

Class, Gender, Race, and Resistance
The United Farm Women of Manitoba, 1916–1936

by

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Abstract

In the second decade of the twentieth century, the resistance of Canadian prairie farm women to the inequities of the Dominion government's national policies, coupled with their growing awareness of women's unequal rights, gave rise to the formation of semi-autonomous farm women's organizations in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. These women were part of the agrarian protest movement that has left its mark on the political, economic and social structures of Canada. Considerable research has shed light on the organized farm women of Saskatchewan and Alberta, but little has been written about the United Farm Women of Manitoba (UFWM). Drawing on the extensive files of the UFWM preserved in the Archives of Manitoba as well as relevant secondary sources, this thesis situates members of the UFWM in the context of settler colonialism and utilizes the intersectional analyses of gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity and region to examine these women's lives and work, both on the farm and in the public sphere, between 1916 and 1936.

The UFWM resisted the economic and political structures of monopoly capitalism that served the interests of the wealthy and privileged while oppressing those who laboured to produce that wealth and the Indigenous nations whose land was stolen. They worked tirelessly to build an alternative society based on principles of cooperation and a more equitable sharing of the earth's resources, and they fought for women's right to vote, to hold public office, to have an equal share in the assets they worked to produce, as well as equality in divorce, separation and child custody. Their strong agrarian class identity prevented them from affiliating closely with urban middle-class women's groups and they felt a closer affinity with the working class. They stood in solidarity with First Nations when the Dominion government tried to take additional reserve land for returning soldiers after World War I. However, as determined as UFWM members were in their resistance to the constructed hierarchies of gender and class, their strong identity with their British Anglo-Saxon race and Protestant religion eventually led them to support assimilation and

eugenics practices. While the UFWM has much to teach us about the liberating possibilities of collective action in the building of a more equitable society, their strong adherence to constructed racial and religious hierarchies reminds us of the ways racism impedes the fight for truth, reconciliation and social justice.

Acknowledgements

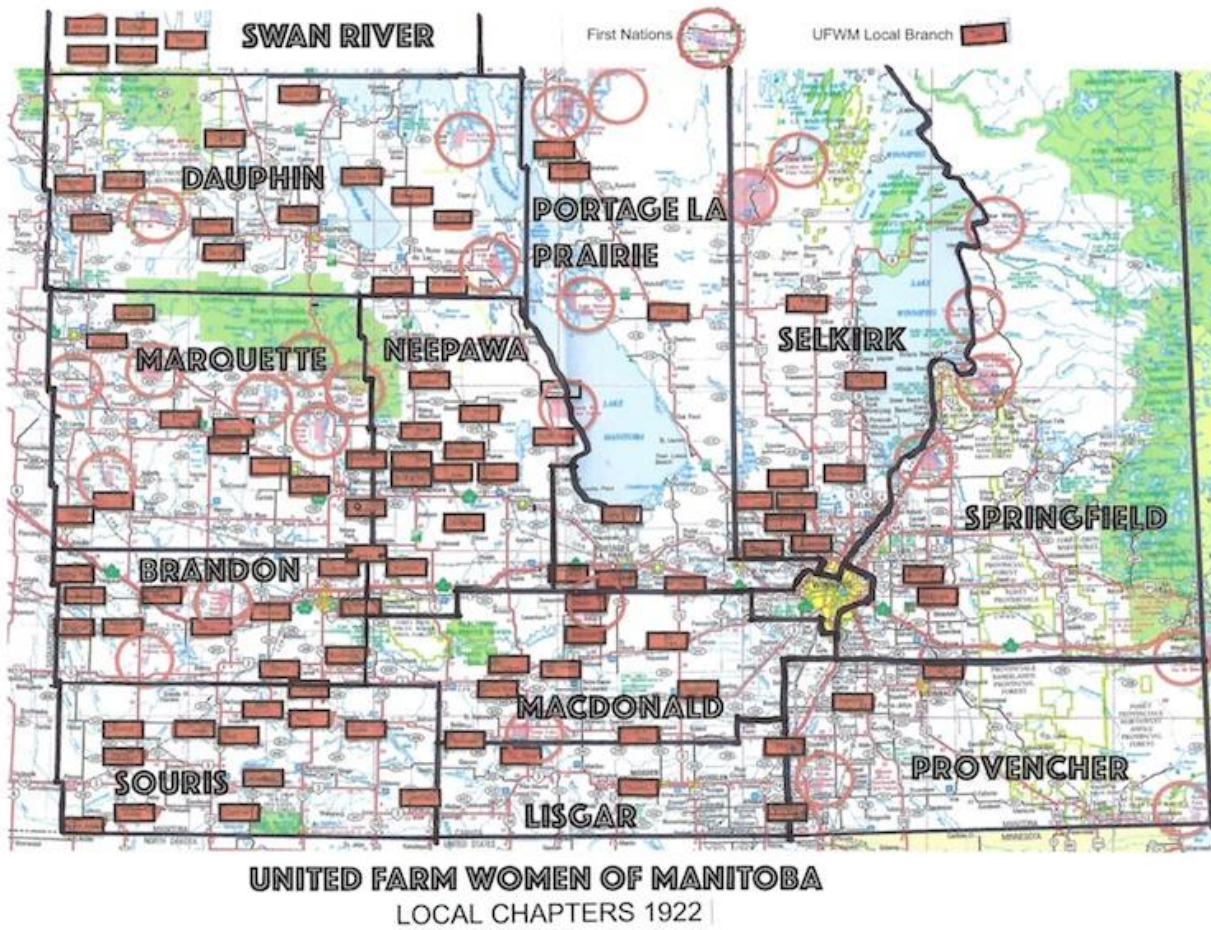
I would like to acknowledge my advisor, Adele Perry, who has been supportive and encouraging throughout the research, writing, and editing of this thesis. I want to thank her for generously sharing her knowledge and expertise in the areas of gender studies and the history of settler colonialism in Canada, and for her deep respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and being. I am also grateful to the members of my advisory committee, Sarah Elvins, Esvyllt Jones, and Julia Smith, for their helpful critiques and guidance. This thesis is much stronger as a result of your input. And finally, I acknowledge the generous support of the University of Manitoba Faculty of Arts for the unanticipated Graduate Award that I received in 2019–20, which not only assisted my research but also provided a much-needed boost of confidence.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my grandmother, Ella Glenne McClelland, who was active in the leadership of the United Farm Women of Manitoba and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), and to my mother, Irene Glenne Milne, who to the very end kept alive the vision for a more equitable, inclusive, co-operative society.

Maps

Map 1. United Farm Women of Manitoba, local chapters, 1922.



Chapter 1

Introduction

In the first decades of the twentieth century an agrarian protest movement swept across the Canadian Prairies. Farm women and men began to organize in order to express their collective resistance to the policies of a Dominion government they believed had betrayed them. This thesis will examine an organization in Manitoba that formed an important part of this agrarian protest movement, the United Farm Women of Manitoba (UFWM). In the midst of World War I, farm women in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta formed semi-autonomous organizations that propelled them from the private sphere of the home and their isolated farmsteads into political and social activism within the public sphere. A considerable body of scholarly research has focused on the separate women's farm organizations in Alberta and Saskatchewan but little has been written about the UFWM.

This thesis will explore the complex identities of women involved in the formation and development of the UFWM from 1916 to 1936 as they fought on their own terms for a voice in the issues that affected their lives and the lives of their families and community. As unpaid labourers on their husband's homesteads with no rights of ownership, no voting rights, no access to income of their own, unequal rights in divorce, separation, and child custody, they fought for gender parity and achieved considerable success in some terrains. Their strong class identification and deep belief that their oppression stemmed in large part from the structural flaws of a monopoly capitalist system often appeared to eclipse the injustices of patriarchy within their own male-dominated farm organization. This same class identification also kept them somewhat distinct from urban middle-class suffragists who were aligned with the corporate elite. Members of the UFWM, who were engaged in backbreaking physical labour from morning to night, often identified more closely with the working class who resisted the injustice of an

inequitable capitalist system. And yet, as predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, they were affected by fears of race degeneration and a belief in the need to uphold the superiority of the British race. This placed limitations on the degree to which UFWM members were able to recognize or seriously challenge the racist attitudes on which the imperialist system depends. Though restricted in many ways, they also stood to profit both directly and indirectly from the colonial project which dispossessed Indigenous people of their land and attempted to assimilate, segregate or exclude those deemed unfit by race, religion, or ethnicity.

Chapter One of this thesis situates the UFWM within the context of settler colonialism and draws on the scholarly work of historians Sarah Carter, Adele Perry, Mary Jane Logan McCallum, and Nicole St-Onge, all of whom contributed substantively to the scaffolding for this thesis. The corpus of Sarah Carter's work has been fundamental to the overall conceptualization and to the interpretation of the lives of UFWM members. Settler colonial women were, as Carter states on page 17 of *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*, both privileged and restricted and therefore "ambiguously complicit." This rings true for UFWM members who fiercely resisted the Dominion government's imposition of gender and class hierarchies and fought for gender equality within their own male-dominated organization, yet exercised their privilege in adhering to the racial and religious hierarchies of the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant society of which they were a part. Chapter 1 also provides a brief overview of the historical context of the prairie agrarian movement drawing on the work of scholars Gerald Friesen, V.C. Fowke, W.L. Morton, Paul Sharp, Paul Phillips, Murray Knuttila, William Irvine, Seymour Martin Lipset, Louis Aubrey Wood and Bradford James Rennie. V.C. Fowke's *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* underscores the intentionality of the Dominion government's national economic policies for western Canada. It was Fowke's work, in concert with historian Gerald Friesen's *The Canadian Prairies: A History* that led to a realization that the national policies responsible for the disposition of Indigenous land and for the creation of a national police force to suppress resistance were part of the same plan that imposed a crippling protective tariff on farm women, men and families and allowed for the creation of

national monopolies like the CPR and private grain companies who would ostensibly pay for the building of the inter-colonial railway while growing rich from land speculation and high transportation costs at the expense of those who toiled on the land and of those whose land was stolen.

Chapter 2 utilizes the extensive files of the UFWM and the United Farmers of Manitoba (UFM) located in the Archives of Manitoba, including minutes of annual provincial conventions, UFWM provincial Board and executive minutes, standing committee reports, minutes of district and local meetings, surveys, correspondence, memoirs, speeches, photographs and clippings. This chapter begins by tracing the origins of the UFWM through the surviving accounts of three of its founding members. These hand-written accounts provide insight into the resistance these women faced from the male-dominated UFM in forming their own semi-autonomous organization and reveal these farm women's involvement as early as 1912 as they worked to educate the male members about gender inequities and gain their support for women's suffrage in 1916. Chapter 2 then tracks the rapid growth and development of the UFWM at the local, regional, provincial and national levels, examining the organizational goals as well as the rather breathtaking volume and range of activity the members undertook at each level of the organization. The breadth and depth of these women's political and social activism is then examined against the backdrop of their enormous output of physical labour that was instrumental in forming and defining their identity. The UFWM's 1922 rural survey on women's physical labour and working conditions survives intact in the historical record and has been mined for insight into the material lives of Manitoba farm women. In addition to the voices of the women found in the UFWM files, I am indebted to historians Mary Kinnear and Sara Brooks Sundberg for their previous analyses of the UFWM's rural survey. Other than Jeffery Taylor's *Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Farm Agricultural Knowledge and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890-1925* that devotes a chapter to the UFWM and some recent research into the UFWM's position on eugenics undertaken by Erna Kurbegovic and discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the work of Kinnear and Brooks Sundberg represent the only extant scholarship on the UFWM.

Building on these insights, Chapter 3 sheds light on these farm women's complex identity, an identity that provided fuel for the wider articulation of the structural injustices of a patriarchal world order. In addition to the critical analyses of settler colonialism, an intersectional analysis of gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion and region has been particularly helpful in unraveling systems and structures of power that expose social and political inequities and layers of privilege and discrimination. For example, the UFWM actively resisted the federal government's national policies including the combined monopoly of the CPR, eastern manufacturing and grain monopolies, and their collusion with the federal government that served the interests of the wealthy and privileged while oppressing those who laboured to produce the wealth. They advocated for public ownership of land and resources that would serve the common good, such as railways, grain companies and utilities and they helped build co-operative models to challenge monopoly capitalism's reliance on private ownership, competition and accumulation of wealth. This chapter has been enhanced by the work of historians Veronica Strong-Boag, Joan Wallach Scott, Carol Bacchi, Georgina Taylor, Nancy Grey Osterud, Wendy Mitchinson, Margaret McCallum, Catherine Cavanaugh, Sarah Carter, Marilyn Barber, Linda Kealey, Cheryl Jahn and others. Strong-Boag and Scott contributed directly to a deeper understanding and analysis of the gender identity of UFWM members, through their wisdom of deconstructing the binary categories of maternal and equal rights feminism and holding them in creative tension. Applying this understanding, signs of a bolder collective voice emerged as these farm women utilized the language of maternal feminism to launch and cultivate a new, more confident, though still fragile female identity. The observations of Nancy Grey Osterud and Georgina Taylor that farm women were able to gain the ability to negotiate a place of greater equality and participation in decision-making through the recognition of the value of their work was also exceedingly helpful.

Finally, Chapter 4 is devoted to the topic of the UFWM and eugenics discourse in Manitoba in this same historical period. Scholars Angus McLaren, Alexandra Minna Stern, Wendy Kline, and Molly Ladd-Taylor have helped to illuminate the history of eugenics throughout the western world. Because Alberta was the first province in Canada to enact sterilization legislation, aided

directly by the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) with strong support from high profile women such as Irene Parlby, Nellie McClung, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney and Emily Murphy, a considerable corpus of scholarly work has emerged that focuses on the UFWM's sister organization in Alberta, notably the research of Jana Grekul, Cecily Devereux, Sheila Gibbons and Amy Samson. Ground-breaking research by Erika Dyck on Alberta's eugenics legislation and its impact on both women and men, as well as the research of scholars Maureen Lux, Mary Ellen Kelm and Karen Stote, on the impact on Indigenous women provided a road map for the study of eugenics in jurisdictions where eugenics legislation was not enacted but where other eugenics practices such as segregation and assimilation were practiced. Erna Kurbegovic's PhD dissertation has provided an important work that contrasts and compares the position of the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) with that of the UFWM. Building on Kurbegovic's analysis, the research undertaken for this thesis revealed that unlike their sister organization in Alberta, whose full support for the sterilization of the "feeble-minded" was influential in the enactment of sterilization legislation in that province in 1928, the UFWM did not have significant support for sterilization legislation in Manitoba until early November of 1933. This was more than six months after proposed sterilization legislation was defeated by one vote in the Manitoba Legislature on May 4, 1933. There is evidence, however, of support from some members of the UFWM for other forms of eugenics practice, such as attempts to limit immigration of the "unfit," and support for the segregation of those deemed to be of 'questionable' moral standing or mental capacity. The examination of eugenics policy and practice among the UFWM provides important insight to further enhance our understanding of the gender, race and class hierarchies that persisted during this period in Manitoba's history.

Note on Terminology and Names

Words such as "feeble-minded," "unfit," "moron," "defective," are used frequently in Chapter 4 of this thesis but are also spread throughout this work. These words are offensive and accordingly, I have placed these words in quotation marks. However, when quoting from

historical material, I have not used quotation marks to maintain the authenticity of the historical period in which they were written.

I have chosen to use women's first names wherever possible throughout this thesis, however, in many cases it has not been possible due to the historical records of this time that consistently refer to married women by their husband's first name or initials followed by their husband's surname, and to single women as Miss followed by their family or "maiden" name. As mentioned in the thesis, the fact that three of the founding members who completed their reflections on the formation of the UFWM signed in their first name and husband's surname, illustrates a small sign of the liberation of first wave feminists as they embraced at least a part of their own identity.

Historical Context: Background

In order to better understand the economic, political and cultural context that gave rise to the United Farm Women of Manitoba, it is important to review the history of the agrarian farm movement and to contextualize it within the framework of settler colonialism. According to Canadian economist V.C. Fowke in his book *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, it became evident to the fathers of Confederation long before 1867 that it would be necessary to form and develop in British North America a political and economic unit on a national basis if British North America was not to be swallowed up by the Americans to the south. This would require the successful accomplishment of two economic imperatives, integration and development, specifically the integration of the far-flung regions of the territories through the completion of an inter-colonial railway and the development of a new investment frontier. What could be a more obvious target for the development of an investment frontier than the large territory of land known as Rupert's Land, claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company, that would then link them with the separate colony of British Columbia?

Fowke uses the term, national policy, without capital letters, to refer collectively to “that group of policies and instruments which were designed to transform the British North American territories of the mid-nineteenth century into a political and economic unit.”¹ The establishment of a new investment frontier in the West would create a large part of the capital needed for development and would pay for a national railway to unite the diverse geographic regions of the Dominion. Agricultural settlement and production on a massive scale in the vast territories to the west would produce wheat and other agricultural produce for sale on international markets while also creating new markets for the manufactured goods produced in the east that the new settlers would require. To assist eastern manufacturers and foster the industrialization of the country, the Dominion government would impose a protective tariff on agricultural implements, equipment and supplies essential to farmers. The protective tariff was one of the major planks of Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s 1878 re-election campaign, and Fowke reminds us that the protective tariff is often synonymous with the National Policy (capital letters). In reality, it was one of at least four national policies despised by western farmers that contributed to the agrarian revolt. A second policy was the building of a trans-continental railroad to carry the settlers who would open up the west, providing the labour to fuel the new investment project while also creating a market for goods from eastern Canada, and then carry back the products of settlers’ labour to markets in the east and beyond. A third policy was the rapid settlement of the prairies with British immigrants eager to create a new life for themselves and their families, necessitating the clearing of the land of its original inhabitants. And a fourth policy was the development of a national police force, the brainchild of Macdonald, which was deemed necessary to demonstrate to Americans Canada’s intention to lay claim to the West and also to deal with any resistance

¹ V. C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 8. Fowke points out that what Canadians commonly refer to as the National Policy, with capital letters, is John A. Macdonald’s tariff policy of 1878. What is important to our understanding of the colonization of western Canada, according to Fowke, is the group of policies that led to the formation of a national government in the time leading up to Confederation. These include the establishment of a central government as a national, imperial political force, and the attendant policies relating to the exploitation of a new investment frontier that included the acquisition of Rupert’s Land for agricultural expansion and settlement, the imposition of a tariff, the development of a national police force, and the construction of a national railway.

from the original inhabitants of the land, First Nations and Metis peoples, in the dispossession of their land. As historian Gerald Friesen observes in his book *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, “Police, railway, settlement, and tariff were central elements in the national design imposed on the western interior”²

Implementing National Policies: Acquiring, Surveying, Policing, and Clearing the Land

The implementation of these national policies and the actions of the Dominion government regarding the colonization of the western interior were as strategic as they were violent. The government set about acquiring the land required for development purposes and profitability, and clearing that land of any impediments that stood in the way. The first step in this imperial project, then, was the transfer of a vast parcel of land known as Rupert’s Land from the British imperial government and the Hudson’s Bay Company to the Dominion government. Just prior to the transfer of Rupert’s Land and before the signing of treaties with First Nations, Lieutenant-Colonel John Stoughton Dennis was dispatched from the Dominion government to initiate a survey of the Principal Meridian starting with the Red River settlement. There was no warning or consultation with Metis and First Nations people who had lived on this land for millennia. Historian Sarah Carter’s research confirms the fact that “At this time, Canada had no legal right to send surveyors west, and no authority to begin surveying.”³ Dennis described the country as a ‘white sheet’ on which he could impose an orderly rectangular grid, divided into 160-acre plots, following with exactitude the U.S. example. As Carter states, “The grid set the stage for both Canadian and American federal governments to become real estate dealers on a massive scale.”⁴

² Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 162.

³ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39. Carter states that the square survey is “the most obvious example of the long-standing and overwhelming influence of the United States on Canada.” Four of these 160-acre plots formed a 640-acre section; and 36 sections, of 640 acres each, comprised a township of 23,040 acres.

Far from a blank slate, the land in the Red River settlement was well populated. According to the census of the day, the population of Red River in 1870 was 12,228 of which over 80% were Metis, approximately 5% Saulteaux, and another 13% white settlers with deep connections through marriage or kinship ties to the Metis and Saulteaux people living there.⁵ Not included in these numbers were the many First Nations' people who travelled frequently to the Red River settlement to trade, camp, and to gather socially and for ceremony. It is no wonder that the people of the Red River settlement, deeply concerned about the possible loss of their land, livelihood, governance, language, religion/spirituality, and culture, asserted their right to remain on their land and to negotiate if, or on what terms, the territory would enter Confederation as a province.

The aggression of the Canadian government created a dynamic for conflict that set the tone for the government's ongoing relationship with First Nations and Metis people. In response to the Metis resistance in the Red River settlement led by Louis Riel that included the capture and imprisonment of members of the Canadian government's survey party as well as a number of loyalists, and the court martialing and death of loyalist Thomas Scott, the Dominion government immediately assembled and dispatched to Red River a police force of 1,200 men led by Colonel Garnet Wolseley. Historian Gerald Friesen describes the Wolseley Expedition as punitive. While Wolseley declared publicly that this was a 'mission of peace', in a private letter to his wife, he unleashed his fury against the 'rebels' in violent language, stating he "should like to hang Riel to the highest tree in the place."⁶ With news of the approaching imperial army, Louis Riel and members of his provisional government had little choice but to flee for their lives. A new lieutenant governor was placed in charge and Manitoba became a province of the Canadian federation later that year through the passage of the *Manitoba Act*.

⁵ Gerhard J. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 140.

⁶ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 126–27.

The Dispossession of Metis Land

There is abundant evidence that the initial demands of the Metis at Red River were fair and reasonable. The Metis were seeking rights as full citizens in the new order, the right to own the land they farmed, to hold public office and the right to responsible government and provincial status, bilingual institutions, denominational schools, and guarantees of land titles as well as federal respect for Indian title. Many of these demands were included in the Manitoba Act of 1870 that clearly stated Metis land would be protected.⁷ “To the English and French-speaking Metis people, Macdonald granted security of tenure within accustomed plots of land, for whatever that was worth, and he reserved 1.4 million acres to be allotted to their unmarried children.”⁸ To this day, the land promised to the Metis people has not been transferred. In 2013 the Supreme Court of Canada finally ruled in favour of the MMF who for many years had charged that Canada failed to implement sections 31 and 32 of the *Manitoba Act* of 1870. On July 6, 2021 a pre-election announcement was made by the current federal Liberal government stating that it had formed a new relationship with the Manitoba Metis Federation, making it the official voice of the Metis in Canada, and hinting at the fulfilment of long overdue promises to provide land to Metis people as outlined in the *Manitoba Act* of 1870.⁹

Historian Sarah Carter’s scholarly work outlines factors that led to the dispossession of Metis land just over 150 years ago. She explains that it was the intentional goal of Adams Archibald, the first Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba and architect of the Metis land distribution plan, to disinherit the Metis people of their land by ensuring that it did not long remain in their hands. In

⁷ Ibid., 126.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Carol Sanders, “Ottawa signs ‘modern-day treaty’ with Metis,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 7, 2021. Crown-Indigenous Relations Minister Carolyn Bennett participated virtually in the two-hour ceremony from Toronto.

language infused with racism and preconceived judgement, Archibald's letters to the Secretary of State for the Provinces inferred that the Metis were a mobile and shiftless people who were incapable of "bearing the restraints which cultivation of a farm implies."¹⁰ He saw to it that the land would not be allocated in one block as envisioned by the Metis leaders. The Metis had requested that the land be unavailable for sale for at least a generation to ensure it would be protected for future generations. Rather, Archibald chose to grant money scrip to adult Metis that could be exchanged for Dominion lands while Metis children were granted land scrip of 240 acres that was to be presented at a Dominion Lands Office and applied to a legally surveyed 240-acre parcel of land (1.5 quarter sections), after which a patent would be issued stating land ownership. As Carter states, "It is clear that Archibald hoped that the granting of outright title would mean that the land would quickly be sold and the Metis dispersed."¹¹ Accounts abound in the historical records of corruption and fraud relating to the theft of Metis scrip. Metis women and men were swindled by speculators, bankers, lawyers and others with cash for half the actual value of their scrip, who in turn took the scrip and either sold it at a profit or redeemed it and claimed the land.¹² Metis author and scholar Maria Campbell, in the Forward to the edited collection *Contours of a People*, describes the outright theft of her grandmother's scrip. A man appeared at her grandmother's door just after her husband had died. The man presented himself as a government agent saying that he could help her and her eight young children, of whom Maria's father was the eldest. He said he would have to take the scrip papers to Regina but would return them in due course. He never returned but some months later another man appeared with the patent, saying he owned the land now and she would be forced to move.¹³ The historical record is filled with similar occurrences of the theft of Metis land. Many prominent Winnipeg businessmen grew rich dealing in Metis scrip, reselling land to other speculators or to settlers. Charles Alloway, who with his brother William Forbes Alloway, the founder of the Winnipeg

¹⁰ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 53.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 54–57.

¹³ Maria Campbell, "Forward: Charting the Way," in St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall, eds., *Contours of a People*, xv–xvi.

Foundation, established the largest private bank in Canada. Charles' chief job within his firm was the purchase (or theft) of both land and money scrip from Metis people.¹⁴

Colonial Constructs and Relationship to the Land

The land survey that precipitated the Riel resistance in the Red River settlement brought radical changes, both physically and ideologically, to the relationship with the land. For generations, the original people of the Great Plains understood the land to be sacred, to be a source of life that was to be respected. Movement on the land followed its contours, habitats, and seasonal cycles. The imposition of the grid with its' perfectly uniform geometric squares, measured section by section with iron chains, literally locked the land down and attempted to reduce it to an economic unit that could now be bought and sold for private profit and speculation. As historian Sarah Carter observes, "It was not just lines that the surveyors set down on the land, it was a social ideology."¹⁵ This social ideology required individual settlers and their families, preferably white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, to permanently fix themselves to homesteads in order to implant and perpetuate the ideology of the imperial motherland in this new part of the empire. The land now permanently bears the physical scars of this ideology. It is also embedded in our language. One of the definitions of the word "settlement" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is "a place, typically one that has hitherto been uninhabited, where people establish a community."¹⁶ The verb 'settle' has been defined "to go to a place where no people have lived permanently before," "to 'fix' or place in a desired state or order," or "to discontinue moving and come to rest in one place."¹⁷

¹⁴ Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AOM), Keystone Archives Descriptive Database, Charles V. Alloway Files, Biographical Sketch.

¹⁵ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 38–39. Carter is building on historian Ian McKay's arguments in his article "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 4 (2000): 616–51. In McKay's words, "Perhaps the *pièce de résistance* of the Canadian liberal order was to carve upon the map ... a social ideology set down on the land and hence made part of everyday western experience" (641).

¹⁶ "Settlement," *Oxford English Dictionary*, <https://www.oed.com/>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

There is an inherent value placed on the notion of settlement, that to be fixed to one place is a desired state, a state that brings order out of disorder.

This construct of European settlers coming to an uninhabited land has been used by colonial powers for generations as a rationale for the theft of Indigenous land. In addition, the labeling of Indigenous people as shiftless, moving from place to place, primitive, unfit for agriculture has been used to explain the purported failure of First Nations and Metis people to adapt to a more ‘civilized’, settled way of life. These notions have been dispelled by the careful, convincing study of countless scholars.¹⁸ Editors Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny and Brenda Macdougall, for example, in the introduction to *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History*, emphasize emergent consensus among a wide variety of distinguished scholars that “three elements - geography, mobility, and family - defined Metis culture and society across North America and that (these elements) were pivotal to a Metis worldview and way of life.”¹⁹ The Metis people thought of themselves as “part of a far-flung network of commerce and had a distinct view of the world as a vast, mobile, and interconnected territory, as opposed to being long-term farmers with clear-cut quarter sections or lots held for generations within a bounded community.”²⁰ Far from the constructed image of Metis people as shiftless, unproductive and not suitable as farmers or homesteaders, as espoused by people in positions of power like Manitoba’s first Lieutenant Governor Adams Archibald, historians have sound evidence that the Metis people, instrumental in the success of the fur trade, were rooted to a mode of life that was intentionally mobile, including those that farmed the land while also working as trip men or buffalo hunters, freighters, traders, guides and interpreters. They were productive, flexible contributors to the mercantile world of their time and place.

¹⁸ For examples: Mary Jane Logan McCallum, Adele Perry, Sarah Carter, James Daschuk, Nicole St-Onge, Mary Ellen Kelm, and Maureen Lux.

¹⁹ Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny, and Brenda Macdougall, eds., *Contours of a People: Metis Family, Mobility, and History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 6.

²⁰ Nicole St-Onge and Carolyn Podruchny, “Scuttling Along a Spider’s Web: Mobility and Kinship in Metis Ethnogenesis,” in St-Onge, Podruchny, and Macdougall, eds., *Contours of a People*, 62.

The same can be said of the construct of the agents of settler colonialism who claimed Indigenous people were invisible or absent, that the land was vacant, empty and therefore available for settlement. At the time of the survey in the Red River region, this land was far from a “white slate” on which the grid of a capitalist economy could be imposed. As stated previously, there was a viable and sophisticated community of over 12,000 people living in the Red River settlement, the majority of whom were Metis, with approximately 560 First Nations residents who lived at locations such as St Peter’s, part of the larger Red River settlement. In addition to the 12,000 residents, there were thousands of First Nations people who came to the settlement regularly to trade. It is now indisputably acknowledged that the site at the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in Winnipeg, Manitoba has been the meeting place of Indigenous people for at least 6,000 years, millennia before European explorers and settlers started arriving on this land. For generations, Elders and Knowledge Keepers have spoken of the long history of their Indigenous ancestors on Turtle Island.²¹ A series of archaeological digs at The Forks site in the late 1980s and early 1990s unearthed a number of artifacts, including a hearth with catfish bones and residue of stone tools as well as campsites that date back to 4,000 BCE.²² There is no doubt that when European settlers arrived in what is now Manitoba, they were coming to a land that was very much occupied, the traditional territory of the Assiniboine, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene Nations, and the traditional homeland of the Metis Nation.

Signing of Treaty One: The Dispossession of First Nations Land and Livelihood

In order to continue clearing the path for the infusion of new settlers, the next step in the colonial project was to negotiate treaties with First Nations leaders starting in Manitoba with the signing

²¹ Amanda Robinson, “Turtle Island,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, November 6, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/turtle-island>.

²² Nathan Baker and Shaneen Robinson-Dejarlais, “The Forks,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, May 31, 2018, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-forks>.

of Treaty One in August 1871 at Lower Fort Garry. Once again, Manitoba's new Lieutenant-Governor Adams Archibald left behind his indelible imprint. Along with Indian Commissioner Wemyss Simpson who negotiated on behalf of the Dominion government, Archibald met with First Nations Chiefs from the entire region of what was to become Treaty One, including the ancestors of the people of current day Brokenhead, Long Plain, Peguis, Roseau River, Sagkeeng, Sandy Bay and Swan Lake First Nations.

The Dominion government was obligated to negotiate treaties with First Nations throughout the North-West prior to settlement according to the terms set out in the transfer of Rupert's Land from the Hudson's Bay Company and the terms of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 that recognized Indigenous title, rights and freedoms, and specifically stipulated that these negotiations were to take place with transparency and reciprocity in full public view. There was eagerness on both the part of the Crown and the Anishinabe to negotiate a treaty due to the instability of the times resulting from the transfer of Rupertsland to Canada without the knowledge of the Anishinabe, the surveying of land without permission or legal authority, the Metis Resistance of 1869-70, and the creation of the province of Manitoba.

Treaty making was not new to Indigenous peoples nor to the Crown. Many of the Crown's treaty negotiations are well documented including the 1764 Treaty of Niagara between the Crown and over 2,000 chiefs of 24 nations, the Manitoulin Island treaty negotiations of the 1860s, and in Manitoba the 1817 Selkirk Treaty. As noted by Anishinabe/Metis lawyer Aimee Craft from Treaty One territory in Manitoba, and author of *Breathing Life into the Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishinabe Understanding of Treaty One*, the Anishinabe had a long history of treaty making among themselves, with other Indigenous nations, with fur traders and with the British Crown. They brought this history, skill, and their own legal knowledge and traditions with them to Treaty One negotiations.²³ Common to the negotiation of all previous treaties undertaken by the

²³ Aimee Craft, *Breathing Life into The Stone Fort Treaty: An Anishinabe Understanding of Treaty One* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd., 2013), 22–36.

Anishinabe was the understanding of treaty as a living relationship continually to be nurtured and renewed, an agreement based on kinship defined primarily by a sacred obligation to share with others in the bounty of Mother Earth. In particular, the image of the kinship between a mother and child was often invoked. During the negotiations of Treaty One, Craft observes that both the Crown and the Anishinabe called on past protocols of the relationship between the British Queen, or “Great Mother” and her red children, with assurances from Archibald and Simpson that the Great Mother would forever treat all her children equally and would act as a mother to the Anishinabe to ensure their sovereignty, autonomy and wellbeing.

Craft argues that Anishinabe law (*inaakonigewin*) relating to the land informed Treaty One negotiations. She observes that numerous protocols were followed including the freeing of Anishinabe prisoners at the Stone Fort prior to the start of the negotiations as well as the following of Anishinabe customs such as waiting until everyone had arrived to begin, and participation in sacred ceremonies such as the Opening Ceremony, the passing and offering of tobacco, the smoking of the sacred pipe, the sharing of food, traditional dancing, and the giving and receiving of gifts. She suggests that these were an acknowledgement on the part of both parties of the presence and importance of both traditions in treaty making. Both British common law and *inaakonigewin* were present at Treaty One, she argues, and both understandings must be applied to the interpretation of Treaty One. Craft contends that the Anishinabe, according to their law, agreed to share the land with the settlers and to allow them to use the land they desired for agriculture, but also understood that the Anishinabe would continue to use the land of Treaty One for their traditional activities such as fishing, hunting, trapping, harvesting, along with the settlers in a spirit of equality and non-interference. To them, “neither traditional harvesting nor farming were mutually exclusive.”²⁴ They further understood that the reserve lands would be kept separate for their sole use and they could choose to farm it or not. It was promised that this decision to farm would be theirs alone and would not be imposed upon them.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

Newspaper accounts of the events of Treaty One negotiations found in *The Manitoban*, placed alongside the private and public correspondence of the representatives of the Crown and knowledge of the intentionality of the government's national policies, make it difficult to believe that the Crown entered Treaty One negotiations in good faith and in the spirit of reciprocity. What is clear is that the Crown's understanding of the meaning of treaty was very different from Anishinabe understanding. We learn that Archibald and Simpson had a clear agenda. They had been given explicit orders "to extinguish Indian claims to the territory once and forever."²⁵ They were also aware that Treaty One would set a precedent for the negotiations of future treaties as the West opened up to settlers, and they were under pressure to deliver this expediently at the most reasonable cost possible to the government. There was a conscious decision on the part of Archibald to have uniformed troops present, symbols of its colonial power. "Military display has always a great effect on savages, and the presence even of a few troops, will have a good tendency," he wrote to his superiors just days before Treaty negotiations began.²⁶ Simpson was dressed in full military garb. Even the seating arrangements for the negotiations reflected a power imbalance. *The Manitoban* reported that Archibald and Simpson were seated with other representatives of the Crown on an elevated platform under the shade of an awning with First Nations Chiefs seated in the hot sun in chairs below with their representatives sitting in Circle on the ground. The newspaper report contained details of the Opening Ceremony, noting that representatives of the Crown looked on as spectators. The Crown representatives spoke first and at length following the Opening Ceremony. At various points in the negotiations Archibald and Simpson emphasized the inevitability of the massive waves of white settlers that would be descending on the land to cultivate it, as if to distance themselves and the Crown from its orchestration. "No power on earth can prevent it," they claimed. Archibald and Simpson stressed

²⁵ Tom Brodbeck, "Treaty 1 contentious from Day 1: Consultations for accord set table for 150 years of colonial rule," *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 31, 2021.

²⁶ *Ibid.* See also *The Manitoban*, July 27, 1871.

that the reserve land would guarantee a home for First Nations, suggesting that the Queen “wishes her red children to be happy and contented...to live in comfort...to adopt the habits of the whites, to till land and raise food and store it up for a time of want.”²⁷ As mentioned above, the representative of the Crown stressed that this would not be forced on the Anishinabe, that their way of life would be preserved, but that the Great Mother was strongly suggesting that they adopt white ways and customs and that this would be in the best interests of her red children’s comfort and safety.

It is not surprising that Chief Ayee-ta-pe-pe-tung, from the Portage band, who spoke with respect and honesty, stated, “This day is like a darkness to me...All is darkness to me how to plan for the future welfare of my grandchildren.”²⁸ When the Chiefs were finally given space to respond to the words of Archibald and Simpson it was immediately obvious that the two sides were far apart. The assembled First Nations’ chiefs made it clear that they would retain their sovereignty over what was then at least two-thirds of Manitoba, while agreeing to share portions with the settlers for the purpose of agriculture. This was completely consistent with Anishinabe understanding of the relationship to the land they call Mother Earth or Nimaamaa Aki, a living being to whom all humans and living things belong, who provides nourishment, shelter and medicines necessary for all life and for whom the Anishinabe deeply care, respect, and give thanks. To the Anishinabe, the land is not a commodity to be bought and sold. It is a gift from Creator and the source of life.

This concept was lost on Simpson who immediately referred to the Chiefs’ proposal as preposterous. He and Archibald countered with a figure of 160 acres for a family of five, which they thought was a “generous” offer and which they argued would place First Nations people on a par with white settlers and in keeping with other treaties negotiated in eastern Canada. Chief

²⁷ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 138–39.

²⁸ *The Manitoban*, July 27, 1871. See also Tom Brodbeck, “Treaty 1 contentious from Day 1: Consultations for accord set table for 150 years of colonial rule,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 31, 2021.

Ayee-ta-pe-pe-tung and his people left the gathering soon after, on the second-to-last day of proceedings, respectfully acknowledging the Crown and the other Chiefs before taking their leave. Other bands were also preparing to leave. Fearing the complete breakdown of negotiations, Simpson and Archibald threatened that it was a ‘take it or leave it’ offer and if the First Nations didn’t like it, there would be no treaty at all, no reserve lands, no provisions, no annuities, no promises of future support. They threatened that the white settlers were going to come to take over the land whether anyone liked it or not, and that the lack of any treaty would leave the First Nations communities without reserve land that could provide a secure home and future for themselves, their children and future generations.²⁹

There is little documentation or reporting of the details of negotiations from this point forward, but after the intervention of one of the Crown’s Metis interpreters, James McKay, there followed counter-offers by the Chiefs and a request to the Chiefs from McKay to stay one more night, promising that he would try to bring the Crown and the Anishinabe closer to an agreement that evening. The rest of the Chiefs and their people made a decision to stay, there were verbal agreements on the part of the Crown to address additional Anishinabe concerns, and the treaty was signed the following day. Although these verbal agreements or ‘outside promises’ were not contained in the text of Treaty One, but only in a memorandum not initially ratified by the Privy Council, the Chiefs voiced their concern almost immediately in the days and weeks following the signing of the treaty and eventually in 1875 the Privy Council officially agreed to recognize the memorandum as part of Treaty One.³⁰

It is difficult not to dismiss the Crown’s participation in the negotiations of Treaty One as manipulative and exploitive. Equally difficult and disturbing is the subsequent knowledge that the terms of the treaties have been continuously undermined. Additional land negotiated as part of Treaty One to accommodate future growth in the First Nations population has never been

²⁹ Craft, *Breathing Life*, 57.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

forthcoming, and even further theft of the small amount of reserve land negotiated in all the treaties with First Nations people in Canada has taken place, either through the practice of land surrender, during the food shortages in World War One or following the war when land was required for returning veterans.³¹ Craft's point, however, reinforced by the wisdom of present day Elders in Treaty One territory, is that whether or not the Crown negotiators understood the sacredness of agreements made in ceremony, or whether they exploited some of the normative obligations of Anishinabe inaaakonigewin, the fact that the Crown invoked them means that they cannot be ignored or dismissed. In the words of recently deceased Treaty One Elder Ken Courchene, "the treaty is a sacred promise that was made with the Creator and cannot be taken back...as long as the sun shines, the earth is green and the waters flow."³²

On the government's part, however, they believed that the signing of Treaty One gave them what they needed to carry on with treaty negotiations further west and to open up settlement to white, industrious, Anglo-Saxon Protestant male farmers and their families. As noted earlier, John A. Macdonald's National Policy was predicated on the rapid settlement of the West. The western investment frontier was now fully open for business and another plank in the national policy was a step closer to fulfilment. With the grid in place and the land cleared of its original inhabitants, the stage was set for a massive influx of British and northern European settlers. As added insurance that Indigenous people would be contained within the reserve system, the 1872 Dominion Lands Act was passed in the Canadian Parliament, excluding First Nations from homestead rights.³³ In 1876, as if to close any possible loophole to that exclusion, the

³¹ Sarah Carter, "An Infamous Proposal: Prairie Indian Reserve Land and Soldier Settlement after World War I," Manitoba Historical Society, *Manitoba History*, no. 37 (1999), http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/37/infamousproposal.shtml. In her book *Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources and the Histories We Remember*, Adele Perry provides another close-up and glaring example of land surrender, in the construction, in 1919, of the aqueduct that supplies Winnipeg's water supply upon land that belonged to Shoal Lake 40 First Nation.

³² Craft, *Breathing Life*, 81–83.

³³ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 57.

government passed the *Indian Act* that, among many other draconian measures, “specifically excluded all those defined as “Indian” from right to homestead.³⁴

Conditions on reserves in the years following the signing of the treaties were grim.³⁵ This was due in part to the decline of the bison and subsequent shortage of food for First Nations and Metis people, but also to the neglect and extreme parsimoniousness of the federal government who was now fully preoccupied with issues of settlement and immigration, the building of a transcontinental railway and other aspects of the colonial project. One of the most revealing accounts of the severe conditions of First Nations people at this time is that of the prominent Plains Cree Chief Pasquah whose 1878 deputation to the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba, Joseph Cauchon, was recorded by an anonymous interpreter. The bison were in serious decline and the people were starving. Although ‘30 pieces of land’ had been broken by Chief Pasquah and his people, the lack of cattle to prepare the land and the lack of seed to sow or provisions to feed the Indigenous workers made it impossible to farm. The one pair of oxen provided by the government had gone lame. The interpreter emphasized that like many other First Nations communities on the Great Plains, Chief Pasquah and his people were eager and capable farmers, but the neglect of the government and its failure to live up to the treaties was causing famine and devastation. The translator communicated that the “white race who while establishing themselves in every comfort in their broad domain, have directly or indirectly caused such havoc among their game and subsistence as would seem to leave no room for them to do no other than suffer and die.”³⁶ Cauchon sent Chief Pasquah back to the Battleford area with only a small bundle of provisions for his journey, telling him that his concern was outside of Manitoba’s jurisdiction.

³⁴ Ibid. The Indian Act gave the Canadian government the legal right to supervise and control almost every aspect of the lives of First Nations people and was essentially used, although ultimately unsuccessfully, as a tool for assimilation.

³⁵ Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 71.

³⁶ Ibid., 77.

Chief Pasquash's deputation did, however, spark a new federal program to encourage farming on First Nations reserves in the North-West Territories, the short-lived Home Farm Experiment. The Conservative government under John A. Macdonald had just been returned to power and there was considerable concern regarding Indigenous unrest and food shortages on the Plains. The scheme involved the hiring of farm instructors who were to set up a home farm in close proximity to several reserves and to have Indigenous people come to learn by observing or working on the home farm. The educational objective seemed secondary to the primary one that was for the instructor to raise as much food as possible for the "distressed Indians at as cheap a rate as possible."³⁷ It essentially became a government relief program with a punitive "work for rations" system that would only reward hard work. The program was an unmitigated disaster. Almost without exception, the instructors were patronage appointments from eastern Canada, personally chosen by Macdonald. They were unfamiliar with the conditions of the West and unfamiliar with Indigenous people, their language and culture. Implements were late arriving, of poor quality, missing essential parts to function, and not suitable for prairie soil conditions. Treaty provisions for farm animals and implements were inadequate. Provisions of food were scant and often inedible or inadequate in volume to pay the Indigenous labourers who constantly applied for work.

As early as 1881 First Nations Chiefs voiced their concerns to government collectively but were ignored. By 1883 First Nations leaders continued to use every vehicle possible to communicate the urgent need for more implements, cattle and food rations and to state their concern about the failure of the government to meet basic obligations but their voices went unheeded. Commissioner Hayter Reed, or Iron Heart, as he came to be known among First Nations people, was sent by the government to investigate the concerns of First Nations Chiefs. Their concerns were once again dismissed. Reed strictly enforced the government's financial retrenchment policy and by late fall 1883, the Home Farm Experiment came to an end. John A. Macdonald

³⁷ Ibid., 83.

admitted that the program had failed but he essentially blamed Indigenous people who he described as “idlers by nature, and uncivilized.”³⁸ He did not believe they were suited to agriculture and stated that they “have not the ox-like quality of the Anglo-Saxon; they will not put their neck to the yoke.”³⁹ Macdonald’s rationale for the failed government program was inaccurate and dangerous. It reinforced racist notions about Indigenous peoples’ aptitude for agriculture and harmed Indigenous relationships with white settlers and decision-makers.

The First Farmers

Indigenous people were the first farmers on the Great Plains and had been practicing agriculture long before the arrival of the settlers. The first white settlers came to rely on Indigenous neighbours for their knowledge and skills in many areas including agriculture, navigation, climate, childbirth, medicines as they attempted to survive and acclimate to the extreme conditions on the Canadian prairies. Many settlers were indebted to Indigenous people for their expertise, generosity and humanity and sought their guidance. The historical record contains ample evidence of Indigenous agriculture on the Great Plains. In the opening chapter of *Imperial Plots*, historian Sarah Carter highlights an agricultural settlement at Lockport, Manitoba on the banks of the Red River that archaeologists believe existed between 800 and 1700.⁴⁰ Evidence of Indigenous agriculture in Manitoba after the arrival of Europeans has also been identified at Netley Creek as well as at sites on the Red River, on the Assiniboine River between Brandon House and Portage la Prairie, on the shores of Lake Manitoba, at Roseau River, Lake of the Woods, and at Sagkeeng First Nations on the Winnipeg River. St. Peter’s, the first home of Peguis First Nation, was an agricultural settlement established by the Swampy Cree and Saulteaux people in the early nineteenth century.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 106.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 31.

⁴¹ Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 39.

Carter also introduces us to Hidatsa farmer Buffalo Bird Woman, Maxi'diwiac, from the Great Plains further south of Manitoba in what is now North Dakota. This historical account emphasizes the lead role Indigenous women took in agriculture. Born about 1839 in an earth-lodge village, Maxi'diwiac learned to farm from her grandmother before she was forced to move with the people of her village to a reservation, where they continued to farm on individual as well as family plots. The men helped clear land, grew tobacco, and assisted with the harvest when needed, but the women were the commercial farmers who grew and dried their produce for use by their own families and also sold or traded their produce at large trade fairs. Maxi'diwiac shared her agricultural expertise with anthropologist Gilbert L. Wilson and her teachings are preserved in a book first published in 1917.⁴² It details the nine varieties of corn that the women grew, many of which they developed themselves to ensure hardy varieties that would withstand the short growing season. In addition, they grew beans, squash, melons, pumpkins and sunflowers. Maxi'diwiac describes how only the best and longest ears of corn were selected to save for seeds for the next 2 years, taken carefully from the very centre of the cob. They cared for the corn as they would care for a child, and their farming was part of their way of life, demonstrating a deep connection with all living things and respect for Mother Earth. As Carter states:

Aside from being skilled in cultivating crops, the Indigenous people of North America, and particularly women, were expert in the science of plants and their environments, and they knew how to sustain and nurture the resources they drew upon for their own purposes and those for future generations. Over millennia they accumulated a vast, specialized, and complex knowledge about plants, their habitats, soil varieties, weather patterns, and seasonal changes.⁴³

⁴² Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 31–33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 38. Carter draws on Nancy J. Turner's *Ancient Pathways, Ancestral Knowledge* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press).

Author Chantal Norrgard describes similar expertise among Ojibwe women who harvested wild rice or manoomin in Minnesota and Wisconsin in the 1920s and 30s. She cites the writings and photographs of American anthropologist and ethnographer Frances Densmore from Red Wing, Minnesota, who observed that wild rice was harvested by Ojibwe women who considered it to be a sacred plant. Norrgard illustrates how this is corroborated by other western agronomists as well as through Ojibwe oral tradition and written sources. In her book *Seasons of Change*, she states that there were important ceremonies connected with the harvesting of wild rice, including prayers and offerings of tobacco prior to the harvest to honour the plant, and the holding of feasts in community prior to eating any of the harvest.⁴⁴ Ojibwe historian Brenda J. Child in her book *My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation*, speaks from the depth of her family's experience on the Red Lake Reservation in Minnesota regarding the centrality of the wild rice harvest to Ojibwe culture. She states, "To the Ojibwe, monoomin was (and is) a sacred food intertwined in countless ways with Ojibwe spiritual practices, kinship relations, economies, gender roles, history, place and contemporary existence."⁴⁵ Although men assisted in setting up the camps, women did the work of harvesting wild rice each fall and it was vital to the community's sustenance throughout the winter, in addition to the maple sugar camps in spring and the gathering of blueberries, raspberries, blackberries and strawberries in the summer months. Ojibwe women also traded or sold their surplus rice, berries and maple sugar that was an important part of their community's economy. All of this work took place in camps where families, and often an entire community, gathered to renew ties with one another and with the land, Mother Earth.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Chantal Norrgard, *Seasons of Change: Labor, Treaty Rights, and Ojibwe Nationhood* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 25.

⁴⁵ Brenda J. Child, *My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2014), 161.

⁴⁶ Norrgard, *Seasons of Change*, 22–26. See also Craft, *Breathing Life*, 61. Craft references Anishinabe understanding of relationship to the land and its resources, such as wild rice, and quotes from a document titled *Untuwe Pi Kin He – Who We Are: Treaty Elders' Teachings*, by Doris Pratt, Henry Bone, and the Treaty and Dakota Elders of Manitoba, in collaboration with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Council of Elders and Darren H. Courchene. The authors refer to wild rice as the Creator's garden, and note that it doesn't belong merely to a single tribe but "to the ones that believe in the spirit of the gift that we call wild rice."

Constructs of Race, Gender, Class, Religion, Ethnicity: The Rationale for Assimilation

Agents of the colonial project insisted on portraying Indigenous people as shiftless, uncivilized, unproductive, and unfit for agriculture because it helped provide the rationale for the theft of their land. Colonialism requires a worldview predicated on a constructed hierarchy of race and the need to position the white race at the top of that hierarchy. This construct provided a convenient but brutal rationale for the outright theft of Indigenous land. Long before Metis leader Louis Riel's provisional government in Red River asserted itself in response to the Dominion government's aggressive and unannounced survey of their lands in preparation for white British settlement, changing attitudes of race, class, gender and religion were taking place. This was due in part to an influx of British clergy in the territories and their concern about miscegenation, as well as the growing influence of nineteenth century scholarship proposing theories of racial hierarchy.⁴⁷ As Gerald Friesen comments, "Race, class, and religion were as powerful as guns and trade in shaping the British empire."⁴⁸ To this, gender must be added. It was the express intent of the Canadian government to impose on western Canada the grid of an orderly, white settler colony that would replicate the so-called "civilized" norms of British racial, gender, class and religious hierarchies. In this worldview, it was not proper for women to farm or to own land. It would disrupt the "natural" patriarchal order. Like Indigenous people, married women were excluded from the right to apply for the homestead grant and all single women in Canada were excluded after 1876. "The right to a grant of 160 acres was overwhelmingly a male preserve."⁴⁹ It is critical to the examination of the United Farm Women of Manitoba and the colonial context in which they lived to understand the ways in which the intersecting constructs of gender, race, class and religion formed these women's identity and impacted their lives, the

⁴⁷ See the preface to Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885–1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

⁴⁸ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 94.

⁴⁹ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 3.

lives of those with whom they interacted, and those whose land and livelihood they stole. As historian Adele Perry reminds us, “both race and gender are not inevitable and fixed categories, but rather historically constructed ones.”⁵⁰ And along with historian Mary Jane Logan McCallum, Perry also reminds us that these constructs remain embedded in the structures, institutions and systems we have created. They continue to perpetuate injustice and inequity.⁵¹

It was the belief in this construct of racial and gender hierarchy and the superiority of the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant worldview that propelled the Canadian government to impose assimilation on Indigenous people and on settlers of eastern and southern European descent. The language used by Simpson and Archibald during the Treaty 1 negotiations, implying that it was the Great Mother’s wish that her red children adopt the habits of the whites and to become ‘civilized’ farmers was a portent of the assimilation policies required to execute the national policies. The government’s intention to assimilate Indigenous people was evident as early as 1828. Following a decline in the need for Indigenous people as military allies, the government threatened to eliminate the Department of Indian Affairs, at that time housed within the Defence Department. The superintendent of Indian Affairs advocated for a new focus for the government’s relationship with Indigenous people, suggesting that “steps be taken to civilize and educate the Indians and that agricultural goods be substituted for the annual presents.”⁵² These presents had been given annually to Indigenous people for recognition of military service but were now considered redundant by a more militarily self-reliant colonial government eager to curtail expenditures. In her book *Lost Harvests*, historian Sarah Carter states that this was the genesis of a new policy that had as its ultimate goal the “total assimilation (of the Indian) into white society. As a distinct cultural group, Indians would disappear. The three basic means to

⁵⁰ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 5.

⁵¹ Mary Jane Logan McCallum and Adele Perry, *Structures of Indifference: An Indigenous Life and Death in a Canadian City* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2018).

⁵² Carter, *Lost Harvests*, 23.

this end were missionaries, schools, and agriculture.”⁵³ It is important to note that at this time, when government responsibility for Indigenous people shifted from the military to a department immediately under the scrutiny of Parliament, not only were costs to be kept to a minimum, public money was not to be used. “The program of civilizing the Indians was to be funded by the sale of the Indians’ own land.”⁵⁴ This explains a great deal about the intransigent parsimony of Indian agents and farm instructors in using food rations as a tool of assimilation as Indigenous people faced starvation, and of the surrender of First Nations’ reserve lands. The government did not want to expend anything more on First Nations and Metis peoples than what was absolutely necessary to quell any unrest that might threaten their national plan.

It was the Canadian governments’ intentional policies of assimilation including the imposition of Christianity, the establishment of residential schools, and the implementation of government-sponsored agricultural programs that set out to rob Indigenous people of their culture, identity, spirituality, language, livelihood, and their very lives. The survivors of Indian residential schools have long been aware that innocent children died and were buried in land next to these schools and confirmation of this violence is now evident in the public announcement of the exact location of 215 unmarked graves outside the Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia, 725 unmarked graves on the site of the Merivale residential school on Cowessess First Nation in Saskatchewan and 182 marked graves next to the St. Eugene mission school near Cranbrook.⁵⁵ In Manitoba, investigations are also underway on or near the grounds of former residential schools including the Brandon Residential School site. It is only a matter of time until more graves will be unearthed. No longer can we pretend that these atrocities were unfortunate isolated incidents that occurred in the past. They are patterns of violence and injustice that

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Karine Duhamel and Adele Perry, “A Season of Historical Reckoning,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, July 12, 2021.

continue to this day in our Canadian structures, institutions, and in our child welfare, health and education policies. They are acts of genocide.⁵⁶

National Policies and the Agrarian Farm Movement

As the land was systematically being cleared of its original inhabitants, the influx of white settlers was rapidly increasing. According to census data, Manitoba's population in 1871 was 25,228. By 1901 it was 255,211.⁵⁷ Manitoba's rural settler population in 1891 and 1901 made up approximately 63% of the overall population of Manitoba. This would mean that approximately 138,600 new settlers moved to Manitoba's rural areas in the ten years between 1891 and 1901. Prior to 1900, the real investment potential of the prairies was not fully known, but between 1900 and 1904, it became increasingly clear that the rich soil of vast sections of the Canadian prairies, along with emerging farming technologies and improved farm implements, held great potential for the development of a major agricultural industry on the prairies. Unknown to the settler farmer, however, the distribution of wealth or profit from that industry would favour the vested interests of eastern Canada at the expense of the farm women and men who toiled on the land. As historian Gerald Friesen states, "By 1920, prairie agriculture specialized in the production of wheat for export. By 1928, Canadian wheat sales constituted nearly half the world export market. An entire society was organized to facilitate this activity. It was built upon rural village and transportation networks, a grain marketing system, and a family economy attuned to the rhythms of the seasons and the demands of the work itself."⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid. The article states that on July 1, 2021, the Canadian Historical Association, representing more than six hundred history professionals, issued a formal statement explaining that Canadian history "fully warrants our use of the term genocide."

⁵⁷ Library and Archives Canada, Census Data. By 1911, the population had climbed to 461,394. By 1921, it was 610,118.

⁵⁸ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 301.

The national policies that led to the dispossession of Indigenous lands on the Great Plains were also at the heart of the agrarian protest movement on the prairies, in particular the protective tariff and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). The CPR, completed in 1885, with its monopoly on grain transportation, its collusion with private grain elevator and marketing companies, the Canadian government and eastern manufacturers, as well as the CPR's practice of land speculation, made it an enemy of the members of the UFWM and UFM. This knowledge is critical to assist in unravelling the complicated class, race, regional and gender identities of members of the UFWM. It also sheds light on the emergence of an agrarian protest movement grounded in the principles of cooperation and public ownership. Many leaders in the UFWM actively resisted capitalist policies that placed unlimited private profit and ownership before the public good.

Forerunners of the UFWM/UFM

Four farm organizations existed in Manitoba prior to the formation of UFWM/UFM and its' immediate predecessor, the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association (MGGA). These included the Grange, the Manitoba and Northwest Farmers' Co-operative Protective Union, the Farmers' Alliance, and the Patrons of Industry. The Grange was imported from the United States by way of Ontario. In America, membership in the organization started slowly, but by 1873, with Minnesota and Iowa taking the lead, there were 3,360 Grange chapters, most located in the North Central district of the U.S. The Grange was founded by clerks in the Department of Agriculture in Washington as an organization exclusively for agriculturalists, and was unique in admitting women to its membership. It was also committed to the principles of cooperation. In Canada the growth in the number of local groups grew rapidly with a total membership of 31,000 recorded in 1879. "In Manitoba a fairly vigorous organization was carried on for many years, old Patrons who had emigrated from Ontario, bringing their order with them. The first to be founded was at High Bluff in 1878, and later in the same year the Burnside Grange was inaugurated at Portage la

Prairie.”⁵⁹ Other locals were organized at Carberry, Mekiwin, Florenta, Wellwood, Arden and Eden. According to historian W.L. Morton, the first local was established in Winnipeg in 1874 as a political caucus.⁶⁰ The Grange movement in Canada was not to last, however, due in part to the isolation of farms from one another and the difficulty of holding regularly scheduled meetings due to the uncertainty of roads, weather and transportation. In addition, failed attempts at cooperative ventures in Ontario disheartened the organization. By 1906, the Grange had ceased to exist in the Province of Manitoba, but in the words of one of its older members, “It set the farmers thinking, and got them together, and gave them a sense of common interests. Unquestionably the Grange was of great benefit to the agricultural class in Canada.”⁶¹

The Manitoba Farmers’ Protective Union followed the Grange. We learn from historian Brian R. McCutcheon that this organization was of “fundamental importance, patterned as it was in part on the native radicalism of the North-West.”⁶² McCutcheon observes that the Manitoba Railway Boom brought 40,000 immigrants to Manitoba between 1876 and 1881, most of them from Ontario, inflating the price of land and creating a frenzy of speculation that was unsustainable. In 1883, the boom collapsed and both urban and rural immigrants were negatively affected. World wheat prices dropped, freight rates and elevator charges remained high, credit was available only at highly inflated interest rates, and Manitoba was facing a general economic depression. On December 5, 1883 at Manitou, the Manitoba Farmers’ Protective Union was organized. They met in convention in Winnipeg later that month and passed a Declaration of Rights patterned on the 1879 Bill of Rights adopted by the Conventions of the Metis and Red River Settlers at the time of the Resistance. Their constitution, dated 1884, records a total of 29 officers including 22 Directors and 7 Executive members. One of the positions listed on the executive is a Traveling

⁵⁹ H. Michell, “The Grange in Canada,” *Bulletin of the Departments of History and Political and Economic Science in Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada*, no. 13 (1914): 14, https://archive.org/stream/cu31924055006658/cu31924055006658_djvu.txt.

⁶⁰ W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 210.

⁶¹ Michell, “The Grange in Canada,” 23.

⁶² Brian R. McCutcheon, “The Patrons of Industry in Manitoba, 1890–1898,” *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions*, ser. 3, no. 22 (1965–66): 1–3.

Agent, whose duties included the organization of branches of the Union throughout the Province and North-West in 8 designated territorial divisions stretching from Emerson to Winnipeg, Portage, Brandon, Nelson, Turtle Mountain, Prince Albert and Whitewood, North West Territory. At their convention held in March 1884, they passed a resolution stating, “until the grievances of the North-West have been remedied, any further immigration should be discouraged.”⁶³ This radical platform was partially appropriated by the leader of the Liberal opposition and the movement became entangled in political crossfire, losing the broad support it needed to survive. “By 1886, the Manitoba Farmers’ Protective Union had disappeared.”⁶⁴ It is important to note that the platform of the Manitoba Farmers’ Protective Union included farmers’ deeply held ongoing concerns with the federal government’s national policies including the CPR, tariffs, public lands, and grain inspection. According to McCutcheon, the platform articulated a program that was later to be taken over by the Patrons of Industry and then in turn by the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association or the UFM/UFWM, the name they officially adopted in 1920.⁶⁵

The third Manitoba farm organization was called the Farmers’ Alliance. This organization originated in the northern central states of the U.S. in the 1870s and 1880s with the common goal of improving economic conditions for farmers through the creation of food, milling, and grain storage cooperatives. They also supported government regulation or ownership of railways and telegraph companies, a decrease in tariffs, and the abolition of national banks.⁶⁶ In Manitoba, the Farmers’ Alliance took root at Balmoral, Manitoba, with locals at Foxton, Greenwood, Alliance, Stony Mountain, Brant, Clandeboye. The fourth farm organization pre-dating the MGGA, the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁶ Patricia Bauer, “Farmers’ Alliance (United States History),” *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Farmers-Alliance>.

Patrons of Industry was gaining strength, however, and the Alliance was soon absorbed into this new protest movement.⁶⁷

The Patrons of Industry, centered in Ontario and influenced by similar farmer protests and agrarian cooperative movements in the state of Michigan, expanded to Manitoba, holding its founding meeting at Portage la Prairie on November 11, 1891. Charles Braithwaite, widely recognized throughout the province as a powerful orator, was elected President of the Manitoba Patrons and toured the province advocating against the “giant combines intent on cheating the farmer.”⁶⁸ He toured the province again in 1894 speaking out against the high CPR rail rates and even higher tariffs. H.C. Clay followed Braithwaite as President of the Patrons. He helped draft an overall policy statement for the Patrons with the election slogan, “Manitoba for Manitobans,” suggesting that farmers and labourers of Manitoba work together with the labourers in the eastern manufacturing plants so that the middle men could be excluded.⁶⁹ This reference to class solidarity between industrial workers and the agricultural class was not sustained in the Patrons organization but it was a theme that was to continue among the more radical members of the UFWM and the UFM. The Patrons reached a decision in the period between 1892 and 1894 to enter politics. They ran six candidates in the provincial election of 1896, two of whom won their seats.⁷⁰ According to W.L. Morton, the Patrons were unsuccessful electorally but there is evidence that there were similarities between the platforms of the Manitoba Farmers’ Protective Union and the Patrons of Industry that were soon to be absorbed by the Territorial Grain Growers’ Association (TGGA), emphasizing the ongoing challenges of low prices for farm produce and high costs of production due to the protective tariff.⁷¹ The TGGA was the parent organization of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association.(MGGA) In 1920 the MGGA changed

⁶⁷ McCutcheon, “Patrons of Industry,” 4.

⁶⁸ Manitoba Historical Society, “Memorable Manitobans: Charles Braithwaite (1850–1910),” January 26, 2019, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/braithwaite_c.shtml.

⁶⁹ McCutcheon, “Patrons of Industry,” 5.

⁷⁰ Manitoba Historical Society, “Events in Manitoba History: Manitoba Provincial Election (1896),” 1–7. Available at: <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/events/provincialelection1896.shtml>.

⁷¹ Morton, *Manitoba*, 181.

its name to the United Farmers of Manitoba and the United Farm Women of Manitoba, and it is to the TGGA that we now turn our attention.

Territorial Grain Growers' Association and the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association

The economic crisis of 1901 in the western provinces was the catalyst that sparked the organization of the TGGA, the first broadly organized and longstanding farmers' movement in western Canada.⁷² The prairies experienced a bumper crop that year, but due to the lack of preparation on the part of the CPR and the private grain companies, almost half of that crop was left to spoil, due to the lack of available grain cars to move the grain to markets. Farm women and men were devastated. For a number of years they had been voicing urgent concern about the monopoly that the CPR and private grain companies held over the marketing and transportation of farmers' grain. The CPR had been giving preference to the large private grain companies in the allocation of railway cars and only as a last resort took grain from flat warehouses near grain elevators or directly from farmers' own wagons.⁷³ This prevented farmers from shipping their grain directly to international markets where they could get higher prices for their wheat and forced them to rely on the "middle men," the local grain merchants and handlers, who were known to arbitrarily determine the grade or weight of wheat, and often downgraded it to a lower quality.⁷⁴ This short-changed the farmers and it was evident that the monopolies were pocketing the surplus. Due to farmers' protests, the Manitoba Grains Act was passed in 1901 in an attempt to address the abuses of the private grain monopolies and the CPR but the grain companies did not comply with the act. Enough was enough. In late fall of 1901, the farmers decided to hold a public meeting to discuss their anger and frustration regarding the loss of half the harvest and the

⁷² Seymour Martin Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan. A Study in Political Sociology* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1968), 59.

⁷³ Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909–1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 17.

⁷⁴ Murray Knuttila, "The TGGA and E. A. Partridge," in Knuttila and Stirling, eds., *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited*, 23. See also Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 58.

long history of betrayal and neglect on the part of the Canadian government, the CPR, the private grain companies and eastern manufacturers. As historian Gerald Friesen states: “Time after time, residents of the west were made to feel that they resided in a colony controlled by an imperial power.”⁷⁵ They realized they needed a collective voice to speak on their behalf and as a result, on December 18, 1901, these farmers formed the Territorial Grain Growers’ Association. In the words of W.R. Motherwell, one of the founders of the TGGA, as he reflected back on the formation of the organization, “There was incipient rebellion when we organized. It’s too late for organization; it’s bullets we want, men were saying... Such conditions engendered bitterness and the country was ready for anything.”⁷⁶

Farm men and women were coming to realize that Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s so-called National Policy was primarily designed to serve the imperial interests of eastern Canada. Prairie farmers felt caught in the cost-price squeeze between the federal government’s imposition of the protective tariff on manufactured goods that were essential to their livelihood and the monopoly that private grain and elevator companies and the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.) held on the handling and shipping of western grain. Manitoba economist Paul Phillips, put it this way, “In the language of the farmers’ movement, the individual agricultural producer was forced to sell grain on a competitive world market and buy inputs and consumer goods on a market

⁷⁵ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 343. Please also refer to pages 331–33, in the same volume, for an excellent description of the economic vulnerability of prairie farmers in this period. Grain marketing involved many factors. No. 1 Northern wheat could get top dollar in the marketplace; but, if the wheat was discoloured due to an early frost, mixed with too many weeds, or contained too much moisture, it could be downgraded by an elevator agent to No. 2, or 3, or even lower, dramatically affecting the price that the farmers would get. These decisions involved a certain amount of subjectivity. In addition, farmers forced to sell their wheat immediately to an elevator agent at the “street price,” rather than ship a carload directly to an export terminal linked to the world market for the “spot price,” lost considerable revenue. The farmer who was not able to fill a boxcar quickly with a specific grade of grain was forced to accept the “street” price. This greatly disadvantaged the medium and smaller farmers, who lacked the acreage to grow vast amounts of wheat. It was issues like these, as well as inflated production costs for farmers, due to the protective tariff imposed by Canada’s central government, that were at the heart of the agrarian protest movement.

⁷⁶ Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 59.

protected by high tariffs and the power of large industrial, financial and commercial capital concentrated in central (eastern) Canada.”⁷⁷

Membership in the nascent TGGGA grew rapidly. At the 1902 convention the membership voted to sue the CPR on grounds that it had completely disregarded the fair distribution of rail car allocation. The farmers had proof and won their case against the mighty CPR.⁷⁸ This created an explosion of growth in TGGGA membership and on January 7, 1903 a separate Manitoba association was formed at Virden, Manitoba with the primary aim “to deal with the pressing problems of grain marketing and the injustices to which farmers were subjected by other interests.”⁷⁹ At the convention held in 1904, forty-nine local branches throughout Manitoba were represented.⁸⁰ The newly formed Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association (MGGGA) worked closely with the parent organization to investigate the Winnipeg Grain Exchange that they believed was not working in farmers’ best interests. In 1905 they sent one of their leaders, E.A. Partridge from Sintaluta, Saskatchewan, to investigate the Grain Exchange. Historian Murray Knuttila’s research of Partridge’s investigation on behalf of the Grain Growers’ Association reveals the scorn and hostility with which Partridge was received. Partridge left Winnipeg more convinced than ever that the Winnipeg Grain Exchange was not operating in the interests of the real producers of wealth, the farmers, and that the western grain growers needed their own grain

⁷⁷ Paul Phillips, “Canada and the West: Then and Now,” in Knuttila and Stirling, *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited*, 10. Phillips acknowledges the influence of his mentor, economist V. C. Fowke, who authored *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, referenced earlier.

⁷⁸ Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 61. The farmers had conducted spot checks at a number of shipping points. At Sintaluta, for example (today located in Saskatchewan close to the border with Manitoba), only seven out of sixty-seven rail cars had been assigned to farmers. This meant that sixty cars contained wheat that elevator agents had bought on their own terms. Farmers calculated that the amount they would receive, if they were forced to go through the private elevators, was ten cents a bushel below the price they could receive if they shipped directly to the open market in Winnipeg *after* paying freight charges. The surplus, the farmers knew, went directly into the pockets of the “middlemen.” See also Rennie, *Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 19.

⁷⁹ Manitoba Historical Society, “Manitoba Organization: Manitoba Grain Growers Association/United Farmers of Manitoba,” June 20, 2020, <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/organization/unitedfarmersofmanitoba.shtml>.

⁸⁰ AOM, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7578/11, “A Bit of Retrospect,” 1.

company.”⁸¹ He addressed the MGGA at a meeting in Winnipeg and then appealed in writing to that body and to the TGGA, providing examples of successful co-operative models and stating that unless steps were taken immediately to create a farmers’ grain company that would restrict those who held all the country’s wealth, “a quarter of a century will see ninety-nine percent of the wealth of North America the private property of one per cent of its population.”⁸²

It wasn’t long after that Partridge’s dream became a reality. In 1906 the Grain Growers’ Grain Company, Ltd. (GGGC) was established under Partridge’s leadership, as a cooperatively owned farmers’ grain agency. This was an obvious threat to the Winnipeg Grain Exchange who almost immediately suspended the right of the GGGC to trade on the Exchange. The farmers’ response was swift. With an approaching provincial election, they appealed successfully to the Manitoba government who pressured the Exchange to rescind their decision. Though this was not the end of their conflict with the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, the GGGC was remarkably successful.⁸³ According to economist V.C. Fowke, by the end of the First World War, the farmers’ grain companies were able “to set the pattern of elevator services and price relationships which would

⁸¹ Knuttila, “The TGGA and E. A. Partridge,” 26. See also Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 334, for further evidence of Partridge’s conclusions following this month-long study of the Winnipeg grain market. Partridge’s quotations – that the Grain Exchange was a “combine” with “a gambling hell thrown in” – are attributed to the research of Canadian economist W. A. Mackintosh and historian Ian MacPherson.

⁸² Knuttila, “The TGGA and E. A. Partridge,” 26–27. It is important to note that in later years, Partridge’s view would deepen, as he came to see that serving farmers’ interests meant not only the need for an alternative system of cooperation, but also questioning the basic assumptions of a system rooted in competition and the private accumulation of wealth.

⁸³ The GGGC posed a serious threat to the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. In 1909–10, the private grain companies worked in concert with the Winnipeg Exchange to abolish a one percent commission that had been paid to all grain companies. The private companies could afford to lose this one percent because they picked it up through their exorbitant grain storage fees; but they knew it would be a disaster for the GGGC, which required the one percent to cover its expenses. Once again, with the support of their grain growers’ associations and their organ, the *Grain Growers’ Guide*, the company was able to hold a referendum, which determined that ninety-eight percent of farmers were willing to continue paying the one percent rather than give in to the pressure. This partial success led Partridge, who had remained on the GGGC’s board of directors, to introduce the idea of government ownership of all grain handling. The provincial governments were not in favour of this and tried to stall, by suggesting more rigorous government regulation, but the farmers organized a public campaign and received tens of thousands of petitions demanding that the three provincial governments take immediate action. Manitoba’s Conservative government, again facing an early election, actually agreed, in December 1909, to set up a line of elevators as a public utility, but this was never implemented.

be most acceptable to their grower owners.”⁸⁴ In 1908, due to the initial financial stability of the cooperative grain company, the farmers launched their own weekly newspaper, the *Grain Growers’ Guide*. E.A. Partridge became the first editor, with T.A. Crerar taking over the leadership of the GGGC. This publication started in Manitoba as the organ of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association, and within one year, it included both the Saskatchewan and Alberta Grain Growers’ Associations. It has been described as “the most important publication of the early farm movement.”⁸⁵ By 1920 it had a circulation of close to 80,000.⁸⁶

A 1917 document found in the UFM/UFWM files entitled, “A Bit of Retrospect,” reflects back on the formation of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association in 1903 and highlights some of the association’s accomplishments. Among the most notable was the participation of the MGGA in the 1910 delegation of 800 farmers who trekked to Ottawa to state their demands to the Prime Minister and Cabinet.⁸⁷ In 1912 the report states that women were admitted into the association on equal terms with men, and among the highlights in 1916 was the adoption provincially of the principles of woman suffrage, direct legislation and the prohibition of the liquor traffic. The report states that these victories were the result of the MGGA’s educational campaigns in the years since their formation.⁸⁸ This retrospective article also makes reference to the *Grain Growers’ Guide* as “one of the essential factors in the propagation of the democratic and

⁸⁴ Fowke, *The National Policy*, 334. As Fowke reminds us, “these farmers’ cooperative companies operated within the open market system and on ‘free enterprise’ principles.” At this point, farmers’ reforms were focused on improving the open-market system, not doing away with it. It wasn’t until the 1920s that farmers pushed to get rid of the private grain companies and lobbied for public control of marketing through the Canadian Wheat Board. There had been a three-year period, from 1917 to 1920, during which a government agency controlled the marketing of Canadian wheat, but in 1920 the federal government restored the private open-market system. With continued pressure from organized farmers, the Canadian Wheat Board was finally re-established, on July 5, 1935.

⁸⁵ *Peel’s Prairie Provinces*, University of Alberta Libraries, peel.library.ualberta.ca. From 1928 until 1936, the *Grain Growers’ Guide* published under the name *The Country Guide*.

⁸⁶ City of Winnipeg Historic Buildings Committee, “290 Vaughan Street – Robinson Building (formerly the Public Press Building),” April 1985, p. 2, http://travelsdocbox.com/Budget_Travel/109444078-290-vaughan-street-robinson-building-formerly-the-public-press-building.html.

⁸⁷ AOM, P7578/11, Convention Program of the MGGA, 1917, “A Bit of Retrospect,” 2. See also *Ibid.*, P7578/5, MGGA Annual Convention, 1911, “Canadian Council of Agriculture descended on Ottawa,” December 16, 1910.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3. The MGGA supported women’s suffrage and this support was a major factor in the victory of women’s suffrage in Manitoba, the first province to win the vote for some (though not all) women.

progressive principles which have characterized this movement.”⁸⁹ As we will learn in the following chapter, farm women did not form a semi-autonomous organization until 1918, but as early as 1912, women started attending UFM meetings at the local level and were admitted as members of the male-dominated MGGA.

The *Grain Growers' Guide* was influential in the lives of the United Farm Women of Manitoba. Living on isolated farmsteads with infrequent trips to the nearest town or neighbour, the *Guide* was a tool that provided these farm women, almost exclusively of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant heritage, with an opportunity to become familiar with the issues of the day, to exchange ideas with other farm women and men, to organize around important issues, and to form a supportive community and class identity. According to Angela E. Davis, researcher of the *Grain Growers' Guide*, “It (The *Guide*) provided its' readers with a forum for discussion on all the political, social, and economic issues of the day as they affected western farmers...It was...to act as a medium for the education and organization of western farmers in the ideals of cooperation against what was seen as their exploitation by grain merchants, bankers, and government imposed tariffs”⁹⁰ From the outset, the *Guide* had a separate section dedicated to issues of particular interest to women and while there was a separate women's section from the *Guide's* inception, it was expected that women would be reading the *Guide* in its' entirety.⁹¹ By 1915, opinion on a wide range of women's issues appeared in longer articles throughout the paper.

The educational impact of the *Grain Growers' Guide* along with other weeklies and dailies cannot be underestimated. A Farm Survey was undertaken by the UFWM in 1922. According to the survey author and instigator, Mrs. James (Martha) Elliott, in a summary report presented at

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Angela Davis, ed., “*Country Homemakers*”: *A Selection of Letters and Editorials from the Woman's Page of the Grain Growers' Guide 1908–1928* (Winnipeg: Angela Davis, 1989), 1. See also Barbara Kelcey and Angela E. Davis, eds., *A Great Movement Underway: Women and The Grain Growers' Guide, 1908–1928. Selected Letters and Editorials from the Woman's Page*, Manitoba Records Society Publications, vol. 12 (Winnipeg: Manitoba Records Society, 1997).

⁹¹ Davis, *Country Homemakers*, 3.

the 1923 UFM/UFWM annual convention, the number of papers and magazines read in UFWM homes ranged from 1 to 17, and the greater number of papers corresponded to moderately sized farms.⁹² Historian Mary Kinnear's quantitative analysis of the UFWM 1922 survey reveals that only 2% of respondents said they took no newspapers or magazines, while 53% said they took one newspaper, 25% said they took 2 newspapers and 59% said they subscribed to either one or two magazines in addition to newspapers. Kinnear also notes that the *Grain Growers' Guide* was mentioned by 64% of respondents as the most commonly read paper, with 43% mentioning the other most commonly read paper, the *Norwest Farmer*.⁹³

The majority of women in the UFWM, especially those in leadership positions, took a keen interest in the wider economic and political issues that affected their livelihood, their family and community. A 1919 document that appears in the MGGA convention files refers to the work that women did in the war effort and suggests that this same spirit of sisterhood must now be directed to the present concerns facing the agricultural class. "Our country is in the process of great change," it states. "Are we going to sit idly by and let such important questions as the land question, the Soldiers' Settlement Act, the Nationalization of Railways, the Tariff and Direct Legislation and Taxation pass without taking any definite action? We cannot do that. These questions concern us women as well as the men and we must act."⁹⁴ The decision of the UFM/UFWM to enter politics both at the federal level in 1921 and at the provincial level in 1922 under the Progressive banner was a game-changer for farm women and men across the prairies. The success of the Progressives or "Farmer's Party" in Manitoba in 1922 was the result of years

⁹² AOM, UFWM fonds, P7575, UFWM Survey of Farm Homes, 1922. See also P7584/4, Rural Survey Report, 1923. Note that in almost all instances, the members of the UFWM are referred to exclusively by their husbands' first and last names. A search of Manitoba's Agricultural Hall of Fame yielded a tribute to Mrs. James Elliott; there, both her first and "maiden" names appeared, along with her married name, Martha Ireton Elliott.

⁹³ Mary Kinnear, "Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Farmer? Women's Work on the Farm, 1922," in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, ed. Donald H. Akenson, vol. 6 (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1988), 146-47.

⁹⁴ AOM, UFWM/UFWM fonds, P7568/2, 1919, "The Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association," 5. This document was not authored by the then president of the Women's Section of the MGGA, because, on page 9 at the very end, the author asks the president to extend an invitation to anyone who would like to join the association and offers her assistance in helping to form local women's sections. The author would likely be the past-president, or possibly the provincial secretary, Mabel Finch.

of educational and organizational work at the grassroots level. Many members of the UFWM/UFM saw the possibility of collective action in developing an alternative to what they understood as an unjust two-party political system. As we will see in the following chapters, their organized resistance to the federal government's national policies was an attack on concentrations of wealth and power. Their commitment to grass roots education, political debate, community development and greater economic and social equity was fundamental not only to the tenacity of the agrarian movement, but to the ground work required to eventually create and sustain a third party in this country. In reflecting on the legacy of the Progressive movement, historian Gerald Friesen states, "It (the Progressive movement) was the most important departure from the two-party system since the consolidation of the Liberals and Conservatives in the 1870s and can be seen as the forerunner of the 'protest' parties of the 1930s."⁹⁵

As we will see in the following chapter of this thesis, members of the UFWM were well informed and eager to take an active role in the organized farm movement, which until the early twentieth century, remained almost exclusively a male bastion. The accounts of three of the UFWM's founding members, as they reflect back on the formation of their organization during the second decade of the twentieth century, provide a visceral account both of the oppression of the patriarchal structures against which even white Anglo-Saxon women of relative privilege strained, and the exhilarating liberation that many first-wave feminists experienced as they blazed a trail for those who were to follow.

⁹⁵ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 367.

Chapter 2

Origins and Development of the United Farm Women of Manitoba

In 1921 the UFWM invited five of its founding members to compile their earliest recollections of the formation of the organization, first called the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association (MGGA). Three of these accounts have been preserved in the Archives of Manitoba, that of Abigail Bennett from Pine Creek, Manitoba, the first woman to attend a Grain Growers' Convention in Manitoba; Florence McGregor from Cypress River, the first secretary of the organization; and Alice Tooth, from Elie, the organization's first President.¹ The personal reflections of these farm women in their own handwriting not only contain important factual details regarding the formation of the UFWM, they are moving accounts that make palpable the liberation experienced by these first-wave agrarian feminists as they moved out of the isolation of their farms to embrace long-sought participation in the wider public sphere. These accounts are an invaluable resource that complement documents such as UFWM convention and executive board minutes, and paint a fuller picture of ways in which events unfolded, how women were impacted, and how they exercised agency. Their reflections also capture something of the spirit and motivating force that led rural women to join what was to become the largest provincial women's organization of its time in Manitoba.² Written in 1921, Abigail Bennett reflects back on the first convention she attended, years before the women formed their own semi-autonomous organization.

As I sit and write this bit of history, I am wondering how I ever got along without our Grain Growers Association. Well do I remember the first Convention I attended, being the only woman present, but it became so interesting I soon forgot that I was sitting listening to a large gathering of men. It seemed so good to be away from home and the

¹ Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AOM), UFM/UFWM fonds, P7568/5, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, "Recollections of Founding Members," 1921.

² Mary Kinnear, "Do You Want," 139.

cares for a day or two. Most wonderful too, to be staying at a hotel having my meals prepared, just to sit and enjoy them without the fuss of preparing them.³

Looking back in 1921, Bennett recalled being presented with a life membership in the organization and how the newspaper had reported her gracious reply when she accepted this honour. She mused, “If you could have seen me you could almost have seen me trembling, as it was the first occasion I had of rising to my feet to say anything. Women were supposed to stay in the home or everything would surely go to pieces. My how things have changed since then. There is no place too large for a woman to fill.”⁴

Florence McGregor’s memories reveal similar sentiments. She recalls attending local meetings of the Cypress River MGGGA association in 1903, the founding year of the association, when she was asked by her husband to attend the meetings to do the clerical work for the local chapter. “Needless to say,” she stated, “I was interested from the first but was always on the outside looking in.”⁵ McGregor remarked that she felt it was her duty “like a good brown mouse” to keep things running smoothly on the farm while her husband attended the conventions. When he arrived home she was eager to hear every detail, having already carefully read through the daily newspapers to follow the events as reported. “How I longed to hear and see the actual thing,” Florence remarks. It was thirteen years later, in 1916, that Florence finally attended her first MGGGA convention in Brandon, Manitoba, and even then her attendance was purely accidental. Her husband, suffering from a serious attack of lumbago and unable to bend at the waist, was nevertheless determined to attend the MGGGA convention. The only way he could manage in his

³ AOM, P7568/5, Reports and Papers, “Women’s Section – M.G.G.A. – 1922, Brief Account by Mrs. J. Bennett, Pine Creek, Manitoba, 1922.” Although no date given as to when Abigail Bennett attended her first convention, we can assume that it was early in the history of the MGGGA, possibly as early as 1903, as she recalls the founding meeting in her local community in 1903 and was made a lifetime member in 1921. Her husband’s obituary, which appears in the 1929 convention program, notes that Abigail had passed away three years before (1926), five years after she shared her recollections.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ AOM, P7568/5, Reports and Papers, “Women’s Section – M.G.G.A. – 1922, Brief Account by Florence McGregor,” 1.

condition was if Florence could attend to help him lace his boots. She recalls how delighted she was to be going. “No one knew how many heart beats I skipped in anticipation.”⁶ Florence’s personal recollections of her first MGGA convention provide insight into rural farm women’s experience in the first decades of the twentieth century. While unique in certain aspects of detail, her story strikes a chord common to the accounts of many other rural women of this time. She describes her attempt to keep her overwhelming excitement to herself in the days leading up to the convention. She describes the dreamlike quality of finding herself in the midst of crowds of warm, congenial and like-minded people after years of relative isolation. And finally, she describes her experience of meeting other women from all over Manitoba, kindred spirits who shared her secret desire for social interaction and broader involvement in the pressing issues of the day. “Only those who have lived out of crowds for years know what that means,” Florence commented.⁷ How she welcomed the opportunity to meet with other rural women in a separate women’s organization where common problems and concerns could be discussed freely from women’s perspective and where unspoken dreams for self-fulfillment and wider involvement could be voiced and realized. Florence McGregor’s moving accounts reveal both the prior depth of rural women’s loneliness and isolation, and the profound sense of liberation women experienced as they pushed beyond the limitation of restricted domestic roles to follow a long-silenced but deeply felt call to new responsibilities and opportunities in the wider public sphere.

Finally, the recollections of Alice Tooth, first President of the Women’s Section, reveal the careful and strategic work that these farm women undertook to ensure that a separate Women’s Section would be firmly entrenched in the male-dominated MGGA. It was January 6, 1916, Alice Tooth recalls, that the women met together for the first time across the hall from the main convention. There they appointed officers and district representatives and planned their first executive meeting. In fact, at the 1916 MGGA convention on January 7, the female members introduced a motion on the floor of the convention to support women’s franchise. The male

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

members of the MGGA rose to their feet to approve the motion unanimously, albeit that increasing support for the upcoming referendum on prohibition may have been the prime motivator for the men's enthusiasm.⁸ Notwithstanding this success, the farmwomen sensed opposition to the establishment of a separate Women's Section of the Association, most notably from the President of the MGGA. They knew they had some work to do. In Alice Tooth's words, "We were looked on somewhat as an unsatisfactory growth. The head of the organization was not at all sure that we were not something of a parasite, possibly a disease that might permeate and destroy or at least tend to disintegrate the main organization."⁹ The women drew up amendments to the MGGA constitution but these were not at first welcomed by the male executive. As Alice Tooth recalls, "The proposed amendments to the constitution were received by the president, Mr. Henders, with many misgivings... (The president) assured us again and again that it would be the thin edge of the wedge of separation."¹⁰ Consequently, the women worked at the MGGA executive level and also with the Editor of the *Grain Grower's Guide*, the organ of the farm movement, to build wide-based support among male members before taking it forward to the main convention in 1918.

McGregor recalls the women meeting in a separate session to rehearse and prepare for the convention debate on the proposed constitutional amendments. "I well remember...meeting in special session and debating the question from all angles in a manner that would do credit to any organization with much more experience. The result was a decision to come into the Association on the same standing as men, with the same fees and responsibilities."¹¹ McGregor later stated,

⁸ AOM, P7578/10, MGGA Annual Convention minutes, Friday morning session, January 7, 1916. In the context of a rural population comprising over 57 percent of Manitoba's overall population at the time, and widespread support for women's suffrage from the MGGA and its organ, the *Grain Growers' Guide*, this support was undoubtedly a key component in the success of women's suffrage in Manitoba, the first province or territory in Canada to win the vote for some women on January 28, 1916. The motion in support of the franchise for women, moved by Mrs. J. S. Wood, refers to the number of the male members of the UFM who had gone to the front to fight in the Great War, making them unavailable to vote on the proposed Liquor Act in favour of temperance. This formed part of the women's rationale for why men should support their motion on women's suffrage.

⁹ AOM, P7568/5, Reports and Papers, "Account of Mrs. A. Tooth, Elie, Man.," 1922, 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., "Women's Section – M.G.G.A. – 1922, Brief Account by Florence McGregor," 3.

“I can almost imagine I can hear the echo yet of the applause when the decision was announced.”¹² For her part, Bennett recalls a final heart-stopping moment when a male delegate made a motion that women pay only fifty-cent membership fees, rather than the full fee of one dollar per person. Without blinking, the women prepared a counter motion that was carried unanimously. Bennett recalls the exact wording. “(The women) respectfully but firmly decline to accept this concession and insist on paying the full membership fee, realizing that equal rights and privileges should carry with them equal financial burdens and responsibilities.”¹³ Alice Tooth states in her recollections that she believed a separate Women’s Section would “give women a firm standing as an essential part of the organization, not merely a supporting proposition that might or might not survive, but an integral part thereof.”¹⁴ A new, semi-autonomous Women’s Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association was now firmly entrenched.

Though the overall tone of the UFWM documents regarding gender balance within the organization seems to emphasize a level of cooperation between women and men and strong class solidarity with farm men in the fight against oppressive national policies, farm women’s fight for equality within the larger organization was much more complicated. The accounts of these founding members illustrate the resistance they experienced from the leaders of the male-dominated movement. Amy Roe, the UFWM’s first Provincial Secretary, in her report of the organization’s activities for the year 1917 states, “After taking into consideration the many obstacles with which we have been hampered, I think we may be justly proud of the work we have accomplished in 1917.”¹⁵ Her report goes on to inform the UFWM members that there had as yet been no official recognition by the male executive of the status of women’s proposed constitutional changes. Only verbal statements had been offered. She states that the women’s

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., “Account of Mrs. J. Bennett.”

¹⁴ Ibid., “Account of Mrs. A. Tooth,” 1.

¹⁵ AOM, P7578/12, “Secretary’s Report and Outline of the Year’s Work of the Women’s Section,” 50.

organization was determined to hold off on any further organizational work throughout the province until the constitutional changes the women wanted had been assured. She also mentions that the women's section had no funds to carry on their work and stated that this would be the next step in negotiations after the approval of constitutional changes. "Now that we are recognized before the law as a little better than idiots and criminals, the next step is to solicit an appropriation, that we may become financially independent."¹⁶ This sheds light on comments Alice Tooth made in her President's report that same year. "Our 1917 record is closed, the past is gone, but the present and future is still ours." Quoting from a poem by Muslim astronomer and mathematician Omar Khayyam, she continues, "The moving finger writes and having writ moves on. Not all your piety nor wit shall lure it back to cancel half a line, nor all your tears wash out a word of it."¹⁷ It is evident that 1917 was a difficult year for Manitoba's organized farm women, but it seemed to strengthen their resolve. Alice Tooth's report goes on to stress the need for women to work together on urgent issues such as infant mortality and the current lack of rural maternal health services, referring to New Zealand's model as worthy of immediate study and implementation. Her report concludes by appealing to all women to support the constitutional changes that would be voted on at the 1918 convention. Every vote was needed and they could take nothing for granted.

Overarching Goals and Aims of the Women's Section of the MGGA

The successful formation of a semi-autonomous Women's Section in 1918 was a major accomplishment for Manitoba farm women. One of the first tasks of this newly constituted group was the articulation of the organization's primary aims and objectives. A 1919 report entitled

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ AOM, P7578/12, "Mrs. Tooth's Address," 78, 79. Alice Tooth is quoting from a poem by Omar Khayyam, a Muslim mathematician and astronomer whose poetic work was translated and popularized for Western audiences by British writer Edward Fitzgerald in 1859. The collection in which this poem appeared was published the same year as Darwin's *Origin of Species*. This lent a timely significance to Khayyam's philosophy, which combined expressions of hedonism with uneasy pondering on the mysteries of life and death.

“The Women’s Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association” states that the overall goals of the organization were “to strengthen the main organization which is concerned with the social, educational, and material wellbeing of farm people...In order to do this we demand a just proportion of the wealth which we create as farmers.”¹⁸ The report specifically identifies the speculators, bankers and railways as vested interest groups scooping all the profit from farmers’ labour. Other goals of the Women’s Section are listed in this report and include better rural schools, wholesome recreation for the old and young, the promotion of better legislation for women and children, the development of local taste for the finer things in life, and the education of women in the duties of citizenship. In her President’s Address in 1921, Janet Wood starts with a review of the “definite principles” of the UFWM. Her list includes “equality for men and women, the development of the co-operative spirit, cultural advancement, and the common good to all mankind.”¹⁹ All of these were among the priorities of the Manitoba Women’s Section throughout the years, but it is clear that their primary motivation for organizing was to create change through education, cooperation and political activism. These women were deeply committed to studying the economic issues that lay at the root of farm people’s exploitation and to be part of a movement that challenged national policies driven by monopoly capitalism and the vested interests of the privileged few. Farm women experienced firsthand the injustice of the crippling protective tariff imposed on farm implements and labour-saving devices in the home. They knew firsthand the urgency of addressing these issues to alleviate the heavy workload of women and men and they felt compelled to speak up. The 1919 UFWM report notes that eastern manufacturers are “aided in the production of their goods for export by having 99% of all the duty (tariffs) they pay on materials brought into Canada refunded.”²⁰ The UFWM wanted the same treatment for farmers. They were aware of the glaring inequities of these national policies and this awareness fuelled their motivation to organize politically.

¹⁸ AOM, P7568/2, Reports, Papers, Addresses, 1919, “The Women’s Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association,” 2.

¹⁹ AOM, P7578/15, UFWM President’s Address, 1921 Convention Year Book, 1921, 72.

²⁰ AOM, P7568/2, Reports, Papers, Addresses, 1919, “The Women’s Sections of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association,” 7.

The UFWM joined the UFM in entering federal politics in 1921 and in 1922 they entered provincial politics. They assisted in the development of the political platform, called the Farmer's Platform, a platform they provocatively entitled the New National Policy. In her President's address delivered at the 1920 convention in Brandon, Manitoba, Janet Wood speaks of the tremendous opportunity the organized farmers now had to put their principles "as enunciated in our political platform, known as the New National Policy, before an eager and hungry electorate... We feel that at last there is a way out. We now have our organization, and also our definite national policy and we find the women as well as the men anxious to study that policy."²¹ Her enthusiasm is echoed in Provincial Secretary Mabel Finch's report that same year. "In reviewing the work for the past year, one cannot help but note the increasing interest of the women of the Province in our movement. Since the early summer, when political action sounded the keynote for the organization, women began to awake."²² She states that women at all levels of the organization were stepping up to offer their time as workers and speakers at public gatherings, and still the organization was having difficulty keeping up with the demand. A 1920 UFWM document entitled "Doors of Opportunity Open to Canadian Women," encourages women not only to vote in upcoming municipal, provincial and Dominion elections, but emphasizes farm women's eligibility to run for political office at every level.²³ By 1920, the year the Women's Section of the MGGA changed its name to the United Farm Women of Manitoba (UFWM), organization was taking place at every level of the organization.²⁴

²¹ AOM, P7578/14, "The President's Address," 80.

²² Ibid., "The Secretary's Report," 84.

²³ AOM, P7582/5, UFM Pamphlets, United Farm Women of Manitoba, "Doors of Opportunity Open to Canadian Women."

²⁴ AOM, P7578/14, UFM Annual Convention Yearbooks, 1902–1923, Convention Minutes, January 7, 1920, 91. See the motion, moved by Mrs. Elliott and seconded by Mrs. Gee, "That the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association be hereafter known as the United Farm Women of Manitoba. Carried unanimously."

Understanding the UFWM's Organizational Structure

The Local Level

In order to understand the extraordinary output of UFWM members, it is instructive to examine their work at the local, district, provincial and national levels. First, at the local level involvement took place either in separate women's local organizations, called Women's Sections, or in mixed-gender locals, with integrated female and male membership.²⁵ There was significant encouragement from the UFWM central office to establish separate Women's Sections that could be organized by a group of 5 or more women coming together in the local community and electing their officers, a President, Vice-President, Secretary Treasurer and up to 6 members-at-large. The local Women's Section met at least once a month and in addition, organized numerous events and special projects throughout the year for the benefit of the broader community. A 1920-21 UFWM handbook encouraged the organization of a separate Women's Section, suggesting that it would likely increase women's membership in the organization, but stipulated that women were under no obligation to do so, and could continue full and equal membership in a mixed local.²⁶ If a mixed local was the preferred option, a Women's Convenor could be appointed to ensure that issues of particular urgency and interest to women would be given equal weight. Over time, it became regular practice that both a female and male president would be elected in a mixed local.

UFWM membership figures for 1922 indicate that of the 2,151 female members, 1,183 or 55% were organized in separate women's locals, and 968 or 45% took part in mixed-gendered locals.²⁷ That same year a total of 120 reports from individual local branches of the UFWM were received by the central office and each report and location can be found in the UFWM fonds. It

²⁵ *Grain Growers' Guide*, January 16, 1924, 12.

²⁶ AOM, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7582/7, UFM Hand Book of Practical Work, 1920-21, "Women's Section," 8.

²⁷ Kinnear, "Do You Want," 139. See also AOM, P7568/5, UFWM's Secretary's Report for confirmation of these figures.

would appear that the majority of these were separate Women's Sections, but some reports may have come from the female convenor or president of a mixed local.²⁸ For the purpose of this study, just over 100 of these Women's Sections or mixed locals were able to be located and placed on a current map of southern Manitoba. This assisted in situating UFWM membership in relation to prime agricultural land, and in proximity to First Nations and Metis communities and to rural immigrant reserve lands such as the Icelandic and Mennonite settlements, as well as Francophone and Ukrainian communities. The demographics of the women who were active in the UFWM indicate that the majority lived on farms located on prime agricultural land and in communities composed primarily of white Anglo-Saxon, Protestant settlers. There were a few exceptions to this. Evidence was found in the UFWM files of Icelandic locals at Vogar, Framnes and Gimli, Mennonite locals in Blumenort near Steinbach and in Gretna, Francophone/Metis locals at Giroux and St. Amelie, and Ukrainian locals in the Dauphin/Gilbert Plains region. A 1925 report from Provincial Secretary Mabel Finch also states that the local of Sapton in the municipality of Springfield had purely Ukrainian membership in a junior local and that the Ukrainian school teachers had organized the youth of the community.²⁹

Activities undertaken by women in separate and mixed locals were fairly consistent. A variety of sources including UFWM Presidents' and Secretaries' reports, committee and convention reports, minute books, and local newspapers have provided fairly detailed information on the broad range of activities and interests undertaken in the areas of education, health and social services, work with young people, the economy, recreation, legal matters of particular concern to women and children, community service work, fundraising, and relief work. Specific themes for each year were suggested at the annual provincial convention and from these themes the

²⁸ AOM, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7577/6, "Annual Reports from Locals, 1922."

²⁹ *Ibid.*, P7568/9, Secretary's Report to Convention, January 12, 1926. Finch's report states: "Sapton holds the unique position of having a purely Ruthenian membership. It is one of the oldest locals in the province." This observation regarding the demographics of the UFWM is consistent with historian Kinnear's conclusion, in her article "Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Farmer?" in which she examines the 1922 Rural Survey of the UFWM, that members of the FWM were overrepresented in the more prosperous western and southwestern areas of the province and underrepresented in the east, southeast, and northern areas of Manitoba.

Provincial Secretary prepared and distributed study and resource packages for the Women's Sections and mixed locals. The Locals were encouraged to plan and prepare their one-year program in advance, selecting topics of particular interest to their community. An examination of the annual reports from UFWM locals throughout the province and from the provincial convention reports from 1918 to 1936 reveals the wide variety of activities undertaken by members at the local level and the extent to which rural women's unique needs were addressed as well as the needs of their community. In the area of education, UFWM locals established permanent or traveling libraries, organized discussion groups and speakers' forums on topics as varied as the Farmers' Platform, the restrictive tariff, cooperative education, women and parliamentary procedure, the Dower Law and legislation regarding gender equality in divorce and child custody. They organized local debating and oratorical competitions for women, men and young people.³⁰ Some locals established hot lunch programs for rural schools and Visiting Days in rural schools to bring the school and the community closer together. Through the University of Manitoba Agricultural Extension Services or the Women's Branch of the provincial Extension Service, locals could work with the UFWM central office to arrange special lectures on a variety of current issues as well as training in food sciences, cooking and canning of fruits and vegetables, dressmaking and millinery. In the area of health, activities ranged from lobbying for public health nurses in rural communities to support for more rural nurses, doctors and municipal hospitals, raising funds to equip a nurse's residence, setting up "well-baby" clinics, arranging for demonstrations in home nursing and agitating for free child welfare clinics in rural areas.³¹ They lobbied for the administration of free eye drops to newborns in all Manitoba births to prevent blindness, and assisted in the establishment of the dental truck scheme for rural Manitoba.

Other initiatives included the organization of buying and selling co-operatives, relief work and raising funds to support needed local facilities. A number of locals formed co-operatives, buying

³⁰ *Emerson Journal*, February 3, 1928, 1.

³¹ AOM, P7578/14, Year Book, 1920, 85.

groceries and other items in bulk and distributing them to the community at considerable savings. The Women's Section at Aux Marais in Provencher constituency, for example, reported in 1922 that they established a cooperative store, buying groceries wholesale and charging only 5% to cover charges for transportation.³² The Cypress River Women's Section, like numerous other branches, was involved in the cooperative purchasing of fruit.³³ A 1916 report from Forrest Branch near Brandon indicates that this local purchased coal, formaldehyde and seed corn cooperatively as well as 4,500 pounds of fresh fish at a saving of one to two cents per pound. The total value of their cooperative purchasing in just one local branch for one year was \$9,605, which meant a saving of \$1,500 or an average of \$15 per member.³⁴ Other locals became part of UFWM poultry marketing cooperatives.

Relief activities included responding to women in the province who expressed a need for additional warm clothing, bedding or food for their children or themselves in the harsh Manitoba winters. For example, the UFWM's 1928 Board of Directors report stated that a number of Women's Sections had responded to requests for assistance for warm clothing from the inter-lake and southeast Manitoba districts.³⁵ In the annual reports from locals, relief work was consistently listed as an activity undertaken for people in their own community, especially in years of drought or crop loss due to hail, excessive precipitation or early frost. Almost every UFWM local kept a relief fund or supply of clothing for this purpose. Relief work at the local level was often coordinated from the central UFWM office in Winnipeg through the Provincial Secretary. A 1922 report entitled, "Some Duties of the UFWM Secretary," describes relief work as one of the most time-consuming of her duties. Requests for help came from all over the province to the central office and then were re-directed to the locals for implementation and

³² AOM, P7577/6, UFWM Annual Reports from Locals.

³³ AOM, P7578/14, Secretary's Report, 84.

³⁴ AOM, P7579/10, Branch Reports, 1916.

³⁵ AOM, P7579/5, UFWM Board of Directors' Report, Relief Work, Year Book, 44.

follow up, but due to lower prices in the city, the Secretary was often in charge of purchasing the necessary items of food and clothing.

Women's Sections raised money for community halls, hospitals, the local school, the Children's Aid Society and the Red Cross. As women became more active and mobile in the public sphere, public restrooms for women in local communities became a necessity. UFWM locals often raised funds and donated their labour to establish and maintain this service for women, which in addition to toilet and washroom facilities, provided a place to rest, have lunch, write a letter, check lists, visit with other women, or change the baby's diaper.³⁶

Clearly many of these initiatives were aimed to help women as mothers, but also to assist the next generation. A pressing concern of the local UFWM members was providing activities and training for young people who they feared would leave the farm for the city. Junior locals were established and open to male and female participants aged 7 to 20 years, with careful attention paid to gender equality. Marquette's District Director, Martha Elliott's 1920 "Report of Young People's Work," states that "where there are both boys and girls, neither should assume monopoly."³⁷ Activities included hands-on lessons in economics and cooperative marketing through pig, cow, colt, or chicken-raising projects, and seed plot experiments. Youth were often involved with the UFWM in community beautification projects such as clean-up of school or church grounds or maintenance of local cemeteries. On the lighter side, recreation was often organized to ensure intergenerational participation and included theatre, plays, musical evenings, dances, picnics, sports events, and organizing the popular Chatauqua festival every summer.³⁸

³⁶ AOM, P7577/1-16, Annual Reports from Locals.

³⁷ AOM, P7568/3, Reports, Papers, Addresses, "Report on Young People's Work," 1920 (formerly MG 10 E1, box 5, UFM Reports, Papers, Addresses, 1918-1929, index card 44-45, 1920).

³⁸ Chatauqua Festivals were held in many rural areas in this period, and often the UFWM were the local sponsors. In addition to musical entertainment, drama productions, visual arts, and public speaking, the festivals featured popular education courses on topics of particular interest to the sponsoring organization. The name comes from Chatauqua County, in New York state, where such an event was first organized.

Close communication was maintained between the UFWM central office and the Women's Sections through circulars from the Provincial Secretary as well as regular memos from the UFWM President and Executive. Every year in June each Woman's Section was encouraged by the UFWM central office to complete a membership drive. This could involve door-to-door canvassing or holding a social evening with an inspirational guest speaker on a specific issue of concern to community women and using it as an opportunity to sign up new members. Locals were also called upon to carry out surveys on farm issues that required input from farm women across the province. The leaders of the UFWM firmly believed that the local Women's Sections were the lifeblood of the organization. They saw evidence of how they provided an opportunity for women "to develop abilities many of us never dreamed we possessed, to extend our vision and make us understand the possibilities of our organization."³⁹

What is quite remarkable is that throughout the years under examination in this study, the link between the locals and the provincial Board continued to be deeply valued and closely maintained. Annual reports during this time period are filled with accounts of the large number of provincial Board members or District Directors who attended local meetings to listen, encourage, and inspire. Regular communication from the Provincial Secretary offered resource materials in response to requests from locals for articles and papers on topics required for debating and speech preparation or the study of special topics. Lists of keynote speakers were maintained in the UFWM central office and made available to the locals upon request. Local Women's Sections were invited to take photos of their members engaged in one of their community activities and send it, along with a short article, to the UFWM central office for publication in the Grain Growers' Guide, the Winnipeg Free Press, the Weekly Tribune and five 'New Canadian' newspapers to showcase their work in the community.⁴⁰ Emphasis was always

³⁹ AOM, P7578/15, Year Book, 1921, UFWM President's Address, 73.

⁴⁰ AOM, P7578/15, UFWM Secretary's Report 1921, 4; Year Book, 1921, p. 82. The five new Canadian newspapers were listed as the *Canadian Ranok* (Ruthenian), the *Nordwestern* (German), the *Norrøna* (Norwegian), the *Svenska-Canada-Tidningen* (Swedish), and the *Logberg* (Icelandic).

placed on the important role of the local organization in attending to their community's specific social and economic welfare and in engaging young people. But locals were also encouraged to recognize the important role they played in the agrarian movement as a whole and not to lose sight of the larger goals.⁴¹ The words of the unnamed author of a 1919 document entitled "The Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association," continued to resonate throughout the organization well into the 1930s. After congratulating the local Women's Sections on the variety, scope, and importance of their work at the local level, the author, likely former President Alice Tooth, had this reminder for the women:

At the same time it is well not to lose sight of the purpose of the organization, that it was established primarily to help the farm people by educating them to understand the economic and political influences that affect the agricultural class. We like to think that farm women are so interested in these things that they will have at least one paper at each meeting that deals with these problems."⁴²

It is difficult to determine the level of education attained by the majority of the members of the UFWM. Historian Gerald Friesen suggests that many of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant prairie farm women and men in the first decades of the twentieth century had been raised in the era of educational reforms of Victorian England and Canada and many had "an unusually rich, unusually democratic introduction to the entire history of English culture."⁴³ The UFWM records are filled with evidence of the degree to which the UFWM members researched, read and studied economic, political, theological, philosophical, literary and scientific papers, periodicals, books and articles. This reinforces Friesen's hunch that many were "literate and forceful."⁴⁴ What is particularly notable is that at every level of the organization there was an uncommon thirst for knowledge and a respect for the transformative power of education. Even more importantly, the

⁴¹ AOM, P7578/14 "The Local Association."

⁴² AOM, P7568/2, The Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, 1919, 9.

⁴³ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 365.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 366.

UFWM members believed that education should be accessible to all, albeit with a strong bias toward the English language, culture and literary traditions.

The District Level

At the district level, the UFWM followed the precedent of the UFM and created their own District Boards of Directors in the 12 rural federal constituencies of Manitoba. This proved to be invaluable when they decided to enter politics in 1921. The UFWM had active District organizations in all 12 federal constituencies including Brandon, Dauphin, Lisgar, Macdonald, Marquette, Neepawa, Portage la Prairie, Provencher, Selkirk, Springfield, Souris and Nelson.⁴⁵ The Women's Sections or mixed locals located within the boundaries of each federal constituency elected the District Board at a District convention held annually each autumn. The District Board consisted of a President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, and a representative from at least 5 locals, up to a total of 8 members. According to the UFM/UFWM 1920 Handbook, the President of the District Board was expected to report on the work of her district at both the District convention and at the annual Provincial convention. The presidents and executives of District Boards were to be "the most effective... women," and they were expected to be able to present the vision and larger issues to inspire individuals and the local unit.⁴⁶

An article entitled "UFWM-Ten Years of Progress" that appeared in the 1928 Provincial Convention Year Book reported that the District Boards had held eleven District Conventions in 1927. Topics included the most pressing issues of the day including concerns in the areas of

⁴⁵ See attached map of twelve federal constituencies in Manitoba, 1932. See also AOM P7578/14, UFWM Convention Year Book, 1920, 79, which lists UFWM district directors for eleven of the twelve federal districts, corresponding to the federal constituencies of Neepawa, Marquette, Provencher, Swan River, Dauphin, Portage, Souris, Macdonald, Brandon, Lisgar, and Selkirk. The same districts were identified in the 1921 convention yearbook (P7578/15, 70) in which, again, the district of Springfield was not listed. It is quite likely that this municipality was represented by the UFWM's president in 1920-21 - Mrs. J. S. Wood, of Oakville, located in Springfield constituency - who could have served as district director while also serving as UFWM president.

⁴⁶ AOM, P7578/14, Convention Year Book, 1920.

Public Health and Social Welfare, Production and Marketing of the By-Products of the Farm, Legislation Affecting Women and Children, Education, Immigration, Young People's Work, Teachers' Retirement Fund, Membership in the Canadian Council of Child Welfare, the Temperance Situation, University Extension Lectures, and a Rural Short Course at the Agricultural College.⁴⁷ The material presented at each of these eleven District Conventions was compiled and distributed to all the Women's Sections and mixed locals for further study and action.

Another major focus of the District Board was the organization of the annual debating competition that took place during the long winter months on the prairies. This activity was extremely popular and tickets sold quickly to crowds of people wanting to hear the debates at the District and Provincial levels. Each District Director was responsible for choosing possible topics for debate, purchasing resource material, ensuring the participation of local teams and judges, and organizing these large public events. Provincial Secretary Mabel Finch's 1927 report delivered at the 1928 convention states that "District Boards are placing themselves more enthusiastically than ever before behind debating and are offering cups and medals."⁴⁸ She provides the example of Souris District who was sponsoring inter-local contests among the four locals in that district with cups awarded for each and a fifth cup for the district championship. The topics chosen for debate were relevant to the lives of the audience, were almost always controversial, and in addition to great entertainment, they were educational. Debate topics in 1929 included, "The Farm Women's Attitude to the Problem of Divorce," "The Married Woman Worker in the Business World," "The Wife of the New Canadian Farmer and Her Problems," "The Farm Woman and Cooperation," "Public Health and It's Relationship to the Farm Home," and "Farm Women's Idea of World Peace."⁴⁹ The winning team of one District then debated the winning team of another District in a playoff until all but 2 of the district debating teams were

⁴⁷ AOM, P7579/5, 1.

⁴⁸ AOM, P7579/5, UFM/UFWM Year Book, 1928, 45.

⁴⁹ AOM, P7568/12, 1929. See box 5, index card 55, 1929.

defeated. The final debate between the two undefeated teams took place at Provincial convention where the winner was presented with the Murray Cup.

Other events that were coordinated by the District Boards included the Women's Conferences held during the summer months between seeding and harvest. The conferences were one-day events and often featured special guest speakers such as Member of Parliament Agnes MacPhail or peace activist Lucy Woodsworth. The 1922 UFWM Board of Directors report delivered at the Provincial convention in January 1923 stated,

Two UFWM conferences were held in our province this year, the Neepawa district, celebrating its third conference and the Portage district its first...It is found that these women conferences are doing much to develop the women in self-expression and poise and in the stimulation of the discussions of problems that particularly affect women and children. The success of these conferences has led your board to recommend them to all districts.⁵⁰

By 1928, the UFWM's Provincial Board reported that 8 Women's Conferences had taken place over the summer of 1927 and in January 1928 it was announced at provincial convention that eleven districts would be holding a Women's Conference during the month of July. Charlotte Whitton, then Executive Secretary of the Canadian Council of Child Welfare, would speak at each one of the conferences over a period of eleven consecutive days. The UFWM Board meeting minutes dated April 12, 1928 contain the itinerary for Charlotte Whitton's whirlwind tour of rural Manitoba from Monday, July 9 through Saturday, July 14, and then from Monday July 16 until Friday, July 20, 1928.⁵¹ Each District Director was expected to provide transportation, meals and accommodation for the special guest speaker and to ensure that she was able to get to her next destination on schedule.

⁵⁰ AOM, P7568/6.

⁵¹ AOM, P7584/3, UFWM Board Meeting Minutes, April 12, 1928. See Fred Tipping, "Religion and the Making of a Labour Leader," in Allen, ed., *The Social Gospel in Canada*, 82. Tipping refers to Charlotte Whitton's responsibility for drawing up Manitoba's Child Welfare Act.

Districts were also responsible for the organization and sponsorship of Summer Conferences at the Manitoba Agricultural College in Winnipeg held jointly with two or three other Districts in conjunction with Co-op Institute week.⁵² In 1930, Districts were asked to organize local UFWM women to attend Rural Women's Rest Week at the Agricultural College which provided women with a much needed break from the routine of farm work and the relentless demands of home, family and community. Program offerings during Rest Week were stimulating but the structure was generally flexible and informal.

In the 1920 UFM/UFWM Year Book a section entitled 'The District Work' underlines the essential role that the district level of the organization played in the overall effectiveness of the Farmers' movement:

Twelve district associations and every one of them alive, active and aggressive! That's some achievement. Why only three years ago they talked of the district association as a 'fifth wheel'... Today... the district is coming into its own in the new activities of the political phase of our work. There is no more important bit of machinery in our movement today than the district board. It finds itself called upon more insistently than ever before to exert itself in organizing and helping to maintain the organization in every local community within its bounds. This means that some one or other of the eight members knows the status and working conditions of every local in the district.⁵³

The report goes on to state that in political action, the district level functioned as the unit of operations responsible for identifying and getting out the Farmers' vote. This demonstrates a highly sophisticated level of organizational acumen that not only proved to be effective for the Progressive movement of the 1920s but also the protest movements of the 1930s, particularly the CCF. The close connection between grassroots people at the local level and those in leadership positions within the organization, as well as the commitment to educational study and debate of

⁵² AOM, MG 10 E1, box 17, file 1930 (index card box 17, p. 2, Minutes of Executive, 1930).

⁵³ AOM, P7578/14, 1920, "The District Work."

the pressing political, social and economic issues of the day was seen as essential to the democratic process. Farm women played a major role in the promotion and maintenance of community connectivity and education at all levels of the organization and their work was essential to the success of the movement.

The Provincial Level

Moving now to the provincial level, the organizational structure of the UFWM included a Provincial Board of Directors made up of a President and Vice-President of the entire organization elected annually at the Provincial convention as well as the organization's District Directors. The District Directors were elected at the District Conventions but if vacancies occurred, they could be filled through elections at the annual provincial convention. The first Presidents were Alice Tooth from Elie, Manitoba (1917 to 1918), Mrs. J.S. (Janet) Wood, Oakville (1918–1922), Mrs. James Elliott (Martha) from Cardale (1922–24), and Mrs. S.E. Gee from Virden (1925–1928).⁵⁴ The Board met once a month during the winter months and as needed during seeding and harvest. The Executive of the Board met regularly and was composed of the Chairperson, the Vice-Chair person, and the Provincial Secretary.

On February 4, 1918, the month after the Women's Section of the MGGGA had been formally constituted, a Provincial Secretary for the Women's Section was hired full time to assist in the organization of Manitoba farm women.⁵⁵ An official office of the UFWM was established at 290 Vaughan Street in Winnipeg which was also home to the Grain Growers' Guide and the Grain Growers' Grain Company. The UFM/UFWM offices then moved to Room 306 in the Bank of Hamilton building at 395 Main Street in Winnipeg. The women who filled the position of Provincial Secretary were extremely capable, often single women, who eventually moved on to other professional careers. The first Provincial Secretary, Amy Roe, became an editor with the *Grain Growers' Guide*. Mabel Finch was hired as the second Provincial Secretary. In 1927

⁵⁴ AOM, P7579/5, "UFWM – Ten Years of Progress," 1928, 17–19.

⁵⁵ AOM, P7579/5, "UFWM – Ten Years of Progress," 1928.

Mabel was granted a six-month leave of absence to take a course in Economics at the University of Chicago. To support Mabel and to make this possible, the President, Vice-President and the District Directors took on additional responsibilities to ensure continuity in the work of the UFWM.⁵⁶ Mabel eventually was employed in the Minister's office of Manitoba's Department of Mines and Natural Resources.⁵⁷ Anna Drysdale Grey of Neepawa also served as Provincial Secretary and won a gold medal as an elocutionist. She was a widely recognized and popular guest speaker throughout the province. In 1928 she filled the position of Provincial secretary for both the UFWM and the UFM.⁵⁸ The role of the Provincial Secretary was to assist the UFWM Board and the organization at every level including researching, writing and presentation of briefs and papers before governmental officials and public commissions, such as the federal commission on the protective tariff in 1922. The Provincial Secretary was responsible for maintaining the financial records of the UFWM as well as maintaining a special book list for "Live Workers and Progressive Thinkers"⁵⁹ that could be loaned to Women's Sections and mixed locals. It was through the office of the Provincial Secretary that the majority of communication was maintained with all the locals throughout the province as well as with the District Directors. The Provincial Secretary played a major role in the enormous task of organizing the Provincial Convention each year and attended every Board and Executive meeting of both the UFWM and the UFM. Her duties also included relief work, as mentioned previously, and arranging for health and hospital care for rural patients who needed to be treated in Winnipeg due to the absence of hospitals and health clinics and the shortage of doctors in most rural areas. She also advocated for those who required assistance to cover the cost of medical care.

⁵⁶ AOM, P7579/5, UFWM Board of Directors Report Presented by Mabel E. Finch, Provincial Secretary, 1928.

⁵⁷ *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 20, 1923, 37.

⁵⁸ AOM, P7579/6, "United Farmers of Manitoba, Secretaries of the UFWM."

⁵⁹ AOM, P7568/4, 1921.

It took time and determination for the UFWM Board to gain a level of gender parity with the UFM at the Provincial level. A resolution initiated by the Women's Section and adopted by the convention in 1920 appears to have given women almost equal representation on the Provincial Board of the UFM. It stated:

Whereas our Association stands for equal rights for all with special privileges to none, and whereas the directors of the Women's Section are allowed to participate in the business and discussions of the central board but not allowed to vote, therefore be it resolved that the constitution be amended to provide for two directors in each district, one of whom shall be a woman.⁶⁰

The UFWM President, Janet Wood, spoke to UFWM members in separate session at the Convention in 1920, prior to the motion on gender parity coming to the floor of the joint session later that same day. Her words indicate that she was anticipating opposition to the proposed motion. She warned women that no matter how they longed for gender parity, they must carry on in a sane, cool manner, avoiding all rashness. "We must guard against the sneer of those who declare all women erratic and unstable, lest we lose prestige. This is the testing point of our organization."⁶¹ The motion for gender parity carried on the floor of the Convention, but the words of the President of the UFWM reveal the intense scrutiny under which women felt subjected as they continued the struggle for equality within their organization. From this time on, letterhead of both the UFM and the UFWM listed the table officers of 15 women and 15 men as the governing Board of Directors of the main organization. In 1922, the constitution was changed again to provide for the inclusion of the UFWM President and Secretary on the UFM Executive.⁶² In her PhD dissertation, historian Joan Sangster sheds some light on the gender balance within the sister organization in Saskatchewan. She notes that in 1925, women in the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan's Grain Growers' Association "were given an assured

⁶⁰ AOM, P7568/3, Reports, Papers, Addresses, 1920, Resolution 48.

⁶¹ AOM, P7578/14, Convention Handbook, President's Address, 80.

⁶² AOM, P7568/6, UFWM Board of Director's Report.

representation of three seats on the Provincial Board.”⁶³ It would appear, therefore, that the UFWM compares favourably in terms of gender parity with this sister prairie farm women’s association.

It must be remembered, however, that overall membership in the UFM far outnumbered that of UFWM members. In 1922, female membership numbered 2,151 compared to a male membership of 15,701.⁶⁴ Evidence of the method of delegate selection reveals that while local associations were encouraged to ensure that women attended as delegates with the provision of child care at the rate of 15 cents per day, there was nothing in the constitution to ensure gender parity in delegate selection.⁶⁵ And while each Women’s Section constituted a local in its own right, with the power to fill its quota of delegates in the same manner as the mixed locals (one delegate for every 10 members of fraction thereof), the sheer gender differential in overall membership assured that men made up the vast majority of voting delegates.⁶⁶ Still, given the great spread in numbers of male and female members, equal representation of women on the Provincial Board is even more remarkable for this time period.

The work of women elected to the UFWM provincial board was extensive. The Board met an average of five times a year at the UFWM headquarters in Room 306 at the Bank of Hamilton building in Winnipeg. These meetings were at least two days in length and included separate sessions of the UFWM Board, a joint meeting with the provincial Board of the UFM, as well as committee meetings. There were morning, afternoon and evening sessions, and it wasn’t unusual for meetings to adjourn at 10:30 or 11 in the evening. The agenda often included meetings with the government’s Provincial Cabinet on issues as varied as legislation affecting women and children, rural education, health care, social services, and automobile licensing for rural vehicles.

⁶³ Joan Sangster, “Canadian Women in Radical Politics and Labour, 1920–1950” (PhD diss., McMaster University, 1984), 171.

⁶⁴ Kinnear, “Do You Want,” 139.

⁶⁵ AOM, MG 10 E1, box 5, file 1921.

⁶⁶ *Grain Growers’ Guide*, January 2, 1924, 19, 22.

Over the years, the provincial Board of the UFWM formed standing committees on Education and Peace, Health, Social Services, Legislation, Youth, Marketing, and Immigration. These committees remained fairly consistent for the entire period under examination in this thesis. Each standing committee was chaired by one of the District Directors who also sat on the UFWM Board of Directors and reported at each Board meeting. These positions involved an enormous commitment of time and energy. Existing policy or legislation was thoroughly researched, drawing on the expertise of local, national and international scholars and practitioners. Rural surveys were undertaken, liaison was maintained with other provincial or local organizations in overlapping or related jurisdictions, and reports were prepared for presentation before various legislative or judicial commissions or inquiries. The chairperson of each standing committee also prepared a year-end report to be presented on the floor of convention annually. To assess the relative weight or impact of this work in the life of the province, it is important to keep in mind that at this time the majority of Manitoba's population was rural, defined as all those not living in incorporated villages, towns or cities.⁶⁷ In 1921, 57% of Manitoba's total population of 610,118 was rural.⁶⁸ It is little wonder that the UFM/UFWM conventions and reports of the UFWM standing committees drew extensive media attention and general interest from elected representatives and the public at large. The opinion of farm women and men on issues of concern was not to be taken lightly, especially given the rather formidable grassroots organization of the agrarian movement.

An examination of one of the UFWM standing committees will serve to demonstrate the scope and nature of the work of these committees, not to mention the untiring dedication of the UFWM women who served as chairpersons or convenors. Ella McClelland from Aux Marais served as Chairperson of the UFWM Standing Committee on Peace and Education from 1924 to 1930. During these years she also served as District Director of Provencher as well as holding the

⁶⁷ Kinnear, "Do You Want," 137.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

position of Vice-President of the provincial UFWM from 1928-1930.⁶⁹ The duties of the District Director and especially of Vice-President of the UFWM often involved attendance at meetings of locals, addressing other District Conventions throughout the province, speaking at Women's Conferences, sitting on the resolutions committee, and assisting with convention planning and evaluation. Responsibility on the joint UFM/UFWM Board also increased. For example, Ella sat on the Organization Committee of the UFM/UFWM in 1929 and chaired a provincial UFM/UFWM study group that researched topics such as monetary reform, land tenure, co-op production, government ownership of public utilities, and taxation.⁷⁰

The Standing Committees were expected to prepare briefs for presentation before commissions and inquiries that fell within their area of responsibility. In 1923, Premier John Bracken set up the Murray Commission on education, chaired by his former colleague Walter Murray, President of the University of Saskatchewan. This was in response to the growing demand for changes in the education system in the wake of the political unrest of the Winnipeg General Strike. Leaders in the labour, farmers' and feminist movements were voicing disdain for an outmoded education system, in particular a history curriculum that was distinctly biased in favour of an imperialist, male-dominated, ruling class perspective. Mary McCallum, an editor of the Grain Growers' Guide, and a close friend of the UFWM, speaking at a teachers' conference in Winnipeg in 1919, stated that the teaching of history was too often "a recital of facts in chronological order," and failed to tell the whole story. She cited the Canadian Pacific Railway as an example. Lauded only as a miracle of modern technological progress, there was never any mention of the CPR in the historical record as "a despicable system of land holdings for speculation," she stated.⁷¹

⁶⁹ AOM, MG 10 E1, box 16, file 1928, 1929. See UFWM Circular Letter #1, dated February 12, 1924, from Central Office to the UFWM membership, which reported that Mrs. T. W. McClelland was Education Convenor for 1924.

⁷⁰ *Emerson Journal*, October 30, 1925; January 15, 1926; February 3, 1928; February 24, 1928; April 6, 1928; and July 13, 1928.

⁷¹ Mary McCallum, "Embryo Citizenship," *Western School Journal* 14, no. 6 (1919): 234-39, quoted in Ken Osborne, "One Hundred Years of History Teaching in Manitoba Schools, Part 1: 1897-1927," Manitoba Historical Society, *Manitoba History*, no. 36 (1998-99), http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/36/historyteaching.shtml.

The UFWM Standing Committee on Education was under Ella McClelland's leadership. In preparation for the presentation to the Murray Commission, they undertook extensive research, conducted surveys among the locals regarding the state of rural education, and drafted recommendations. The research revealed that Manitoba stood second among the provinces in the prevalence of illiteracy, with illiteracy in the rural districts twice as great as in urban centres. The majority of rural students did not continue their education beyond Grade 6 of the public school system. Other related challenges included teacher retention and the lack of incentives for teachers to remain at a rural school for more than one year, and the lack of such things as an increased daily per diem starting in the second year of teaching at the same school and a pension plan to match that of urban teachers. Also at issue was the quality and length of teacher training, the need for life-long learning through greater accessibility of the rural population to the University of Manitoba and the Agricultural College's extension services, and finally the need for a complete review of school curriculum at all levels. The UFWM sharply criticized the curriculum for its lack of relevance to rural life, the omission of curricula relating to the teaching of co-operative ideals of equality and social justice, the absence of peace studies and the over-emphasis on the glorification of war and cadet training in schools, not to mention the failure to focus on citizenship and on social, political and economic history. Ella McClelland's "UFWM Report of the Committee on Education for 1925," opens with a review of the broad aims of the Murray Commission and then goes on to focus on the legislation enacted as a result of the many submissions to the Commission.⁷²

⁷² AOM, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7579/3, UFM Convention Minutes, 1926. The recommendations of the UFWM Standing Committee on Education can be found in Ella McClelland's "Report of the Committee on Education for 1925," presented to the annual UFM/UFWM convention in January 1926. See P7568/8, United Farm Women of Manitoba, Report on Committee on Education for 1925, delivered at the January 1926 Convention. The three goals of the Murray Commission, as listed in the UFWM report, were as follows: better educational facilities for the less developed areas, better adaptation of elementary and secondary schools to the needs of the communities they serve, and readjustment of the relations of higher institutions of learning to provide for their extension into the communities of Manitoba.

What is quite remarkable is the success of the UFWM Standing Committees generally in influencing legislative changes or enacting new legislation. The recommendations of the UFWM's Standing Committee on Education, for example, included incentive grants to teachers who stayed more than one year in one-room schools, the extension of teacher training from several months to at least one year, the establishment of a Teacher's Retirement Fund in rural areas to match that of urban centres, and the extension of access to post-secondary education for rural people. Ella McClelland's 1925 report lists many of the recommendations that had been enacted in legislation including the extension of Normal School training to one year in length and the discontinuation of short courses. The new full-time teacher-training program would now be available not only in Winnipeg but also in Brandon, Manitou and Dauphin. Practice teaching was added as a requirement for graduation and rural elementary and secondary schools surrounding Brandon and Manitou now would be used for practice teaching of the pupils at these centres. The elimination of short courses made it possible for inspectors, who had been teaching these courses part time, to devote full time to inspection and support for teachers and school administrators. Entry qualifications for acceptance into Normal School were raised. Legislation to incentivize teachers to remain more than one year in one-room rural schools was enacted, with grants available at the rate of 15 cents a day for the second year of service and 25 cents per day for subsequent years of service at the same school. Regarding legislation to establish a Teacher's Retirement Fund, the 1925 Standing Committee on Education reported, "an act along this line was passed at the last session of the legislature. While it is not what can be called a complete Actuarial Bill or Fund, it is considered a start along the lines of pension legislation for the future."⁷³

In addition, regarding the need to extend post-secondary education to rural people, legislation was enacted to amalgamate the University of Manitoba and the Agricultural College under one Board of Directors, with the College becoming a Faculty of the University of Manitoba to ensure

⁷³ Ibid.

accreditation of agricultural degree and diploma programs. This also provided the opportunity for the University to use the institution in St. Vital (later to be called Fort Garry)⁷⁴ in the interests of the agricultural sector and to increase the short courses and other extension work for the benefit of rural Manitobans. Provision was also made for the development of the largest Summer School in Canada with over 600 students availing themselves of courses delivered jointly by the Department of Education and the University of Manitoba.

Legislation was also enacted to guarantee government coverage of the unpaid levies of rural and remote municipalities. Among the recommendations that were either fully enacted in legislation or were soon to be put into effect were the availability of vocational training in agriculture, reference libraries in schools, school textbooks, increased public health nurses for rural schools, manual training and home economics. Finally, a committee was officially appointed to review the elementary and high school curricula to better adapt school curricula to the needs of the community. The review committee consisted of representation from agriculture, industry, commerce and professional organizations. The first task of the review committee was to send out questionnaires to every stakeholder throughout the province. There is evidence in the UFWM archival records that this questionnaire was then distributed by the UFWM central office to all UFWM locals for their input, a report was prepared utilizing the information gleaned from the responses, and the Provincial Secretary, Mabel Finch, appeared before the curriculum review committee to provide the feedback and suggestions from the UFWM. The majority of their recommendations became law in 1925, three years after the UFM/UFWM helped bring John Bracken to power as Premier of Manitoba. It is important to note that the work of the Standing Committee on Education was not unique. A review of the work of other UFWM Standing Committees in the areas of health, social services, legislation, youth, marketing and immigration reveals evidence of the same thorough approach to issues of concern to rural people and the

⁷⁴ Leo Pettipas and Friends of Taché Hall, *Taché Hall: Celebrating a Century of Residence Life at the University of Manitoba 1911–2011* (Winnipeg: Linda Rzeszutek, 2012), http://umanitoba.ca/campus/housing/images/_Chapter_1.pdf.

passionate desire to work cooperatively toward the improvement of the quality of life for women, children, and rural society in general.⁷⁵

The National Level

Organization of the UFWM at the national level was initiated at the founding convention of the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association in January 1918. At the opening session of the third day of the convention, Friday, January 11, a resolution moved by Mrs. Ames and seconded by Alice Tooth was carried as follows: "Whereas federal matters require the closest cooperation of the rural women of the sister provinces, be it resolved that we agree to form an inter-provincial council composed of two members from the executive of each of the provincial provinces to join and aid in establishing same."⁷⁶ Violet McNaughton, President of the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association attended the 1918 convention in Manitoba to bring greetings to the farm women. She delivered an inspiring speech entitled the "Open Door," and congratulated Manitoba farm women on the founding of their semi-autonomous women's organization. The minutes of that meeting reflect the enthusiasm with which her address was received. She believed that "the farmers' movement, through thorough organization, was the open door to possibilities along every line for the farm man and the farm woman...and urged on all the necessity of farm women belonging to the organized farmers' movement."⁷⁷ The women agreed to form a committee with representation from each of the three prairie provinces and Ontario to draft a constitution for an inter-provincial council of farm women.

The following year, in January 1919, the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association invited the leaders of the United Farm Women of Alberta, the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, and the United Farm Women of Ontario to the

⁷⁵ AOM, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7579/3, UFM Convention Minutes, 1926.

⁷⁶ P7578/12, "Annual Convention Women's Section," 1918, 84.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

UFWM annual convention in Brandon.⁷⁸ These representatives addressed the opening session of the Convention and gave their report. They recommended that an Inter-Provincial Council of Farm Women be formed with two representatives from each of the four provinces with the following officers: Violet McNaughton, from the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, President; Irene Parlby from the United Farm Women of Alberta, Vice-President; and Mabel Finch, Provincial Secretary of the UFWM, Secretary. The minutes of the January 1919 convention record that a constitution for the new Inter-Provincial Council was presented and approved at that convention. The minutes also indicate that the United Farm Women lost no time to formalize a link with the Canadian Council of Agriculture, a national farmers' organization that had formed in 1909. The following recommendation was introduced at the 1919 convention of the Women's Section of the MGGA for approval of that body, and would then be forwarded to the Canadian Council of Agriculture if adopted at all upcoming provincial conventions in the three other provinces. The recommendation read as follows:

Whereas the interest and work of the organized farm women are now nation wide and are steadily growing in national importance,

And whereas we believe that this work can now best be furthered by organizing along national lines,

And whereas we believe further that the closest possible affiliation with the farmers' national organization, the Canadian Council of Agriculture, is in the best interest of the whole farmers' movement and the nation of which we form a part, we recommend:

First, that a Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture be formed

Second, that the Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture be composed of one representative from the executives of each of the following organizations: United Farm Women of Ontario, the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, and the United Farm Women of Alberta, and one representative from the Grain Growers' Guide.

⁷⁸ AOM, P7578/13, MGGA Annual Convention Minutes, January 8, 9, and 10, 1919, Year Book, p. 67.

Third, that the Women's section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture may meet in joint session with the Canadian Council of Agriculture for the conduct of such business as may be considered to be of common interest, and that members of the Women's Section shall at such joint sessions be accorded all the rights and privileges of members of the CCA.

Fourth, that necessary travelling expenses of the members of the Women's Section, when attending meetings of the Women's Section or of the CCA, shall be paid by the CCA.⁷⁹

The recommendation, put in the form of a motion, was moved by Mrs. Robinson and seconded by Mrs. Bennett and was adopted. Within months this Council had gained official membership on the Canadian Council of Agriculture (CCA), previously an exclusively male organization.⁸⁰ The activities of the newly formed Inter-Provincial Council can be traced in the UFWM President's Address to the 1920 UFWM convention. Janet Wood reported that the Council held its first meeting in Brandon in late January of 1919 and met again three times during that year in conjunction with the CCA. At the July 1919 meeting the constitution of that organization was amended to allow for one representative from each of the four provincial women's associations. In April of 1919, seven standing committees of the Inter-Provincial Council of Farm Women, soon to be called the Women's Section of the CCA, were formed, including Immigration, Public Health, Social Service, Young People, Marketing, Publicity, and Property Laws for Women.⁸¹ A 1922 article in the *Grain Grower's Guide* entitled, "Farm Women United Nationally," reviews the history of the formation of organized farm women at the national level and lists the name of the convenor for each of the standing committees, noting that each female member of the Inter-Provincial Council is also a Convenor of one of the standing committees who is in direct liaison with the provincial standing committee convenors and dependent on the provincial committees

⁷⁹ AOM, P7578/13, Minutes of the Women's Section, 1919, Hand Book, 67.

⁸⁰ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 368. Historian Gerald Friesen describes the Canadian Council of Agriculture (CCA), established in 1909, as "a national institution in which farmers could lament the continued evil of the tariff and warn of the dangers of rural depopulation." The CCA was an effective and highly respected vehicle in agricultural circles that brought together United Farmers from across the Dominion and helped to provide farmers with a distinct occupational identity, or, as some might argue, a class identity, as Friesen notes.

⁸¹ AOM, 7578/14, "The President's Address," 1920 Convention Handbook, 81.

for information on provincial matters.⁸² This is reinforced in the 1921 report of the UFWM Board of Directors. It states, “Recognizing the limited time at the disposal of farm women for the study of rural problems, the (UFWM) Board appointed committees to undertake research work and gather information...The committees were appointed synonymously with those of the Women’s Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, as it was felt that in this way the interprovincial and provincial work could be co-related and strength gained in the unification of activities and advancement of all mutual aims.”⁸³

The sophistication of this organizational framework and the care taken to coordinate activity at every level of the farm women’s organizations in each province is nothing short of remarkable. The intent was to ensure a national voice for organized farm women and to operate in a co-operative and inclusive way that would strengthen each provincial and local chapter of the organization. The *Grain Growers’ Guide* reported, “One very strong factor in building up the farm women’s organizations throughout the various provinces has been the linking up of their forces through the Canadian Council of Agriculture. Working quietly and unostentatiously the Women’s Section of the CAA has given impetus, direction and weight to the work of the provincial organizations...the organized farm women now have a medium to express themselves locally, provincially, nationally.”⁸⁴

The UFWM Rural Surveys

It is important to place the volume of work that the majority of the UFWM members did at all levels of the organization against the backdrop of the heavy physical demands of their daily work on the farm. In 1919, the Women’s Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association passed

⁸² AOM, P7568/5, UFM Reports, Papers and Addresses, 1922, “Farm Women United Nationally,” in the *Grain Growers’ Guide*.

⁸³ AOM, P7578/15, Year Book, 1921, “UFWM Board of Directors’ Report,” 75–76.

⁸⁴ AOM, P7568/5, “Farm Women United Nationally,” *Grain Growers’ Guide*, 12, 23.

a motion at the Provincial convention asking the Inter-Provincial Council of Farm Women to study the alleviation of the over-work of farm women.⁸⁵ No records were found confirming that the Inter-Provincial Council was able to follow up on this request, but we do know that the following year, in the fall of 1920, Martha Elliott, Vice-President of the UFWM from 1921 to 1923 and President from 1923 to 1924, decided to conduct the first of three rural surveys to gather information about farm women's working conditions. The 1920 survey was conducted to assist the UFWM in gathering information for their presentation before the Tariff Commission hearings in Brandon on October 13, 1920.⁸⁶ Elliott begins her brief to the Commission in this way. "In presenting my paper putting forth claims for the redress of Tariff oppressions for an oppressed people, the agriculturalists, I make no apologies. All my statements are facts gleaned from actual resident-toiling agriculturalists, men and women." She goes on to describe her methodology. Taking her home on a farm near Cardale, Manitoba as a centre point, she called three separate meetings with approximately 16 women to the east, 16 to the west, and 16 to the north of her home for a total of 48 women. She asked the same questions to each group including the material used in the construction of their home, how the home was heated and lit, whether there was water in the kitchen or plumbing of any kind in the house, what labour-saving devices they had in their home, whether they took a vacation and if so how often, whether they had hired help in the home or children who could assist with chores. The women were asked what their daily routine involved in summer and winter and the number of hours they normally worked daily, weekly and seasonally, what education levels had been attained by their children, the clothing requirements for family, satisfaction with farm life, knowledge of people who were forced to leave the occupation of farming, and impacts of the protective tariff. Elliott also interviewed returned soldiers, a doctor, a banker and several merchants.

The results of this first survey were disturbing but confirmed what most farm women already knew about their strenuous and unrelenting physical workload. Thirty-nine of the 48 people

⁸⁵ AOM, P7578/13, Minutes of the Women's Section, 1919.

⁸⁶ AOM, P7568/3, Mrs. James Elliott's report on the first UFWM survey, 1920, 1-5.

(70%) completing the survey had homes heated by wood stoves and 45 of the 48 (or 93.75%) used oil lamps for light. Not one home had water in the kitchen, hot or cold. Not one had a bath. Only 7 homes or 15% of respondents had an indoor winter toilet. The hauling of wood and water was almost exclusively women's responsibility. All 48 homes reported having a sewing machine to make all the family's clothing. The only other labour saving devices were eggbeaters, dust and floor mops, and 21 homes didn't have these. In terms of women's workload, 100% of those interviewed were responsible for the washing, sewing, bread-baking, caring for a large garden, and raising poultry. 81% milked cows, many helped in the fields in harvest. None of the women had ever taken a carefree vacation or any vacation at all, with the exception of being in hospital to recover from an illness. Many had lived on the farm between 10 and 45 years. Almost all the respondents reported that they were unable to clothe their adult children with the high cost of fabric due to the tariff. Many adult children were forced to take jobs on other farms or in the city to pay their own way. A number of women reported that these adult children sent back their worn clothing and shoes so the mother could utilize the material to make clothing for the younger children. Only 4 of the 48 or 8% of the respondents could afford any hired help in the home. Regarding work schedules, the majority of women started their workday at 5 a.m. in the summer and 6 a.m. in the winter and ended their workday between 9 and 10 p.m. winter and summer. As Elliott sardonically comments, "The retiring hours of country women do not indicate an 8-hour day."⁸⁷ In answer to the question as to whether they would leave the farm if they could, 100% responded that they would choose to leave if they had employable skills.

Martha Elliott presented a strong case for the urgency to remove or lessen the negative and life-threatening impacts of the protective tariff on rural people. For example, woollen items such as sweaters, mittens, socks, blankets, critical to the health of children and families in Manitoba's severe winter climate, were no longer within reach of the majority of rural people due to the tariff. Mrs. Elliott reminds the tariff commissioners, "woollens that were obtainable at fifty and

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2.

sixty cents in 1914 are now \$3.00 and few come in at that price. The brutality of it all is that manufacturers realize the labouring people, which includes farmers, cannot pay the price, hence ...very few warm woollen articles are secured by our country stores.”⁸⁸ One of the merchants she spoke to confirmed that they stopped ordering woollens for children or woollen blankets because they were too expensive to handle with an imposed tariff of 35%.

A local rural doctor who was interviewed by Elliott spoke of the health implications for children and the elderly whose immune systems were continually stressed by extreme and relentless cold temperatures, exposing them to lung disease and other infections. He added that farm women get so little rest that this makes both their children and themselves vulnerable to disease. Elliott goes on in her report to point out the contradiction of governments handing out advice on how to keep children and families healthy while refusing to lift the tax on items that will prevent illness. As she states, the government gives us “yards of instruction as to the care of the young, how to be healthy, old age hints. Who can see justification in such absurdities and injustices?”⁸⁹

Due to the alarming conditions highlighted in this 1920 report to the Tariff Commission, the UFWM Convention voted to conduct a second, more extensive survey the following year. The first report had been picked up by the *Globe* and the *Star* in Toronto and was generating a great deal of public interest. As Janet Wood, President of the UFWM, reported at the 1921 Convention, “(our report to the Tariff Commission) was particularly well prepared, and it must have been convincing when prominent papers such as *The Globe* and *Toronto Star* commented favourably on it.”⁹⁰ The results of the second survey are available in a document entitled, “Report on Rural Survey,” authored by Martha Elliott.⁹¹ She begins by emphasizing the importance of the Canadian farming community gathering its own statistics to strengthen the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ AOM, P7578/15, UFWM President’s Report for 1920 (delivered at Convention in January 1921), 72.

⁹¹ AOM, P7568/4, Report for the Year 1921, “Report on Rural Survey” (delivered January 1922), 1–3.

argument for needed social and economic change, and not relying solely on the United States for their data. Elliott had obviously been studying survey methodology because in 1921, the UFWM drafted actual survey forms that all members of the UFWM were asked to complete and return to Central office. She was disappointed with the response. Although the total number of forms distributed is not mentioned, she states, “out of all the forms sent out, 225 home surveys were reported.”⁹² This broader survey included many of the same questions as the first, and revealed very similar outcomes. The categories where some improvement was seen included home heating by furnace (up by approximately 12%), water in the kitchen, up by approximately 27%, but for all but 18% of the respondents, water in the home was only available in the summer. This survey asked about electricity or sources available to operate labour saving devices. Close to 70% reported no source of power at all, while 1.3% had access to a power washing machine. Regarding domestic help, 83% said they had none and couldn’t afford it even if it was available. When asked the number of days that they were not able to work due to illness, the overwhelming answer was “None.” Women couldn’t afford to be sick. Asked about the quality of education, the majority expressed concern, calling rural education a “second-class standing.” While there was no mention of the distance to a hospital, the nearest doctor was an average of 6 and one-half miles away. In response to the availability of libraries, most women answered that no library services were available. Finally, in answer to the question as to the number of newspapers and magazines that came into the home, two respondents indicated none, 3 indicated 1, and the remainder responses were between 2 and 17. Elliott describes this as “an indication of the fact that many of our people take a keen interest in current affairs and (this) speaks well for the future.”⁹³ The report ends with a sincere plea to the members of the UFWM to take part in an expanded “Rural Survey” with improved forms and more complete details in the coming year.⁹⁴

⁹² Ibid., 1.

⁹³ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁴ AOM, P7578/16, “United Farm Women of Manitoba Minutes of 1922 Convention.” The minutes state, on page 1, that Mrs. Elliott’s 1921 Rural Survey report was presented, following which the Convention voted that a more extensive survey be made during the ensuing year. See also P7578/16, 1922.

The third and final UFWM survey, also conducted and coordinated by Martha Elliott, was distributed to all UFWM members in 1922. A circular letter from Mabel Finch, Provincial Secretary, addressed to “All UFWM Workers” and dated June 14, 1922 was sent to “Secretaries of the Women’s Sections and Convenors of Women’s Committees in Mixed Locals.”⁹⁵ This was a special appeal to all UFWM members urging them to take part in the survey so that accurate information could be gathered regarding farm women’s labour and working conditions. The memo states that the survey would be asking specific questions that might seem trivial, but that only full participation and careful response to each question would assist the movement to gather the data needed to get a true reading of their situation. This would then lead to solutions to improve the strength, happiness, health and contentment of farm women. The memo promises that the strictest confidentiality of names and addresses would be maintained, and assures members that the answers would not disclose the identity of any respondent but would be used solely for statistical analysis. It goes on to suggest a number of ways that Women’s Sections and Mixed Locals could work together to ensure that all members complete a form and it requests that all forms be returned to Central Office by August 1, 1922.

In January 1923, Martha Elliott’s full report of the UFWM 1922 Rural Survey was presented at the provincial convention and is preserved in the archives.⁹⁶ She begins by reminding the Convention of the primary reason the three surveys were undertaken. It was to try to get to the bottom of the oppression of farm women due to the exceptionally heavy workload that had been driving women to an early grave. There is a tone of disappointment in her opening remarks. She states her regret that the response to the survey was much less enthusiastic and comprehensive than anticipated. They had hoped for 1,000 responses to the 1922 survey, but only received 307

⁹⁵ AOM, P7568/5, Official Circular no. 4.

⁹⁶ AOM, P7584/4, “United Farm Women of Manitoba Rural Survey”; and P7568/6, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, “Review Rural Conditions for Farm Women: Splendid Symposium Presented to Annual Convention of U.F.W. Today,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, n.d. (but from the Tuesday daily), 1923. Except for the deletion of the opening and closing paragraphs that appeared in the UFWM files, these two reports are identical. Martha Elliott delivered her report on Tuesday, January 9.

completed surveys in time to be included in her report. Elliott comments on the reticence of UFWM members to share personal information, and how this impeded the outcome by preventing the gathering of information from a much larger sample of farm women's working conditions. This is reiterated in her President's Address at the same Convention. Here she states that "No more effective work was put on by the farm women than the Rural Survey...Every province in the Dominion is interested in it." Letters of inquiry came from Vancouver, the United States and New Zealand, and Great Britain.⁹⁷ What Martha Elliott found shocking and deeply disappointing was "the antipathy shown by many of our women to the survey even after a continuance of the work being voted by the last Convention. Without the active cooperation of all our women it does not recompense us for the time and expense of preparing the survey."⁹⁸

Notwithstanding Martha Elliott's disappointment with the response of her colleagues, the Survey Report is an impressive document that confirms the dire state of farm women's workload. It indicates that 176 out of 307 respondents or over half of the farm homes reported having no water system in the kitchen. These results indicated some improvement over the previous smaller surveys, but Elliott supplements these statistics with results of a 1922 contest in the *Grain Growers' Guide*, asking women, "Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Farmer?" She states that the most frequently mentioned problem facing farm women in the responses to the *Guide's* contest was the lack of a convenient water supply. She goes on to say that a prominent engineer recently made a careful study of the water supply situation on Canadian farms and concluded that farm women lift a ton of water a day in their routine duties. In her report, she urges women to gather information on available labour-saving systems at different price points and suggests that if they missed the splendid light and water power display at the Brandon summer fair last year they could get the information through the government's extension service or scour the *Grain Growers' Guide* or other farm papers for affordable options. The survey also revealed that

⁹⁷ AOM, P7568/6, United Farm Women of Manitoba, "UFWM President's Address" to the 1923 Annual Convention, 4.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

only 37 of the 306 or 12 % of respondents reported having a bath, and Elliott suggests that this could be part of the reason why the health conditions of rural residents are among the lowest in the province.

Her report goes on to say that the survey revealed some farm homes located as far as 20 miles from a doctor and 120 miles from a hospital, and urges farm women to press the government for more public health nurses and doctors in rural communities. Other results were as follows: only 5% of respondents reported having domestic help all year round; the majority of women did their own canning of fruit and vegetables; only 25% of respondents reported having power but only for a washing machine and only 1.6% had any other labour-saving devices such as gas or electric irons, bread mixers, vacuums; the homes of over 66% of respondents reported having wood stoves for heating with all the attendant heavy work of hauling in wood, carrying out ashes, and getting up at all hours through the night in winter to maintain warmth in the home; almost 80% of farm women reported using coal oil lamps which require constant cleaning and refilling; the majority of women, 292 or 95%, reported doing all the sewing for the entire family, 50% reported being responsible for part or all of the milking, 45% tended large gardens. The majority of women listed the tasks of washing, ironing, and mending all the family's clothing, bedding and linens, preparing all the food for the family, including a hired man and huge threshing gangs at harvest time, and being the primary if not sole care-giver for the children. At this point in her report, Martha Elliott asks if anyone could dispute that the farm woman is not the greatest asset on the farm? She urges that everything possible be done to prolong and protect farm women's life and health.

One thing that would help women's physical and mental health, Martha Elliott suggests, is to have a holiday at least once a year and to be able to socialize with others. 35% of the women surveyed reported never having taken a holiday. The majority reported having no income of their own despite contributing significantly to the family income, either through the direct sale of eggs, milk, butter, cheese, vegetables, etc., through direct contribution to farm labour especially

at harvest or seeding time or in managing the financial records of the farm year-round. Farm women's domestic labour saved large amounts of cash that the family would otherwise have to expend on domestic help or on items such as store-bought clothing, woollens, blankets, food. Although 80% of respondents reported having a vehicle on the farm, only 23% of women could operate the vehicle. This, in Martha Elliott's opinion, contributed to women's sense of isolation and prevented them from being able to socialize with others, or to run necessary errands especially during the very busy times of seeding and harvest when supplies or parts for machinery were needed.

There are a number of statistics that point to the relative class privilege of the majority of UFWM members. The size of the average home as revealed in the responses was 7 rooms and the average number of children still living at home was three. A total of 259 homes or 84% had at least one musical instrument, most often a piano or organ, and the number of papers and magazines in homes of respondents ranged from between 1 and 17. Out of the 307 farm women who responded to the survey, 85% lived on farms that were 360 acres or more, and 88% of the farms were owned, not rented. Historian Mary Kinnear, who in 1988 published a paper on the UFWM Rural Survey, examined the survey data and compared it with 1921 census material. Without exception, in areas relating to the size of home, the size of farm acreage, and the percentage of those who owned their home or land as opposed to renting, UFWM respondents were above average in rural Manitoba. As Kinnear states, "These UFWM respondents came from the more prosperous parts of the farm population...(they) were underrepresented in the east, southeast and northern areas of Manitoba, the poorer and more recently settled parts... and overrepresented in the western and south-western areas, those more prosperous places of longer settlement with Ontario-origin communities."⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Kinnear, "Do You Want," 143.

The report also addresses issues of gender. It notes that a total of 88% of the farms were owned, but not by UFWM members. Although Elliott doesn't specifically raise the issue of gender inequity in land ownership, national policy made it next to impossible for single or married women to qualify for a free homestead under federal homestead law, for farm women to have ownership of the land upon their husband's death, for women to have equal say in the sale or disposition of land they worked to purchase, for widows to qualify for a homestead unless they had dependent children, or for women who farmed all their lives with their husband to get a share of the estate when the husband died.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, Elliott's report is filled with gender-related observations. When describing the lack of water in farm homes, she expressed her exasperation that solutions to these problems were available at affordable rates, but states, "it is not simply the lack of money that has bereft farm houses of comfort; it is the lack of the "will to do" and "the care for others."¹⁰¹ At another point in the same report she comments, "If women were allowed the sale price of the half-worn, discarded, and need-never-have-been-bought machinery on the ordinary farm, she would be able to install a convenient water system in the house, which would tend to preserve her own strength and the health of not only herself but the whole family."¹⁰² Further on in the report, Elliott mentions that cellars are to be found in the most humble homes, and she mentions that she would be ready to offer praise to the man who had the foresight to build a cellar for food and general storage, were it not that they are most often poorly ventilated and built without stairs, so women have to drop a chair down and strain themselves up many times a day. The implication is that with a little more thought for women, many of these problems could be alleviated. Another issue was women's lack of spending money of their own. She makes the point that it's fine to think about ways women can earn money through special projects like raising calves or poultry or through bee-keeping, but what is much more important is male "recognition of the principle of women's labour on the farm being as

¹⁰⁰ See Margaret E. McCallum, "Prairie Women and the Struggle for a Dower Law, 1905–1920," in Kubik and Marchildon, eds., *Women's History: History of the Prairie West Series*, 137–55.

¹⁰¹ AOM, P7568/6, Reports, Papers & Addresses, "Review Rural Conditions for Farm Women: Splendid Symposium Presented to Annual Convention of U.F.W. Today," 1923.

¹⁰² AOM, P7584/4, "United Farm Women of Manitoba: Rural Survey," 2.

great as man's labour, and that as the efforts of both go to make the home, so both should share in the monetary returns."¹⁰³ And finally, as she ends her report, there is no mistaking Martha Elliott's disdain for male farmers who seem oblivious to women's experience. She observes that it is often on the largest farms that the least number of labour-saving devices are in place for women. Often the purchasing of more land or machinery is a higher priority than expenditures on labour-saving devices or systems that would provide some relief for farm women and help to preserve their health. "Is it a craze to own large tracts of land, sometimes veritable weed patches? Would ... co-operation not be applied better if at least one-quarter section were sold and the proceeds spent in labour-saving devices (and) comforts for the home?"¹⁰⁴

Two historians have examined the 364 completed surveys that can be found in the UFWM records.¹⁰⁵ Sara Brooks Sundberg wrote a paper in 1986 based on her analysis of the 1922 questionnaires. It is entitled, "A Quantitative Examination of the Home Lives of Manitoba Farm Women in 1922."¹⁰⁶ This article was refined for inclusion under a new title, "A Female Frontier: Manitoba Farm Women in 1922," in the book *Women's History: History of the Prairie West Series*, published in 2015 and edited by Wendee Kubik and Gregory P. Marchildon.¹⁰⁷ As mentioned previously, the other historian to examine in detail the UFWM survey results was Mary Kinnear. For the purposes of this study, a comparison of the two historians' statistics with Martha Elliott's own report revealed some minor discrepancies due to the total number of surveys included in their respective analyses, but on the whole the results were very similar.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Ibid., 4–5.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁵ AOM, P7575/1–7. They are divided into individual files of fifty surveys each, for boxes 1–6, and sixty-four surveys in box 7. At the time of her report, the UFWM's central office had only received 307 completed surveys, so this was the number Martha Elliott used when compiling her 1922 report.

¹⁰⁶ Sara Brooks Sundberg, "A Quantitative Examination of the Home Lives of Manitoba Farm Women in 1922," paper prepared for the American Farm Women in Historical Perspective Conference, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin–Madison, October 18, 1986.

¹⁰⁷ Sara Brooks Sundberg, "A Female Frontier: Manitoba Farm Women in 1922," in Kubik and Marchildon, eds., *Women's History*, 245–65.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Martha Elliott had only received 307 surveys at the time of her report in 1923, but another fifty-seven were submitted later that year for a total of 364, all of which are available today in the archives. Mary Kinnear

All three women agree that the surveys, upon compilation and analysis of all the data, revealed that farm women's work was essential to the farm economy but that working conditions for farm women in 1922 had not advanced much beyond the conditions of Manitoba pioneer women in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. They also agreed that the mechanization to improve women's workload was available and relatively affordable in the 1920s in Manitoba but was not prioritized by farm families, especially in times of crop failure or economic downturns. The high tariffs on farm machinery and labour-saving devices for both the farm and the home were of constant concern, and both Kinnear and Sundberg would agree with Martha Elliott that her primary motivation for undertaking the UFWM survey was to draw attention to the negative impact of the high tariffs that UFWM leaders believed lay at the heart of the lack of labour-saving devices and the deleterious impact this had on the health and wellbeing of women in particular.

The tariff was not entirely to blame, however, in the eyes of farm women. There is evidence that even when there was a bumper crop, a rise in commodity prices, or an upturn in the economy, farm men often chose to invest first in new farm machinery or even in the purchase of additional land before investing in things that would ease the back-breaking work of women. Sundberg and Kinnear both pick up on Elliott's very pointed comments regarding the need for the reallocation of limited farm resources from the purchase of excess land or unnecessary farm machinery to things such as the purchase of a convenient water system for the home to preserve the strength and health of farm women.¹⁰⁹ Sundberg points to a 1986 article in *Prairie Forum* that confirms farmers' tendency to purchase more machinery than needed, and also highlights census data in this time period that reports a steep rise in the purchase of farm machinery and a comparatively low percentage of farm income spent on things such as gas lighting, water systems in the home

chose to work with all 364 surveys, but Sara Brooks Sundberg used only 330 for her calculations, having limited the number to those she considered to be complete surveys.

¹⁰⁹ Kinnear, "Do You Want," 150; Sundberg, "A Female Frontier," 254.

or conversion to furnaces for heating.¹¹⁰ While there is evidence that a real sense of partnership existed between farm women and men and that both women and men supported decisions to invest in things that would increase farm production, reduce the cost-price squeeze, and ease financial strain of the business they shared, it is impossible to ignore the extreme tension that existed in farm households as the extent of women's workload and its toll on their mental and physical health became more evident. With heavy involvement in their communities and beyond, in addition to their productive and reproductive roles, women were ready to voice their concerns and to negotiate a more equitable place in the farming partnership.

In addition to the quantitative source for her analysis of women's work on the farm in 1922, Kinnear also mined the *Grain Growers' Guide* for qualitative evidence of farm women's perceptions of their own lives. In her report, Martha Elliott had referred to an essay contest that the *Guide* advertised for all subscribers in March of 1922. It offered prizes for the best 12 letters that addressed the following question, "If you had a daughter of marriageable age, would you, in light of your experience as a farm woman, want her to marry a farmer and make her future life on the farm? If so, why? If not, why not."¹¹¹ The response to this contest was overwhelming with 440 entries, and according to the editors of the *Guide*, the largest number of Canadian farm women ever to express in their own words their opinion as to whether or not farm life was satisfying.¹¹² When the contest results were announced, 360 or 82% of the contestants had answered in the affirmative and 40 or 18% responded in the negative. Those writing in favour of farm life for their daughters cited the wholesome food, pure air, fit bodies, opportunities for women to earn their own money, and an overall sense of a cleaner, safer and morally superior

¹¹⁰ Sundberg, "A Female Frontier," 254. Sundberg draws on an article by R. Bruce Shepard: "Tractors and Combines in the Second Stage of Agricultural Mechanization on the Canadian Plains," *Prairie Forum* 2, no. 2 (1986): 258; as well as on *Census of Canada 1931, Vol. 5, Agriculture*, table 29, lxxiv. See also this comment by author and suffragist Nellie McClung: "The outside work on the farm is done by horse, steam or gasoline, but the indoor work is all done by woman-power." Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These: The Rise of Feminism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 114.

¹¹¹ *Grain Growers' Guide*, March 1922; Kinnear, "Do You Want," 147.

¹¹² *Grain Growers' Guide*, June 14, 1922. See also Kinnear, "Do You Want," 148.

lifestyle. Many contestants felt that it was a good environment in which to raise children. Those answering in the negative spoke of the relentless workload, the lack of sanitation, lack of access to health care and in particular to medical support for women in childbirth, the isolation, monotony, lack of financial independence, lack of recreation or holidays, financial stress, and an inferior education system where children were at the mercy of young, inexperienced teachers. Some spoke of the precarious economic constraints as a “no win” situation with uncertain markets, a hopeless credit system, disproportionate freight rates, low commodity prices, and exorbitant tariffs on most of the items farmers had to purchase.¹¹³ In the end, the positive responses outweighed the negative, but evidence of the impact of this occupation and the toll that it took, especially on women, was laid bare.

In summary, the stories of three of the UFWM’s founding members that have been preserved in the archives, in combination with an examination of the UFWM’s extensive organizational work and the results of the farm surveys undertaken by one of their presidents, Martha Elliott, have provided valuable insight into the lives and work of Manitoba’s organized farm women in the early decades of the twentieth century. Common to the accounts of the three founding members is the profound sense of isolation they experienced prior to involvement in the organized farm movement, their keen intellect and passionate interest in current global, provincial and local issues, and the strong desire to meet with other like-minded women to participate directly in public discourse and decision-making. It is important to remember that these personal recollections were written in each woman’s own handwriting and signed using their first name, something that was never done in the formal records of the organization, a small but significant symbol of their liberation. Without these personal accounts, we would not have known the degree of resistance farm women faced from the male dominated United Farmers of Manitoba (UFM) to form their own semi-autonomous organization or to introduce and win a motion to gain the UFM’s support for suffrage for some women in Manitoba, even prior to the UFWM’s

¹¹³ *Grain Growers’ Guide*, June 14, 1922.

formal constitution. What is also remarkable is the speed with which these farm women were able to organize at the local, district, provincial and national levels. In less than a decade from the formation of the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association in 1918, Manitoba farm women had created a cohesive and comprehensive grassroots organization that was instrumental in the election of the Farmer's Party in the Manitoba legislature and created opportunities for women, young people and entire communities to research and debate pressing economic, political and social issues of the day and to affect change. They sustained this sophisticated cooperative organizational model for over a decade and their work served as a template for the organization of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) that would eventually lead to a viable third party in Canada. Driven by one of their primary goals of resisting the government's national policies that inequitably concentrated wealth and power in the hands of a privileged elite, the UFWM engaged directly in the fight for a just proportion of the wealth that farm women and men produced, fought for equal rights for women, and participated directly in the building of a cooperative society.

The other valuable primary source that has been examined in this chapter is the work of UFWM leader Martha Elliott who conducted three surveys of Manitoba farm women in 1920, 1921 and 1922. The results of the surveys provide an account of these women's material lives that would otherwise not be readily accessible. Women worked an average of 16 hours per day in conditions that had not advanced significantly beyond pioneer women's working conditions in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Much of the work was hard and relentless physical labour that led to an early death for many farm women. Although labour-saving devices were being invented and manufactured at this time, most farms prioritized the devices that would reduce men's heavy workload, perceived to be critical to the survival of the farm. What the survey revealed, however, was that women's work often saved the farm from bankruptcy, either through remuneration for their direct productive work raising farm animals, vegetables, bees, or gathering wild berries and fruit and selling the produce for cash, or the work done to save or minimize expenditures on store-bought clothing, food, or hired help, allowing more funds to be applied instead to

mortgage, machinery, seed, feed or property tax payments. Although the government's protective tariff added a huge burden of expense to both farm and household necessities, women realized that there was a gender inequity that had to be addressed. Women wanted recognition for the value of the work they did, and Martha Elliott made it clear in her reports that there were ways to lessen the heavy workload of women in recognition of their substantial contribution to the farm economy. She maintained that the installation of a simple water system for the home, for example, not just for the cattle in the barn, should be a top priority.

The farm surveys, when examined against the backdrop of the enormous output of UFWM members' in their organized farm movement, begin to paint a picture of the lives and identities of these farm women. Their awareness of the broader economic injustices, coupled with a growing awareness of gender inequities within their own households and farm organization propelled members of the UFWM to fight for change in both spheres. The surveys also reveal the relative class privilege of many UFWM members, with larger than average homes located in some of the most fertile areas of Manitoba close to markets, higher than average levels of education, proficiency in the English language, and access to politicians and decision-makers due to their British race and Protestant religion. In the next chapter, in addition to the critical analysis of settler colonialism, we will apply an intersectional analysis of gender, class, region, race, ethnicity, and religion to examine further the complicated identities of organized farm women in Manitoba and the systems and structures of power that expose social and political inequities and layers of privilege and discrimination.

Chapter 3

UFWM Members' Complex Identities

As revealed in the previous chapter, a close examination of the extensive files of the United Farm Women of Manitoba (UFWM), located in the Archives of Manitoba, has shed some light on the life, work, organization and identity of organized farm women in this province in the first decades of the twentieth century. A series of farm surveys conducted in the early 1920s by the UFWM revealed that the majority of their members lived on isolated farmsteads miles from neighbours or towns. Some farms were located as far as 20 miles from a doctor and 120 miles from a hospital. Women seldom left the farm. Male members of the household travelled to the nearest town or sometimes to the nearest city for supplies, food, repairs, mail, newspapers, or to settle accounts, attend conferences, or to socialize with other men. Although 80% of women reported having a vehicle on the farm, only 23% had learned how to drive. Due to the lack or sparsity medical services in rural areas, the majority of farm women delivered their babies on their own or with the help of a midwife, and too many lost their lives or their babies in the process. They gathered information about the outside world from the daily newspapers, weekly farm papers and magazines and connected with other women through the Women's Page of the farm papers or possibly once a week at the country church. When asked if they took a holiday now and again, the majority of women responded that they had never taken a holiday. Work was hard and relentless but most reported having no money of their own.

Well informed about the women's suffrage movement as well as the economic squeeze in which farmers found themselves due to the federal government's national policies, women were eager to become part of the organized farm movement. They longed to meet with other like-minded women, to create spaces in which women felt comfortable to learn, grow and express themselves. In 1918, Manitoba farm women created a semi-autonomous organization, the

Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association that changed its name to the United Farm Women of Manitoba (UFWM) in 1920. The enormous collective output of these women contributed to legislative changes that would improve women's lives, the lives of their children and of the agrarian class as a whole. Many worked to promote an alternative economic, social and political vision that would challenge the national policies of the two-party system in Canada, a system they understood to serve the interests of the wealthy few at the expense of those who laboured on the land and in the cities and those whose land was stolen.

Building on the insights of the previous two chapters we will now apply an intersectional analysis of gender, class, region, race, ethnicity and religion, along with the critical analysis of settler colonialism to examine the systems and structures of power that these organized Manitoba farm women experienced and the ways that these structures and women's responses to them helped shape their identity. To begin, we will explore the interlocking dynamics of gender and class.

Gender and Class Identity of UFWM

The examination of the UFWM organization and the material lives of its' members in the previous chapter revealed a distinct tension between gender and class identity. On the one hand, there is abundant evidence that points to a strong class identity in which the economic discrimination of both women and men seems to eclipse the sexual exploitation felt by women. As we have seen, organized farm women in Manitoba were acutely aware of the political and economic oppression prairie farmers experienced as a class due to national policies including the tariff, and in large part it was this awareness that motivated women to organize.¹ They believed the lack of labour-saving devices in the home, which perpetuated back-breaking work for

¹ *Grain Growers' Guide* referendum report, 1914, referenced in Carol Bacchi, "Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage," in Kealey, ed. *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, 101. Also see Mrs. James Elliott's speeches regarding political motivation of the Women's Section of the MGGA.

women, was due in large part to the prohibitive imposition of the protective tariff. In her article “Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage,” historian Carol Lee Bacchi argues that farm women “felt no more oppressed than their husbands, with whom they faced a common oppressor, the Eastern interests.”² She refers to the President of the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA), Irene Parlby, who believed that “tariffs, not men, were the villains and the real reason why farm women were overworked or grew old before their time.”³ This sentiment was not absent among members of the UFWM. They saw themselves as participants with their husbands in a way of life that was threatened by government national policies favouring Eastern interests that required both women and men to pull together. Farm women shared a profound sense of regional alienation from the politicians and corporate elite in eastern Canada who they felt had no real knowledge of or interest in the conditions and challenges faced by western farm families. On the other hand, however, there is significant evidence that Manitoba farm women chafed against the oppression of male domination and patriarchy on which the agricultural sector was constructed. They were not hesitant to point out the ways in which women’s labour was undervalued, their workload minimized, their health compromised, their economic independence denied, controlled or constrained, and their autonomy curtailed. As historian Veronica Strong-Boag suggests in her article, “Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load,” farm women during the interwar years not so much worked in double harness as carried a double load. Not only were women solely responsible for the production and maintenance of food and clothing for the entire family that involved the strenuous work of hauling water and wood in, ashes and grey water out, the ongoing care of many children in sickness and health, and the endless tasks of running the home, they were also responsible for maintaining and harvesting huge gardens, raising poultry and livestock, and processing and marketing farm products such as eggs, butter, milk, cream, cheese. In addition, they were available to help in the fields during seeding and harvest and often managed the farm financial records. We know that women’s labour was essential to the farm economy and yet it

² Bacchi, “Divided Allegiances,” 103.

³ Ibid.

was largely unrecognized and unremunerated. The feminism of UFWM members was rooted both in the political awareness and activism of the agrarian class they shared with farm men and also in an awareness of the inequities they faced as women and in a strong sense of same-sex identification.⁴

Further complicating an understanding of farm women's identities in this historical period is the tension between what has been defined by historians of first-wave feminism as equal rights feminism and maternal feminism. Equal rights feminism can be identified by women's resistance to the limitations of 'traditional' constructed male and female gender roles and their desire to take their rightful place in the public and political sphere. Maternal feminism rationalizes women's expanding role outside the home by accepting the 'traditional' private/public dichotomy of separate gender roles for women and men, with women primarily confined to the private sphere or assuming responsibility for issues or tasks seen to be within women's realm such as caring for children and the home. Maternal feminism has also been linked to an assumption of women's moral superiority and purity. An examination of the lives, work and attitudes of UFWM members reveals both of these expressions of feminism.

In the earlier historiography of this period, there was a tendency to polarize these two streams of feminism and to assume that maternal feminism was inherently less radical because it maintained the patriarchal construction of distinct gender roles for women and men that trapped women in the private or domestic sphere. The examination of the UFWM, however, not only unpacks evidence of both maternal and equal rights feminism, but also reveals that they often worked in tandem, as women learned how to fight for equal rights in the language of maternal feminism in order to be heard by both men and women. As historian Catherine Cavanaugh insightfully states,

⁴ Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21, no. 3 (1986): 32-52.

maternal feminism was for many “both the point of oppression and the point of departure.”⁵ Strong-Boag has also challenged us to avoid the binaries of political/apolitical and public/private and to recognize the politics at play within the private sphere. Strong-Boag disagrees with Bacchi that farm women felt no more oppressed than their husbands. She argues that while these class and regional loyalties were strong and present, farm women’s passionate involvement in suffrage, property rights, temperance, dower legislation and divorce law reform, as well as their demands to have their domestic and productive labour recognized and remunerated is an expression of equal rights feminism.⁶ Historian Joan Wallach Scott is also critical of the maternal vs. equal rights dichotomy. She has stated that these binary categories need to be deconstructed and the differences held in tension, not set in opposition.⁷ Historian Janice I. Newton also rejects the assumption that maternal feminism is inherently non-radical. She argues that many feminist women accepted maternal feminism and turned it to radical ends, making the home a site for radical social democratic transformation to enhance women’s autonomy.⁸

From the earliest years of the Women’s Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Association there is evidence that these farm women were expressing both equal rights and maternal feminism and it is important not to categorize these as opposing dualities. As with any paradigm shift throughout history, change happens over time and what we seem to be witnessing here is the gradual emergence of a new female identity. Women were straining against the patriarchal gender roles that no longer defined who they were. They often chose to utilize the outworn but familiar and less threatening language of their domestic, maternal role to forge a new identity.

⁵ Catherine Cavanaugh, “The Limitations of the Pioneering Partnership: The Alberta Campaign for Homestead Dower, 1900–25,” *Canadian Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (1993): 198–225.

⁶ Strong-Boag, “Pulling in Double Harness,” 34–35.

⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, “Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: or, The Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism,” in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsh and Evelyn Fox Keller, 134–48 (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 1990).

⁸ Janice Newton, *The Feminist Challenge to the Canadian Left, 1900–1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 10. See also McCallum, “Prairie Women,” 138, in which the author relates Gail Cuthbert Grant’s argument that “neither individuals or movements are usefully labeled as one or the other,” a reference to women reformers in this period who used both maternal feminist and equal rights rhetoric to further their cause.

For example, when President Alice Tooth spoke on the floor of the Provincial convention in 1918 to a mixed gender crowd regarding the need for women to be elected as school trustees, she used the rationale of women's maternal role rather than the need for gender equity in the political process. She states, "Women are needed as school trustees. To whom can we look for the ideal surroundings at the country school if not to the mothers of our children...we need organized effort to obtain laws that will enable us to raise healthy children under sanitary conditions...for the prevention of infectious diseases thereby conserving child life."⁹ A similar sentiment is expressed in a UFWM motion at the 1917 Provincial convention, "Whereas there is much lack of interest on the part of many rural school boards respecting sanitary and moral conditions, therefore be it resolved that one woman should be on every rural school board."¹⁰ This notion of women's involvement in the public sphere was often linked to the rationale that women embodied an innate ability to improve the purity of both physical and moral conditions, from the prevention of infectious diseases to the purification of the political process itself. For example, in President Janet Wood's address to the 1921 Provincial convention she speaks of UFWM members' involvement in both the recent federal election and in the prohibition referendum, and comments that "the presence of women at the polls seemed to have a steadying effect to such an extent that it would be almost impossible to have a repetition of the impurities of the system of conducting past elections."¹¹

In a 1918 UFWM document entitled "The New Outlook," we can literally see the use of the language of maternal feminism used as a 'jumping off' point for wider public engagement. It begins with a reference to women's past contributions to pioneer life, stating that women's "presence and inspiration has meant much for the maintenance of social purity and for the establishment of the home as one of the basic institutions." But just a few paragraphs later it

⁹ Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AOM), P7578/1, "Mrs. Tooth's Address," UFWM Convention Year Book, 1918, 78.

¹⁰ AOM, P7578/11, Minutes of the 1917 Annual Convention, 61.

¹¹ AOM, P7578/15, UFWM President's Address, 1921.

states that now that the Women's Section of the MGGA is entrenched and women have the elective franchise, "there must be of necessity a larger place and a greater responsibility for the women of the Province...and we should set ourselves with...the development and expansion of the life amid which we move in order that the people who live and labour on the land may take a larger and worthier place in the life of the nation."¹² In an address by UFWM President Martha Elliott delivered at the 1923 Provincial Convention, she calls on women, as mothers and citizens to "uphold... the high standards of clean living and right thinking," to do God's will to abolish the use of alcoholic beverages and "elevate the moral and intellectual plane of their communities." Later in the same speech, referring to women's outstanding role in the 1922 election campaign, she states, "women took an active interest in the campaign...thereby showing once more women's interests need not be held in one groove, her personality in one channel, her emotions to one end, her genius to only one achievement, namely motherhood and home, as so many people are want to consider women's realm."¹³

Holding these dualities of equal rights and maternal feminism in dynamic tension, knowing that both were part of these women's reality and identity, let's move on to an examination of the many equal rights issues in which the organized farm women of Manitoba passionately engaged including women's suffrage, women's homestead rights, the Dower Law, divorce legislation, child custody rights and temperance. Without removing our intersectional lenses, we will then go on to examine, using the scholarship of settler colonialism, the ways in which UFWM members' race and religion further complicated their class and gender identity, their relationship with those of non-British origin, and with Indigenous communities whose land had been stolen to make way for the coming of white, Anglo-Saxon settlers.

¹² AOM, P7578/12, 1918 Program of the Annual Convention, Women's Section of the MGGA, "The New Outlook," 77.

¹³ AOM, P7568/6, UFM Reports, Papers, and Addresses, UFWM President's Address to the 1923 Annual Convention.

Women's Suffrage

On January 28, 1916, Manitoba became the first province in Canada to approve suffrage at least for some women. Women had been members of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association (MGGA) on somewhat equal terms with men since 1912 and some women had been attending the annual provincial conventions since that time, often meeting in separate session for at least a portion of the convention. We know that these organized farm women had worked long and hard to convince the male members of the MGGA to support women's suffrage because on January 7, 1916 they introduced a motion at the main convention indicating farm women's enthusiastic support for women's suffrage, asking "the whole convention to support the movement most heartily."¹⁴ Moved by Janet Wood and seconded by Mrs. Gee, the resolution stressed the urgency of passing this motion immediately so that farm women could cast their vote in the upcoming referendum on prohibition in March of 1917. The resolution passed unanimously.

Following the presentation of the motion, Mrs. W.H. English from Harding, Manitoba and Mrs. Gee from Virden both addressed the convention. Speaking about the passing of the vote on women's suffrage, Mrs. English states, "(The MGGA) ... is the first association of men to give

¹⁴ AOM, P7578/10, Minutes of the MGGA 1916 Convention, January 7, 1916. See also Mallory Allyson Richard, "Exploring the 'Thirteenth' Reason for Suffrage: Enfranchising 'Mothers of the British Race' on the Canadian Prairies," in Colpitts and Devine, eds., *Finding Directions West*, 111–31. Richard examines Canadian political debates on women's entitlement to vote (or to enjoy equal status within male-dominated organizations), comparing women to racial and ethnic minority groups and developing a hierarchy of privilege as determined by the dominant male elite. Anglo-Saxon married women were at one point to be excluded from the franchise along with Chinese Canadians, Indigenous Canadians, and Black Canadians. Men feared relinquishing their exclusive grip on power and were reluctant to approve the franchise for women or to give equal status to any woman. This is evident in the political debates highlighted in Richard's article and also in the reaction of some men in the UFM, as women fought for gender parity within the broader organization. It is important to note, however, that white, Anglo-Saxon women, who many referred to as the "Mothers of the Nation," were near the top of that hierarchy, and used the privilege of their race to win the vote for themselves to the exclusion of Asian and Indigenous women, who were not able to vote in Canada until 1948 and 1960 respectively.

help and promote the cause of women's rights, and we ... are proud to say so. We still want (men's) help to give us the place we think we are worthy of both in the home and the state. We have done our best to help them make the home and raise their children. Is it not right that they should help us to have better laws?" She continues on, "Is it not barbarous that any woman should have to fight for a legal right to parent her child...or that a man can give or sell the property he and his wife have worked together to secure and she has no voice in the disposal of it? Many of our farmers' wives have not a dollar they can call their own, and have to ask for it from their husbands. Do we get the chance to ask them where they spend their money or what they do with it? Do you not think it is time there was a law more equitable?"¹⁵ Mrs. Gee's address to the predominantly male delegates was equally as pointed. She identifies that she has been an active member of Manitoba's Political Equality League and has realized the importance of women taking a greater interest in the whole work of the state. "First the home, second the school, third the state, and we must not do one and leave the others undone." She goes on to say that men can help women by taking "a deeper interest in (the) upbringing of our boys and girls," and stresses the importance of farm women and men working together.¹⁶

These fiery speeches were delivered immediately following the successful suffrage vote at the MGGA convention prior to the province-wide vote on women's suffrage exactly three weeks later. Farm women were clear that the reason they wanted the vote was to help sway the plebiscite on prohibition, and also to get farm men's support to change laws that discriminated against women. We know the MGGA's positive stance on suffrage would have carried real weight in the provincial suffrage vote due to the organization's size, political influence and credibility. Catherine L. Cleverdon's book on the suffrage movement in Canada confirms the influence of the male-dominated MGGA. On a number of occasions she names both the MGGA

¹⁵ AOM, P7578/10, Convention Reports, 1916.

¹⁶ Ibid.

and the *Grain Growers' Guide* as supporters of suffrage in Manitoba.¹⁷ She also acknowledges earlier work on suffrage undertaken in Manitoba by the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council, the Icelandic Woman's Suffrage Association, and the YWCA. Her primary focus, however, is on the urban suffragists involved in the Political Equality League and the prominent role played by urban, middle class press women including Cora E. Hind, Lillian Beynon Thomas, Frances M. Beynon and author Nellie McClung.

Further research is required to determine more accurately the extent of the contribution of the Manitoba Grain Growers to the women's suffrage movement. What role did organized rural women play in bringing about the support of the male members of the MGGA? Was Mrs. Gee's affiliation with the Political Equality League an exception, or did these farm women work consistently and collaboratively across class lines with the Political Equality League's predominantly middle-class urban women? Cleverdon mentions that a Mrs. Richardson from Roaring River, Manitoba, was a member of the League's executive and assisted the League in organizing rural women.¹⁸ An article on women's suffrage published in 1996 by the Manitoba Historical Society provides evidence of collaboration between the Political Equality League in the Swan River area under Gertrude Richardson's leadership and the Women's Section of the MGGA who met together periodically in the schoolhouse for a business social.¹⁹ This same article records Gertrude and her mother collecting signatures for the Political Equality League at the annual Grain Growers' Guide picnic in Swan River just after Norris became Premier of Manitoba. Although Norris was elected with the support of the powerful suffrage movement, after elected he was hesitant to introduce legislation on woman's suffrage declaring that women

¹⁷ Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 61–62.

¹⁹ Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin, "'Give us our due!' How Manitoba Women Won the Vote," Manitoba Historical Society, *Manitoba History*, no. 32 (Autumn 1996): 17–18. Available at: http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/32/womenwonthevote.shtml.

would need to demonstrate that they really wanted the vote. This propelled the Women's Equality League into action to organize petitions throughout the province and it is quite likely that Gertrude Richardson was working diligently to that end in her rural community as First Vice President of the Manitoba Political Equality League. There is record of a Manitoba Grain Growers' Association local organization at Roaring River at this time. It is quite possible that Mrs. Richardson was also a member of the Women's Section of the MGGA. Although it is unclear as to the level of collaboration, it is clear that there was cooperation between the Political Equality League and organized farm women in some rural areas of Manitoba. What we also know for certain is that as early as 1914-15, farm women were organizing within their own farm organization for their right to vote in order to influence important legislation regarding women's rights and that in January 1916 they introduced a motion to the male-dominated MGGA convention resulting in that organization's unanimous and highly influential support for women's suffrage in Manitoba.

It is important to point out another interesting connection between middleclass suffragists and Manitoba agrarian women. We know that suffragists E. Cora Hind, Francis Marion Beynon, Lillian Beynon Thomas, Kenneth Haig and May Glendennan are specifically acknowledged in the recollections of the three founding members of the Women's Section of the MGGA for their part in assisting farm women in their initial formation. Once up and running, however, there is no further evidence of these women in the UFWM convention records with the exception of E. Cora Hind and Francis Beynon's rare appearances as guest speakers at the Women's Section conferences.²⁰ Organized farm women in Manitoba had no intention of relinquishing the leadership of the Women's Section to urban middle-class professionals. Without exception, members and leaders of the UFWM came from the ranks of farmwomen actively engaged in

²⁰ AOM, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7568/5, Reports and Papers, Recollections of Mrs. J. Bennett and Florence McGregor. See also P7578/12, MGGA Annual Convention Minutes 1918, Minutes of the Women's Section, 65-68. May Glendennan was listed as a guest speaker in 1918, and E. Cora Hind in 1938.

farm labour. This appears to have been the case in the farm women's movements in both Alberta and Saskatchewan.²¹

Both the Beynon sisters and E. Cora Hind, however, had unique connections with the organized farm women's movement in Manitoba through their work as journalists. Having been raised on Manitoba farms there was no doubt an added layer of trust. Cora was the agricultural editor for the Manitoba Free Press and was highly respected internationally as an accurate predictor of crop yields. In 1906, Lillian Beynon Thomas was hired as an assistant editor of a women's page for the Weekly Free Press and Prairie Farmer and her sister Francis was hired as the editor of the Women's Section of the *Grain Growers' Guide* in 1912, serving in this position until 1917. These three women were also leaders in the Political Equality League and the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Manitoba and it is quite likely that they served as a bridge between the middle and agrarian class women, often travelling throughout the province speaking to groups of farm women during the suffrage campaign and writing articles that farm women eagerly read. The 1996 Manitoba Historical Society article on the topic of suffrage referenced earlier contains a story that illustrates an important connection between urban press women and the UFWM. When the suffrage bill was finally ready to be presented to the Legislature in early January 1916, someone leaked information to Lillian Beynon Thomas that the bill as drafted had omitted women's right to sit in the legislature. Lillian went immediately to see the Attorney General who allowed her to review the draft with the understanding that she would keep the information confidential. Having confirmed that full rights would not be granted in the draft legislation, Beynon Thomas immediately notified all members of the Political Equality League to have them contact their MLA and ask if the right to sit in the legislature was included in the

²¹ Bacchi, "Divided Allegiances," 101. Bacchi provides evidence that in Saskatchewan, Francis Marion Beynon was invited to assist in the development of the Women's Section in 1913, and that other suffragists, including Nellie McClung, Lillian Beynon Thomas, and E. Cora Hind, attended the opening meeting. In Alberta, however, Miss Jean Reed, a former suffragist from Great Britain and a journalist by profession, assisted in the formation of the UFWA and became its first president. It would seem that in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, at least, the rural women assumed leadership positions from the very beginning.

forthcoming suffrage bill. Thomas' sister Francis was attending the UFWM convention in Brandon when she received the news. Francis let it be known that she would inform the entire Grain Growers' convention if this could not be turned around immediately to include the missing clause. George Chipman, editor of the Grain Growers' Guide and an ardent Liberal who was also in attendance at the UFM/UFWM convention, threatened the Premier that unless women were granted full rights, the farmers would withdraw their support for the Norris government. The Premier immediately capitulated and the Bill was passed as originally negotiated. This incident serves to illustrate not only a connection between the UFWM and some of the middleclass press women, but also the influence that the farm movement, and in particular the UFWM, had on the success of women's suffrage legislation in 1916.²²

Women's Homestead Rights

On January 11, 1918 an important resolution from the Women's Section of the MGGA was approved at the Provincial convention. Moved by Martha Elliot and seconded by Alice Tooth, the motion resolved that "free land be made available for women and that the conditions prevailing for men farmers in the obtaining of any loans to increase production be made to prevail for women farmers."²³ The stated rationale for this motion was that in light of the depleted world food supply that was threatening to bring about a world famine, and the government of Canada's appeal to farmers to increase production, women in Canada who were farming successfully needed to be given the same opportunities as men to homestead and to receive free land as well as to qualify for loans.

²² Gutkin and Gutkin, "Give us our due!", 19. See also Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement*, 63, in which the author relates the same story to demonstrate the influence of the agrarian movement in the province, then predominantly rural. As the source of this information, Cleverdon cites a letter dated April 21, 1944, given to her by Lillian Beynon Thomas.

²³ AOM, P7578/12, Resolution 8.

This motion is important for a number of reasons. As Sarah Carter has reminded us in her monograph *Imperial Plots*, Canada's 1872 Dominion Lands Act declared that homesteads were not available to First Nations people and that The Indian Act of 1876 specifically excluded all those defined as "Indian" from the right to homestead. Women were ultimately excluded from the right to homestead. In 1872, it was possible in Manitoba for single women and female heads of households who had reached the age of 21 and were British subjects to qualify for a homestead, but this was overturned for single and married women in 1876, departing significantly from land policies in the United States. After 1876 only widows who were the sole head of their family with at least one totally dependent child were allowed to file for the homestead grant. As Carter states, "All of these groups - women, Indigenous people, Europeans of non-British descent - were marginalized through a variety of political, material, and imaginative systems or 'structures of constraint' that perpetuated subordination and inferiority."²⁴

It is well documented that Frank Oliver, Laurier's Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, feared that the granting of homestead rights to women would make them "independent of marriage," and this would run counter to the national policy and the state's determination to impose a patriarchal model of monogamous, heterosexual, lifelong marriage on the people of the prairies.²⁵ In Carter's book, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, she speaks of the "marriage fortress," that was part of the national agenda, where family farms with a male head of household and a subordinate, devoted wife with children formed the economic unit that could only function with the unpaid labour of women and their offspring. It was believed by the proponents of this policy that this unit would ensure the perpetuation of the white, Anglo-Saxon

²⁴ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 15, 22.

²⁵ Ibid. See also Catherine Cavanaugh's confirmation that Oliver's public defence of government policy stated that work on the land was "men's work"; and that this was in the best interests of the West, since the object of granting homesteads was to make the land productive, and this would not be the case if homesteads were given to women. Cavanaugh learned that, in private, Oliver had shared with Cora Hind that "to admit women to the opportunities of the land grant would be to make them independent of marriage." Cavanaugh, "The Limitations," 205–06.

race while miscegenation or marriage ‘a la facon du pays’ would dilute the purity and superiority of the British race. According to this constructed reality, white women of British stock were not to toil as beasts in the fields but to toil out of view in the house and farmyard as the dependent and unpaid helpmate of their husband as they attended to their primary task of reproduction.²⁶

The motion of the Women’s Section calling for government to make land available for women to farm was therefore radical and provides us with another example of the ways in which organized farm women in Manitoba resisted the imposition of the government’s national policies and patriarchal constructs. In addition, implicit in this motion is resistance to the government’s use of an impending global famine as a rationale to steal more ‘vacant’ Indigenous lands in order to expand wheat production for a hungry world after the Great War. Farm women were not in favour of this, and as we will discuss later in this chapter, they challenged the government to take some of the thousands of acres of prime farmland given by the government to the CPR, rather than dishonouring the treaties with First Nations people.

The Fight for Dower Law

New Brunswick legal historian Margaret E. McCallum, defines dower as follows, “Dower is the right of a widow to an interest for her life in one-third of the real property owned by her husband at any time during the marriage...Effectively, the wife’s dower right meant that a husband had to have his wife’s consent to sell, mortgage or give away his property.”²⁷ This English law became part of the law of the Canadian Prairies when Manitoba first became a province in 1870 but was abolished by the Manitoba provincial government in 1885, ostensibly to simplify land transfers due to the Torrens system of land registration that saw dower as an encumbrance on land title. The government and the CPR feared that the Dower would place a check on western expansion

²⁶ Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 4.

²⁷ McCallum, “Prairie Women,” 139.

and disrupt their national development plan.²⁸ This left prairie women without any protection and meant that the land-owning male could sell, mortgage, gift or will the land that women had given their labour and lives to help develop and maintain without their consent. McCallum explains that prairie women began to organize in order to demand protective legislation and she maintains that this issue, along with demands for women's homestead rights, were among the primary motivators in women's fight for suffrage.²⁹ As indicated previously, Mrs. W.H. English's reference to the injustice of women's property rights in her 1916 speech to the MGGA convention just after support for the suffrage motion was obtained, demonstrates the UFWM's serious concerns about the disposition of land by farm men.

The Norris government swept to power in Manitoba in August of 1915 and in the first legislative session in January 1916 rights were extended to franchise some women and, as we have seen, to legislate women's right to run for political office at the provincial level and to sit as members in the provincial legislature. There was no action taken on women's property rights in Manitoba until 1918, however, when the government passed the Dower Act. McCallum states that despite its name, this legislation did not reinstate the common law right of dower. Rather it provided the wife with alternative rights in her husband's real and personal property. It meant that during the husband's lifetime, the wife's consent was required for any disposition of the property identified as the homestead and a widow was entitled to a life interest in her husband's homestead. Additionally, if a husband failed to provide adequately for his wife in his will, a widow could claim one-third of the value of his net real and personal estate.³⁰ While this was an improvement over women having no protection at all, McCallum reports that a lively debate continued among prairie farm women regarding amendments to the legislation that would work to ensure joint ownership of land that women had worked to secure and maintain.

²⁸ Cavanaugh, "The Limitations," 204.

²⁹ McCallum, "Prairie Women," 148.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

The UFWM Secretary's Report in 1920 confirms Manitoba farm women's continuing engagement in Dower and property rights for women. The report lists a fourfold work plan agreed upon by all UFWM locals to concentrate their activities for the coming year. Among them was "making a study of laws affecting women and children, with special attention to the dower law and wills."³¹ The minutes of the Women's Section that year report that on the afternoon of Tuesday, January 8, 1920, Mrs. John Dick presented the Dower Law to the gathered assembly, reading the Act clause by clause and reviewing the content. So thorough was the discussion that the time expired before the entire Act had been reviewed, and so engaged were the women in this issue that it was voted to continue the debate at the Thursday afternoon session. The specific questions under deliberation were whether or not wives should have an interest in all of the husband's property, both real and personal, instead of just the homestead; whether the wife should have a specified share in her husband's property (either 1/3 or 1/2) and the right to will it to her children; whether the wife should have personal notice served upon her regarding disposition of home or homestead, if living apart from her husband for any period of time; and how the full family could be protected. A motion followed, moved by Martha Elliot and seconded by Mrs. Grey, that the President appoint a committee to investigate the Dower Law and submit the results of their investigations to the Board of Directors later that month. This motion was approved, a committee was appointed and the afternoon session adjourned at 6 p.m.³²

We know that the UFWM worked cooperatively with the organized farm women of Alberta and Saskatchewan, not only in the establishment of the Interprovincial Council, but also in supporting one another regarding various pieces of legislation. A resolution appearing in the UFWM convention meeting minutes in 1920 shows solidarity with the United Farm Women of Alberta in legislation aimed at protecting women's property rights. Alberta law excused a man who died intestate from leaving any personal property to his widow if she had deserted him prior

³¹ AOM, P7578/14, UFWM Secretary's Report, Convention Year Book, 1920, 84.

³² Ibid.

to his death and lived in adultery thereafter. The same law, however, did not prevent a man who deserted his wife and lived in adultery from receiving his wife's personal property if she died intestate, no matter how valuable it may be, or notwithstanding that she acquired that property by her own efforts. The motion called for that law to be amended so that what applied to the women in the first instance be applied to the man. The motion carried and the Provincial Secretary was directed to send this motion of endorsement to the UFWA prior to their upcoming convention.³³

Following up on the UFWM's 1920 motion to appoint a committee to further investigate Dower legislation, a report of the Board of Directors presented at the 1921 Provincial convention indicates that the special committee investigating property laws generally and the Dower Law in particular had been expanded and that this committee was working with the Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture (WSCCA), formerly the Inter Provincial Council of Farm Women, to strengthen the collective voice of farm women regarding Dower Law. The reports of the WSCCA on their research into Dower Law had been circulated to each member of the UFWM provincial Board who utilized the information in the preparation of speeches on the issue throughout the province. The report also states that Mrs. Gee had been called upon throughout the year to address a large number of meetings on the Dower Law and that "considerable interest has been awakened in its operation and the necessity of working for amendments to the Act."³⁴

Discussion regarding Dower Law in the records of the UFWM is evident as late as 1927. Four resolutions were recorded in the minutes of the 1927 UFM/UFWM annual Provincial convention. An amendment to the Dower Law was presented in a motion from the UFWM to the whole convention calling for the government to register dower interests in the Land Titles Office. It argued that a wife's dower interest was currently not eligible for registration and could be defeated by a perjured affidavit. This motion carried. Another motion called for women's right to will her dower, but this motion was laid over for another year for further study. A third

³³ AOM, P7578/14, Convention Minutes of the Women's Section, 1920 Convention Year Book, 92-93.

³⁴ AOM, P7578/15, UFWM Board of Directors Report, 1921 Year Book, 78.

fairly radical motion related to the Devolution of Estates Act, requested the provincial government to amend sections 3 and 4 of the Act to read: “If no widow, all to the mother and father in equal shares; if no father, all to the mother; if no father or mother, all to the brothers and sisters in equal shares.” This motion was carried. And finally, a motion was put forward recommending that a wife or husband be given a dower interest in the whole of the estate, rather than one-third. This motion was tabled and referred back to the locals for further study.³⁵ As McCallum states, women finally achieved the limited objective of having legal recognition of a woman’s claim to the right to share in at least a portion of the homestead she had created with her husband after his death, but the fight for an equal sharing of the homestead during the husband’s lifetime remained out of reach for at least half a century.³⁶

It wasn’t until the 1973 case of *Murdoch v. Murdoch* became public that the needed impetus for legislative change became glaringly evident. In 1973, an Alberta rancher, Irene Florence Murdoch, submitted a claim for half the interest in the family ranch that was registered under her husband’s name. The Murdochs had separated and Irene felt she was entitled to half the value of the family ranch due to her direct labour in the business that included haying, raking, swathing, driving horses, trucks, and tractors, as well as dehorning, vaccinating and branding animals. The 4-1 decision of the court resulted in the dismissal of her application stating that her labour on the ranch was not beyond what was normally expected of a farm wife. This outcome sent a wave of shock and outcry across the country and resulted in significant reforms to property laws across Canada, including the eventual equal rights of husbands and wives to property acquired during the course of their marriage.³⁷

Fight for More Equitable Divorce and Child Custody Legislation

³⁵ AOM, P7579/4, UFM/UFWM Convention Minutes, 1927.

³⁶ McCallum, “Prairie Women,” 139, 152.

³⁷ Peter Bowal and Devon Slavin, “*Murdoch v. Murdoch*,” LawNow.org, July 5, 2017, <https://www.lawnow.org/murdoch-v-murdoch/>. Bowal is a professor of law at the Haskayne School of Business, University of Calgary.

The minutes recording the proceedings of the UFWM Women's Section at the January, 1920 Provincial convention contain the following motion: "Whereas a husband may obtain a divorce from his wife if she has committed adultery, but a wife is not entitled to a divorce if the husband has committed adultery, unless his adultery is coupled with cruelty or with desertion without lawful excuse for at least two years, be it resolved that the last two sentences of the clause be withdrawn, and so allow the wife to obtain a divorce on the proving of adultery alone."³⁸ The motion was put forward by Mrs. Gee, seconded by Martha Elliott, and was carried. Like the resolution that same year on Dower Legislation, direction was given to the Provincial Secretary to forward the endorsement to the Convention of the United Farm Women of Alberta.

Again in 1922, Mrs. S.E. Gee, then Vice-President of the UFWM, gave the report of the Legislative Committee at the annual Convention. It included a section on 'Divorce Rules' and reiterates the same injustice, that a husband can apply for divorce and damages for adultery alone, whereas the wife cannot petition for divorce on the charge of adultery alone. In addition, regarding child custody, her report states that a husband does not need to ask for the custody of his children owing to his common law rights, but a wife must petition for the custody of her children.³⁹ It was this to which Mrs. English was referring in her speech following the passage of the motion on women's suffrage in 1916 when she stated, "Is it not barbarous that any woman should have to fight for a legal right to parent her child?"⁴⁰

It took until 1925 to see a change in legislation that addressed the inequity of divorce law as articulated by the UFWM in solidarity with the UFWA. A report entitled, "Services Rendered by the UFWM, 1925" provides a long account of the organization's impressive work and

³⁸ AOM, P7578/14, Minutes of the Women's Section, Convention Year Book, 1920, 92.

³⁹ AOM, P7568/5, UFWM Report on Legislation, 2-3.

⁴⁰ AOM, P7578/10, Convention Reports, 1916.

accomplishments. Among them is listed the success they had finally achieved in the area of divorce legislation. The report reads as follows:

Our Association has always been a staunch supporter of equal rights as between men and women and has therefore lent its influence to having many unequal laws adjusted. Amongst others, our attention has been directed to the Divorce Laws of our province. Our United Farm Women through their federal organization, the Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture (WSCCA) asked the government to amend the law to provide for equality of the sexes. After a keenly contested struggle, the House of Commons approved the Bill, introduced by J.T. Shaw, Progressive M.P. for Calgary West, which provides that in the four western provinces women shall not be required to prove cruelty or desertion in addition to unfaithfulness (adultery) on the part of their husbands in order to obtain a divorce. Husbands never have been required to prove anything except that the wife was not faithful.⁴¹

The report goes on to say that this inequitable law only pertained to the four Prairie Provinces due to the government's insistence in 1870 that British law be replicated in the West. It did not pertain to Ontario, Quebec or the Maritime provinces whose legislation in this particular issue was less regressive. The report celebrates that now, at least in this case, women in all of Canada would finally be on equal footing.⁴²

The Temperance Movement and the UFWM

References to temperance activity can be found in UFWM files throughout the entire period under examination in this study. A 1917 document entitled, "A Bit of Retrospect: Something Attempted, Something Done," that appeared in the 1917 convention program, looks back over the accomplishments of the MGGA from the time of its inception in 1903. The highlights of each year have been documented and for the year 1916, the successes include the adoption provincially of the principles of women's suffrage, direct legislation, and the prohibition of the

⁴¹ AOM, P7568/8, UFM, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, "Services Rendered by the UFWM, 1925," 8.

⁴² Ibid.

liquor traffic, “in which the Grain Growers recognize victories that to a considerable extent are the result of their educational campaigns along these lines in the years immediately preceding.”⁴³ This issue of prohibition figured prominently in the files of the UFWM as well, starting with a motion in 1917 that appears in the minutes of the provincial convention introduced by the Women’s Section. It is directed to the “constituted authorities representing the people of Great Britain” and implores Great Britain to stop immediately all liquor traffic to Canada, with the exception of medicinal and other useful purposes. The motion states that Manitoba and many of the provinces of Canada have prohibited the sale of liquor and that adherence to this request “would give an incalculable impetus to our patriotism and determination to carry on the war in the interest of the Empire and her Allies.”⁴⁴

A 1920 UFWM report from their internal Committee of Social Services, delivered at the 1921 Provincial convention, reflects back on the previous year.⁴⁵ Leading the list of the UFWM’s many accomplishments, under the heading ‘Prohibition’, it announces that on October 25, 1920, Manitobans voted on a referendum to prohibit the importation of liquors between provinces for beverages purposes. The author of the report, Mable Johnson from Chater, Manitoba, states that these amendments have allowed Manitoba to settle its own destiny without interference from the outside due to direct legislation. She goes on to list the amendments to the Manitoba Temperance Act passed at the last Provincial session of the legislature that were awaiting proclamation. These included a record of the exact limitations of alcohol allowed to be dispensed to registered medical practitioners, dentists, veterinary surgeons, incorporated hospitals, ministers of the gospel, scientists, and manufacturers. Johnson also reports that when the amendments come into force, no liquor would be able to be sold legally in Manitoba except through a government vendor with the Lieutenant Governor determining the price. She ends her report with a resolution recommending unalterable opposition of any further referenda on the liquor question and urging

⁴³ AOM, P7578/11, “A Bit of Retrospect,” 7.

⁴⁴ AOM, P7578/12, Minutes of the 1917 MGGA Provincial Convention.

⁴⁵ AOM, P7568/3, UFWM Report from the Committee of Social Service, 1.

the Manitoba government to use all possible machinery to enforce these prohibition amendments.⁴⁶

Recorded in the 1921 Year Book and Report of Convention Proceedings is a section on prohibition that confirms the zeal of the combined forces of Manitoba farm women and men in the fight for temperance. Authored by the President of the UFM it announces with great enthusiasm the victory of the organization's temperance forces in the achievement of the recent federal referendum that was about to come into effect, along with the increased restrictions of the amendments to the Manitoba Temperance Act to "give us more definite curtailment of the evils of liquor selling and liquor drinking than ever have been realized in the past."⁴⁷ The report gives credit for these victories to "the whole weight of our organization" including the Provincial Secretary of the main UFM organization, W.R. Wood, who, in addition to his regular duties, became vice-chairperson of a provincial Board on temperance. It is quite likely that this refers to the Manitoba Social Service's special Temperance Board on which the UFM/UFWM had 10 representatives.⁴⁸ Clearly, the organized farm movement in Manitoba took full credit for the victory of temperance and prohibition legislation in rural Manitoba which made up over 57% of the province's population at that time. As the 1921 UFM President states, "The large majority recorded in the rural centres throughout the province speak eloquently of the work accomplished

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ AOM, P7578/15, UFM 1921 Year Book, Report of Proceedings of Annual Convention, January 1921, 31.

⁴⁸ A clue to this is found in the 1922 report of UFM's board of directors, presented at the 1923 provincial convention. Under the heading "The Temperance Cause," it states that due to the formation, in 1922, of an organization known as the Moderation League, which "has been agitating for a measure reviving the sale for beverage purposes and has prepared a bill which they propose to have referred to the people," the Manitoba Social Services Council established a Temperance Board, upon which the UFM/UFWM had ten representatives, tasked with working on a campaign in anticipation of another referendum in the summer of 1923. AOM, P7568/6 "UFM Report of Directors 1922 – The Temperance Cause." The history of the Manitoba Department of Families notes that it was the Manitoba Social Services Council that "called on the government to take early steps to establish and adequately support a Child Welfare Department for the province, shaped on modern lines and provided with the facilities which will make possible proper classification of the children cared for, efficient supervision of them all and a comprehensive survey of the needs of the province in this most important of all fields." "General report of the Executive of the Social Service Council of Manitoba," authored by D. B. Harkness, March 1920. See also Manitoba Historical Society, "Memorable Manitobans: David Bruce Harkness, 1872–1948," January 20, 2020, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/harkness_db.shtml.

and the part played by our association.”⁴⁹ This is consistent with an undated article by Mary P. McCallum, Associate Editor of the *Grain Growers’ Guide* found in the UFWM files entitled “Women as an Organized Force.” The article praises Saskatchewan farm women for their efforts to co-operate with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in that province but it also states that “Manitoba had some excellent arrangements in the (temperance) campaign especially in the country districts, and in these our farm people cooperated to the utmost of their ability. The result in Manitoba again evidenced the influence so independent and powerful an organization can exert when directed in channels for the betterment of its people.”⁵⁰

The 1921 minutes of the UFWM convention highlight the deep frustration that temperance advocates in the movement were experiencing due to the continual cry from vested interests in the liquor trade for additional referenda on the issue. A motion moved by Mrs. J.B. Parker and seconded by Alice Tooth relates a short history of the many plebiscites on prohibition at both the provincial and national level, listing an 1892 provincial plebiscite, a 1898 Dominion plebiscite, a 1916 referendum on the Manitoba Temperance Act and a 1920 referendum on amendments to the Canada Temperance Act, all of which favoured prohibition by large majorities. The preamble to the motion reminds members that sub-section 2 of section 156 of the current Canada Temperance Act states that “no polling or voting, whether for bringing into force any prohibition or for the revocation of the same, shall be held...within three years of any previous poll or voting held.” The motion, which was approved, confirmed strong UFWM opposition to any further attempts to question the decisions prior to 1923.⁵¹

A 1922 document outlining the political platform of the UFM, under the title ‘Public Welfare,’ clarifies the organized farmers’ policy on prohibition. In addition to the prohibition of the

⁴⁹ AOM, P7578/15, “United Farmers of Manitoba Year Book – Prohibition,” 1921.

⁵⁰ AOM, P7582/5, UFM Pamphlets, 1910–28, “Women as an Organized Force.”

⁵¹ AOM, P7578/15, Convention Year Book, 1921, “Report of Proceedings of Annual Convention,” January 12, 13, and 14, 1921.

manufacture, importation and sale in intoxicating liquors with the exception of use in sacramental, medicinal, scientific and mechanical purposes, the UFWM also believed strongly in government ownership and control of all liquors handled and sold in the province for the permitted purposes, and in the elimination of the elements of private gain and public revenue from all such trades.⁵² A subsequent document entitled, “Why Electors of Manitoba Should Support the Progressives,” dated June 22, 1922, states, “Prohibition of the liquor traffic is one of the oldest principles in the platform of the farmers’ movement. It has been supported consistently by all the farmers’ organizations in the three Prairie Provinces. At the same time the farmers are absolutely loyal to the principle of the Initiative and Referendum, and believe that legislation can only be effective when supported by the majority will of the electorate.”⁵³ The statement goes on to state that farmers opposed a referendum on the liquor question at their conventions in 1921 and 1922 on the grounds that insufficient time had been given to test present legislation, but that the United Farmers and Farm Women of Manitoba would be agreeable to hold a referendum on the subject in 1923.

In January 1923 the UFWM at their Provincial convention adopted a resolution reaffirming adherence to the principle of prohibition of the sale of intoxicants for beverage use, stating that the suffering and privation entailed by drunkenness usually falls most heavily upon women and children. The motion called on the citizens of the province and particularly the women to rally to support the enforcement of present legislation and to resist the determined effort of the liquor trade to re-establish itself in Manitoba.⁵⁴ This was no doubt in anticipation of the upcoming referendum which, in the end, favoured the repeal of prohibition legislation by a vote of 107,609 to 67,092. As late as 1929, this great disappointment was still felt in the UFWM, when President Mrs. Gee Curtis called on farm women and men to remain vigilant in light of the ongoing

⁵² AOM, P7582/6, Platforms, “United Farmers of Manitoba Political Platform,” 1922, 7.

⁵³ AOM, P7582/6, “Why the Electors of Manitoba Should Support the Progressives” (under heading “Referendum on Liquor”).

⁵⁴ AOM, P7578/17, United Farmers of Manitoba Minutes of 1923 Convention, Brandon, January 9–12, 1923, Tuesday morning session.

challenges facing the agrarian community, such as high freight rates, taxation and the fragility of co-operatives and to resist complacency. “A few years ago we made that mistake in regard to Temperance. We thought once the legislation was placed upon the statute books we could rest from our labours. Today we are paying bitterly for that error.”⁵⁵

In addition to the sustained focus on temperance work at the provincial level of the UFWM, the reports from local UFWM branches in 1923 and 1924 reveal a fairly high interest in prohibition at the grassroots level of the organization.⁵⁶ What was it that motivated Manitoba farm women to rally around the cause of temperance? Historian Veronica Strong-Boag reminds us that prohibition has often been portrayed as a conservative agent of social control, but it also “represented the organized might of women opposed to violence against women.”⁵⁷ Historian Wendy Mitchinson’s work on the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Canada also mentions the WCTU’s abhorrence for the suffering that alcohol created for women and children in general, particularly in urban areas with high concentrations of immigrant families. She maintains that the largely white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, middle-class members of WCTU associated alcohol with poverty, crime, mental illness, and a general breakdown of moral society as a result of rapid urbanization and immigration. They believed it was their mission to take up the fight for prohibition, ostensibly to protect their working-class sisters from harm, but also to protect the Christian values of sobriety, morality, and traditional motherhood. Quoting Mrs. Jacob Spence, first superintendent of the Ontario WCTU, Mitchinson encapsulates both the moral zeal of these middle-class WCTU reformers and their rationalization for stepping out of their traditional role in the home to demand the vote for women.

It is not the clamour of ambition...trying to gain position. It is the prayer of earnest, thoughtful, Christian women on behalf of their children and their children’s children. It is in the interest of our homes, our divinely appointed place, to protect the home against the

⁵⁵ AOM, P7579/6, UFWM President’s Address, 1929.

⁵⁶ AOM, P7578/8, 1923; P7577/9, 1924, “Annual Reports from Locals.”

⁵⁷ Strong-Boag, “Pulling in Double Harness,” 35.

licensed evil which is the enemy of the home, and also to aid in our efforts to advance God's kingdom beyond the bounds of our homes ... It is only by legislation that the roots of great evils can be touched, and for want of the ballot we stand powerless in face of our most terrible foe, the legalized liquor traffic. The liquor sellers are not afraid of our conventions, but they are afraid of our vote.⁵⁸

By upholding the domestic ideal of women, the WCTU members did not upset the patriarchal order upon which their class depended. Their fight for women's franchise was often articulated as a means to an end that preserved the purity of women's role as moral guardian of the home. It is important to discern the UFWM's motivation for their tireless work on prohibition, and if, or to what extent, they worked collaboratively with the WCTU. There is no doubt that the organizations shared many of the same goals as well as a common racial and religious identity, and this shared identity will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter. In terms of direct collaboration with the WCTU, however, not much could be found in the UFWM files. The presence of a representative from the Winnipeg or Brandon WCTU at the UFWM conventions was sometimes noted in convention minutes. It is possible that members of the UFWM also held individual membership in the WCTU similar to Mrs. Gee's personal participation in the Women's Political Equality League. Once again, however, the evidence seems to suggest that the UFWM's chief line of collaboration on prohibition and temperance was with farm women in their sister organizations in other provinces, the UFWA, the Women's Section of the SGGA, the United Farm Women of Ontario, or their national organization, the Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture.

The Women's Party and National Council of Women of Canada

There is also strong class identity evident in the 1919 document entitled "The Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association." The report announces the formation of a new political party, The Women's Party. This is the party that was started in Toronto the previous

⁵⁸ Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism," in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, 151-67.

year in 1918 by feminist Constance Hamilton and members of the National Equal Franchise Union. Here is what the UFWM report has to say:

Recently a new Women's Party has been formed and from the planks in its platform we would judge that it is under the power of the protected interests. It advocates Imperial ownership and control of all the natural resources, essential industries and transport systems within the British empire. Rather hard on the Canadian Council of Agriculture isn't it, when they are striving to have the natural resources of our country state owned and controlled. This Women's Party directly opposes "control of Industry by the Workers, saying it will lead to demoralization and disintegration of Canadian industry... Since they object to control of industry by the worker and want increased production without any attempt at a more just distribution of the wealth it creates, this places them at once on the side of the protected interests and so they cannot hope to gain our support."⁵⁹

Another expression of strong class identity is the UFWM's decision to discontinue its affiliation with the middle-class and politically conservative National Council of Women of Canada. Mrs. A. McGregor, District Director from Neepawa, is quoted in the Board of Director's report to the Provincial convention in 1921, "This is the first year that our organization has not affiliated with the National Council of Women of Canada. The question of their federal platform, the attitude of many of their members toward the protective tariff, and the fact that we now have a national organization through which we may direct our energies for national development, have been some of the reasons that have influenced our organization."⁶⁰

Women's Institute and the UFWM

The extent of the UFWM's affiliation with the Manitoba Women's Institute (W.I.) is less clear. Women's Institutes began in 1897 in Ontario and the first chapter in Manitoba was established in Morris, Manitoba in August 1910 with assistance from the government of Premier Rodmond

⁵⁹ AOM, P7568/2, The Women's Section of the Manitoba United Grain Growers' Association, 8.

⁶⁰ AOM, P7578/15, UFWM Board of Directors Report, 1921.

Roblin. Local associations were organized throughout the province by the government with the help of the Manitoba Agricultural College (MAC). A history of the Manitoba Women's Institute entitled *The Great Human Heart* indicates that the first meetings of the W.I. were often held under the auspices of the agricultural societies.⁶¹ This quite likely refers to the organized farm women and men of the MGGA. There is evidence of cooperation between the W.I. and the UFWM at the local level where these two organizations would co-sponsor a speaker or workshop on a topic of interest to women in the district such as dressmaking or nutrition. At the Provincial level, representatives of the local W.I. in the city or town in which the UFWM annual convention was being held would often be in attendance to bring greetings. In 1928 the Provincial Board heard a presentation from Miss Esther Thompson at their April 12 meeting. As a representative of the Manitoba Agricultural College Extension Service through the Department of Home Economics, she explained the upcoming development of a new Extension Service offered through the Manitoba government for all rural women, but expressed concern that the changes would place Women's Institutes on a more self-supporting basis and this would threaten the four-fold program of service delivery that was already underway. Thompson was soliciting the UFWM Board's support for the W.I. programs. The Board considered the request when Miss Thompson left the meeting, but there was concern expressed that the current economic conditions on the farm did not warrant advocacy for expenditure on specialists in the Extension Department. The matter was referred for further consideration at the upcoming UFWM

⁶¹ Manitoba Women's Institute, *The Great Human Heart: A History of the Manitoba Women's Institute, 1910–1980* (Altona, MB: Manitoba's Women's Institute, 1980), 2–3. See also AOM, RBC HQ 1907, Mary Speechly, "A Story of the Women's Institutes of Manitoba, 1910–1934." It appears that the Manitoba Women's Institute operated under the direction of an advisory board consisting of six women, four elected at the annual convention and two appointed by government. At a meeting of the advisory board in March 1919, a change to this arrangement was introduced by Mary Speechly, according to which all representatives would be elected by delegates at the annual convention, and none appointed by government, but this was not approved. It would also appear that the Institute received annual grants from the government to cover the costs of its convention and speakers, as well as courses in home economics for local associations throughout the year, but these grants were discontinued in the Depression. After government funding was discontinued, the Institute established a convention fund to replace the government grant, by charging the local institutes \$8 per year, for a total of \$1,000 annually. A Silver Jubilee Fund was also established, to raise an additional \$1,000 per year, for which Institute members would volunteer to organize teas and garden parties, with all proceeds going to the Fund. A membership fee of 25 cents per member was also introduced to assist in fundraising.

Women's Conferences and District Conventions.⁶² It wasn't until the UFWM Provincial convention in January 1932, however, that a resolution came forward addressing the issue of the W.I.'s continued government subsidization. It pointedly presented its case for not supporting further government financing of the W.I. relating the string of supports that the Manitoba Government had been providing the W.I. including the housing of its' head office in the Department of Agriculture at no cost to the organization, additional free office space, full time stenographic help, free supplies for programs, coverage of W.I. delegates' expenses to attend their annual convention each year, and full coverage of the salaries of government employees to deliver programs to a small portion of the tax-paying public, taken from taxpayer dollars. The UFWM had always been self-supporting, and the resentment of the government's financial support for the W.I. cannot be missed in their motion. "We, the United Farm Women of Manitoba, protest against Government monies and civil servants being employed to develop any organization at the expense of the general tax-payer, when it should and could be self-sustaining, and which, without Government subsidy and organization, would find its own field of activity."⁶³

Historian Georgina Taylor's PhD dissertation on Violet McNaughton, Founder and President of the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, provides convincing evidence of McNaughton's close collaboration with the Women's Institute or Homemakers' Clubs as they were called in that province.⁶⁴ She takes exception to historian Carol Lee Bacchi's claim that farm women were suspicious of the W.I. in Alberta and Saskatchewan because they

⁶² AOM, P7584/3, UFWM Minute Book, UFWM Board Minutes, April 12, 1928.

⁶³ AOM, P7579/9, Convention Resolutions, 1932.

⁶⁴ Georgina Taylor, "Ground for Common Action: Violet McNaughton's Agrarian Feminism and the Origins of the Farm Women's Movement in Canada" (PhD diss., Carleton University, 1997). Understandably, Taylor takes issue with Carol Bacchi's portrayal of Violet McNaughton as an enemy of the Women's Institute, but she does not dispute Bacchi's claim that McNaughton, along with Irene Parlby from the UFWA, were among the Women's Party's most vociferous critics. Taylor states that McNaughton "integrated a resistance to ... forms of domination of prairie farm people by those who supported the first National Policy and the domination of the working class" (24). This would certainly include the Women's Party and was likely one of the reasons why McNaughton wanted to organize a national voice for agrarian women, leading the way in the development of the Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, which she saw as much more radical and relevant to farm women than the National Council of Women of Canada or the Women's Party.

were conservative women's societies formed by Liberal governments to draw attention away from the more radical and politically threatening UFWA and the Women's Section of the SGGGA.⁶⁵ Taylor argues that McNaughton did not perceive the W.I. or Homemaker's Clubs in Saskatchewan as a threat or an enemy. She highlights the integrative quality of McNaughton's leadership, firmly rooted in her agrarian feminism, that incorporated both maternal and equal rights feminism as well as a deep-seated belief in agrarian cooperation. Taylor argues that McNaughton was able to work both with other agrarian men and women as well as across class lines with the W.I., the Political Equality League and the Saskatchewan WCTU to improve conditions for those adversely affected by oppressive national policies.

There are many parallels between McNaughton's style of leadership and that of members of UFWM and evidence of her direct influence. She was first and foremost an active farm woman, a trusted and respected leader who had provided sage advice to the Women's Section of the MGGA leading up to their founding convention in 1918. As discussed earlier, McNaughton was in attendance at that founding convention and worked with the MGGA to organize the Women's Interprovincial Council where she served as the first President, bringing a coordinated national voice for issues of concern to farm women in the three prairie provinces and Ontario through the formation of the Women's Section of the Canadian Council of Agriculture.⁶⁶ There is little doubt that women in the UFWM would follow McNaughton's lead in applying their belief in cooperation and collaboration with the W.I. particularly at the local community level on the delivery of programs that improved farm women's domestic skills, partly because the women in these two groups were neighbours and no doubt affiliated with both the W.I. and the UFWM. But as we have seen, at the organizational level the UFWM resented the fact that the government sponsored the W.I. while the UFWM was financially self-sustaining. In addition, the historical relationship between the W.I. and the UFWM was different from both Saskatchewan and Alberta in that the Manitoba W.I. was established under a Conservative government in 1910, over a

⁶⁵ Bacchi, "Divided Allegiances," 104.

⁶⁶ AOM, P7578/13, Minutes of the Women's Section, Hand Book, 1919, 65.

decade before the Farmer's Party or Progressives came to power in Manitoba in 1922, and prior to the formation of the UFWM. Even after the Progressives came to power, it would not have been prudent to advocate for the cutting of the W.I.'s financial ties with government until the Depression presented a rationale for doing so. As we have seen, however, the UFWM was only too happy to support the decision to cut government funding to the W.I. when the time came.

An examination of some of the many issues that engaged UFWM members has highlighted both the degree of the challenges they faced as well as their collective agency and resilience. In order to determine the extent to which the UFWM collaborated with organizations such as the W.I., the Women's Equality League or the WCTU, more research is required, but it does seem fairly clear that the focus of the UFWM's collaboration was with like-minded, class-related organized farm women in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario. The UFWM cooperated with some of these more conservative organizations at the grassroots level, particularly the W.I., due to overlap in the delivery of home economics programs that the Manitoba extension services offered at this time and opportunities to share limited resources. The UFWM certainly shared many of the goals of the Women's Equality League and the WCTU and kept in touch with the work that each organization was doing. There is, however, evidence that the UFWM took the lead in both these campaigns within its own rural membership, leaving the work of organizing in urban areas to the middleclass women involved in the franchise and temperance movements.

The UFWM identified more with the working class, and although there is little evidence of close affiliation, references can be found within the UFM/UFWM records for the rights of the working class and the hope of joining forces with labour to fight against the privileged class. A representative from the Winnipeg labour movement, Mr. R.A. Rigg, spoke at the 1914 convention on the subject of "Workers and Farmers." He refers in his speech to the common enemy of the farmer and wage earner as "those parasites who drain off the surplus profit without

having contributed to the production of that wealth.”⁶⁷ The UFM President’s speech at the annual convention in 1920 also underlines distinct class identity. He refers to the “elaborate systems of exploitation...systems which minister to...certain privileged classes at the expense of others. In these systems there lies the root...of social discord and industrial disturbance.” This address was given just six months after the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. Although very few references to the strike was found in the UFM/UFWM fonds, there is little doubt that the Manitoba farm movement stood in solidarity with the urban working class. J.S. and Lucy Woodsworth were well known and respected leaders and the UFM/UFWM would have been aware of J.S. Woodsworth’s direct involvement in the strike. In the same speech, UFM President also refers to the heavy financial burden of the war and expresses concern regarding how that burden will be distributed. His fear is that the less privileged classes will be expected to bear an even greater portion of taxation through the customs tariff “that absolutely fails to distribute the burden equitably...and becomes a means whereby privileged interests may extort blood money from those less privileged...(and this) becomes an iniquity that we cannot tolerate.”⁶⁸ This is reminiscent of the UFWM’s disgust toward the privileged interests of eastern Canada as well as their dismay at the insensitivity of the of the National Women’s Party to the cause of the worker. When it came to finding allies in the fight against the government’s oppressive national policies and its’ collusion with monopoly interests, it was clear where the UFWM stood. Although there is no evidence of direct collaboration, this was a position they shared with the Women’s Labour League (WLL) who worked on their own terms for women’s suffrage in urban centres. According to Bacchi, ideological differences between the suffragists and the working class prevented them from working closely together. Both groups worked for women’s suffrage but for different reasons. The WLL sought the vote to promote organization among working women in order to win equal pay for equal work. Their relationship with the middleclass suffragists remained strained and Ada Muir, a founder of the Winnipeg Labour League, maintained that the

⁶⁷ AOM, P7578/8, Convention Minutes, 1914.

⁶⁸ AOM, P7578/14, UFM President’s Report, Convention Year Book, 1920, 35.

suffragists represented professionals who were part of the middleclass monopoly interests while the WLL represented working women.⁶⁹

It has been instructive to review numerous examples of the patriarchal structure embedded in the federal government's national policies and the UFWM's resistance to these policies. Whether it was drawing attention to women's unremunerated and relentless workload, or fighting for the right to vote, the right to homestead, the right to an equitable share in the farm business women helped develop and maintain, the right to equal child custody and divorce legislation or the right to enact legislation to lessen the impact of violence against women and children, the UFWM continued to push back against the inequities they experienced as women and as members of an agrarian class. What is glaringly evident is the historical construction of prairie agriculture as a white male enterprise, conceived long before the arrival of the majority of white settlers. To facilitate the national policies such as the intentional dispossession of Indigenous people from their land, the monopoly of the CPR, the imposition of the protective tariff, and the creation of a national police force, the government imposed familiar imperial hierarchies of power that privileged white Anglo-Saxon men over Indigenous people and women by removing Indigenous people to reserves and making it almost impossible for women to own land or have economic independence. The UFWM challenged these hierarchies of power and aligned most closely with those who resisted the federal government's national policies.

An American Comparison

Historian Grey Osterud's 2012 monograph, *Putting the Barn Before the House*, presents an excellent point of comparison with farm women and men in the Nanticoke Valley in the early twentieth century.⁷⁰ Although there are many differences between the organized farm women

⁶⁹ Bacchi, "Divided Allegiances," 97.

⁷⁰ Nancy Grey Osterud, *Putting the Barn Before the House: Women and Family Farming in Early Twentieth-Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

and men in south-central New York state and those in Manitoba, the similarities are striking. Conducting oral history interviews with women in this farming community over many years, Osterud gained insight into the complex gender relations at play in this rural community, as well as examples of women's agency in challenging the patriarchal structure of the family and resisting capitalist culture with its marginalization of women's work. She identifies the source of this community's strength as their deep connection to the Grange movement that had been responsible for founding cooperative creameries in this location at the end of the nineteenth century. We will recall that the Grange was one of the forerunners of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association.

The strong tradition of both producer and purchaser cooperatives sprang up at the turn of the century in New York state as an alternative to the patriarchal capitalist agricultural structure and provided the base for powerful economic and political organizations that sustained this farming community. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, like many other rural areas affected by crop failures, the cost-price squeeze and economic downturns, people were leaving farms in large numbers. Theodore Roosevelt's response was the establishment of the Country Life Commission. It was not trusted by the people in the Nanticoke Valley due to its explicit endorsement of the trend toward specialization that was forcing farm consolidation and threatening farm persons' livelihood and way of life. In the minds of this farming community, the Country Life Movement was the antithesis of what was needed to change the power relations among producers, shippers, processors and manufacturers. As Osterud states, "Across the country, farm people had sought to protect and advance their economic and social interests by adhering to non-capitalist or anti-capitalist ideas and practices that valorized producers over "parasites," resisting their subordination to profit-minded shippers and processors, and refusing the blandishments of political leaders who told them that what was good for the commodity market was good for farmers."⁷¹

⁷¹ Ibid., 12.

Osterud argues that increased specialization and large-scale farming was seen by Nanticoke Valley farm women and men not only to make producers more reliant on processors, manufacturers and middlemen, thereby threatening the fragile economic relationship between farmers and capitalist agribusiness, it also threatened to de-value women's work. The more mechanized the farm became, the more gendered the division of labour became and the less decision-making was shared. This significantly altered power relations in families. Referring to the centrality of women's labour Osterud points out, "Until World War II women produced much of the family's living which not only guaranteed an adequate subsistence but also enabled the returns from the main farm operations to be reinvested in the enterprise. The exigencies of the post-World War I decline in farm prices and the Great Depression meant that holding on to land and accumulating capital depended on women's cash-saving as well as (their) income-producing labor."⁷²

As we have discovered in the exploration of the lives and work of organized farm women in Manitoba at this same historical period, the division of work was similarly critical to the farm economy and to women's ability to negotiate a share in the decision-making. We know that the unpaid work of UFWM members and their children both inside and outside the home was an economic necessity for the survival of the family farm, particularly in the first three decades of the twentieth century. As late as 1929 a UFWM document entitled, "Our Women," quotes the following statement, "A man works from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done," and goes on to say, "This statement is doubly true on the farm...I know of one woman in the Rossburn District that made more money out her hens and cows than her husband did out of his grain. In fact, she saved him from ruin and she was responsible for the profit."⁷³ In the case of settlers on the prairies and dairy farmers in the Nanticoke Valley, the interdependence of farm tasks was a fundamental fact of farm life.

⁷² Ibid., 112.

⁷³ AOM, P7579/6, "Our Women," 1929.

Although this interdependence was not a guarantee of complete gender parity in decision-making or in women's economic equality, Osterud argues that it did alter power relations in families, allowing for a process of negotiation, and in this way farm families were able to limit the conflicts created by the patriarchal structure of the family.⁷⁴ Gender integration and interdependence, coupled with a shared disgust for the parasitic shippers and processors who got rich off the labour of farm women and men, also meant that women often chose to place a higher priority on putting scant resources into their productive property rather than raising their own standard of living, in other words 'putting the barn before the house.' This certainly parallels the experience of members of the UFWM who didn't turn a blind eye to their own need for labour-saving devices in the home to preserve their health, but were astute farm managers who were able to negotiate their position and exercise agency. Osterud's analysis is also closely aligned with Georgina Taylor's interpretation of Violet McNaughton's agrarian feminism. In reference to McNaughton, Taylor states, "her agrarian feminism promoted the recognition of the partnership between women and men on family farms rather than defining the production unit as a solitary male farmer...(this) encouraged farm women to negotiate the conditions of their productive, reproductive and community work in order to improve these conditions."⁷⁵ She goes on to say that McNaughton's feminism aimed at improving conditions in which farm people as a class worked and lived. This scholarship collectively affirms historian Joan Wallach Scott's important observation that binary categories need to be deconstructed and the differences held in tension, not set in opposition. In the end, this allows for the emergence of a truer picture of the identity of organized farm women in this historical period.

Religion, Ethnicity and Race

⁷⁴ Osterud, *Putting the Barn*, 109. Osterud is quoting from Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900–1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 32–33.

⁷⁵ Taylor, "Ground for Common Action," 12.

Members of the UFWM did not share class identity with urban middle class reformers and suffragists but they shared a common race and religion. Like those reformers, UFWM members were predominantly, white, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant.⁷⁶ Their annual conventions were often held in Methodist churches, with devotional exercises led by the minister of the host church. Community singing was always part of the Convention program and often featured favourite Protestant hymns. Guest speakers at the Conventions regularly included theologians and clergy of the Protestant social gospel tradition such as Salem Bland, professor of theology at Wesley College and J.S. Woodsworth, Methodist minister, former director of All People's Mission in Winnipeg. He soon left the ministry and, as mentioned earlier, was directly involved in the Winnipeg General Strike. He helped organize the Manitoba Independent Labour Party and successfully ran for Winnipeg North Centre as a labour candidate. He then formed a new national party, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and became its' leader. Lucy Woodsworth, an active member of the Methodist Church and a committed pacifist, was a frequent speaker at UFWM Conventions and gatherings.⁷⁷ In 1920, the organization initiated an annual church service that was attended by male and female members and held on the same day in many communities throughout the province.⁷⁸ Clearly these farm women saw themselves to be devout Protestants with a Christian mission to make the world a better place.

Though membership in the Protestant church was not synonymous with a belief in the Social Gospel, the Social Gospel was, nonetheless, a powerful element within the mainline Methodist,

⁷⁶ Kinnear, "Do You Want," 143. Mary Kinnear's analysis of a 1922 UFWM rural survey, which she correlated with the 1926 census data, indicates that members were overrepresented in the more prosperous western and southwestern areas of the province, populated by settlers of British origin, and underrepresented in the eastern, southeastern, and northern areas of Manitoba. As Kinnear points out, this speaks to the UFWM's predominantly white, Anglo-Saxon membership and its concentration in the older, more established areas of rural Manitoba. A review of obituaries of many of the organization's leaders and rank-and-file members reveals a high incidence of parallel membership in the mainline Protestant churches, primarily Methodist, Presbyterian and, after 1925, the United Church of Canada.

⁷⁷ AOM, MG10 E1, boxes 15–17. In 1925, the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational churches amalgamated to become the United Church of Canada.

⁷⁸ AOM, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7578/4, 1920 Resolutions Book, Resolution 20.

Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Baptist churches at this time and its influence was strongly felt within the UFM/UFWM. The Social Gospel invited a more radical interpretation of Christianity that often challenged the dominant hegemony of the capitalist system. According to historian Marilyn Barber, followers of the Social Gospel saw the roots of injustice to lie more in social structures than in individual acts. The strong nativist leanings of many of its adherents, however, including J.S. and Lucy Woodsworth and leaders of the UFM/UFWM, served to reinforce the inequities of the status quo. They were convinced it was their responsibility to ensure that Canada retain its British identity because they believed the Anglo-Saxon race had developed the highest form of religion and civilization.⁷⁹ This deep-seated belief in the superiority of the British race, Protestant religion, and the English language as expressed through the Social Gospel, combined with the realities of declining fertility rates among Anglo-Saxons, the loss of life during the Great War, declining membership in the mainline Protestant churches, and the rapid acceleration of immigration from eastern and southern Europe into Canada in the first two decades of the twentieth century, led to fears of race degeneration among those of British Protestant origin. The reform-minded Protestant churches, including members of the UFM/UFWM, were vehemently at odds with the middle- and upper-class imperialists about the inequities regarding the distribution of wealth, but, as historian Linda Kealey points out, women of the agrarian and middle class were of one mind regarding the survival of the British race and Protestant religion. As Kealey argues, “these two classes of women shared common assumptions about the inferiority of southern and eastern European immigrants as compared with the hardier northern races. Religion and race reinforced each other; the hardier northerners tended to be Protestant while the inferior southerners belonged to the Catholic faith.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Marilyn Barber, “Nationalism, Nativism, and the Social Gospel,” in Richard Allen, ed. *The Social Gospel in Canada*, 189.

⁸⁰ Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s–1920s* (Toronto: Women’s Educational Press, 1979), 5.

Evidence of concern about race degeneration and the need to preserve the dominant English language, British culture and Protestant beliefs through the promotion of tougher immigration laws, assimilation, and the adoption of eugenics principles can be found within the records of the UFWM and will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter. The goal of lobbying for more stringent immigration laws that gave preference first to settlers from Britain and then to immigrants from northern European countries absorbed a great deal of these farm women's time and energy. They also strived to assimilate settlers who had already arrived from 'foreign' countries. They fought for legislation that upheld Anglo-Saxon Protestant values of sobriety and 'high moral conduct.' Not only did they fight for prohibition, as discussed earlier, some of the members also fought for gambling restrictions and censorship of moving pictures that they felt were responsible for the moral deterioration of young people. For example, a resolution appears in the Minutes of the 1922 UFWM Annual Convention calling on the Parliament of Canada to remove from the Criminal Code the clause that exempts those conducting horse races from the application of the law against commercialized gambling.⁸¹ Another resolution appears in the same minutes under the heading "Censorship of Moving Pictures." The wording of the motion suggests that they believed the subject material of some motion picture films created an unhealthy state of mind in the children who viewed them and "render(ed) the child more accessible to demoralization." The motion calls for the Attorney General to use his influence to regulate films more strictly and to censor all films "of a questionable nature."⁸² Minutes of the 1926 UFWM Convention also contain a motion regarding gambling that was passed by the membership present. "Resolved that we deplore the marked increase in some forms of gambling; that we exhort our members to do all they can to check it, and that we appoint a committee to investigate and report on the desirability and possibility of removing the exemptions made in the application of the law."⁸³

⁸¹ AOM, P7578/16, "United Farm Women of Manitoba Minutes of 1922 Convention," 8.

⁸² AOM, P7578/16, "United Farm Women of Manitoba Minutes of 1922 Convention," 9.

⁸³ AOM, P7579/3, "United Farm Women of Manitoba Convention Minutes of 1926 – Gambling."

As late as 1935 some members of the UFWM were calling for censorship of moving pictures as reflected in this motion, “The UFWM reaffirms its stand on retention of the Provincial Censor Board for Moving Pictures and sympathy with the ideals of the League of Decency.”⁸⁴ The League of Decency was most likely referencing the Legion of Decency that was an organization of the Catholic Church established in 1933 to rate and censor moving pictures. They established three categories, A, B, and C, with Category “C” designated as ‘condemned’. These films were to be boycotted by Catholics and all good Christians and if they were rated thus by the Provincial Censor Board they were forbidden by law to be shown in theatres.⁸⁵ The belief in the moral, intellectual, and spiritual superiority of the British race and the supremacy of Christian values led to support for eugenics among members of the UFWM, although ardent articulation in favour of sterilization came later in the UFWM’s history. As we will see in Chapter 4 of this study, the majority of UFWM members supported the segregation of the ‘feebleminded’ in institutions although the intensity of attitudes toward eugenics were mixed and changed over time.

Indigenous People and the UFWM

Only three references to Indigenous people were found within the records of the UFM/UFWM. Two of these references were in the form of motions put forward at conventions about Indian reserve lands that indicated support by the mover and seconder of the motion for the confiscation of specific reserve lands for returning World War I soldiers, land that in the opinion of the persons making the motion was sitting idle and vacant. In 1920, we find a motion in the convention minutes to petition the Dominion Government to “throw the (Turtle Mountain)

⁸⁴ AOM, P7579/12, Annual Convention Minutes, 1935, 4.

⁸⁵ James Skinner, “Reminiscences of a Manitoba Film Censor: An Interview with Locksley D. McNeill,” Manitoba Historical Society, *Manitoba History*, no. 17 (1989), http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/17/mcneill_id.shtml. In this interview, McNeill, who served as chairperson of the Manitoba Film Censor Board from 1934 to 1935, was asked how many films were censored during his term. He responded that at least 10 percent had been censored, with at least another 10 percent of those not censored being cut for language or images that the Board deemed “indecent.” A portion of his job also involved surveillance of movie theatres, to ensure that the censored films were not being shown and that posters depicting redacted images were not displayed. It is interesting to note that McNeill went on to become executive assistant to Premier John Bracken in the latter part of the 1930s.

Reserve open for soldier settlement,” and also to release for settlement large tracts of land in the Riding Mountain Reserve which “are composed of the best agricultural soil in south western Manitoba.”⁸⁶ Again in the minutes of the 1922 convention a similar motion appeared, this time “to petition the federal government to survey the St. Peter’s Indian Reserve in parcels of 40 to 80 acres, to be offered for sale, and that no further leases be granted.”⁸⁷

These motions were clearly part of a broader debate that had been taking place in the Dominion, first, regarding the government’s desire to find additional arable land in order to increase the production of food as a result of the war and later, the need to find suitable land for non-Indigenous soldiers returning from the Great War. As Sarah Carter states in her article, “Infamous proposal: prairie Indian reserve land and soldier settlement after World War 1,” amendments to the Indian Act in the spring of 1918 gave the Department of Indian Affairs unprecedented powers to allow reserve land to be leased to non-Aboriginal farmers without the consent of the band.⁸⁸ It also gave the government the power to use band funds to purchase machinery and labour to improve the land for the non-Indigenous renter. Carter notes that the war simply provided an excuse for further diminishment of reserve land by the federal government that had been taking place since the late nineteenth century. Rather than standing up and insisting that the numbered treaties be honoured, the government had been caving in to powerful non-Indigenous interests who wanted to use what they perceived to be idle or vacant reserve lands for their own farm expansion or to graze cattle or hold for purposes of speculation. Many people in the West were led to believe the government’s self-serving position that the reserves were obstacles to development and that Indigenous people had no desire to farm. As

⁸⁶ AOM, P7578/14, UFM/UFWM 1920 Year Book, Minutes of 1920 Convention. The Riding Mountain Reserve is today the Keeseekoowenin First Nation, whose settlement was burned to the ground when Indigenous people resisted the theft of their land for the creation of Riding Mountain National Park in the 1930s. The people of Keeseekoowenin were relocated to the settlement of Elphinstone, but recently a number of Elders have been successful in reclaiming a section of their original lands and burial grounds, and have implemented land-based learning, sacred ceremonies, and traditional teachings for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Manitoba.

⁸⁷ AOM, P7578/16, 1922 Convention Year Book, Minutes of UFM/UFWM Convention.

⁸⁸ Carter, “An Infamous Proposal,” 3.

discussed in the first chapter of this study, a number of historians have presented convincing evidence of the government's attempts to discourage and sabotage Indigenous agriculture through the peasant farming policy and attempts to subdivide reserve land into 40-acre lots to create larger "vacant" acres that could then be leased or sold.⁸⁹ Amendments to the Indian Act in 1906 and 1911 allowed the government to offer large cash incentives to entice First Nations leaders to surrender large parcels of their land. As Carter states, "the Soldier Settlement Board acquired over 85,000 acres of Indian reserve land in Western Canada for non-Indigenous soldier settlement in the years immediately after World War I."⁹⁰

It was not that land for returning soldiers was in short supply. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, including the United Farmers of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, pointed to the land being held out of production for speculative purposes by large corporations such as the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Hudson's Bay Company. As Carter states, "The federal government's response to this, however, was to divert attention to the issue of what was supposedly vacant and idle Indian reserve lands, rather than taking steps that might offend or harm the investments of powerful commercial interests."⁹¹

We know that the issue of the monopoly of the CPR and grain companies was a sore point for the United Farm Women of Manitoba. A 1919 UFWM document read at the annual Provincial convention refers to the Soldiers' Settlement Act. It informs UFWM members that there will be a total of 105,000 soldiers returning to the land. It asks where the government hopes to place these returning soldiers and notes that much of the arable land within 30-40 miles of the railroad is currently unavailable for settlement because corporations are holding on to it for purposes of speculation.⁹² This is a direct reference to the CPR who was granted 25 million acres of land in a

⁸⁹ Carter, *Lost Harvests*; and James Daschuk, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Indigenous Life* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2019).

⁹⁰ Carter, "An Infamous Proposal," 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² AOM, P7568/2, "The Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, 1919, 6.

belt along either side of the railway.⁹³ Carter's research confirms this. She states, "There were vast acreages held from production for speculative purposes by the railways, the Hudson's Bay Company and other companies, and individual land speculators. The Grain Growers' Guide estimated that there were 30,000 acres of good farm land in the three prairie provinces in districts served by the railway that were "absolutely idle," were inhibiting settlement and distorting its pattern."⁹⁴ The author of the 1919 UFWM document, likely Alice Tooth, goes on to say, "This land that is closer (to railways and settlement) is held at a figure above the purse of the ordinary individual. Are we going to let the speculator continue to hold this land at such a high figure and force the soldiers to outlying regions? This question applies to us women as well as the men."⁹⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that both resolutions, one put forward at the 1920 convention and the other at the 1922 convention regarding the theft of more Indigenous land, were not carried but were tabled and referred back to the executive.⁹⁶ This almost always indicated that there was not widespread support for the sentiments expressed in these motions. As Carter clearly states, "The farm movement was opposed to the theft of reserve lands ... they argued that this was a fundamental violation of the government's commitment to act as trustee for the residents of Indian reserves."⁹⁷ She concludes that this protest on the part of organized farmers, particularly in Manitoba, was effective in withstanding the pressures to surrender the land and that efforts to acquire Indian reserve land for non-Indian soldier settlement did not meet with success.

The other reference to Indigenous people appeared as an ad in one of their pamphlets extolling the accomplishments of the organization's many cooperative ventures. It offered a free booklet to boys and girls "about the tribe of the far northern valleys; about the beaver and the buffalo; about

⁹³ Omer Lavallé, "Canadian Pacific Railway," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, March 6, 2008, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canadian-pacific-railway>.

⁹⁴ Carter, "An Infamous Proposal," 4–5.

⁹⁵ AOM, P7568/2, "The Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, 1919.

⁹⁶ AOM, P7578/16, 1922 UFWM Convention Minutes under "Indian Reserve," 7. "On motion it was agreed that this be referred to the Executive and that the members-elect look into the matter." See also P7578/14. "This resolution was referred to the Executive."

⁹⁷ Carter, "An Infamous Proposal," 3.

the Indian boys and girls; and about the free, happy life these folks lead because they have learned the simple secret of working together.” The words are accompanied by a cartoon-like image of a smiling Indigenous chief in full headdress paddling a canoe.⁹⁸ One can only speculate about the reasoning behind this, but there was quite possibly a desire on behalf of the women’s farm movement to reinforce the allure and adventure of rural life for young people who were leaving the farm for urban centres. This unabashed appropriation of Indigenous culture by non-Indigenous people was not uncommon. Historian Sharon Wall points to this phenomenon in the context of summer camps in Ontario during this period, where entire summer programs were designed to give children the opportunity to get out of their urban environment and back to the natural world to “play Indian.” She points out that the image of Indians portrayed at these camps “were those of strictly pre-contact innocence... ‘Real Indians’... were no longer a people who ‘lived among us’ or who had a place in the modern world.”⁹⁹ This is consistent with historian Mary Jane McCallum’s analysis of the ways in which non-Indigenous people have chosen to construct Indigenous identities, attempting either to keep Indigenous people frozen in the past outside of modernity or to lock them in binaries such as primitive vs. civilized, thereby reinforcing white power and superiority.¹⁰⁰ As Wall observes, ‘playing Indian’ at summer camps actually contributed to the ongoing rationalization and naturalizing of colonialism. This advertisement for white, rural farm children, while seemingly innocuous, speaks volumes. The language of the ad assumes a commonality and closeness with Indigenous people in the values of cooperation as they stood together to oppose the raw greed of land speculators, developers and corporate interests, but it also patronizes and romanticizes Indigenous people, freezing them in a make-belief past. The wording absurdly insinuates that Indigenous people may have “learned the simple secret of working together” from the good example of the farmers’ movement. And it reveals the organized farm movement’s appalling naivety or denial regarding the living

⁹⁸ AOM, P7582/5, UFM/UFWM Pamphlets and Platforms.

⁹⁹ Sharon Wall, “Totem Poles, Teepees, and Token Traditions: ‘Playing Indian’ at Ontario Summer Camps, 1920–1955,” *Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (2005): 531.

¹⁰⁰ Mary Jane McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History 1940–1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014), 8.

conditions Indigenous people were facing at this time due to the government's enactment of the brutal and self-serving national policies and legislation, including the Indian Act and the enforced placement of Indigenous children in residential schools.

We see here the same tendency to assert white racial superiority that we will observe in the UFM/UFWM's relationship with 'foreign' immigrants as we examine attitudes to immigration in the following chapter. Women and men in the United Farm movement were aware of the presence of Indigenous people and some even vehemently opposed the ways in which First Nations people were being doubly robbed of their land, yet they were also part of the Anglo-Saxon Protestant dominant culture of settler colonialism that perpetuated racial hierarchies. There is little doubt that the UFWM shared a deep distrust of the capitalist system that oppressed themselves and others, and they believed in a society where land and resources could be publicly owned, where co-operation could function as a real alternative to private ownership, competition, speculation, and greed, and where "the welfare of all is the concern of all."¹⁰¹ Loyalty to the white, British race and Protestant religion, however, created a blind spot preventing farm women from confronting the deeper injustices of the settler colonial project of which they were a part. Many scholars of settler colonialism have pointed to the often subtle and insidious ways racism is linked to capitalism, and ways in which that system is constructed to 'buy off' some marginalized people at the expense of others or to incentivize them to accept resources or land that has been stolen from others, knowingly or otherwise.¹⁰² Although the UFWM attempted to steer the government away from further theft of Indigenous land toward the monopoly interests of the CPR and Hudson's Bay land holdings, they didn't question the government's original theft of First Nations' land, the placement of the original inhabitants of this land on reserves, the establishment of residential schools, and the devastating and damaging imposition of colonial legislation embedded in the Indian Act.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, "Ground for Common Action," 534.

¹⁰² Owen Toews, *Stolen City: Racial Capitalism and the Making of Winnipeg* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2018), 18.

In order to build a new investment frontier on the Canadian prairies and to implement its national policies, the federal government created systems and structures of power based on constructed hierarchies of gender, class, race, ethnicity and religion. By resisting these national policies, Manitoba farm women forged a distinct agrarian class identity while negotiating their rights for gender equality. Their strong identification with their Protestant religious beliefs, particularly the Social Gospel, and an entrenched belief in the superiority of the British race, exacerbated by their fears of race suicide, compromised opportunities for real solidarity with Indigenous people and eastern European immigrants and complicated their relationship with those who could otherwise have been close allies. These are the complex layers that only the intersecting analyses of gender, class, race, religion, ethnicity, and the reality of settler colonialism have helped to expose. The following chapter will further explore the ways in which constructed hierarchies of race, religion, class and gender can be used to rationalize the misuse of power and acts of discrimination, violence and genocide as we examine the sobering reality of eugenics policies and practices in Manitoba through the lens of organized farm women.

Chapter 4

Eugenics and the UFWM

We will now examine eugenics discourse and policy in Manitoba from 1918 to 1935 through the experience of the United Farm Women of Manitoba and within the context of Canadian historiography. Very little has been written about eugenics in Manitoba but we have learned from the research of Alberta eugenics' scholars that members of the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) were instrumental in the promotion and implementation of sterilization legislation in that province. We also know that high profile first wave feminists who were also active in the UFWA such as Emily Murphy, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney, Henrietta Muir Edwards, and Nellie McClung were outspoken proponents of sterilization and played a key role in promoting and influencing the eugenics discourse, legislation, and enforcement in that province. Were members and leaders of the UFWM as fervently committed to sterilization of the "feeble-minded"? If so, were they as eager as their counterparts in Alberta to enact legislation? If not, did they focus on other aspects of eugenics practice? And how do the UFWM's attitudes and actions regarding eugenics further our understanding of their complex identities?

Eugenics in Canada

Canada was not immune to the racism fuelling the eugenics movement in Great Britain, central Europe and the United States in the latter part of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century. Little was known about its pervasive influence in this country until the 1990s. Historian Angus McLaren's 1990 monograph, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885–1945*, the first full-length study of eugenics in Canada, provides an excellent overview of the origins of the eugenics movement in Great Britain and its' rather unstable pseudo-scientific foundations which were nonetheless swallowed whole by many physicians, psychiatrists, clergy, reform

leaders, politicians, and feminists of every political stripe throughout the Western world.¹ Francis Galton coined the term “eugenics” in Great Britain in 1883 to describe “the study of the agencies under social control that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally.”² Galton believed human intelligence was a scientific concept that was both measurable and inheritable and that through testing and quantitative studies heredity would be proven to be the primary factor in determining both mental and physical fitness and capability. Although Galton was never able to provide proof for his theory, and many geneticists turned away from the simplistic concepts of eugenics after 1915, the theory of eugenics took on a life of its own. As McLaren observes, it appeared at a time when confidence in liberalism was waning and the ruling classes were searching for answers to their fears of race suicide due to the declining birth rates among the upper class and the rapid increase in birth rates among the poorest portions of the population. In addition, the recruiting program for the Boer War revealed the chronic ill health and physical weakness of the British race.³ In Canada, as in Great Britain, eugenics appealed particularly to the ruling upper and middle classes who believed in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and lived in fear of race degeneration. Canada had just lost thousands of young, white Anglo-Saxon men in World War I and was simultaneously experiencing an influx of immigrants, many coming from eastern and southern European countries to Canada’s urban centres in response to industrial capitalism’s rapacious appetite for cheap labour. City infrastructure was not prepared for this influx, and problems of poverty, overcrowding, crime, prostitution, alcoholism, venereal disease were rampant. Rather than attributing these problems to structural flaws in the economy, those fearing race degeneration blamed the “foreign” immigrants themselves who they described as unclean, uncouth, degenerate, uncivilized, unenlightened and “unfit.” Because many of the immigrants had large families, it was assumed that they were unable or unwilling to control their sexual appetites and were reproducing at rates far greater than the “fit” Anglo-Saxon race. It was this fear, McLaren

¹ McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*, 9.

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ *Ibid.*

believes, that led so many white Anglo-Saxon middle class people to embrace the new “science” of eugenics, with its construction of racial and class hierarchies, and to use it to justify the segregation or sterilization of those deemed “unfit” as a solution to the social problems of the day.⁴

Canadian sociologist Jana Grekul echoes McLaren’s observation regarding the powerful ideological influence of eugenics theory that “promulgated the idea that the “fit” members of society – the intelligent, successful middle and upper classes – should be encouraged to reproduce, and those “unfit” – lower class, mental defectives, in other words, the “feebleminded” – should be prevented from increasing their numbers.”⁵ Other scholars have examined the connection between Anglo-Saxon fears of race degeneration and the Protestant faith, particularly the Social Gospel. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, historians Marilyn Barber and Linda Kealey both address the Social Gospel’s emphasis on the urgent need for economic and political structural change, but also draw close attention to the ways in which the reforming zeal of its adherents, and their belief in the superiority of the Protestant Anglo-Saxon race, led to measures of assimilation and eugenics practices.⁶

Just five years after McLaren’s book was published in 1990, the high-profile case of Albertan Leilani Muir in 1995-96 prompted a number of Canadian historians and scholars to examine various aspects of eugenics in that province. Historian Erika Dyck, in her monograph *Facing Eugenics: Reproduction, Sterilization, and the Politics of Choice*, profiles case studies of a number of people directly impacted by Alberta’s sterilization program, including Leilani Muir.⁷ Muir was one of the female victims of Alberta’s sterilization program and her story made

⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁵ Jana Grekul, “The Social Construction of the Feebleminded Threat: Implementation of the Sexual Sterilization Act in Alberta, 1929–1972” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2002), 2.

⁶ Barber, “Nationalism, Nativism,” 189. See also the author’s introduction to Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*.

⁷ Erika Dyck, *Facing Eugenics: Reproduction, Sterilization, and the Politics of Choice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 4, 12.

headlines across the country. Like many of the 2,822 sterilization victims recorded in Alberta, Muir had been sterilized without her knowledge or consent. This occurred in the 1950s at the age of 14 when she was a resident of the Red Deer Provincial Training School for Mental Defectives. In 1966, Muir won her case against the Province of Alberta and was awarded a total of \$970,780 in damages. Her case exposed the flagrant injustice of Alberta's eugenics program. Long after the atrocities of Nazi Germany were revealed, Canadians and others around the world learned about Alberta's flawed IQ tests used to determine "feeble-mindedness" and its persistent lack of informed consent. Alberta's Sexual Sterilization Act remained in place for almost 44 years, from 1928 to 1972. In 1937, two years after the Social Credit Party came to power in Alberta, the Act was revised to expand the mandate of the Eugenics Board and remove the need for informed consent for those deemed to be mentally defective. The amendment also contained a clause that provided legal protection for surgeons or medical persons involved in sexual sterilization operations. Alberta therefore has the dubious distinction of having the "longest and most aggressive sexual sterilization program in the country," and the only one in Canada or the United States to remove the need for informed consent.⁸

Grekul's work on the social construction of the feeble-minded threat and the medicalization of social deviance in Alberta has been particularly helpful in providing a roadmap for the exploration of eugenics practice in Manitoba and other jurisdictions where sterilization was never enacted in legislation. Drawing on the scholarship of American historians Alexandra Minna Stern and Wendy Kline, Grekul examines the intersecting factors of gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion and ability in her meticulous review of the Alberta Eugenics Board's existing documents to discover the ways in which criteria for sterilization and the definition of "feeble-minded" changed over time.⁹ She noticed that often the IQ scores of young women in

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Grekul, "The Social Construction," 55–56. Stern observed inextricable links between eugenics and motherhood, sexuality, and child welfare in Mexico's eugenics movement, which formed part of Mexico's reconstruction policies in the 1920s and 1930s. She examined the notion of what constituted "responsible motherhood" as part of a broader process of the medicalization of motherhood and state expansion.

particular did not warrant the constructed label of “moron” that would rationalize the need for sterilization, but that other judgements or observations found in the reports of young patients regarding signs of immoral, promiscuous, criminal or deviant behaviour came to be linked to mental abnormality, thereby making the young women candidates for sterilization. While this was also the case for some “problematic” men, Grekul observes that women were far more likely to be labeled as promiscuous or what was felt to be incurably deviant.¹⁰ A survey of Alberta’s facilities for the mentally abnormal undertaken by the General Director of the Canadian National Committee on Mental Hygiene (CNCMH) in 1921, psychiatrist Dr. Clarence Hincks, purported to have found links between mental abnormality and both immorality and criminality.¹¹ This survey gave the United Farmers of Alberta government the impetus it needed to build public support for the sterilization of the mentally and morally “unfit.” Grekul’s 2004 article, “Sterilizing the Feeble-minded: Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929-1972,” written in collaboration with colleagues Krahn and Odynak, has also been helpful in refining the profile of those targeted for sterilization in Alberta, revealing the disproportionate numbers of women sterilized in the earlier years of the program and the disproportionate number of Indigenous women and men sterilized in the latter years of the eugenics program in that province.¹²

The work of another respected scholar Karen Stote in her 2015 monograph, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women*, has been extremely helpful in examining the links between the history of colonization, the eugenics movement, and eugenic feminism.¹³ Stote explores the ways Indigenous women in Canada have been and continue to be affected by eugenics. She undertakes a structural analysis of settler colonialism’s capitalist system and contextualizes it within the broader eugenics movement and the federal government’s Indian

¹⁰ Ibid., 39.

¹¹ Ibid., 25–27.

¹² Jana Grekul, Harvey Krahn, and Dave Odynak, “Sterilizing the Feeble-Minded: Eugenics in Alberta, Canada, 1929–1972,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 17, no. 4 (2004): 362.

¹³ Karen Stote, *An Act of Genocide: Colonialism and the Sterilization of Aboriginal Women* (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 7.

policies. She confirms evidence of the acceleration of the coercive sterilization of Indigenous women toward the end of Alberta's program, as well as recent scholarship undertaken by historians Mary-Ellen Kelm, Maureen Lux, and Mary Jane McCallum that unearths the abusive treatment and segregation of Indigenous people in Indian hospitals and residential schools. Stote recognizes that these were potential sites of involuntary sterilization and she places eugenics on the continuum of a longstanding colonial project to dispossess Indigenous people of their land, their resources, their way of life and their sovereignty. She provides evidence of the continued assault on Indigenous women's reproductive rights that continues to this present day.

British Columbia was the only other province in Canada to enact sterilization legislation.¹⁴ Approximately 200 residents of that province are on record as having been sterilized between the program's inception in 1933 and the legislation's repeal in 1973. There is emerging evidence, however, that just as in Alberta, disproportionate numbers of Indigenous people were targets of coercive sterilization especially in the latter years of the legislation and even beyond its repeal. Although B.C. never amended the legislation to remove the requirement for informed consent, the public learned in the early 1970s that Indigenous people were being subjected to coercive sterilizations in northern B.C.¹⁵ These numbers would not have been included in the commonly quoted statistics. It is instructive to explore the scholarship in Alberta and B.C. where sterilization legislation was in place to be aware of the many faces of eugenics including institutional segregation of "feble-minded" in mental institutions, provincial training centres, detention centres; mandatory intelligence tests administered in public schools; marriage regulations and restrictions; increased surveillance; immigration restrictions and deportation of those deemed 'unfit.'

¹⁴ Ibid., 3. See also Luke Kersten, "British Columbia Passes an Act Respecting Sexual Sterilization," October 31, 2013, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/database/documents/5271e077dc1dc8b865000030>; and Jane Harris-Zsovan, *Eugenics and the Firewall: Canada's Nasty Little Secret* (Winnipeg: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing, 2010), 139.

¹⁵ Stote, *An Act of Genocide*, 111–23.

Eugenics scholarship in jurisdictions beyond Canada's two most westerly provinces is starting to emerge. Other provinces across Canada have been deeply affected by the pervasive "science" of eugenics during the first decades of the twentieth century and beyond. In Ontario, for example, Linda Revie's 2006 article, "More Than Just Boots! The Eugenic and Commercial Concerns Beyond A.R. Kaufman's Birth Controlling Activities," uncovers evidence of the sterilization of over 10,000 immigrant men and women, many of whom were employed by Kaufman at his rubber manufacturing plant in Kitchener, Ontario.¹⁶ Kaufman was driven by eugenics ideology and made sterilization a condition of employment. He believed sterilization was necessary for those living in poverty who he judged to be not biologically clever enough or willing to utilize contraceptives. In Nova Scotia, Leslie Baker's 2015 PhD dissertation, "Institutionalizing Eugenics: Custody, Class, Gender, and Education in Nova Scotia's Response to the "Feeble-Minded," 1890-1931," reveals prominent physicians' direct involvement in utilizing public schools as clearing houses through which "defective" children could be identified and then segregated in institutions. Although sterilization legislation was not enacted in Nova Scotia, other legislation such as the Nova Scotia Training School Act allowed for the establishment of a board not unlike the Eugenics Boards in Alberta and B.C. that gave power to detain any child who was deemed "defective."¹⁷ In Saskatchewan, a sterilization bill was introduced but was never passed into law. However, through the Mental Defectives Act that became law in that province, those deemed mentally defective could be referred to a Justice of the Peace who could then admit them to the Weyburn Mental Hospital. In addition, legislation was enacted in the 1930s in Saskatchewan that made it lawful to conduct mental and physical examinations prior to marriage and to prohibit the marriage of those considered mentally defective.¹⁸

¹⁶ Linda Revie, "More Than Just Boots! The Eugenic and Commercial Concerns Beyond A. R. Kaufman's Birth Controlling Activities," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 23, no. 1 (2006): 119–43.

¹⁷ Leslie Elaine Baker, "Institutionalizing Eugenics: Custody, Class, Gender and Education in Nova Scotia's Response to the 'Feeble-Minded,' 1890–1931" (PhD diss., University of Saskatchewan, 2015).

¹⁸ Alex Deighton, "Saskatchewan," March 26, 2015, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/database/documents/551482b25eff8d344d000001>.

Eugenics in Manitoba and the UFWM

As mentioned earlier, very little scholarly work has focused on eugenics in Manitoba. Erna Kurbegovic's 2019 PhD. diss., "Eugenics in Comparative Perspective: Explaining Manitoba and Alberta's Divergence on Eugenics Policy, 1910 to the 1930s," has been helpful in gaining an entry point into comparisons between Manitoba and Alberta farm women's discourse and actions on eugenics. In addition, her more recent article, "Eugenics in Manitoba and the Sterilization Controversy of 1933," encapsulates some of the dramatic events surrounding the introduction and close defeat of sterilization legislation in our province. Both are welcome additions to the historical record and will be examined in the section on sterilization later in this chapter.¹⁹ A close examination of the records of the United Farm Women of Manitoba has revealed significant evidence of discourse on eugenics that manifested itself both in negative eugenics or the prevention of the procreation of the "unfit," and in positive eugenics, or the promotion of procreation of the "fit." Among examples of negative eugenics supported in varying degrees by the UFWM are calls for more stringent immigration policies to restrict or limit the number of "unfit" from entering the country, policies and actions to assimilate "foreigners," increased surveillance including the medical and physical inspection of rural children in schools and homes, advocacy for legislation that would restrict the marriage of those deemed mentally inferior or morally deviant, support for the segregation of the "feebleminded" and "morally degenerate," and later on, sterilization of the morally deviant and mentally "unfit." The UFWM worked tirelessly to build public and government support for public health nurses who could

¹⁹ Erna Kurbegovic, "Eugenics in Comparative Perspective: Explaining Manitoba and Alberta's Divergence on Eugenics Policy, 1910s–1930s" (PhD diss., University of Calgary, 2019). See also Erna Kurbegovic, "Eugenics in Manitoba and the Sterilization Controversy of 1933," in *Psychiatry and the Legacies of Eugenics*, ed. Frank W. Stahnivch and Erna Kurbegovic (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2020).

serve Manitoba's rural population, driven by the urgency of the high incidence of infant and maternal death rates. In addition to an increase in the number of public health nurses hired to serve rural Manitoba, other services they fought for included free child welfare clinics, better baby conferences, home nursing, First Aid courses, and health lectures. These services were, on the whole, welcomed by rural women of all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, but they also presented opportunity for the practice of both positive and negative eugenics practices as elaborated on more fully in the upcoming discussion of public health nurses.

Immigration

A fairly wide range of attitudes and policies regarding immigration can be found within the UFWM records and it is not surprising given the ongoing tension between the liberal and more radical ideologies at play within the organization. Not only were members often on opposing sides of a debate, these distinctions could also change over time. It's important to keep this dynamic in mind as we examine attitudes to immigration as well as the other components of the eugenics spectrum. In 1920 we see a UFWM resolution supporting amendments to the Immigration Act that would prohibit Hutterites, Mennonites, and Doukhobors from entering Canada and calling for the deportation of anyone who had entered Canada illegally.²⁰ This motion makes reference to a 1919 Order-in-Council amending the Immigration Act to prohibit further entry into Canada of these three groups of settlers. The UFWM resolution preamble states that since the Order-in-Council was initiated, various parties of Hutterites have entered Manitoba ostensibly as visitors and are now in Canada illegally. The motion criticizes the lack of enforcement on the part of Immigration officials as well as the slack surveillance of the border between Canada and the U.S., with the exception of the legal ports of entry. Also mentioned specifically is the observation that the Hutterites had openly proclaimed that they had no intention of becoming Canadian citizens unless granted exemption from military service. The

²⁰ Archives of Manitoba (hereafter AOM), UFM/UFWM fonds, P7578/14, Convention Resolutions, 63.

motion calls for an amendment to the Immigration Act and the Naturalization Act requesting that after registration, should anyone of “the above prohibited classes” be found to be here illegally, they should be immediately deported. Although the minutes record that the motion carried, it was obviously contentious because it contains an awkward addendum with a proviso that if this motion should violate rights that had been granted prior to the war, the motion would not apply. In the end, the motion was referred back to the Party Executive, almost always a sign that it required further study and that action would be unlikely to follow.

By way of contrast to the rather extreme position expressed in that motion, an article appeared front and centre in the UFM/UFWM 1920 Convention Program that very same year entitled “The New Challenge,” likely authored by the UFM President. It called for a “new attitude and relationship to those of our citizenship who are foreign birth and language” and went on at length as follows: “These people are not to be hated or shunned...It is not enough that we should think of teaching and assimilating them. We must recognize that they have a definite contribution to make to the enrichment of our future life...it is true we may teach them...but it is no less true that they may teach us...we must learn (this) and re-echo it in all our organization, in all our community work, in all our public service, until the last shred of racial and sectional prejudice is banished.”²¹ At the same convention, a motion was introduced opposing a federal government amendment to the Immigration Act enabling the deportation of immigrants legal without trial by jury. The UFWM motion called for the repeal of this amendment at the earliest opportunity, demanding the right of every person to trial by jury. The motion was carried.²² The same motion was re-introduced over the years at numerous Provincial conventions and always received the support of the majority of delegates.

A degree of divergence of opinion was fairly common in the UFWM, not only due to differing ideological positions but because the organized farm movement in Manitoba was preparing to

²¹ AOM, P7578/14, 1920 Annual Convention Year Book, “The New Challenge.”

²² AOM, P7578/15, Convention Resolutions, 1920 Year Book, 64.

enter politics as the Farmers' Party or Progressive Party of Manitoba and wanted to attract new Canadians, especially those who had been naturalized and were eligible to vote. In 1919, for example, we see the political platforms and literature of the UFM/UFWM translated and printed in several languages including French, Ukrainian, Russian, and Icelandic.²³ Whether this represented tolerance or opportunism, or a bit of both on the part of some in the movement, it did not, however, prevent other motions coming forward to the floor of the annual convention the very next year that reflected a desire to control and assimilate. In 1921, for example, a motion was introduced and immediately carried calling for the Dominion government to adopt a stricter method of selection for agrarian immigrants so that "only such numbers and character of immigrants be received into Canada as can be properly assimilated."²⁴ The other part of this motion talked about the need for the government to improve the economic conditions of present residents of the land before proceeding with more immigration. Given the dramatic drop in commodity prices after the Great War this sentiment was close to the hearts and pocketbooks of farm women and men. In the years ahead, however, as we shall witness, the language and sentiment of the UFWM in the area of immigration, fuelled by a growing sense of race degeneration, mirrored even more strongly their racial and religious biases and reflected their deep-seated belief in the superiority of the British race and Protestant religion.

The 1925 and 1926 UFWM reports delivered by the UFWM provincial convenor of the committee on Immigration, Mrs. F. Howell, are illustrative of an escalation of concern about the erosion of British standards and loss of perceived British class and racial superiority. Howell's 1925 report sounds the alarm that immigration authorities are giving consideration to bringing thousands of central Europeans to settle on the prairies in the coming year due to the slowdown in immigration, the subsequent stagnation of population growth and the negative effects on the economy. She notes that two problems present themselves when considering the class of

²³ AOM, P7582/6. Three similar election platform pamphlets can be found in the UFM/UFWM records, one in French, one in Ukrainian, and one in Russian.

²⁴ AOM, P7578/15, 1921 Year Book, 53.

immigrants desired in Canada, the first being the problem of industry and the second the question of mental and physical fitness of those coming to Canada. She observes that in southern Manitoba where farming has been unprofitable for a number of years, a new movement is taking place. Mennonites from southern Russia are coming and purchasing large farms of hundreds of acres that they farm together, pooling their implements, stock, feed, and seed. Howell refers to the Mennonites as a thrifty, moral and intelligent people, from German and Dutch descent that is “much superior to the Russian peasant agriculturalist.” Nonetheless, you can sense her bewilderment about what this will mean for the future of the British farmers who have not been able to hold on to their farms. She asks, “If our British stock are not able to make good on the land and maintain their present standard of living, what is to be the future of farming in Manitoba? ...Does this mean peasant farmers, a lower standard of living in the country, a lower standard of education with the lowering of our Canadian ideals...What of the present Canadian farmers? Are they going to be content to associate with neighbours of a different race who have lower standards of living?”²⁵ She then goes on to the second problem. How can assurances be given that the immigrants coming to Canada will be physically and mentally fit? “We want the best possible mental and physical inheritance for our land. We do not want to be burdened with the support of the unfit.”²⁶ Howell quotes from a recent editorial in the *Manitoba Free Press* regarding the high numbers of the “mentally defective” in British Columbia hospitals who were born outside of Canada and the disproportionately high numbers of “foreigners” in Manitoba jails, in particular Austrians and Russians. Her report concludes with advice regarding Canada’s immigration policy. If immigration is to be successful, states Howell, it must take into consideration the economic conditions of the country and the suitability of the immigrant to the community in which the immigrant is placed. She also urges the UFWM to press the Dominion Government for the provision of more stringent medical and psychiatric inspection of all

²⁵ AOM, P7568/8, UFWM Immigration Report, 1925, 2–3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

immigrants at the port of embarkation and to ensure that the examination prior to departure for Canada will be final and binding.²⁷

Equally enlightening is Howell's 1926 UFWM Report on Immigration. She notes that the Honourable Robert Forke, Member of Parliament from Brandon, Manitoba and leader of the federal Progressive Party serving in the government of William Lyon Mackenzie King, has been appointed Minister of Immigration and Colonization. This appointment, Howell believes, underlines the importance of immigration on the national stage and also reflects the changing attitudes of farmers toward immigration now that there has been a turn for the better in the rural economy. She is quick to point out that while all agree that increased population is needed, it is important that immigrants are "properly selected." She laments the low percentage of immigrants from Great Britain despite many government inducements, and quotes from a recent speech of Anglican Archbishop Matheson in which he raised alarm that the last census showed only 55% of the population of Canada was of British origin and strongly encouraged immigration officials to "maintain the British strain."²⁸ Using this phrase as a title for a section of her report, Howell warns, "As we are greatly concerned in regard to maintaining the British strain, we will be specially interested in noting the origin of our new arrivals."²⁹

Her report highlights two groups of settlers of whom she believes few Manitobans are aware, Italian colonies at Lorette and Alonsa, Manitoba, and the Mennonite Settlement in southern Manitoba. Here her former praise for the hardworking and thrifty character of the Mennonite people gives way to a more critical and fearful tone. "Every year Manitoba sees colonies of

²⁷ Ibid., 6.

²⁸ AOM, P7568/9, UFM Records, Papers and Addresses, 1926, "UFWM Report on Committee on Immigration for 1926." Archbishop Samuel Matheson was a graduate of St. John's College, University of Manitoba, where he took a Doctor of Divinity degree in 1903 and served as Master the college. Matheson became Dean of Rupert's Land in 1902 and Archbishop of Rupert's Land in 1909. He was elected Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, in which office he served until 1931. From 1908 to 1934, he also served as the University of Manitoba's second chancellor.

²⁹ Ibid., 3.

(Mennonites) settled in blocks in our midst. In a number of instances, these are being injected into old settled districts with the result that the established English settlers are becoming discontented because they are not finding them congenial associates. The success of these new settlers on land where apparently the English settler has failed is not hard to explain. (The Mennonites) live in colonies where buildings accommodate many inmates, their standards of living are low compared with ours, they spend little money as their requirements are few, hence they are able to produce the goods required by the financial interests who are backing them.” As she ends her report, Howell asks the question, “What will be the destiny of our country if these immigrants from Southern Europe continue to settle in blocks in our midst? Can they be absorbed into Canadian life and become imbued with our ideals of Canadian citizenship? Or are we going to acknowledge the failure of the English-speaking people to make good on the land and submit to a peasantry in Western Canada?”³⁰

Fear of race degeneration is evident in Howell’s report and there is an observable escalation of this sentiment from the previous year’s report. This is not surprising when we recall that sterilization legislation in Alberta was just two years from enactment and the ground was being prepared through wide discourse in the public media by the organized farm movement in Alberta. Notable in Howell’s 1926 Report on Immigration is her growing reliance on medical experts who were forging careers in the emerging fields of psychology and psychiatry. Howell quotes Dr. Mathers, head of the Winnipeg Psychopathic Hospital, who reports that in a two-year period from 1924 to 1926 he saw 568 patients admitted to the institution and of these, 307 or over half were born outside Canada. He also quotes the exorbitant costs associated with caring for the “feeble-minded.” Dr. Stewart of the Ninette Sanatorium is also quoted. “In the last two or three years we have had a good many of what are called New Mennonites, seven of whom have had very serious illness and have died of tuberculosis.” Although Dr. Stewart attributed this to wartime conditions, Howell makes her own observation based on one Mennonite family she met

³⁰ Ibid., 4.

who immigrated in 1925, stating that they looked undernourished, pallid and about to become tubercular. She also quotes Dr. M.S. Fraser of the Provincial Board of Health in reference to the results of examinations conducted in the Manitoba municipality of Rhineland where many New Mennonites settled. Dr. Fraser states “even a cursory perusal of these reports (reveals) an appalling prevalence of tuberculosis and trachoma among recently arrived colonists.”³¹ And finally, Howell reiterates the same statistic she quoted in her 1925 report, attributed to Dr. Eric K. Clarke of the Canadian National Committee on Mental Hygiene (CNCMH), who calculates that “75.3% of the mentally deficient children found in our public schools are there as a direct result of our lack of immigrant inspectors, with only 24.7% of the sub-normal children classed as coming from Canadian stock.”³²

Howell’s growing reliance on mental health experts was not uncommon. These new health care providers were aggressively trying to capture public opinion in order to enhance their emerging professions of psychiatry, psychology, psychiatric nursing and social work. As sociologist Jana Grekul, historian Angus McLaren and others have highlighted, science and medical knowledge was advancing rapidly in the early twentieth century but the medical profession itself was still not a secure profession. These scholars have observed the ways in which the activities of the newly formed CNCMH served as a launching pad for both the psychiatric and psychology professions in Canada as they cornered the market on expertise relating to the rising concerns of mental, physical, and moral deficiency linked to eugenics and fears of race degeneration.³³ The tendency to associate “foreignness” with disease, unclean living conditions, alcoholism, promiscuity, delinquency and to link these to “feeble-mindedness” is also characteristic of the eugenics thought and discourse perpetuated by many of these professionals. Consciously or unconsciously this fed into the discomfort white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant settlers were feeling about the rapid changes in their communities and their discourse and policies began to echo that

³¹ AOM, P7568/9, UFWM Report of Committee on Immigration for 1926,” 4.

³² Ibid. See also AOM, P7568/8, “United Farm Women of Manitoba: Immigration Report,” 5.

³³ Grekul, “The Social Construction,” 47–48.

of the new professionals. The escalated tone of Howell's 1926 report is evident as she reiterates more pointedly her disdain for difference and her fear of loss for the familiar British way of life. Her report once again calls for the careful screening by trained physicians and psychiatrists of settlers coming from eastern and southern European countries. The examination of immigrants at the port of embarkation was precisely what many of the influential Protestant religious and reform leaders, such as J.S. Woodsworth, as well as some leaders in the medical profession, were advocating as the only way to prevent what they believed to be a high percentage of "feeble-minded," or those with communicable diseases such as tuberculosis, from gaining entry into Canada.³⁴

Assimilation

Closely linked to the issues of immigration were concerns about assimilation. Howell's questions about the future composition of rural Manitoba and the potential loss of accustomed British traditions, the English language, the standard of living reveal the deep angst that was fuelled by the racism of the eugenics debate of this historical period. It is somewhat ironic that the United Farmers movement, including the UFWM, prided itself on its' cooperative values and yet judged examples of Mennonite cooperation with suspicion. Just the year before in her Immigration report, Howell spoke of the positive characteristics of the Mennonite people, their thrift, morality and intelligence. She indicated that she had one of the girls from a nearby Mennonite colony as an employee and found her to be "a good type, anxious to learn Canadian ways and our language." Almost to dispel her own fears, she notes in her 1925 report that "These people do not want to be tenants on any farm but intend to own their land... (They) are most anxious for

³⁴ Ibid., 23. Grekul identifies J. S. Woodsworth's membership on the board of the Bureau of Social Research for Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta (see page 29 of her dissertation). While the provincial bureaus were commissioned to study a variety of topics such as child welfare, immigration, anti-crime legislation, rural communities, etc., they also studied "mental defectiveness," placing subjects in four categories: idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded, and moral defectives. The Bureau supported the belief that mental defectiveness was hereditary, and extended that belief further to argue for a hereditary basis for alcoholism.

their children to attend school and the women want to attend the women's clubs and help in the programs by singing."³⁵

References can be found throughout the UFWM files demonstrating the genuine friendship and neighbourliness that UFWM members extended to new immigrants. Annual reports from the local branches are filled with news of the ways the local organization welcomed new families, meeting them at the train station upon arrival, taking them to their home, adding a few comforts to make the home attractive, providing vegetables to last till the following summer season, providing meals until they were settled, informing them about local resources and services such as schools and medical assistance which were often many, many miles away, inviting their participation at community events, and establishing regular neighbourly visits. This initial contact was often coordinated through the central office of the UFWM. A 1925 document entitled, "Service Rendered By the UFWM," states that the UFWM had been working closely that year with the Settlement Branch of the Department of Immigration. As the names and particulars of immigrant families were received by the UFWM Central Office, the Provincial Secretary corresponded with the secretaries of the various districts into which the families would be moving, advising of the family's anticipated arrival time and inviting local UFWM members to work with other organizations in the community to welcome the newcomers.³⁶ The 1925 UFWM Immigration Report also mentions that men had been appointed as field supervisors to visit the farms of newcomers and give assistance where required. The UFWM lobbied the federal Department of Immigration for a similar position to be created for a woman supervisor in each district and this position was added the following year.³⁷ In addition to this initiative, as mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the UFWM responded to requests from new immigrants

³⁵ AOM, P7568/8, UFWM Immigration Report, 1925, 2.

³⁶ AOM, P7568/8, "Service Rendered by the UFWM," 1925, 3-4.

³⁷ AOM, P7568/8, UFWM Immigration Report, 1925, 2. That this suggestion was acted upon is evidenced in the report of the UFWM's Committee on Immigration for 1926, on page 1, where it states: "This suggestion was acted upon and the woman chosen to fill the position was our president, Mrs. Gee. That this was a wise choice was proved by the comments of the Board who have only the highest praise for her work and for the satisfied and contented women settlers who were helped by her in their many problems in their new mode of life in Canada."

across the province for warm woollen clothing and blankets for children and families that were in such short supply as well as food and other materials needed for survival in the harsh winter climate. Again, Central Office played a key role, notifying the district and local members of the urgent needs so that items could be gathered and sent to the central office for distribution to the families in order to maintain confidentiality.³⁸

As much as these examples would seem to indicate a fairly seamless transition of new settlers into the Manitoba prairie landscape, there were signs of acrimony, suspicion and fear not too far beneath the surface. Concern about the need to assimilate immigrants into the dominant British hierarchy seemed to stem from eugenic-induced fears that immigrant children were more prone to delinquency and could be a poor influence on the children of British or Canadian settlers. The 1921 UFWM report of the Committee of Social Service, for example, states, “The assimilation of the New Canadian in our midst will prevent a certain amount of delinquency. These people should not be left in communities wholly by themselves.”³⁹ This attitude was evident again in the 1922 UFWM Report of the Social Services and Public Health Committee which states, “To prevent delinquency we must assimilate the New Canadian from which class such a large proportion of delinquents come. We must raise the standards of family life through improved economic conditions, better education, and wholesome recreation.”⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that the author of this UFWM document cites economic conditions as one of the reasons for delinquency, but better education almost surely meant nothing other than a British education and “wholesome recreation” definitely had a ring of moral superiority.

³⁸ AOM, P7577/1–16, Annual Reports from Locals. See also P7568/8, “Services Rendered by the UFWM,” 3–4. Also see page 7 of the same report, where it states: “Every year the Central Office receives many calls from the destitute areas to supply food and clothing to families in need.... Not only are our locals doing much to see that those in their own communities are being looked after, but this fall may we not urge every mother at housecleaning time to make up a bundle of the things she can spare and advise Central office, through the local.”

³⁹ AOM, P7568/4, Committee of Social Service, 1921 Report.

⁴⁰ AOM, P7568/5, Social Services and Public Health Report, 1922, 4. See also Report of the Committee of Social Service, 1921, p. 1.

In addition to fears of delinquency among the new immigrants were fears of the mentally or morally “unfit.” Returning briefly to Mrs. F. Howell’s 1925 Immigration report she raises the problems that confront Canada in securing immigrants who are physically and mentally fit. Assimilation as a solution is at the forefront of her mind when she states, “We do not want to be burdened with the unfit...we desire to bring in the type of settler who will be an asset to our land, whose ideals may be moulded as one with our ideals and whose aspirations may be a reaching out and striving after better things. With this class of settler we shall be glad to work.”⁴¹

One of the most effective means to achieve assimilation, some members of the UFWM believed, was through the rural school system. A project of Manitoba’s Department of Education known as the English School Project was initiated in 1918.⁴² The report of the UFWM Provincial Secretary in 1920 stated, “Eighteen new rural Canadian schools are now receiving assistance from our Women’s Sections. The object is to help teachers in a foreign district in their work of making a united people in Canada.” The report goes on to say that boxes of magazines, Sunday School papers, cards, and library books had been donated to many rural Canadian schools for new immigrant children, as well as boxes of clothing, a typewriter purchased by five Women’s Sections for a physically disabled boy to enable him to receive business training, a canning outfit for one school so the children could learn to process canned fruit and vegetables from their school gardens to be used later in the year for their hot school lunches. In addition, it refers to correspondence that was established between a number of associate UFWM members and new Canadian pupils that “has already created a bond of sympathy between the different races.”⁴³

⁴¹ AOM, P7568/8, UFWM Immigration Report, 1925, 6.

⁴² Rose Bruno-Jofre, “Citizenship and Schooling in Manitoba, 1918–1945,” Manitoba Historical Society, *Manitoba History*, no. 36 (1998–99): 3. Available at: http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/36/citizenship.shtml. This article confirms that in 1918, the minister of education, Dr. R. S. Thornton, identified the need to bring newcomers into Canadian national life, and into the life of the province, more quickly. “Our aim,” said Dr. Thornton, “is to plant Canadian schools with Canadian teachers setting forth Canadian ideals and teaching the language of the country.” The article notes that it was this minister who, in 1916, repealed the section of the Public Schools Act that had previously permitted bilingual instruction in schools supported by public funds. The legislature unanimously approved the School Attendance Act, making school attendance compulsory, with unilingual instruction in English.

⁴³ AOM, P7578/14, UFM/UFWM Year Book, Secretary’s Report, Mabel Finch, 1920, 85.

The President's Address that same year reflected this enthusiasm. "Our Women's Sections have been... especially responsive to that of the New Canadian Schools. This is an interesting subject and one in which we find so many ways of rendering assistance...Our clubs are trying to encourage teachers who are taking up the work of making Canadian citizens of the non-English children, for we are told that in order to accomplish results it must come through the children."⁴⁴ Her report describes ways in which the children were taught domestic skills and Canadian customs. As an incentive to attract teachers to outlying districts, she states, homes are built for them adjacent to the schools and "the children are taken into these homes in turn and taught everyday customs of the Canadian people."⁴⁵ In a burst of nationalistic pride, the President, Janet Wood, speaks about Canada's fine reputation won during the war through the service of "our boys" that has earned Canada a prominent position among the nations of the world. She then equates the fight to assimilate the non-English with the continuation of the battle recently fought to win the war. "To uphold (Canada's) status and become truly a nation among nations, our work must be to make every man, woman and child a loyal Canadian citizen." And with a triumphant flourish she ends her report as follows, "Our work for the coming year is not yet fully planned but there are hosts of things to be done. There is the subject of our great national war debt, and what part we are to take in lessening it. We will still continue the work of trying to make Canadian citizens of the non-English. These are the two great problems facing Canada today...Our Canadianism is the only kind of nation building that is worthwhile. It goes hand and hand with social reform; it aims in carrying on an active crusade for the health of the babies of the nation and citizens of tomorrow."⁴⁶

Public Health Nurses in Manitoba and their Role in Positive and Negative Eugenics

⁴⁴ AOM, P7578/14, UFM/UFWM Annual Convention Year Book, 1920, President's Address, 81.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 82.

From the earliest days of the formation of the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association in 1918, child, infant, and maternal health was a priority for Manitoba's organized farm women. The organization's first President, Alice Tooth, in her 1918 inaugural address to Convention delegates, highlights the work of New Zealand women in developing methods of caring for the health of women and children that had become models for the world. Due to the intervention of New Zealand women, Tooth reports, the infant mortality in that country dropped to 51 per 1,000 or less than half that of the U.S. She challenges her colleagues to take up this cause and to work for women and children's health in Manitoba, especially for those in rural areas who are often far from medical aid.⁴⁷ As we saw in Chapter 2 of this study, the UFWM rural survey revealed high percentages of farm families who lived as far as 120 miles from a hospital and over 20 miles from the nearest doctor. Alice Tooth also quotes a Miss Rankin from Montana who studied the welfare of mothers and babies in England during the war and observed the way in which the war was able to help direct public attention to the welfare of mothers and babies. Birth registration became obligatory in England in 1915 and this led directly to a program of maternity and infant protection followed by the provision of maternity aid. That aid was given directly to the mother, thanks to the efforts of the Women's Co-operative Guild. In England, she reports, public money is also used to fund maternity clinics and child welfare centres all over the country where mothers may go for free examination and advice. Tooth calls on the Women's Section of the MGGA to work toward the establishment of free child welfare clinics and public health nurses throughout rural Manitoba.

The women moved swiftly. The very next year in 1919 an article appeared in the *Grain Growers' Guide* written by Associate Editor Mary P. McCallum providing a retrospective on the organized farm women's movement in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba and highlighting some of the organizations' major achievements. Among the accomplishments of the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association was listed the work of initiating free child

⁴⁷ AOM, P7578/12, Mrs. Tooth's Address, Convention Year Book, 1918, 78-79.

welfare clinics.⁴⁸ In her article, McCallum states that due to the Women's Section of the MGGA, public opinion in Manitoba is now so strong that the Department of Health has been encouraged to initiate the free clinics with a number of clinics already in operation and others coming on stream. She states that public health nurses and doctors will be in charge and that these clinics are there "not only for the benefit the school children but for every child who can reach its doors."⁴⁹

As early as 1918 there were motions at the Women's Section of the MGGA convention calling for child welfare clinics and more public health nurses in rural Manitoba due to high infant and maternal mortality rates, to the scarcity of medical facilities and physicians in rural and remote areas, and to the Spanish flu epidemic. For example, resolution # 1 in the 1918 minutes, moved by Mrs. Wieneke and seconded by Mrs. Amos, was passed immediately and read as follows: "Resolved that a Child Clinic be established in each municipality at some suitable place where mothers and their children may receive free medical advice until the child attains school age, this clinic to be held twice each year and attendance at such clinic to be made compulsory."⁵⁰ Another 1919 motion laments the terrible wastage of human life in the war and the loss of life of "our strong young manhood who have made the greatest sacrifice the past four years," and links this to the urgency of "carrying out a child welfare campaign in order to conserve (our) greatest asset, the child."⁵¹ And a further 1919 motion in the minutes of the MGGA Women's Section

⁴⁸ AOM, P7582/5, UFWM Clippings, "Women as Organized Force," article by Mary P. McCallum, Associate Editor, *Grain Growers' Guide*, 13.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Also see P7582/2, "The Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, 1919," 5. "In Manitoba the agitation has been chiefly for free child welfare clinics. There are now four in operation, one each in Brandon, Winnipeg, St. James, and Dauphin." There is also an explanation of how public health nurses were funded, with one-third coming from the provincial government and the other two-thirds from the municipality engaging the nurse. The municipality also paid for any necessary equipment or materials used, with all municipal contributions raised by taxes levied through the school tax. It also states that the public health nurses were under the direction of Dr. Stewart Fraser.

⁵⁰ AOM, P7578/12, MGGA Annual Convention Women's Section Minutes, January 10, 1918. See Resolution 1. The addition of compulsory attendance is initially surprising, but, given the prevalence of the Spanish flu at the time, this is somewhat understandable. Just over one hundred years later, our current Covid-19 pandemic adds real perspective.

⁵¹ AOM, P7578/13, "Minutes of the Women's Section," 1919.

calls for the establishment of an institution for the training of persons to serve as nurses during the epidemic. It suggests that returning VAD's (Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses) be placed in charge.⁵² In 1920 the Report of the Committee on Public Health, Convenor H.G. Thornton praises the work done by public health nurses during the flu epidemic and reports that there are now 43 public health nurses in the province under the direction of the Department of Public Health, up from only 13 just a few years earlier. The report highlights the work of the public health nurse in schools and homes, the benefits they have brought such as pre and post-natal care to address infant and maternal mortality, early detection of tuberculosis and venereal disease, the care of the sick where no doctor is available, the medical inspection of children in schools, the establishment of baby conferences, well baby clinics and free child welfare clinics, the sponsorship of First Aid clinics and home nursing courses. She states that the public health nurse assists the Department by gathering information on tuberculosis and reporting it to the local health officer. There was obviously some resistance to public health nurses because when speaking about the Department of Public Health in the 1920 report, Thornton states that "there still exists in some districts prejudice against this form of education, but this will vanish as the people come to know the character and effect of the work that the Public Health Nurse is doing."⁵³ Her report the following year states that due to public health nurses "thousands of children suffering from mental and physical defects have had attention drawn to these defects and remedies applied."

She also reports "baby conferences were held in connection with a number of local fairs and were very successful with over seventy babies being examined at Dauphin and almost as many at Gladstone...with 90 in Brandon."⁵⁴ At baby conferences, babies were thoroughly examined by physicians, score cards were created showing weight measurement, feeding, notation of any

⁵² AOM, P7578/15, "Minutes of the Women's Section," 1919.

⁵³ AOM, P7568/2 and P7568/3, UFM/UFWM Reports, Papers, and Addresses, Report of the Committee of Public Health, 1920. See also P7578/14, UFWM President's Address, 1920.

⁵⁴ Ibid., P7568/3, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, "Report of the Committee on Public Health, 1921."

defects, and at a follow up clinic, improvements were noted.⁵⁵ This would no doubt be intimidating to any young parent, but particularly if there was a language or cultural barrier. It seems that the majority of the rural population utilizing well baby clinics would be of Anglo-Saxon origin and were English-speaking, so it is reasonable to conclude that the promotion of baby clinics was part of positive eugenics practiced by the UFWM to preserve the dominant race. It would have been part of the “active crusade for the health of the babies of the nation and citizens of tomorrow,” that President Wood had envisioned in her 1920 address to the Women’s Section of the MGGGA.⁵⁶ And it is also quite likely that the resistance to this form of intervention and surveillance to which Thornton refers was from the parents of new, non-British immigrant families.

The UFWM’s relentless campaign to increase public health nurses and expand the inspection of children in schools cut both ways. On the one hand, the UFWM’s almost singular focus to establish and expand free public health services was clearly motivated by the alarmingly high rates of infant and maternal death and the lack of medical services for farm people, particularly women and children. They linked the cause of high mortality rates directly to poverty, the overwork of women, impure water and milk supplies and poor housing conditions. The availability of public health services would no doubt have been welcomed by all farm women, including the poorer, more isolated non-Anglo women who could take what served them well and deflect as “advice” what was inconsistent with their own health and cultural traditions. On the other hand, the UFWM’s focus on public health could be interpreted as positive eugenics as a way to increase access to medical services for the Anglo-Saxon rural population and address some of the concerns about race degeneration. And similar to historian Amy Sampson’s research in Alberta regarding public health nurses, there was clearly an aspect of negative eugenics at

⁵⁵ AOM, P7582/7, “Hand Book of Practical Work,” 1920–21, 23.

⁵⁶ AOM, P7578/14, UFWM President’s Address, 1920.

play.⁵⁷ As Sampson discovered in Alberta, public health nurses had access to children's schools and homes and part of their job was surveillance. Clearly listed in their job description was the examination of children for possible presentation of mental and physical defects, the identification of early signs of delinquency or promiscuity and the right to enter the children's homes to see if families were conforming to acceptable standards of moral behaviour, as well as physical and mental hygiene. As early as 1917 a UFWM resolution was adopted that supported medical inspection in public schools. It reads as follows: "Resolved that whereas experience has shown that prevention is incomparably better and cheaper than cure and also that physical defects and weaknesses check the mental as well as the physical development of children, therefore be it resolved that the Women's Section of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association desire to see a system of medical inspection introduced into all our public schools and that active steps be taken to that end."⁵⁸

In the 1925 document entitled "Service Rendered by the UFWM," it is reported that during the three years ending January 1924, public health nurses examined 88,272 school children in the province, and of that number 37,070 were found with defects. The report goes on to say that through the intervention of the public health nurse, necessary 'correction' was obtained for 14,297 of these children.⁵⁹ Though the report doesn't indicate what happened to the other 22,773 children with detected 'defects', nor does it provide a breakdown of race, class, ethnicity, region of the children diagnosed, it is clear that the public health nurse was, at best, a positive resource for people with minimal access to medical care, and at worst, a tool of the state for surveillance, segregation of "mental defectives," and assimilation. As late as 1937 the UFWM convention minutes record the report of Miss Elizabeth Russell, Superintendent of Provincial Public Health Nursing Service of Manitoba. She lists the duties of the public health nurses in rural Manitoba

⁵⁷ Amy Samson, "Eugenics in the Community: Gendered Professions and Eugenic Sterilization in Alberta, 1928–1972," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 31, no. 1 (2014): 147.

⁵⁸ AOM, P7578/11, Minutes of the 1917 Convention, 61.

⁵⁹ AOM, P7568/8, "Service Rendered by the UFWM," 1925, 5.

that include visiting schools, charting and reporting children for defects, giving health instruction, reporting on sanitary conditions, attending tuberculosis clinics, looking after children placed in homes, and furnishing information to school boards and councils.⁶⁰ Access to Manitoba's public health records during this time period would shed light on the degree to which the role of the public health nurses changed over time and sometimes crossed the line to embrace negative eugenics.

Marriage Regulations and Restrictions

In her book, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, historian Sarah Carter states that “in early twentieth century English Canada, new fears emerged of threats to marriage and the family particularly in light of the arrival of diverse immigrants.”⁶¹ She goes on to say that these fears were linked to concerns about the erosion of traditional British values that were heightened by anxiety about race degeneration. Carter refers to a 1988 article by James Snell and Cynthia Comacchio Abeele in the *Canadian Historical Review* that examined attitudes toward marriage in British Canada at this time. Marriage was understood by those of the Anglo-Saxon race to be a privilege for those who “demonstrated the features most desired in the future Canada: genetic quality, emotional and mental stability, good health, maturity.”⁶² In other words, anyone showing signs of genetic weaknesses, including some forms of disease, should not marry or certainly should not be allowed to procreate.

Discourse and action regarding marriage restrictions gradually began to appear in western Canada. In 1926 in Alberta, for example, the UFWA made a recommendation making it compulsory for all persons to undergo a medical examination prior to marriage.⁶³ In 1933,

⁶⁰ AOM, P7579/14, “UFM Minutes, Miss Russell’s Report,” 1937, 23.

⁶¹ Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, 287.

⁶² James Snell and Cynthia Comacchio Abeele, “Regulating Nuptiality: Restricting Access to Marriage in Early Twentieth-Century English-Speaking Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 69, no. 4 (1988): 468.

⁶³ Grekul, “The Social Construction,” 28–29.

Saskatchewan passed an amendment to the Marriage Act requiring any prospective groom to undergo a medical examination and to produce a medical certificate proving that he was free of venereal disease, tuberculosis or any other communicable disease at least ten days prior to the date of marriage. This began to apply to women in Saskatchewan in 1941.⁶⁴ As discussed earlier, the work of Grekul and others has demonstrated the ways in which disease and “immoral,” deviant or promiscuous behaviour was somewhat conveniently linked to the label of “feble-mindedness.”

The concern about the need for medical inspection prior to marriage is evident in the UFWM files. Medical inspection was directly linked to venereal disease and numerous references to this disease can be found, as well as motions that call for health certificates prior to marriage for both women and men. The 1920 UFWM Public Health report announced that a department of venereal diseases had been operating successfully in Manitoba during the past year. It stated that the number of persons seeking help was evidence that the educational campaign had been effective. It attributed fear of publicity to people’s previous hesitancy in seeking treatment, but with a new numerical registration and notification procedure, complete privacy was assured and the uptake had been swift. The report stated that 1,158 patients were notified under the Venereal Diseases Act in 1920.⁶⁵ In 1922 the number of patients treated was recorded at 14,669.⁶⁶ Another UFWM document titled “Report of Committee on Public Health,” contained a section on venereal diseases and stated, “One of the important phases of Public Health work is that of clinics for venereal diseases. Without doubt the Great War is largely responsible for the attention given to this national menace. The Federal Government has voted the sum of \$400,000 to be used in stamping out these diseases and the Provincial Governments are cooperating to the fullest extent. Toward this end, free clinics have been established in Winnipeg, Brandon, Dauphin and

⁶⁴ Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous*, 288.

⁶⁵ AOM, P7568/3, UFWM Public Health Report, 1920, 2.

⁶⁶ AOM, P7568/5 UFM Reports, Papers, and Addresses, UFWM Social Service Public Health Report, p. 7.

Minnedosa.”⁶⁷ Notwithstanding this progress in fighting venereal disease, the topic was still on the UFWM’s radar as late as 1938.

Calls for marriage restrictions can be seen in UFWM convention resolutions from 1918 through to 1938. A 1918 resolution reads, “Resolved that health certificates for both sexes be produced when applying for a marriage license.” The identical motion appeared in the minutes in 1919 and in both years the motions carried.⁶⁸ In 1922 a report from the UFWM Legislation Committee, a section featuring marriage laws reports on current legislation. Included is the law that declares “no clergyman, minister or other person shall celebrate the ceremony of marriage between two persons knowing or believing either to be an idiot or insane, the person so offending shall incur a penalty of \$500.” Embedded in that paragraph is another provision stating that “no license shall be issued to any party under the age of 16 years except where a marriage is shown to be necessary to prevent illegitimacy of offspring and certificate to this effect is given by a legally qualified medical practitioner.”⁶⁹ From 1927 to 1938 the issue of requiring a medical certificate prior to marriage met with mixed reviews on the floor of the UFWM Convention. In 1927 a motion appeared, calling for a “Clean Bill of Health,” to be required before granting a marriage license. This motion was tabled and referred back to the locals for further study.⁷⁰ The identical motion reappeared in 1928 and this time the minutes reported that “the discussion showed that the resolution was not practicable and on being put to a vote, it was defeated.”⁷¹ In 1931 the Clean Bill of Health resurfaced and this time was carried, but in 1938, following an address on venereal disease to the UFWM in separate session by a Dr. Swan from the Department of Health, a motion requiring “a complete medical examination including the Wasserman reaction before marriage,” was approved in a separate meeting of the UFWM, but did not appear to have made it

⁶⁷ AOM, P7568/3, “Report of Committee on Public Health,” 1921, 5.

⁶⁸ AOM, P7578/12, Women’s Section Annual Convention, 1918. See also P7578/13, “Minutes of the Women’s Section,” 1919.

⁶⁹ AOM, P7568/5, UFWM Report on Legislation, 1922.

⁷⁰ AOM, P7579/4, 1927 UFWM Convention Minutes.

⁷¹ AOM, P7579/5, Annual Convention Year Book 1928, 11.

to the floor of the main Convention.⁷² It appears that support for this measure of marriage restriction was not consistently strong within the UFWM, possibly due to the impracticability of enforcement, but also due to the ongoing tension between a liberal and more radical element in the organization that was apparent throughout its history. Support for marriage restriction was nonetheless an ongoing part of eugenics discourse within the UFWM and stoked the fires that kept constructed notions of racial and religious hierarchy alive.

Segregation

“Segregation of Mental Defectives” was the title of an address given by delegate Mrs. E. Elliott from Totonka, Manitoba, according to the 1918 minutes of the MGGGA Provincial convention. Mrs. Elliott indicated that only definite reform in the treatment of these cases (of mental defectiveness) could prevent their rapid increase. The minutes recorded that Mrs. Elliott’s address was “clear and to the point and was much appreciated.” The following resolution was introduced later at that same convention, moved by Mrs. Elliott, seconded by Mrs. MacGregor and carried. “Resolved that our provincial legislature be asked to make and enforce laws by which all mental defectives would be segregated and made wards of the state, and provisions be made for them to be wholly or in a measure self-supporting.”⁷³ This was the same year that Manitoba’s Public Welfare Commission approached the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene (CNCMH) to undertake a survey to determine the condition and capacity of existing buildings and services for the feeble-minded, the elderly and infirm, prison inmates and juvenile delinquents. Manitoba was the first jurisdiction in Canada to make such a request. As we learn from Jana Grekul’s research, the Province of Alberta followed suit in 1921 and it was

⁷² AOM, P7579/15, UFM/UFWM Annual Convention Minutes, 1938.

⁷³ AOM, P7578/12, MGGGA 1918 Annual Convention, Women’s Section, Resolution 5.

the CNCMH report that was highly influential in the eventual enactment of sterilization legislation in that province.

In Manitoba, public attention was drawn to the CNCMH survey early on through media coverage. An article in the *Manitoba Free Press* dated May 25, 1918 in “Over the Teacups,” a section targeted to female readers, introduces the CNCMH, describing its purpose “to work for the conservation of mental health and for improvement in the care and treatment of those suffering from nervous or mental disease and mental deficiency.”⁷⁴ The article stated that this included returning soldiers from World War I suffering from nervous disorders, but also highlighted concern for the growing numbers of “mentally deficient” Manitobans and made a direct link to juvenile and adult crime. The article applauded CNCMH’s urgent cry to increase psychiatric expertise in the province, and to classify and segregate patients accordingly the various designations of mental deficiency. Another *Manitoba Free Press* article on March 20, 1919 announces that Manitoba was being recognized as a national leader in the field of mental hygiene following the study undertaken by the CNCMH. It cites an article in the *Toronto Globe* applauding Manitoba for the most advanced legislation on mental hygiene in the world.⁷⁵ This public attention no doubt raised awareness within the Women’s Section of the MGGGA whose members meticulously read the daily newspapers and were well informed about a wide variety of current issues. When the same motion came to the floor of Convention from Mrs. Elliott the following year, calling again for the segregation of all mental defectives as wards of the state and for provisions to be made for them to be self-supporting, it was adopted unanimously.⁷⁶

The UFWM 1920 Report on Social Services presented at the 1921 Provincial convention by Mabel Johnson celebrates the new psychopathic ward at the General Hospital in Winnipeg where “those having mental trouble receive examination and treatment by a specialist instead of being

⁷⁴ “Over the Tea Cups,” *Manitoba Free Press*, May 25, 1918.

⁷⁵ “Action of Manitoba is Warmly Approved,” *Manitoba Free Press*, March 20, 1919.

⁷⁶ AOM, P7578/13, “Minutes of the Women’s Section,” 1919, 69.

sent to jails and asylums as previously.”⁷⁷ This is in line with the CNCMH’s recommendations regarding the need for specialized intervention by psychiatrists in order to classify who might be treated in a psychiatric outpatient clinic and who needed to be institutionalized for a longer period or indefinitely. Johnson concludes her report by urging the UFWM to give careful consideration to recommendations passed at the Manitoba Social Service Convention, one of which was to undertake “a program of education intended to bring home to the public yet more strongly the menace of feeble-mindedness and the social and economic wisdom of safeguarding the lives of mental defectives and taking steps to prevent, so far as possible, any reproduction of mental defectives.”⁷⁸

The report of this UFWM standing committee the following year in 1921, incorporates some of the deliberations of the Conference on Children Needing Special Care that was held in Winnipeg on October 5-7, 1921, organized by Dr. Helen MacMurchy, Chief of the Division of Maternal and Child Welfare Bureau for the federal government’s Department of Health, and an outspoken supporter of eugenics.⁷⁹ In 1920 MacMurchy published a book, *The Almosts: A Study of the Feeble-Minded*, warning of the dangers of feeble-mindedness due to the extreme naivety and the ease with which the “mentally deficient” can be drawn into activities such as crime, prostitution, venereal disease, illegitimacy and alcoholism. She therefore advocated that the feeble-minded be segregated from a very early age, ostensibly to protect their innocence. Historian Angus McLaren states that MacMurchy’s writings, including her Blue Books on infant and maternal health, were motivated by eugenic concerns including her belief that “personal inadequacies underlay much of the ill health of the nation.” MacMurchy blamed the high infant and maternal death rates on ignorant mothers, lack of cleanliness and reliance on midwives.⁸⁰ This is important

⁷⁷ AOM, P7568/3, “Committee on Social Service, 1920, presented by Miss Mabel Johnson Chater – Convenor at the 1921 Convention,” 2–3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁹ AOM, P7568/4, Report of the Committee of Social Service, 1921, 1.

⁸⁰ Amy Samson, “MacMurchy, Helen,” September 14, 2013, <https://eugenicsarchive.ca/database/documents/5233e5ac5c2ec500000000e4>. Though a strong supporter of

because it links MacMurchy directly to the UFWM and her influential discourse at that time around the segregation of the “mental defective.”

Also mentioned in the 1921 report of the UFWM Committee of Social Service is the speech of Judge Ethel McLaughlin of Saskatchewan at the same conference organized by MacMurchy. Her address made an impression on the writer of the UFWM report who stated that Judge McLaughlin’s presentation was one of the most outstanding at the conference and that she “comes more closely in touch with rural conditions...than any other judge in Canada.”⁸¹ Speaking about the different forms of delinquency, McLaughlin placed the blame on parents for not instilling a greater sense of morality in their children, particularly in girls. “The incorrigible girl is more difficult than that of the incorrigible boy,” McLaughlin stated in her address, and she encouraged parents to strive for a “higher standard of family life ” to prevent the “moral contamination” of children, “where sometimes the influence of one child has a bad effect on the whole school.”⁸²

The impact of this conference was reflected in the UFWM report summary. “Until we prevent in some way the feeble minded from producing their kind, we are going to have the world partially filled with their most undesirable offspring and delinquency in all its worst forms may result. These people should be placed in an institution where they could be trained according to their mentality.”⁸³ It is not surprising then, with the growing anxiety about the need to segregate “feeble-minded” or sexually deviant girls, that in 1929 we find in the UFWM files a discussion about the Industrial School at Portage la Prairie for delinquent boys under the leadership of Superintendent Mr. Harry Atkinson, and a call for a similar facility for delinquent girls. “A similar institution for delinquent girls is sorely needed as is also a training school for the

segregation, MacMurchy was later known to offer sterilization as the only economically viable solution for the problem of feeble-mindedness. Samson quotes from McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*.

⁸¹ AOM, UFWM, P7568/4, Report of the Committee on Social Service, 1921, 1–2.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

mentally defective boy or girl. These, though incapable of education through ordinary channels, may nevertheless under proper supervision, be trained so as to become self-supporting adults.”⁸⁴ A motion to this effect was introduced and carried at the 1930 UFWM Provincial convention.⁸⁵

UFWM’s Evolving Position on Sterilization

Clearly until 1932 segregation, not sterilization, was top of mind for the majority of members of the UFWM as the best solution to the “menace of feeble-mindedness.” Sterilization legislation had been in effect in Alberta since 1928, but with few exceptions, it would not be until 1933 that any serious consideration of sterilization was to take place within the UFWM. The first reference to sterilization in the UFWM files was found in the minutes of the 1929 convention when the Director of Public Health Nurses, Elizabeth Russell spoke to the UFWM and emphasized the importance of sexual sterilization for the feeble-minded. There is no evidence of the introduction of a motion at this convention, but a random note scribbled at the bottom of a page summarizing the Convenors’ reports stated, “The matter of the sterilization bill was left with the Executive to make a decision.”⁸⁶ It is interesting to note that none of the 1929 Convenor’s reports referred to sterilization nor did any of the topics for study or discussion at the District and local levels of the organization. If a motion came from the floor and did not have sufficient support, it was commonly referred back to the Executive, sent back to the Locals for further study, or tabled. A review of the UFWM Executive minutes that year did not reveal any follow up. The topic of sterilization is evidenced again when the 1931 UFWM Provincial Convention Program announced that a paper entitled “Education on Birth Control and Sterilization of Mentally Defective Persons,” would be delivered by a Mrs. Smallman from Holmfield, Manitoba.⁸⁷ It

⁸⁴ AOM, P7579/6, UFWM President’s Address, 1929, 2.

⁸⁵ AOM, P7579/7, UFF Annual Convention Program and Minutes, 1930, Resolution 45, p. 19. The motion read: “Resolved that in the best interest of the delinquent girl there should be established in Manitoba in the immediate future, state industrial training for delinquent girls.”

⁸⁶ AOM, P7568/12, UFWM Convenor’s Reports, 1929.

⁸⁷ AOM, P7579/8, UFW/UFWM Annual Convention, 1931, 25.

appears that Mrs. Smallman did not deliver that address, but the 1931 Convention minutes report that a Mrs. Clarke of Virden, Manitoba read a paper on the sterilization of mental defectives.⁸⁸ Once again, no motion on sterilization was found in the minutes that year but the following year, in November, 1932 this motion was recorded in the Convention minutes. “We, the Convention of the UFM, go on record as being strongly in favour of Supervised Sterilization and do urge the government to continue their efforts sponsoring this Bill.”⁸⁹ On January 19, 1933, however, a letter to Premier John Bracken and the Provincial Cabinet was found in the UFWM files outlining the UFM/UFWM’s pressing issues for the upcoming year and there was no mention of sterilization legislation. Concerns focused instead on the economic devastation that the farming community was experiencing.⁹⁰ That sterilization was not a top priority in the midst of the Great Depression is not surprising. Nonetheless, these early references to sterilization were signs that the debate taking place in the newspapers and the broader community regarding sterilization was entering UFWM discourse, and that the divisive debate on sterilization in Manitoba that had been percolating in the Legislature was heating up.

Sexual Sterilization Legislation in Manitoba, February to May 1933.

Sterilization legislation in Manitoba was introduced in Clauses 30 and 31 of the 1933 Act to Provide for Mentally Defective Persons.⁹¹ The Act called for the establishment of an Advisory Board of not less than three nor more than five members, one of whom should be a medical practitioner. The Minister of Health and Public Welfare was to be an ex officio member of the Advisory Board. Clause 30 granted the provincial psychiatrist legal permission to recommend to the Advisory Board the sterilization of essentially any defective in Manitoba, and if, “after such investigations as seems necessary, sterilization is desirable,” a recommendation could be made to

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ AOM, P7570/1, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, UFM Annual Secretarial Report, November 1, 1932.

⁹⁰ AOM, P7570/2, UFWM Letter to Premier Bracken and Cabinet, January 10, 1933.

⁹¹ Manitoba Legislative Reading Room, Journals of the Legislative Assembly, Manitoba, vol. 67, stack 108, case 4, 1933 session, Manitoba Blue Bill no. 7, 1–18.

the Minister. The Minister would then contact two medical practitioners to examine the defective person “to determine the desirability of such an operation.” There was provision for the consent of either the defective person or the parent/guardian, but it stipulated that this must be in a form prescribed by the Minister with a certified copy to be submitted to the hospital and surgeon performing the operation. Clause 31 absolved of all liability any surgeon or medical officer, any member of the Advisory Board, the Minister and any psychiatrist or person acting under the direction of anyone in connection with the sterilization operations in the Province of Manitoba.⁹²

The introduction of sterilization clauses in the proposed legislation immediately stimulated heated debate throughout the province. On February 25, 1933, an article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* announced that the new Defectives Bill passed the Law Amendments Committee after hearing presentations from Dr. F.W. Jackson, Deputy Minister of Health and Dr. A.T. Atkinson, Superintendent of the Provincial Home for Mental Defectives in Portage la Prairie.⁹³ The most vocal opponents were members of the Roman Catholic Church, led by clergy representing both French and English-speaking Catholics. They opposed sterilization on the grounds of sanctity of life, morality and the taking away of individual dignity and bodily integrity, but also on the grounds of what many saw to be a complete lack of scientific evidence.⁹⁴ The Catholic Church was well organized and mounted a strong campaign. A pamphlet created by the Catholic clergy entitled, “The Case Against Sterilization,” was circulated throughout the province. On February 27, just after Manitoba’s Minister of Education, Robert A. Hoey, introduced the bill, the entire pamphlet appeared in the *Winnipeg Free Press*.⁹⁵ The Catholic Church then organized a letter-writing campaign that involved hundreds of constituents, targeting every MLA and cabinet minister in the Province as well as the Premier. They gathered petitions protesting sterilization,

⁹² *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹³ “New Defectives Bill Passes Law Amendment Body: Proposed Sterilization of Feeble-minded Persons Explained by Doctors,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 25, 1933.

⁹⁴ For an excellent discussion of the rationale of the Roman Catholic Church in Manitoba regarding resistance to sterilization, see Kurbegovic, “Eugenics in Manitoba.”

⁹⁵ “Sterilization in Mental Defective Cases Is Opposed,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 27, 1933.

sent letters to the editor in local papers throughout the Province, and attended the Law Amendments Committee hearings to make their views known. Coverage of their presentations was widely circulated in the daily newspapers as well as in community newspapers and local newsletters. In addition, many high profile Catholics including F.W. Russell, Chairperson on the Council of Catholic Action, Rev. Wilfrid Louis Jubinville, Vicar General of the St. Boniface Archdiocese, Rev. F. Faure, rector of St. Boniface College, J.H. Daignault, secretary of l'association d'education des canadiens-francais du Manitoba and Rev. Antoine d'Eschambault, Secretary to the Archbishop of St. Boniface and President of the St. Boniface Historical Society were vocal and articulate spokespersons opposing sterilization in the public debate of 1933.⁹⁶

Leading the support for sterilization of the mentally deficient in this debate were many physicians and psychiatrists. As mentioned earlier, the CNCMH survey conducted in Manitoba in 1918 under the leadership of Canadian psychiatrists Clarence Hincks and Charles Clarke, did a great deal to prepare the ground for the seeds of eugenics thought to take hold in Manitoba. Many years passed between the filing of their report in 1919 and the introduction of the sterilization clauses in the Manitoba Mental Deficiencies Act in February 1933. However, the information emanating from that report, including the deplorable conditions of Manitoba's institutions for the care of the mentally ill, the urgency for more psychiatric expertise to modernize and classify the "feeble-minded," the purported rate of the escalating numbers of patients and the ever-rising costs, all contributed to a gradual crescendo of concern which reached a climax by 1933, in the midst of the Depression. This unleashed fears not only of race degeneration but also of fiscal ruin if extreme measures such as sterilization were not taken. It is possible to trace two of the strongest pro-eugenics arguments of the 1918 CNCMH study, the arguments of economics and humanitarianism, to the rationale given for sterilization legislation in 1933.

⁹⁶ Kurbegovic, "Eugenics in Manitoba," 7-8.

The economic argument was initially put forward in the 1919 government report under the heading of “Institutional and Farm Colonies,” where it was recommended that the institutions housing mental defectives be designed with separate cottages built and maintained by the patients as part of their training school program. The training, it was suggested, could also include “teaching the boys a trade and teaching housekeeping and laundry skills to the girls.” Citing the example of a facility in Massachusetts, the report suggests that this recommendation would be economically feasible and sustainable by making the feebleminded work for their board and room.⁹⁷ In 1933, caught in the grip of the Great Depression, the economic argument was even more persuasive and the psychiatrists and some members of the medical profession were not slow to play this card when presenting their case to the politicians. Kurbegovic reveals that a number of Manitoba psychiatrists argued that sterilization would save the government hundreds of thousands of dollars, both in output for the provision of more institutions and equipment and for the ever-increasing annual maintenance and operating costs.⁹⁸ The argument was that if a good portion of the feebleminded were sterilized, they could be released into the community without concern for the procreation of ever more financially dependent offspring and the current institutions would suffice to segregate and contain the most severely mentally deficient individuals.

Historian Molly Ladd-Taylor, in her 2017 study of sterilization in the state of Minnesota, entitled *Fixing the Poor*, convincingly argues that while eugenics theories were important in the development of sterilization legislation, the economic reasons for sterilization were equally influential. Ladd-Taylor points to a portion of the ruling of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes’ disturbing but often overlooked statement in the well-known *Buck v. Bell* case that states, “many

⁹⁷ Manitoba Historical Society Archives, Public Welfare Commission Annual Report, 1919, 126. The report states that, “the overflow population of the training school is cared for at small expense.” It should be noted that this model was not dissimilar to the government- and church-sponsored residential schools for Indigenous children, which were structured on a cost-recovery basis with the children responsible for meal preparation, laundry, food production, and care of farm animals under the pretext of providing skills training for future employment and assimilation.

⁹⁸ Kurbegovic, “Eugenics in Manitoba,” 3–4.

defective persons...if incapable of procreating, might be discharged with safety and become self-supporting with benefit to themselves and society.”⁹⁹ As Ladd-Taylor observes, “the goal of reducing the cost of defective, dependent, and delinquent classes shaped the adjudication of feeble-mindedness in Minnesota probate courts and was equally important to sterilization.”¹⁰⁰ As we can see, there is evidence of this same economic argument in Manitoba’s discourse that attempted to point to sterilization as a quick way out of the mounting costs of incarceration and segregation of those deemed “unfit,” by literally “fixing” the poor and taking away their right to reproduce. In so doing, it was hoped that the exorbitant and escalating costs of detaining the “feeble-minded” in institutions would be reduced.

Hand in hand with the economic argument used in the 1933 pro-sterilization debate in Manitoba was the appeal to humanitarianism. This argument can also be traced to the 1918 CNCMH study that calls for better lighting, improved air quality, the addition of balconies, more usable outdoor space in the existing facilities for the “feeble-minded” and also for better classification of “mental defectives” by trained psychiatrists that would result in the decriminalization of mental illness and more humane treatment of many of those deemed mentally deficient. Proponents of sterilization in the 1933 debates point to the freedom that sterilization would afford the “feeble-minded,” allowing them to leave the institutions and participate more freely in society.¹⁰¹ No mention is made of the personal costs and ramifications of sterilization including the mental anguish and the trampling of reproductive and human rights. These humanitarian arguments appealed to the Protestant clergy and moral reformers such as the Local Council of Women, and undoubtedly to some of the members of the UFWM.

⁹⁹ Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Fixing the Poor: Eugenics Sterilization and Child Welfare in the Twentieth Century* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), 117.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Kurbegovic, “Eugenics in Manitoba,” 4.

Politicians were completely split on the issue of sterilization. Some opposed on religious grounds or because they represented many Catholics who were opposed either due to religious or moral considerations or because they felt the science of eugenics was seriously flawed. Others felt the legislation was rushed and the intent and ultimate outcomes unclear. Many Labour MLA's, including S.J. Farmer, felt that many cases of mental deficiency were not the cause of heredity but of conditions of poverty, unemployment and poor housing. Those who supported Clauses 30 and 31 put forward either the economic or humanitarian arguments. Premier Bracken, who had cobbled together a coalition government to remain in power, wanted as little controversy as possible, and recognizing the level of acrimony not only in his own government but also among the Manitoba public, decided to allow a free vote and have each member of the Legislature vote according to their own conscience. Finally on May 4, 1933, the *Winnipeg Tribune* reported, "Hon. R.A. Hoey's mental defectives bill ended a chequered career in the legislature early this morning, when in the dying hours of the session, it was finally given third reading with the sterilization clauses taken out."¹⁰² It was a close vote with only one vote more in the opposing camp, but there is little doubt that the concerted efforts of the Catholic Church, as well as the timing of this proposed legislation, were instrumental in the defeat of sterilization legislation in the Province of Manitoba. The *Tribune* reported that the bill had travelled back and forth from one committee to another and from third reading back to committee of the whole nearly a dozen times, and that it completely cut across party lines with every group in the House split on the issue.

At the time of this heated debate on sterilization, Bracken's Progressive-Liberal coalition government was less than a year into its' third term. The Depression was presenting fiscal challenges and Bracken was being threatened by the federal Conservative Prime Minister, R.B. Bennett, that if the Premier couldn't manage the provincial budget, a Controller would be brought in to manage Manitoba's finances. As much as the economic arguments for sterilization

¹⁰² "Sterilization Proposals are Killed by House," *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 4, 1933.

would have been attractive to the fiscally conservative Bracken, the divisiveness of the issue was much more threatening, and he was no doubt quite relieved to have this issue behind him. Though there were efforts on behalf of some of Manitoba's medical community to re-introduce the sterilization clauses after their defeat, these efforts did not meet with success. On December 6, 1933, the *Winnipeg Free Press* reported news of an anticipated attempt to re-introduce the sterilization legislation in the upcoming session of the Manitoba Legislature early in 1934. It stated "the government is understood not to be at all eager to identify itself with such legislation with the memory fresh in mind of the controversy aroused by the attempt made at the last session to incorporate sterilization law in the new Mental Defectives Act."¹⁰³ Manitoba narrowly escaped the enactment of sterilization legislation, though it was steeped in eugenics practice through its support for policies regarding selective immigration, censorship, promotion of public health nurses who sometimes served as tools of surveillance and detection, the promotion of marriage restrictions and the segregation of the feebleminded.

The UFWM and Sterilization Legislation

It was not until the Annual Convention in the autumn of 1933, after the sterilization clauses had been defeated in the provincial legislature in early May, that UFWM Public Health Convenor, Mrs. L.E. Sampson from Otterburne, took on the sterilization cause with a passion not previously evidenced in the UFWM records on this issue. In her Health Report delivered to convention delegates that year, she raised concern regarding the cost of the institutionalization of mental defectives in Manitoba. She states, "The Mental Defectives of the Province are a grave problem. The economic burden is tremendous and is steadily growing worse...What government can

¹⁰³ "Government Will Not Sponsor Bill on Sterilization: Cabinet Said Not to Be Eager to Identify Itself with Such Legislation," *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 6, 1933. Although there may have been an attempt to reintroduce sterilization through a private member's bill, record of this could not be substantiated. In fact, formal sterilization legislation was never enacted in Manitoba.

maintain institutions for the ever-increasing number of these unfortunates. Is sterilization of Mental Defectives the solution?" She continues, "When families that send a child to an institution for the feeble-minded average twice as large as families that send a child to the University, it is time for society to act."¹⁰⁴ Although it is difficult to discern her exact meaning, it is evident that this information was gleaned from coverage of a statement made by Manitoba psychiatrist Byron M. Unkauf who during the 1933 public debates on sterilization in Manitoba, when referring to the cost of maintaining institutions for the feeble-minded, stated that "taxpayers spend annually twice the amount of money, approximately, to care for these people as for the provincial university for higher education."¹⁰⁵

In the same report, Sampson again echoes comments made by Unkauf when she says, "Strong, intelligent, useful families are becoming smaller. Irresponsible, diseased, defective parents, on the other hand, do not limit their families accordingly. There can be but one result. That result is race degeneration."¹⁰⁶ Kurbegovic has uncovered one of Unkauf's articles entitled, "The Sterilization of the Mental Defective," in which he argues for the need for provincial governments to speed up the process of sterilization because, "intelligent, healthy and useful families are becoming smaller, while irresponsible, diseased and mentally defective families are becoming larger and larger."¹⁰⁷ Sampson has quoted Unkauf almost word for word without revealing her source, but the parallel is hard to miss. The impact of some vocal members of the medical community on the formation of public opinion and its direct influence on some members of the UFWM, particularly Sampson, is unmistakable. In her rather comprehensive report, Sampson refers to sterilization legislation in the U.S. where, she says, "between 1907 and 1929, twenty-seven states have put eugenic sterilization laws on their statute books." She goes on to say that while the Sterilization Bill was defeated in the last session of the Manitoba legislature, there

¹⁰⁴ P7570/1, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, "Public Health Report," 1933, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Kurbegovic, "Eugenics in Manitoba," 4.

¹⁰⁶ AOM, P7570/1, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, "Public Health Report," 1933, 4.

¹⁰⁷ Kurbegovic, "Eugenics in Manitoba," 4.

is a plan to reintroduce it, and she ends with these questions, “Are we to let our population be controlled by intelligence or chance? Are we rationally to reduce the unfit and increase the fit?”¹⁰⁸

Why would Sampson have waited until 1933 to push so fervently for the sterilization clauses to be re-introduced, when there was little likelihood of success? One distinct possibility is that notwithstanding the UFWM’s support for segregation and other eugenics practices, the support for sterilization was not a priority for the majority of UFWM members until Sampson took hold of this issue in the fall of 1933. In her PhD dissertation highlighting the divergence between the UFWM and the United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) on eugenics policy, Kurbegovic argues that the UFWM was clearly supportive of eugenic ideology including sterilization of the mentally defective, but were poorly organized and ineffective as a lobby group. She cites two examples of the UFWM’s inability to get motions through their own organization, let alone see them become policy in the legislature.¹⁰⁹ The first is regarding the issuing of health certificates to ensure fitness before marriage or what was known as the “clean bill of health.” It is true that this motion came up several times at conventions around 1928, but as we have seen, there clearly was not widespread support for this concept within the organization. The other example Kurbegovic cites is Clause 72 of the Child Welfare Act which addressed paternity and child support for unmarried mothers. In this situation, it is true that there clearly was widespread support within the UFWM and that this Clause was excluded when the Child Care Act was proclaimed in 1925 in spite of the UFWM’s consistent advocacy. What Kurbegovic does not mention is the UFWM’s success that very same year regarding another amendment to the same Child Welfare Act. On page 6 of the document, “Services Rendered by the UFWM,” it reports that the UFWM Executive appeared before the Law Amendments Committee of the Legislature on March 27, 1925 to give support to another much desired amendment to the Child Welfare Act regarding access to education for the children of unmarried parents. The report states that the UFWM were

¹⁰⁸ AOM, P7570/1, Public Health Report, 1933, 5.

¹⁰⁹ Kurbegovic, “Eugenics in Comparative Perspective,” 81–82.

“successful in proving the merit of their request, with the result that the amendment passed the House this last session.” The report went on, “This is a great step forward in our social legislation. The Act is one of the most up-to-date pieces of child legislation in the world. The Association has representation on the Board which directs the carrying out of the Act.”¹¹⁰ Perhaps the UFWM had to pick their battles.

Other examples of the UFWM’s effectiveness in lobbying for legislative change are numerous. That same year, in 1925, under the guidance of Ella McClelland, Education Convenor for the UFWM, at least four of the five recommendations of the UFWM standing committee on Education were passed into legislation including the establishment of a Teacher’s Retirement Fund in rural areas to match that of urban centres; incentive grants to teachers who stayed more than one year in one-room schools; the extension of teacher training to a minimum of one full year, and the discontinuation of short courses for rural teachers’ certification eligibility.¹¹¹ Still other examples of the UFWM’s successful lobbying through the years include their influence in the 1916 women’s suffrage vote, legislation on prohibition, the appointment of a Director of Temperance Education, and continued success in increasing public health nurses in rural Manitoba. At the federal level, the UFWM were tenacious on issues such as lifting the protective tariff, lowering freight rates, legislation to develop cooperatives, and more equitable divorce legislation. These were all issues of pressing concern to the UFWM and for the most part, their efforts met with considerable success. The UFWM could exert significant political influence on issues for which they had broad-based support and consensus within their organization.

¹¹⁰ AOM, P7568/8, “Service Rendered by the UFWM,” 1925, 6.

¹¹¹ AOM, P7579/3, UFM Convention Minutes, 1926. The recommendations and achievements of the UFWM Standing Committee on Education can be found in Ella McClelland’s “Report of the Committee on Education for 1925,” presented at the annual UFM/UFWM convention in January 1926. Also see the editorial “Under the Dome,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 29, 1925; and “Education legislation, Murray report adopted,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, January 30, 1925.

A close look at the UFWM records reveals that there was not significant support within the organization for sterilization of defective persons prior to 1933. Evidence for this is contained in a circular newsletter to all UFWM members from the Provincial Secretary Anna Gray, dated April 1933, in which she directly addresses “the Bill in the Provincial House calling for the Sterilization of Mental Defectives.” This letter was written at the height of the debate in the Legislature. Referring directly to the Sterilization Clauses of the Act to Provide for Mentally Defective Persons, she states the following:

The Bill is meeting with a great deal of opposition. The Board and Executive of the UFWM have passed motions favouring this measure, but the Local groups have never declared themselves. At this stage there is some confusion in the midst of the public as to the effect of this bill; they regard it as the thin edge of the wedge that will later allow further legislation that may be very far reaching in its powers. Because of the lack of knowledge regarding the attitude of the Local groups, the Secretary has not attended any of the meetings, nor appeared before the Legislative Committee to register the opinion of the Organization. It will be necessary for us to take a definite stand in regard to “Sterilization Laws” before another Annual Convention closes.¹¹²

This letter from Provincial Secretary Anna Gray helps to explain why the UFWM did not seriously entertain the issue of sterilization of mentally defective persons until after the sterilization clauses were defeated in the Manitoba Legislature. Grey’s letter, dated April 1933, confirms that no lobbying on the part of the UFWM had taken place on this matter. She clearly states that no one from the UFWM had appeared before the Legislative Committee on Sterilization because there was not enough support within the organization and the Locals had not seen the issue important enough to weigh in on it prior to this time. It wasn’t until Mrs. Sampson, Convenor for the UFWM Health Committee in 1933 and a supporter of sterilization legislation, became a member of the UFWM Executive that central office was instructed to send out information to every District Director, announcing that they were to organize two Summer Conferences in each UFWM District throughout the province between the dates of June 1 and

¹¹² AOM, P7570/3, UFWM Newsletter, April 1933.

July 15 to decide on their position regarding sterilization of the mentally defective. Enclosed with this directive were suggestions for program material for the summer conferences, including an item listed as “Sterilization of Mental Defectives, Discussion and Resolutions.” This was highly irregular as in all past years the most Central Office would do would be to encourage Districts to hold one conference and to provide some ideas of topics in which the locals within that each District may be interested, but were under no obligation to follow. We recall that Sampson referred to the California Sterilization program in glowing terms in her Health Report, and this same letter from central office with the directive to hold two summer conferences in each District also stated that the Central Office was in the process of preparing copies of the California Act on Sterilization for use by locals in their deliberations.¹¹³

In 1934 there is evidence that there were still attempts on the part of some members of the medical community to pressure the government to reintroduce the sterilization clauses, but the government was not biting. These members of the medical community were also looking for every opportunity to influence public opinion. The minutes of the 1934 UFWM Convention record that Dr. Cameron spoke to convention delegates in favour of sterilization, stating that it would lessen the number of mental defectives. This was followed by an address from Dr. Thomas Alexander Pincock, Medical Superintendent of the Manitoba Hospital for Mental Diseases at Brandon, who also spoke on the resolution, indicating the value of sterilization. The minutes record that Dr. Pincock “stated that sterilization has been used in cases of physical disease and showed that where there is one reason for sterilization in physical illness, there are two in mental cases. In cases of children born of mentally defective parents, they not only run the risk of being mental defectives but are denied proper parental care.”¹¹⁴ Prior to the speeches from the doctors, Sampson read out Resolution No. 6 as follows, “We the Convention of the United Farmers of Manitoba, go on record as being strongly in favour of supervised sterilization and do

¹¹³ AOM, P7570/1–3, Reports, Papers, and Addresses, “United Farm Women of Manitoba, 303 Hamilton Building, Winnipeg, Man,” 1933, 2.

¹¹⁴ AOM, P7579/11, UFM/UFWM Convention Minutes, 1934, Resolution 6.

urge the Government to continue their efforts sponsoring this Bill.” The vote took place immediately following the two speeches by the doctors and the motion carried.¹¹⁵ The following year a similar motion in support of selective sterilization of mental defectives was passed at the annual Convention but only after an amendment was approved to add the word “voluntary.” The wording of that amended 1935 motion was as follows: “The UFWM go on record as favouring carefully supervised, selective, voluntary sterilization of Mental Defectives.”¹¹⁶ By this time it was clear that the Provincial Legislature was not going to reintroduce sterilization legislation, and it was too late for the UFWM motion to have any influence.

What is clear now is that prior to 1933, the UFWM did not have significant support throughout the organization for the sterilization of the mentally defective. We know that they did not make a presentation to the Law Amendments Committee of the Manitoba Legislature or undertake any attempts to lobby the Provincial government on the issue. What is also clear from Provincial Secretary Anna Gray’s February April 1933 letter to the UFWM membership, is that there was as much confusion and uncertainty among the membership of the UFWM on the issue as there was among politicians and members of the public. A careful study of the UFWM records reveals that while there were rumblings of support for sterilization as early as 1929, there is no evidence of wide-based support within the organization until after the defeat of the sterilization clauses.

Kurbegovic also argues that the UFWM did not have the ear of the government and that the organization had withdrawn from politics by the mid-twenties. Both of these assumptions must be challenged. Certainly, in the earlier years of the organization, from 1922 until the early thirties, the UFWM had the ear of the Premier and Cabinet. Bracken had been recruited by the organization to be their leader and Premier of Manitoba after the Farmer’s Party unexpectedly won the 1922 provincial election by a landslide. He attended and spoke at every UFM/UFWM convention during these years as the leader of the movement, met frequently with UFM and

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ AOM, P7579/12, UFWM Convention Minutes, 1935, Resolution 1.

UFWM executives, and counted on their support. There is no doubt that Bracken's coalition with the Liberals in the 1932 election, his fiscal conservatism, and his consensus style of governance eventually reduced the government's responsiveness to farm women, but this was later in the UFWM's history. As for the withdrawal of the organization from politics by the mid-twenties, historian Gerald Friesen places this in the late twenties. Tensions within the farm movement in Manitoba between the radical and more liberal elements regarding the organization's direct engagement in politics can be found in UFM/UFWM records from the earliest years and this tension lasted well into the early thirties. Resolutions in 1932, 1933, and as late as 1935, urged the UFM/UFWM convention to link up with the CCF for political action, but by this time many members wanting to retain political activism were already moving their support to the CCF.¹¹⁷ All of these dynamics must be considered if we are to gain perspective on the UFWM's attitudes to eugenics and particularly to the sterilization of "mental defectives." Kurbegovic is correct to note that the UFWM did not exert influence in the debate on sterilization legislation in Manitoba, but it was not because they fervently supported it and were simply ineffective in their lobbying efforts, nor that they lacked the ear of government. Rather they focused their energy on other forms of eugenics and on the pressing economic and political issues of the day.

Another factor that almost certainly influenced the outcome of sterilization legislation in Alberta in comparison to Manitoba was the presence in Alberta of high profile maternal feminists such as

¹¹⁷ The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) was founded in Calgary in 1932, a mixture of the more radical farmers in the United Farm Movement, academics from the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR), and the Ginger Group, an organization of MPs in Ottawa that included J. S. Woodsworth, a member of Parliament from Manitoba's Independent Labour Party (ILP). Woodsworth helped bring together trade unionists and members of the organized farm movement, and was elected the first leader of the CCF at the party's founding convention in 1933, in Regina. He was a regular guest speaker at UFM/UFWM conventions into the early thirties, and a number of UFWM members including Ella McClelland, left the UFWM to become an active part of the CCF leadership in Manitoba. Historian Gerald Friesen states that it wasn't until the late twenties that the UFM/UFWM resolved to leave politics, and this forced Premier John Bracken to court the Liberals in Manitoba, forming a Progressive-Liberal coalition in 1932. Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 401. This aligns with evidence contained in the UFM/UFWM files. The tension within the organization regarding the decision to join with the CCF can be found in the UFM/UFWM fonds, P7579/9, UFM/UFWM Convention Minutes, 1932; P7579/10 UFM/UFWM Convention Minutes, 1933; P7579/11, President's Address, 1934; and P7579/12, Resolution for Political Action, 1933. See also Joan Sangster, "Canadian Women," 171.

Emily Murphy, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney, Henrietta Muir Edwards, and Nellie McClung who were active in the UFWA and outspoken advocates of sterilization. What is perhaps less well known is the influence of British suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst on Alberta eugenics legislation. Sarah Carter's article on this topic paints a detailed picture of Pankhurst's influence on Emily Murphy who she met in 1916 through Nellie McClung on one of Pankhurst's many lecture tours in Canada.¹¹⁸ The two women had a great deal in common, not the least of which was their loyalty to the British empire and their strong belief in eugenics, particularly the sterilization of the "unfit." Pankhurst lectured all across the country during her four-year residency in Canada from 1920 to 1924. During his time she worked for the Canadian Council for Combating Venereal Disease (CNCCVD) and spoke to capacity audiences throughout Canada, strengthening her stance regarding the superiority of the British race, the dangers of defective, deviant and undisciplined 'aliens', the perils of race degeneration and the urgent need for sterilization legislation. In Alberta she spoke to thousands of people and teamed up with Emily Murphy who had just been appointed the first female magistrate in Alberta and in the whole of the British Empire. As Carter convincingly argues, "support for the involuntary sterilization of the feeble-minded grew following the Pankhurst and Murphy lectures."¹¹⁹

Within the files of the UFWM there is no evidence of this bold leadership style that undoubtedly created fertile ground for sterilization legislation in Alberta. Leadership in the UFWM came exclusively from grassroots farmwomen who saw themselves as part of a collective movement. Many were self-educated. A few had gone to Normal School and had taught in rural areas prior to marriage. Another few were single women who later sought careers in journalism or the civil service. Most were mothers of large families and were deeply committed to their local community as well as to the principles of cooperation through which they hoped to contribute to the building of a more equitable world. Their strong agrarian class identity, their participation in

¹¹⁸ Carter, "Develop a Great Imperial Race: Emmeline Pankhurst, Emily Murphy, and the Promotion of Race Betterment in Western Canada in the 1920s," in Colpitts and Devine, eds., *Finding Directions West*, 133–50.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

productive labour, and their attachment to the land and seasonal life cycles created a certain distrust of city life and of urban middle-class professional women with their close attachment to capitalist and protectionist interests. There were no champions of sterilization to be found within the leadership of the UFWM. This must be considered when comparing eugenics policies and practices in Alberta with that of Manitoba.

The full story of eugenics practices in Manitoba has not yet been told. We know that in Alberta over 2,700 people were sterilized, many without their consent. In B.C. the estimated numbers are 200, but as scholar Karen Stote reminds us, these numbers are likely much higher.¹²⁰ Drawing on the work of historians Mary-Ellen Kelm and Maureen Lux, Stote points to a number of factors that lead to this conclusion, including unrecorded sterilizations in Indian hospitals, residential schools, training schools or institutions for the “feeble-minded,” as well as lost or destroyed records, access to information protection that limits or prevents access to files, jurisdictional confusion due to the Department of Indian Affairs’ arbitrary labeling of Indigenous people and the subsequent difficulty of tracing health records. These scholars are also uncovering evidence indicating that funds belonging to First Nations communities for their own health services were diverted to help finance municipal hospitals on the assumption that municipal hospitals would serve First Nations communities located in that district. After construction, however, many of these hospitals either did not welcome Indigenous patients or segregated them in basement wards or ill-equipped older annexes.¹²¹ Evidence is also emerging in some jurisdictions that municipal hospitals set up their own internal sterilization committees, but these records are proving difficult

¹²⁰ Stote, *An Act of Genocide*. See also Maureen Lux’s ground-breaking work on Indian Hospitals in *Separate Beds: A History of Indian Hospitals in Canada, 1920s–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016). This comprehensive study has created awareness of the ways in which Canada’s healthcare system has systematically failed First Nations people and has revealed other potential sites of coercive sterilization in Canada.

¹²¹ A Manitoba example of this is highlighted in Lux, *Separate Beds*, 15–17. The residents of Sagkeeng First Nation, located 132 kilometres northeast of Winnipeg, were not welcomed at the local hospital when townspeople objected to their presence. Indian Affairs thus built an adjacent annex, which became the Fort Alexander Indian Hospital, where, for years, occupancy was over capacity, conditions were constantly overcrowded, and neither fire exits nor adequate capacity for isolation were provided.

to access.¹²² There is still much work to be done to uncover the extent of eugenics practices including evidence of hidden and unrecorded sterilizations in the records of municipal and Indian hospitals in Manitoba. Just as the unmarked graves of Indigenous children are being unearthed today to reveal the true horrors of the residential school system in this province and across Canada, an investigation into the potential sites of sterilization is needed if we are to learn the full truth that can lead to acknowledgement, accountability and reconciliation.

A number of observations regarding the UFWM's attitudes toward eugenics principles, and in particular toward the sterilization of the "feeble-minded," emerge as we return to answer the questions posed in the opening paragraph of this final chapter. Unlike the UFWA in Alberta, the UFWM did not take a lead role in the promotion or enactment of sterilization legislation in Manitoba. As we have noted, this was not due to their ineffectiveness as lobbyists nor to their inability to influence politicians, but due to the fact that the organization was not sufficiently united on the issue of sterilization in the spring of 1933. We know from the correspondence of the UFWM Provincial Secretary to the entire UFWM membership dated April 1933, that the UFWM intentionally had not appeared before the Law Amendments committee, did not actively lobby for sterilization legislation nor did they take part in the very public debate that occurred in Manitoba around this issue.

UFWM support for sterilization is only evident after the sterilization clauses in the proposed legislation were defeated. Factors leading to this rather late support include the direct influence of some members of the medical community on members of the UFWM, particularly some psychiatrists who actively solicited support throughout the province for the possible re-

¹²² Mary Horodyski, "'Society seems like it doesn't even know...': Archival Records Regarding People Labelled with Intellectual Disability Who Have Been Institutionalized in Manitoba" (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 2017), 24. Horodyski draws attention to a 1973 review of eugenics legislation in Canada. She notes that "some hospitals formed sterilization committees, but to date historical scholarship that specifically looks at these committees, or at sterilizations performed privately by individual doctors in hospitals and institutions, does not seem to exist." The 1973 review was completed by Bernard Starkman and is published in the *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 13, no. 5 (1973): 175–78.

introduction of the sterilization clauses in the legislature, the purported urgency of the need to take immediate action due to the presumed escalation in numbers of the “unfit” and the threat of race degeneration, the growing pressure of the economic argument for implementing sterilization in the midst of the Great Depression, and the zeal of the UFWM’s new convenor of health and her placement on the organization’s executive.

How have the attitudes and actions of the UFWM regarding eugenics furthered an understanding of their members’ complex identities? Although there is strong evidence that unlike their sister organization in Alberta, the UFWM did not prioritize sterilization as an answer to the economic and social issues of their time, this in no way exempts them from complicity in other eugenics practices such as segregation, assimilation, support for restrictive immigration policies, surveillance by public health nurses, and support by some for marriage restrictions. While there is evidence of tension between members of the UFWM as to the degree of time invested in eugenics activity as opposed to the broader issues of economic and political struggle, not to mention calls by leaders of the organization for the eradication of racism, the growing influence of some prominent members of the medical community helped fan the flames of fear, and in the end, it was the UFWM’s strong Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity that created support for racial hierarchy. This ultimately led to their support for eugenics principles and prevented them from seriously challenging the structures that perpetuate racist attitudes on which eugenics practices depend.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Two primary factors motivated the United Farm Women of Manitoba to organize a semi-autonomous women's organization in the second decade of the twentieth century. The first factor was a growing awareness of the patriarchal structure of the male-dominated organized farm movement and glaring inequities in policies and legislation that directly impacted women. The second factor was farm women's resistance to the federal government's national policies, in particular, the protective tariff and the monopoly of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). In early January 1916, emboldened by the stirrings of first wave feminism that these isolated farm women had read about in the pages of the *Grain Growers' Guide* for many years prior to their involvement in the public sphere, they moved with lightning speed to convince the members of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association (MGGA) to give their unanimous support to a motion on women's suffrage in time for an upcoming vote on this issue in the Manitoba legislature. This was two years prior to the formal constitution of the Women's Section of the MGGA in 1918, but these farm women were already actively engaged in educating the male members of the largest farm organization in Manitoba regarding equal rights for women including the right to vote, the right to hold public office, the right to equality in divorce, separation and child custody, and the right to a fair share of the assets women had worked to produce. The MGGA's public endorsement of women's right to vote on January 7, 1916, just three weeks prior to the provincial vote on suffrage, was critical to its' successful outcome. At this time, a majority of Manitobans lived in rural areas and the MGGA was a highly visible and well-respected organization throughout the province.¹ MGGA endorsement made all the difference and it is highly unlikely that this endorsement would have been forthcoming without the patient and determined work of these farm women. On January 28, 1916, Manitoba became the first

¹ Kinnear, "Do You Want," 137.

province in Canada for some but not all women to win the right to vote and to hold provincial office.² Organized farm women played a significant role in the initial achievement of women's suffrage in Manitoba, but their contribution has been largely invisible in the historical record.

Another motivating factor that led to the organization of farm women in Manitoba was their resistance to the national policies of the Dominion government. They experienced first hand the unjust imposition of the government's protective tariff that favoured the protected interests of eastern manufacturers and placed the cost of goods urgently needed by farm families beyond their reach. Articles essential to the health and wellbeing of children, families, and individuals such as warm woollen clothing, blankets, as well as labour-saving devices, farm machinery and supplies that would help alleviate the backbreaking work for both farm women and men were taxed at rates ranging from 20-35%. Further, these women deplored the government-sanctioned exclusive monopoly of private grain and elevator companies and the CPR on the handling and shipping of western grain. The CPR controlled shipping rates and gave preference to the large private grain companies in the allocation of railway cars, leaving smaller farmers' wheat to be held back, and with few options for storage there was a high risk of spoilage. These "middle men" could also arbitrarily determine the grade or weight of wheat, often downgrading it to a lower quality, mixing it with other wheat at the eastern terminals to get higher prices, and pocketing the profit. The Women's Section of the MGGA actively studied the economic policies that they believed to be at the root of their exploitation and were deeply committed to challenging policies and practices that promoted monopoly capitalism and the accumulation of wealth by vested eastern interests.

By 1921, just three short years after the formal constitution of the Women's Section of the MGGA (renamed the United Farm Women of Manitoba or UFWM in 1920), organization had

² Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Women Suffrage Movement*, 49. It must be remembered that the vote for women's suffrage at this time included neither Asian women nor Indigenous women, who were restricted from voting until 1948 and 1960 respectively.

taken place at the local, district, provincial and national levels. The UFWM was to become the largest provincial women's organization of its time in Manitoba with over 120 local chapters scattered throughout the province as early as 1922 and over 2,000 active members. Their comprehensive organizational structure followed the provincial and federal electoral boundaries, and they had representation in almost every provincial and federal electoral constituency throughout the province. Because each UFWM district kept in close touch with all of the locals within their boundaries, they were able to maintain ongoing communication with the grassroots, to understand people's needs, hear their opinions and ideas and engage large numbers of people in the democratic process. The UFWM had participated directly in the drafting of the Farmer's Platform that they intentionally called the "New National Policy" to draw attention to the urgent need for alternatives to the Dominion government's old national policies. In it, they presented an alternative economic and political vision based on principles of cooperation and public ownership. Their platform and policies were thoroughly debated and studied at all levels of the organization and members at every level volunteered to act as guest speakers, debaters and spokespersons in response to the growing demand for information throughout the province.

The UFWM, along with their male counterparts, were ready to enter politics and they were a force to be reckoned with. They wanted to challenge what they understood to be an unjust two-party political system that placed unlimited private profit and ownership before the common good. The extensive organizational work undertaken by the UFWM was instrumental in the unanticipated and unprecedented victory of the Progressive Party, or what became known as the Farmer's Party, in the 1922 provincial election.³ So unexpected was the win for the Progressive party that they had to scramble to find a leader who would automatically become Premier. They recruited John Bracken, an agronomist who was a professor in the Faculty of Agriculture at the

³ Manitoba Legislative Library, Manitoba Election Records (December 1870–November 1957). See also Manitoba Historical Society, "Events in Manitoba History: Manitoba Provincial Election (1922)," July 17, 2021, <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/events/provincialelection1922.shtml>.

University of Manitoba. Bracken had no previous political experience and little interest in politics but was intelligent, personable, hard-working and dedicated to agrarian life and values.

Little has been written about organized farm women in Manitoba or about the significant role they played in the political life of their province in this historical period. The UFWM formed standing committees on education and peace, health, social service, legislation, youth, marketing and immigration at the provincial level of their organization. Each committee convenor undertook detailed research on every topic within her area of responsibility. These women were well informed and were taken seriously. Their research involved thorough consultation and frequent surveys involving their entire membership as well as with scholars and practitioners in their area of responsibility. Also, they had the ear of the Premier and Cabinet, especially in the early years of the Progressive government in Manitoba. The Premier was sensitive to the needs of the farming community that made up the majority of Manitoba's population at this time and he depended on them for his re-election.⁴ Farm news was followed closely in the print media and coverage of UFM/UFWM conventions and gatherings was often on the front page of the Winnipeg dailies. As we have seen, UFWM members were successful in initiating or influencing progressive legislative changes in education, health and social services. Their organizational work was not only influential in winning provincial elections during this time, but their effective, cooperative organizational model was sustained by the UFWM for over a decade and became a template for one of the 'protest' parties of the 1930s, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). A number of women active in leadership in the UFWM eventually joined the CCF and took with them a commitment to grass roots education, political debate, community development, cooperative principles and identification with the labour movement, as well as the practical skills, knowledge and tireless work of grassroots organization.⁵ This work was integral

⁴ Kinnear, "Do You Want," 137. In 1921, 57 percent of Manitoba's total population of 610,118 was rural. *Rural* was defined as all those not living in incorporated villages, towns, or cities.

⁵ Joan Sangster, "Canadian Women," 169–70. Sangster lists Manitobans Bessie Keating, Ira Thompson, and Ella McClelland as women who joined the CCF following participation and leadership in the organized farm movement.

not only to the strength of the agrarian movement but to the ground work required to eventually create and sustain a third party in this country. While the contribution of the male-dominated Progressive movement as a whole has been acknowledged as an important departure in Canada to our two-party political system and a forerunner to the CCF, the contribution of Manitoba farm women needs to be recognized.⁶

When the earliest settlers made the decision to homestead on the prairies, they were likely unaware of the Dominion government's economic plan and national policies that had been put in place long before their arrival. These national policies set out an intentional plan for the development of an investment frontier on the Canadian prairies. The land was seen as a commodity, an inanimate resource to be extorted for private profit that would keep the engines of monopoly capitalism running. Settlers, even the preferred British settlers, were merely cogs in the wheel, their labour to be exploited. Resistance to these policies lay at the heart of the agrarian protest movement that swept across Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in the last decades of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth centuries. This resistance can be traced to the forerunners of the UFM/UFWM dating back to 1874 with the formation of the Grange, the Manitoba Farmers' Protective Union, the Farmers' Alliance, the Patrons of Industry, the Territorial Grain Growers and the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association. In addition to the protective tariff and the building of an inter-colonial railway, the Dominion government's national policies also included the formation of a police force and the settlement of the West by white, Anglo-Saxon male farmers. The land had to be cleared of all "impediments" at any cost, even if this meant the illegal confinement or death of the original people of the land and the destruction of entire cultures and ways of life. The Anishinabe had lived on this land now called Treaty One Territory for millennia prior to white settlement. For over 150 years prior to the assault on Mother Earth by white surveyors with iron chains, the Metis made this land their home. The Dominion government's national policies affected Indigenous peoples' very lives,

⁶ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 367.

livelihood, culture, language and way of life and they resisted the imposition of the government's oppressive, intrusive actions.

At the interface of Treaty One negotiations between the Crown and the Anishinabe leaders lay two opposing worldviews regarding attitudes toward the land. The surveyors who were carrying out the national policies for the Dominion government viewed the land as an investment opportunity, a commodity that could be carved up, owned, possessed, policed and used for speculation, a resource to be exploited for private profit. The Anishinabe understanding of the land as described by Anishinabe Elders, was and is that of a relationship to a Mother who gives and sustains life, a sacred gift to be respected and to whom we are attached by way of her connection to all of creation. Never was there an understanding on the part of the Anishinabe that they would surrender the land. The land was not nor could not be for sale. It belonged and belongs to Creator and sustains all of life. Rather it was their understanding that the land could be shared and they were willing to share it with the settlers, as long as respect for the land would be maintained, and the autonomy, co-existence and wellbeing of each nation would be honoured.⁷

It is essential to remember that the first farmers of these plains were Anishinabe women who had been caring for Mother Earth, cultivating and harvesting crops long before the arrival of settlers. They were commercial farmers who were closely connected to the land and were expert in their knowledge of local plants that they used for medicines, food, clothing and shelter. They understood plant species and environments, and developed various varieties that would survive and thrive in a short growing season or in times of drought. These women grew and dried their produce for use by their own families and communities and also sold and traded their produce of corn, beans, squash, melons, pumpkins and sunflowers at large trade fairs. They played an important part in the economy of their community and region.⁸ In Manitoba, the earliest evidence

⁷ Craft, *Breathing Life*, 22–36.

⁸ Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 30–38.

of Indigenous agriculture has been located at the foot of the rapids near Lockport, dating back to the early 1400s.⁹ Agriculture was a way of life that was integral to cultural, economic, social and ceremonial traditions. It was not based on possession or acquisition but on the notion of respect, nurture and sharing the bounty of Mother Earth.

When British settlers started arriving from Ontario, the United States and Great Britain in the newly formed Province of Manitoba after 1870, they had much to learn from Indigenous farmers. Unfamiliar with the harsh weather in both winter and summer, the dust storms, grasshopper infestations, heat, drought, floods, early frosts, and winter blizzards many relied on Indigenous men and women for their knowledge and assistance. With no medical services for hundreds of miles, many settler families were given help in times of illness and childbirth by Indigenous medicine women and midwives. Indigenous men and women also readily adapted new skills and technologies they learned from the settlers. Historian Sarah Carter, in her book *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900*, suggests that “conditions at the start of the era of intensive settlement could have been favourable to the formation of a common world, or ‘middle ground.’”¹⁰ What was it that prevented the possibility of working toward the vision that Indigenous leaders put forward during the negotiations of Treaty One, a vision that the two nations could “eat on a plate together,” as described by Elder Victor Courchene.¹¹ Anishinabe leaders spoke of the sharing of land and resources for the mutual benefit of all. The *Manitoba Act* was originally intended for the Metis to retain their land and communities in Manitoba. There is evidence that the early farm resistance movements, such as the Manitoba Farmers’ Protective Union, passed a Declaration of Rights in 1883 patterned on the Bill of Rights adopted by the

⁹ Catherine Flynn and E. Leigh Syms, “Manitoba’s First Farmers,” Manitoba Historical Society, *Manitoba History*, no. 31 (Spring 1996): 4–11. Available at: http://mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/31/firstfarmers.shtml.

¹⁰ Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 131–32.

¹¹ Craft, *Breathing Life*, 110. Elder Victor Courchene was quoting an old man whose grandfather shared the Anishinabe understanding of how Treaty One was intended to work: “It is like a plate and the resources were on that plate. The white man was invited to come and eat from that plate together with the Anishinabe. This is how he understood the Treaty. They never gave up anything.”

Conventions of the Metis and Red River Settlers at the time of the Metis resistance. There was a shared understanding of what was required if we are to live together peaceably and share responsibility for protecting the land, literally the source of life. A similar sentiment was often expressed by the UFWM when they referred to the need for a more equitable, cooperative society, public ownership of resources, and the need to work together for the common good.

It is evident that the Dominion government chose not to embrace this vision of the common good, or what Elders call pimadiziwin, a good life. Rather, the government continued to implement their national policies with ruthless speed. The full realization of the cost to Anishinabe children, to Indigenous nations, to the land and environment, to all treaty people, and to future generations is finally being exposed. Indigenous nations have known for years about the children who died at residential schools and are buried in unmarked graves. The work of the National Truth and Reconciliation Committee, led by Judge Murray Sinclair from Manitoba, has brought to light gross crimes against humanity at residential schools and Indian hospitals, crimes steeped in racist colonial policies that still persist today in our Canadian structures, institutions, and in our child welfare, health and education policies. The report calls us all to action to hear the truth, to understand the underpinnings of colonization and to work toward reconciliation. There is no collective task more urgent in this country if we are to move forward in a good way for future generations and the very survival of Mother Earth.

What provided the rationale and momentum for the Dominion government to develop national policies that resulted in the theft of land that was not theirs to steal, policies that falsely portrayed Indigenous people as shiftless, uncivilized and incapable of farming, policies that attempted to assimilate Indigenous nations who had their own sophisticated economic, legal, political systems and their own cultural and spiritual practices? How was it that policies and practices were enacted to tear children from their families and expose them to physical, emotional and sexual abuse in Christian-sponsored residential schools? What rationale could allow for the enactment

of sterilization legislation or create tolerance for the practice of other forms of eugenics? What circumstances, values or beliefs led “civilized” people to commit acts of genocide?

Colonization requires a worldview predicated on a historically constructed hierarchy of race, class, gender and religion that conveniently, for those who are to benefit, places the privileged few at the top of that hierarchy. In the colonial project of “settling” the West, the Dominion government relied on the constructed hierarchies of the ordered British model with which they were familiar, and they intentionally set out to impose, both physically and ideologically, the grid of this orderly society on the land and on the original people who belonged to the land. The national policies were predicated on what they believed was the “natural” supremacy of the white race over the red, black or yellow races, men over women, Protestants over Catholics, upper and middle classes over working classes, Christian over “heathen.” As long as this supremacy could be maintained and enforced with the strength of the Northwest Mounted Police, the Dominion government could remove any obstacles that got in the way of the realization of their investment plan. There was little thought given to the impact of this plan on Indigenous people whose land, livelihood, culture and children they were stealing, on the farmers whose labour they were exploiting, on women whose subordination to a reproductive role they were depending, or on eastern and southern immigrants whose lives they were upending. Their presumption was that eventually everyone would see the wisdom of this “benevolent” plan, would come to accept it and would be assimilated into this colonial model. Expressing the pressure they were under to proceed with haste due to the Dominion’s loss of financial support from Britain and the rapid encroachment of the United States to the south, they used this as a rationale to exert their power and control and implement their plan.

The UFWM resisted the gender and class hierarchies that were imposed on them by the Dominion government. They fought within their own male-dominated organization and within the larger public sphere to be recognized as equal to men and fought for their right to vote, to run for political office, to be educated, to have adequate medical care, to own land and pass it on to

their descendants, to share in the profits that they helped produce, to have equal rights in divorce, separation and child custody. In addition, they identified strongly with workers and resisted the Dominion government's national policies that promoted the power and control of a ruling class over an agrarian or working class. This class identification separated them from affiliation with urban middleclass women's groups such as the National Council of Women and the Women's Party who were aligned with the corporate elite. They fought against the oppression of the structural inequity of monopoly capitalism based on the accumulation of wealth for the privileged few. They resented the monopoly that the CPR held on millions of acres of land that were being used for speculative purposes. When the Dominion government was faced with food shortages in World War I and then with returning soldiers after the war, their first plan was to take "vacant" land on First Nations' reserves for these purposes rather than to disrupt the monopoly of the CPR on their vast acres of vacant land. The UFWM resisted this along with their male counterparts in the agrarian movement, and according to the research of historian Sarah Carter, that resistance was effective in withstanding the pressures of further land surrender in Manitoba and in thwarting the government's plan to acquire more Indigenous land for the purpose of non-Indigenous soldier settlement. These farm women held up an alternative vision of a society based not on greed and acquisition, but on principles of cooperation, public ownership of land, and the sharing of resources for the common good.

It is important to note that some historians argue that the UFM/UFWM's capacity for resistance to these repressive policies of the Dominion government, as mentioned above, diminished over time and that members became increasingly co-opted by the mainstream political parties and educational institutions. Historian Jeffery Taylor, for example, argues that Manitoba's state officials and educational institutions such as the Manitoba Agricultural College and the government's extension services significantly changed farm women and men's previous identification as labourers in solidarity with the working class to "professionals" or business

managers through the introduction of scientific methods to modernize farm production.¹² While there is some truth to this, evidence of fairly strong resistance to the State within the UFM/UFWM can be seen until the early thirties. Although some UFWM members may have been influenced by the emerging science of home economics, most took what was practically useful from the agricultural experts and discarded the rest. This is consistent with the research of historian Nancy Grey Osterud in her examination of farm women in New York State during this same historical period. These Nanticoke farm women adopted some of the scientific methods offered by experts at Cornell University's New York State College of Agriculture, but rejected the capitalist business models its' farm management advisors recommended.¹³ The same observation has been made by historian Georgina Taylor in her study of the leadership within the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA), a sister organization to the UFWM. She argues that Violet McNaughton, President of the Women's Section of the SGGA for many years, and highly influential in the UFWM, sustained the organization's strong resistance to the government's national policies while maintaining a respectful relationship with the more liberal institutions and women's organizations such as the Women's Institute or the Homemakers' Clubs. This is not dissimilar to the experience of the UFWM as revealed in a close examination of their records.

What is unmistakable in the records of the UFM/UFWM is evidence of the escalation of the ongoing tensions between the radical and more liberal elements within the movement that grew more acute in the early 1930s with Bracken's proclivity toward coalition governments in order to retain power. There were those in the UFWM for whom a sustained critique of monopoly capitalism, a vision for a more equitable, cooperative society, and resistance to the mainline parties' national policies were not negotiable. These members became increasingly disillusioned with the Bracken government and were drawn to the new national party that was forming in the

¹² Jeffery M. Taylor, *Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Agricultural Knowledge and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890–1925* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1994), 117–18.

¹³ Osterud, *Putting the Barn*, 193–94.

early thirties, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Numerous resolutions in 1932, 1933, and as late as 1935 can be found in the UFM/UFWM convention minutes calling for the UFM/UFWM to link up with the CCF. By 1933, however, the year of the CCF's founding convention in Regina, members of the more radical element of the UFWM had already moved their support to the CCF and the resolutions failed.¹⁴ The loss of this more radical voice within the UFWM was much more influential in the waning of resistance within the UFWM to the government's national policies than the influence of the Manitoba Agricultural College or the government's agricultural extension workers. These women carried the fight for equality into the CCF. As historian Joan Sangster has observed, "Women who came to the CCF from the agrarian farm movement brought with them the influence of their own class analysis, which stressed the value of small producers, criticized the power of capitalist financial institutions and rejected competitive individualism in favour of cooperative principles."¹⁵

As determined as UFWM members were in their resistance to the constructed hierarchies of gender and class, the same cannot be said about their resistance to constructed racial, religious and ethnic hierarchies. Their strong identification with the white Anglo-Saxon race and with their Protestant religion created a blind spot that promoted the assimilation of immigrants and racist immigration policies, supported the labelling and segregation of the "feeble-minded," and later in their history, the sterilization of those deemed "unfit." Although they were restricted by oppressive policies of the State, they were also privileged. They stood to profit both directly and indirectly from the colonial project that originally dispossessed Indigenous people of their land. While they stood in solidarity with Indigenous leaders when the Dominion government attempted further theft of reserve land for returning soldiers after World War I, and urged the

¹⁴ Archives of Manitoba, UFM/UFWM fonds, P7579/9, UFM/UFWM Convention Minutes, 1932. See also P7579/10, UFM/UFWM Convention Minutes, 1933; P7579/11, President's Address, 1934; and P7579/12, Resolution for Political Action, 1933.

¹⁵ Joan Sangster, "'Women and the New Era': The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933–1940," in *Building the Co-operative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada*, ed. J. William Brennan (Regina: University of Regina Press, 1984), 76.

Dominion government to respect the treaties and to take instead the land required from the massive CPR holdings, they didn't raise their voices to protest the government's original theft of Indigenous land, the placement of First Nations on reserves, the enforcement of an oppressive pass system to control when and if they could leave and return to their reserves, the establishment of residential schools or the imposition of colonial legislation embedded in the *Indian Act*.

The UFWM's fight for a better way of life, for an alternative economic and political model based on principles of cooperation and a more equitable sharing of resources, was much closer to the Anishinabe knowledge of what is required for a good life or pimadiziwin than the Dominion government's national policies that resulted in a good life only for the privileged few at the top of a constructed hierarchy. Since the time of the negotiations of Treaty One and before, Anishinabe Elders and leaders have kept alive and articulated the teachings of their ancestors regarding a relationship to the land that sustains life for future generations. At the foundation of these sacred laws or innakonigewin is an understanding of the interconnectedness and interdependency of all creation. Constructed hierarchies are foreign to these natural laws and are ultimately unsustainable. Though the UFWM's remarkable output to build a more equitable model was life-giving on a number of fronts, their adherence to the constructed hierarchies of race and religion obstructed the possibilities for a real alternative to the inequities of an unjust capitalist system. The United Farm Women of Manitoba can teach us much about the liberating possibilities of collective action as they challenged the gender and class hierarchies within the male-dominated farm movement and in the broader public sphere. Their strong identification with the constructed hierarchies of the British race and their Protestant religion, however, remind us of the ways that adherence to these hierarchies ultimately impede the fight for truth, reconciliation and social justice.

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