged Canada to take an independent position in international affairs. Critical of "sentimental imperialists," Parlby argued that Canadians would have to place reality above sentiment and chart an independent course based on Canada's own political and economic interests. She still believed that collective security under the League of Nations was the world's best hope for peace. Should that vision fail, she urged an alliance with the United States and the countries of the Pacific. She was, she thought, especially qualified to raise the question of Canada's future relations with Britain since she was "English by birth and education, but Canadian by virtue of some 36 years spent on her soil and affection for her people and institutions."[31]

While Parlby came to see herself in new ways, the same cannot be said for her Canadian supporters and admirers. For many of them she represented the ideal of British womanhood. Premier Brownlee once described her as "the best of the best that the British had to offer."[32] Her English accent alone seemed to carry the weight of authority for R.M. Edmanson, a Calgary lawyer. After listening to Parlby speak on radio, he wrote to compliment her on her diction and the "quality of her voice."[33] Harold W. Riley welcomed the example she set for those who "look upon the pioneers as a 'bunch of mossbacks' devoid of culture and appreciation of the finer things of life."[34] In an article in the UFA newspaper written at the time of Parlby's appointment as a Canadian delegate to the League of Nations, Zella Spencer recalled that as head of the farm women's organization "the gracious, dignified Mrs. Parlby" commanded "a greater

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[31]Parlby, "Canada Must Choose Her Policy Among Nations," Edmonton Journal (19 February 1934).
[32]The Edmonton Journal (15 August 1930).
[33]Letter from R. M. Edmanson, March 1938, Parlby's personal papers.
[34]Letter from Harold W. Riley, 19 February 1938, Parlby's personal papers.

respect" for rural women and as a result "we [felt] an added respect for ourselves."[35] These comments suggest that public office was, in part at least, a social reward for being British, and more, a British gentlewoman. The real irony is that while Parlby was able to accomodate a broader, more comprehensive sense of herself as a Western Canadian, her Canadian public imposed on her their stereotypical image of Imperial daughter. As a result, her public persona is as revealing of the country, or a segment of it, as it is of the woman herself.

This is not to suggest that Parlby can be seen as outside of that social process that ensured a minority of Anglo-Canadians hegemony in Western Canada. Indeed, the problem was that she was so thoroughly included in it. She never achieved the egalitarian vision McNaughton had or the unshakable confidence of McClung. The reasons for this lie in her class, gender and nationality. But class, nationality and loyalty to Empire were also potentially transformable: her gender was inescapable. As a result the lessons of gender proved more enduring. Despite her long public career and the challenge to male authority that it inevitably represented, her view of women's place in society changed remarkably little from the lessons she had learned in childhood. In a radio broadcast in 1952 she cautioned women to remember that they were "the guardians of the intangibles of life: they may not be called upon to play any spectacular part, but their quiet influence in maintaining the finer attitudes toward life can, and does, influence human society."[36] This faith in feminine influence prevented Parlby from directly confronting the question of power in her own life. Her feelings of ambiguity about herself as a politician were rooted in her position as a woman in a man's world, where male authority ruled.

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[35] A. Zella Spencer, "Mrs. Parlby's Appointment to League of Nations Assembly," The UFA (September 1930), p. 12.

[36] Parlby, radio broadcast, "On The Farm Front," CFCN, Calgary, March 1952.

Conclusion

Irene Parlby's search for a useful life was much more than an inarticulate revolt against redundancy. It was a positive pursuit of purpose that would give her life meaning. But the ground upon which she conducted her search was not neutral ground. Rather, it was infused with meaning that multiply and simultaneously privileged and bound her by gender, class and race. Of these gender proved the most problematic. Where her search challenged dominant notions of ideal femininity the terms for renegotiating gender relations were always limited by the way in which her sex was socially defined and positioned.

The Canadian West seemed to open new possibilities not only because of its 'spaciousness and freshness' but also because emigration disrupted old patterns and conventions making new ones imaginable. Leaving her parents' home was a critical first step towards independence, confidence came with marriage, motherhood and mastering frontier domesticity which demanded ingenuity and resourcefulness. Her public work reflected, reinforced and extended the possibilities open to her as a woman. But Parlby's reconsideration of women's place in society was not based upon her experience alone. She did not say that in Canada she discovered that she could be useful and important but rather that women could be useful and important. The experience of other women around her and their contribution to settlement confirmed her own marriage and family partnership.

Parlby's hope and inspiration came from the practical work of settlement. She often invoked the theme of the pioneering partnership as an example of the best of human achievement. Like many Progressives, she was optimistic. She viewed the social experiment taking place on the prairies, with their "many races, many tongues, many creeds," as proof of the possibilities for bridging "human barriers" and building a safer, more tolerant and more just society.[1] She understood discrimination of every kind as cultural. Thus justice and fairness was more than a legal question alone, it was a matter of changing attitudes by education and example. She was not so naive as to believe that social harmony was a simple matter of sympathetic understanding, rather, understanding was a necessary precondition for achieving that goal. Whatever the particular problem, she believed that the effective solution depended upon people's willingness to seek common goals through mutual respect and understanding. This was true for resolving class and racial tensions but also for reconstructing relationships between the sexes. It was essential to change men's and women's attitudes in order to alter women's position in society. She was critical of McClung's confrontational stance because she saw it as working against rather than promoting sympathetic understanding. Of course one of the consequences of this view was that it reinforced the notion of women as influential but not powerful which in effect worked to keep women in their place. But that is not how she saw it.

For someone who believed so strongly in the power of education to effect change Parlby had surprisingly little advice about how to change men's - and women's - attitudes. It is at this point that the boundaries of her analysis or vision become apparent. She considered men to be a primary obstacle to women's equality but believed that the solution rested with women. A central motive for her entry into public life was to show men that women were important. For this reason she urged greater opportunities for women in education, paid employment and politics. She cautioned "progressive women" to be vigilant lest future generations lose the gains that others had won and urged all women to "train and qualify" themselves

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[1]Parlby writing on the International Conference of Women at Washington in The Western Producer, 2 July 1915.

to enter all occupations.[2] Her experience in public life gave her a keen understanding of the difficulties women faced but she believed that only by taking up positions in all walks of life would women alter their estate. The other important and practical solution was for women to organize. Reflecting on the gains Canadian women had made during the early decades of the twentieth century, Parlby credited the power of women working together toward a common objective rather than individual leadership.

For all that she remained loyal to the farm movement Parlby never exaggerated the importance of her own leadership or the Farmers' government in the record of gains for women. On the contrary, she recognized that these achievements had come as a result of women's efforts and those of 'socially minded' men.

By 1938 Parlby had come to the view that the Farmers' experiment in government had been a "side trail," diverting them from the main goal of collective effort.[3] Although she never publicly acknowledged the ineffectiveness of her own ministry, her experience in government left her feeling disappointed if not disillusioned. She was always a reluctant politician. From the outset she believed that the position of 'Woman's Minister' was illogical. Her own understanding of the limitations of her position in cabinet could only have reinforced her doubt about her abilities as a politician and her skepticism of the political system generally. When she urged changes in legislation that would recognize the value of women's domestic labour she described married women's economic dependence as humiliating. Her correspondence with Violet McNaughton gives the strong impression that she often felt similarly about her position in government. Certainly there was little dignity in her subordinate and ancillary relationship to her male colleagues. She was disappointed not to have been given a portfolio. Although she accepted the terms of her appointment in another context she wondered why "men are so greedy to grab everything for themselves."[4]

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[2]Parlby, notes on women's position in Canada (c. 1938), Parlby's personal papers.
[3]Parlby, "The position of women in Canada," notes from CBC radio broadcast (1938), Parlby's personal papers.
[4]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 12 September 1925.

Parlby found the issue of men the most difficult. She liked men. She even attributed to them qualities and skills she felt were most lacking in women, perhaps even in herself. She enjoyed working with men at least as much as women although her closest friends were women. Her relationship with Violet McNaughton was particularly important in sustaining her through the early strenuous years as president of the UFWA. Later, as Minister without Portfolio she often consulted with McNaughton on issues, strategies and tactics. As the only woman in a government of men Parlby also relied on McNaughton as a friend. Because they were in a similar position as women in the male-dominated councils of the farm movement Parlby could openly confide in McNaughton without fear of betraying the men but also confident of support and understanding. Part of the attraction of interprovincial meetings was the prospect of seeing each other again. When their busy schedules made this impossible Parlby urged private visits to Alix, promising McNaughton "I will give you a restful time & your breakfast in bed."[5] They were not able to be together as often as Parlby would have liked but she depended on McNaughton admitting that "I always use you as my safety valve, to let off steam to."[6]

The fact is that Parlby's ministry had little chance of succeeding as a vehicle for improving the conditions of women. This raises the question of why she remained in office for as long as she did. Here it must be remembered that Parlby did not enter elected office primarily to advance women's reform agenda. As she often pointed out, she was not elected as a women's candidate but as a woman member of the Farmers' party. She felt that her first responsibility was to the UFA and to her constituents both women and men. Her faith in agrarianism's vision of social improvement kept her in government. Another reason she stayed was that leaving would have meant giving up her ambition of useful and important work. McClung and McNaughton both had other occupations that allowed them to continue to make a contribution to their community. For Parlby retirement meant surrendering the influence, status and independent income she had earned through her own dedication and hard labour.

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[5]Parlby lettter to McNaughton, 10 April 1918.
[6]Parlby letter to McNaughton, 2 June 1918.

Irene Parlby enjoyed her greatest success as leader of the UFWA and she remembered the early years of organizing most fondly. Always a very private person, she disliked public life because it intruded on her personal life and kept her from her husband and family. When the Legislature was in session she took "rooms in a private house, with a little kitchenette," in Edmonton but she missed the comforts of her own home and garden and worried about leaving Walter on his own for long periods of time.[7] Their marriage proved a long and happy partnership. According to their daughter-in-law Bee, Walter Parlby was proud of his wife's accomplishments. When he died in January 1952 Irene was "unutterably lonely."[8] But it was during these years that she renewed her friendship with Violet McNaughton. During the 1950s Violet's husband John spent a large part of each year at their cottage in British Columbia. On her trips to the west coast McNaughton frequently stopped in Alix to visit with her old friend and colleague.

Parlby died in Red Deer, Alberta in July 1965. The last surviving member of her Marryat family, she was ninety-seven years old.

This biography raises a number of issues for women's history but also for Western Canadian history generally. As Joan Scott pointed out in 1985, biography can lift up the ways in which gendered identities are substantively constructed socially and culturally in a way that studying women in the aggregate cannot.[9] Of course no woman or man will always conform to their society's gender proscriptions or prescriptions so that biography also reveals the tensions between individual identity and social expectations. Gender also functions as a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated and legitimated. This is important for studying individual lives but also has wider implications. The evidence presented here suggests that the contest for social authority waged in Canada in the 1910s and 20s was cast in gender terms both as a means of

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[7]Parlby letter to McNaughton, February 1924.
[8]Villy Cormack, p. 153.
[9]Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," Coming to Terms, Elizabeth Weed, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1989), p. 95.

challenging established power and legitimating new sites of power. Joan Scott makes the important point that although concepts of power are engendered they are "not always literally about gender itself."[10] Drawing on the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's argument that the "di-vision du monde" - the conception of "biological differences and notably those that refer to the division of the labor of procreation and reproduction — operates as the "best founded of collective illusions," Scott points out that gender is especially crucial to the ways a society is symbolically ordered as well as concretely made.[11] Gender as a tool for historical analysis provides a way to decode meaning and understand human interaction. Scott suggests that "[w]hen historians look for the ways in which the concept of gender legitimizes and constructs social relationships, they develop insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society and into the particular and contextually specific ways in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics."[12] Gender then would seem to be essential to understanding social formation during the settlement period.[13]

The gender debate also alerts us to the importance of studying women's past experience in its broad social context. In order to understand how and why women (and men) acted as they did we need to see more clearly the ways in which they were bound and freed because of their sex. The comparison of Parlby, McNaughton and McClung that appears here suggests that a reconsideration of concepts of public and private, class and gender is necessary but also that rather than pursue the discussion of women's political activities in terms of types of feminisms, historians should look to the specific and different conditions that made women's politics as well as women politicians.

Finally, this biography reinforces the importance of memory in history. 'Truth' is always filtered through human memory. We act out of our memory of events and how we felt about them at least as much as we do to

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[10]Ibid.
[11]Ibid., p. 96.
[12]Ibid.
[13]See, for example, Sarah Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada," Great Plains Quarterly 13 (Summer 1993), pp. 147-161.

the events themselves. In preparing this biography it was crucial to attend to events but more than this to understand Parlby's memory of them. For example, a central question relating to her public life is the contradiction between her memory that her political career happened 'out of the blue' and her long struggle with the decision to enter politics. While this tension can not be completely resolved it is central to the issue of gender in her own life and in the life of her society. A critical concern for women's history must be how memory functions to protect, inspire and sustain women in their day to day lives. Irene Parlby's life illustrates the complexity of the constructions of gender and power at a formative time in Canadian history and provides insights into how one woman negotiated the issue of gender to indeed make for herself a useful life.

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