

**“An Honored Place”: Gender, Work, and the Brook Family on the Western Canadian Home Front During the First World War**

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## **Abstract**

In June of 1916, Sidney Brook left for war, leaving his thirty-year-old pregnant wife Isabelle Brook behind in Craigmyle, Alberta. In addition to caring for their young children, she was left the responsibilities of their farm for the duration of the war. Using the correspondence this couple left behind at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, this thesis examines women's roles on farms in the Prairie Provinces, exploring the ways in which work during the First World War was highlighted as patriotic and temporary. Women used their domestic work – knitting, sending letters and parcels, fundraising, and rationing food – to help support the war effort. Despite the fact that women often helped on farms in times of necessity – i.e. harvesting and threshing – the war brought greater numbers of women to the field. However, this work was constructed as temporary in order to maintain pre-war gender ideals. Men's roles too were specifically defined as patriotic, particularly their work as soldiers and as farmers. Such patriotic work demonstrated their duty to the Empire and to their families.

While perhaps not completely representative of all couples on prairie farms in Canada, Isabelle and Sidney Brook's rich historical record provides insight into the lives of middle-class English-Canadian farm women as they lived on farms during this turbulent period. Building particularly on the work of historian Sarah Carter, this thesis seeks to add further understanding of prairie farm women during the First World War by closely analyzing the rich archival record of the Brook family.

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## Introduction

Speaking of “feelings”, can you explain what’s the difference since I’ve been home? Somehow I’m not the same – have been trying to solve the mystery, or diagnose the case, but am no further ahead than two days ago. Never had any trouble about writing to you before, but now – well I don’t know how to write. Physically and mentally I am not feeling the same.<sup>1</sup>

Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook from Sarcee Camp, Calgary  
August 20, 1916

In May 1916, Sidney Brook signed his Attestation Paper, officially enlisting with the 113<sup>th</sup> “Lethbridge Highlander” Battalion in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In June, Sidney left his thirty-year-old pregnant wife of nine years to care for their four young boys, the oldest of whom – Gordon – was only eight years old, while he pursued his ‘patriotic duty’ overseas.<sup>2</sup> Left alone, Isabelle Brook had to assume his role on their farm in Craigmyle, Alberta, adding Sidney’s responsibilities onto her own domestic duties. She did so gladly, explaining that although she missed him, she was “keeping up pretty well.”<sup>3</sup> It is apparent through examining her wartime letters that she enjoyed caring for the farm. While it was not uncommon for women to take over their farms in their husbands’ absences, the First World War presented a unique situation on the prairies in western Canada. More men left for longer periods, leaving an agricultural labour crisis behind. While many men found patriotism through their work as farmers and soldiers, women across the prairies refashioned their work both within the home and on the fields to reflect the patriotic ideals of the time.

This thesis explores the roles men and women played in western Canada during the First World War, confronting the mythologies surrounding women’s work, and exploring how gender

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<sup>1</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, August 20, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1098 – 4, Sidney Brook, “Attestation Paper,” May 18, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-21, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, September 20, 1916.

roles temporarily shifted from 1914 to 1918. Extended absences took many men away from their farms, leaving their work to wives who not only had their own work, but also that of their husbands. Many people in western Canada praised women's work as patriotic, some even claiming that it was this work that gave women the vote across the prairies in 1916.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, farmers competed with soldiers for recognition as the most vital part of the war effort, particularly when they faced conscription in 1917. This thesis focuses particularly on the life of one family, the Brooks, who farmed near and lived in the town of Craigmyle, Alberta in the early twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> For the duration of the war, Isabelle and Sidney exchanged letters. Now housed at the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, Alberta, both sets of letters survived. This is rare, as many soldiers were unable to carry letters from home with them while overseas, and therefore destroyed them. Instead Sidney kept these letters close, and as a result a rich historical record of wartime farm life in rural western Canada now remains. While the Brooks are both representative and unrepresentative of farm families, I use their story to highlight some of what men and women experienced on the Canadian prairies during the First World War.

Christina Isabelle McFadden was born in Manitou, Manitoba to Irish-immigrant-turned-farmer William, and his wife, Jane McFadden. Isabelle was a schoolteacher until 1907, when she met and married Sidney Brook, an English-born immigrant farming in Manitoba.<sup>6</sup> In her diary, she wrote only a brief, wry statement regarding her nuptials: "Married – it's all over now."<sup>7</sup> Isabelle did not continue teaching after she and Sidney married. As historian Mary Kinnear has

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<sup>4</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR2003.302/SE, Nellie McClung, "Address by Mrs. Nellie McClung," *United Farmers of Alberta: Annual Report and Year Book, 1916* (Calgary: Alberta Job Printing Department, 1917), 171.

<sup>5</sup> Craigmyle is a small hamlet situated between Hanna and Drumheller, Alberta, just off Highway 9.

<sup>6</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-9, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letters to Sidney Brook.

<sup>7</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-9, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, Diary, 1903-1907. Unfortunately, no diary from the war years exists in the archive.

demonstrated, most women ended their paid labour once they married.<sup>8</sup> Sidney had emigrated as a twenty-year-old in 1891 to take advantage of the growing opportunities in Canada.<sup>9</sup> Two years after the couple married, Sidney continued his journey westward and began a homestead near Craigmyle, Alberta. Isabelle and their infant son, Gordon, joined Sidney one year later.<sup>10</sup> They lived together on their homestead until 1916, when Sidney enlisted with the 113<sup>th</sup> Battalion. When Sidney was already away training at Sarcee Camp in Calgary the young family moved into the town of Craigmyle, potentially as a way to end the isolation Isabelle faced living alone on the homestead. Isabelle finished managing the construction of their town home, and organized the move from the farm to the town.<sup>11</sup> From there, she continued farming the homestead land. By September Sidney was transferred overseas, where he fought with the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion until he was discharged in June 1918.<sup>12</sup>

The nature of homesteading in “The Last Best West” was one that had always necessitated cooperation between the sexes.<sup>13</sup> By the time of the Great War, cooperation was defined as a rigid separation of roles, where each gender had a specific role to play on farms. Men were in charge of outside work, and women the inside. ‘Inside’ work on farms, scholars agree, included work around the farmhouse – milking, gardening, collecting eggs, making butter, etc.<sup>14</sup> Sheila McManus argues that, practically, men and women operated within their assigned

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Kinnear, *A Female Economy: Women’s Work in a Prairie Province, 1870-1970* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 100.

<sup>9</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076, Brook Family Fonds, Description.

<sup>10</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-10, 11, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letters to Isabelle Brook.

<sup>11</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-20, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letters to Sidney Brook, July 2, 1916-August 27, 1916.

<sup>12</sup> Hugh MacIntyre Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion (The Canadian Scottish) Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: The MacMillan Company of Canada, Limited, 1932), 513. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-19, Brook Family Fonds, Lieutenant-Officer, Discharge Section, letter to Cpl. Sidney Brook, June 17, 1918.

<sup>13</sup> Sheila McManus, “Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women, 1905-1929,” found in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women’s History*, edited by Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000). 127.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.



gender roles so that the home and subsistence agriculture could be performed by women, leaving men free to focus on operating the outside work, and growing the business for market production.<sup>15</sup> Separating the workload created an efficient environment that benefited the mutual interests of a farming couple's partnership, which Cecilia Danysk argues created the strongest and most successful farms in western Canada.<sup>16</sup>

Arguments that a gendered division of labour would create prosperous farms often perpetuated gender ideals of the time. For example, Mrs. O. Cooper, from Aquadell, Saskatchewan, wrote a circular letter to the local secretaries of the women's section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association in September of 1915 describing in detail a "Farm Woman's Duty."<sup>17</sup> In her letter, Mrs. Cooper defined the specific role women were to play in agricultural settings, and advocated for the separation of genders and duties. This, she argued, would "keep the routine of the farm running smoothly."<sup>18</sup> Mrs. Cooper defined women's role as studying

the best way to make her efforts count in the general plan, to see that her house is kept neat, clean and attractive as she can, to see that the family is provided with well-cooked meals and all the various and trying incidents of home life, are given the attention circumstances demand.<sup>19</sup>

In her view – and in the view of the female farming organizations – women's main goal was maintaining the home. While this put men in control of business, women's roles were perceived as equally necessary in building successful farms.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>16</sup> Cecilia Danysk, "'A Bachelor's Paradise': Homesteaders, Hired Hands, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1880-1930," in *Making Western Canada: Essays on European and Colonization and Settlement*, edited by Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), 155.

<sup>17</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon, A1, E.92, McNaughton Papers, Mrs. O. Cooper, "Letter to all Local Secretaries," September 22, 1915.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

Mrs. Cooper continued in a later portion of the letter entitled “Woman’s Interest on the Farm”, discussing the ways in which women could support their husbands. Here she stated:

No true woman on the farm can help but be intensely interested in all that goes on. Aside altogether from the cares of her house, there is the interest she cannot help but have in the ambition of her husband, in his effort to make a success and provide a home for himself and his family . . . To be sure she may not be as interested in the detail of the outside farm management, as her husband, but she is vitally affected by every undertaking.<sup>20</sup>

A farming couple’s interests were intricately tied. As a result, Cooper advocated that farm women become aware of the business’ details so they could better support their husbands. Being interested in the business also meant that women occasionally had to step outside of their assigned roles to assist their husbands on the fields. While this did happen in times of necessity, it was not necessarily the ideal.<sup>21</sup> Women were encouraged to remain within a domestic role, caring for the farm home and family. But being “intensely interested” in farm management would prove especially useful when many wives were left in control of their farms during the war.<sup>22</sup>

Not only was this separation of gender roles seen as practical, it also maintained the conventional gender norms of the time, which praised “feminine respectability.”<sup>23</sup> These strictly separated gender roles extended beyond economics. In an address at the United Farmers of Alberta Convention in 1916, United Farm Women of Alberta president and suffrage activist Irene Parlby discussed “Women’s Place in the Nation,” arguing that women’s place was largely to bear and rear children.<sup>24</sup> Parlby asserted that, despite the fact that there were many women who “do not marry,” and could use their “leisure time” for “the benefit of the community,”

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> McManus, “Gender(ed) Tensions,” 130.

<sup>22</sup> Mrs. O. Cooper, “Letter to all Local Secretaries.”

<sup>23</sup> McManus, “Gender(ed) Tensions,” 135.

<sup>24</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M8602-2, Langford Fonds, Irene Parlby, “Women’s Place in the Nation,” Address Delivered at UFWA Annual Convention, 1916.

the raising and training of future generations is the most important constructive work that women can engage in – the giving to the nation of citizens who will uphold all that is noble and pure in the national life; and the making of homes that shall strive after such high ideals, that their influence will be felt in ever widening circles, like the ripples on the water into which you have thrown a stone.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout this speech, Irene Parlby made it clear where the female members of the farmer's movement were required to render their services. Women in her view were uniquely suited – and therefore, morally obligated – to rear children and create suitable homes for western families. This work would in turn create a strong society.

Sarah Carter argues in her book *Imperial Plots* that both men and women were encouraged to come to western Canada to help build the British Empire. While “the job of empire building was man's work,” women were meant to “reproduce and to tame the wild colonial males.”<sup>26</sup> Men were the builders; women “were vessels to transport and perpetuate British culture and identity.”<sup>27</sup> Women – specifically white, English-speaking women – were expected and encouraged to remain within the domestic sphere. Carter argues that outdoor labour was deemed not fitting for British women, who represented “proper womanhood.”<sup>28</sup> However, it was appropriate to expect outdoor labour from women of “primitive” societies; Doukhobor women, for example, were “used to illustrate the stark contrast between the desired and condemned activities for women.”<sup>29</sup> British women were expected to be better than working in the fields, and were instead encouraged to remain within the domestic sphere. It was believed that this “constructive work” would create the most stable and productive farming homes.<sup>30</sup> As suffragist Nellie McClung stated, “women are naturally the guardians of the race,” likely referring

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 7, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Irene Parlby, “Women's Place in the Nation,” Address Delivered at UFWA Annual Convention, 1916.

specifically to Anglo women.<sup>31</sup> Sarah Carter argues that, while McClung did “endorse ethnic diversity” in Canada, she also expressed “deep pride and admiration in the British Empire.”<sup>32</sup> Other suffragists used the perceived superiority of British women to “foreign” men to bolster their justification of receiving the vote.<sup>33</sup> These ideas of British superiority permeated the areas of war work on the western Canadian home front, which praised women for using their domestic work for patriotism and the benefit of the British Empire. By making extra fieldwork explicitly patriotic during the war, ‘traditional’ gender roles could be preserved and maintained over the course of the conflict.

Isabelle was a part of the farming community in Craigmyle, and it appears that, like most of the town, she also fit firmly within the Anglo-Canadian demographic. For Isabelle, this community was particularly supportive when it came to her children. Just after Sidney had finally arrived in England, Isabelle gave birth to another child, Alice. She wrote to Sidney of her daughter’s birth on November 4, 1916, expressing her hope that the news “has not taken all your breath away”, and wishing “with all my heart you would walk into the room, just this very minute.”<sup>34</sup> Fortunately, Isabelle had other women assisting her throughout the labour. Some of these women, most notably Florence Lavers, also had husbands away at war. Fredrick Lavers had enlisted only days after Sidney Brook, and they were in the same battalion, the 113<sup>th</sup>.<sup>35</sup> Florence’s children, older than Isabelle’s, were able to help her run her own farm. However, like Isabelle, Florence had no choice but to take over the responsibilities of the farm. These two women in particular banded together in the absence of their husbands. Florence and her children

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<sup>31</sup> Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: McLeod & Allen, 1915), 25.

<sup>32</sup> Sarah Carter, “‘Daughters of British Blood’ or ‘Hordes of Men of Alien Race’: The Homesteads-For-Women Campaign in Western Canada,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 281.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-21, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1916.

<sup>35</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5442-3, Fredrick Husband Lavers, “Attestation Paper,” May 24, 1916. Sidney Brook, “Attestation Paper.”

are mentioned frequently throughout Isabelle's letters to Sidney. She, along with other women from Craigmyle, was important in supporting Isabelle when she needed it most.

This community was with Isabelle again when, almost exactly one year later, in late October of 1917, Isabelle had to write her husband about the death of their seven-year-old son, Arnott, of diphtheria.

Gordon & Arnott were like a little team – now I've only one left. They did about an equal share of all the shopping errands, bringing over water etc., but for all Arnott was the youngest I sort of depended more on him. But the wee man will never go in and out of our home anymore. He's gone to a happier land to live. Fri. Oct 5th, the night of which I took sick, was his last day at school. Poor little chap. And there's so many things around to remind one of him.<sup>36</sup>

Only a few days prior to his death, Isabelle had commented on his helpfulness, saying "But Arnott's our all round man, and he does most anything and everything."<sup>37</sup> Not only did she miss his character, she missed the help he provided around the home and the farm. Isabelle, it appears, suffered greatly with the loss of her son, and relied on her community to help her through the difficult time. These letters are the only time that she shows despair and loneliness. She writes that she is "not very spry at all," and it seems as though a sickness plagued her after Arnott's death, laying her up in bed.<sup>38</sup> Her letters suggest that her friends and neighbours stepped in to help her and her other children during this difficult time, providing childcare and extra food.

Even while surrounded by a caring community, Isabelle was acutely aware of time and distance between her and her husband, which often made her feel lonely in the rural town. She remarked: "How far we are from each other eh? And how long it takes for word to travel from

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<sup>36</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-26, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, October 29, 1917.

<sup>37</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-26, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, October 16, 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1917.

one to the other.”<sup>39</sup> Despite the loneliness she often felt, and the hopefulness she had that Sidney would return soon (for example, she often speculated that he would be back in time for Christmas), Isabelle supported the Canadian war effort and the soldiers overseas through her work on the home front. She gladly accepted the reins as farm businesswoman, taking over her husband’s role on the farm while maintaining her own domestic position as farm woman. She was not alone. Some women, many of whom could not afford the rising cost of farm labourers, took a direct role in outdoor farm labour.<sup>40</sup> Others, like Isabelle Brook, were able to secure farm labourers (and domestic help later in the war) and took on a managerial role instead. This type of work suggests that the Brooks were more affluent farmers, and helped put Isabelle in a far more fortunate position than many other farm women in western Canada.

For his part, Sidney Brook greatly appreciated the farm work Isabelle did. While at the start of the war Sidney continually inquired of the state of the farm and answered Isabelle’s questions from overseas, eventually his instructions waned as the time between questions and answers lengthened.<sup>41</sup> He stated in one of his early letters: “its no use me advising you about our business – you must do your best.”<sup>42</sup> This statement makes it clear that Isabelle had an equal stake in their farm. Sidney left the operation of the farm completely to Isabelle, telling her to “keep the home fires burning” in his absence.<sup>43</sup> In fact, he seemed relieved at the prospect of leaving farm work behind, finding soldiering to be more relaxing and lazy than farm life, even

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<sup>39</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 9, 1917.

<sup>40</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 337.

<sup>41</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-15, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, October 22, 1916.

<sup>42</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-15, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, October 25, 1916.

<sup>43</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-14, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, September 24, 1916.

cryptically remarking that he had “changed his mind about living on the farm.”<sup>44</sup>

A couple that clearly thought of each other as equals, even Isabelle and Sidney Brook had preconceived notions about gender in western Canada. For example, after commenting on the help Florence Lavers received from her daughter’s fiancé, Isabelle joked to Sidney, “Now don’t you wish you had a son-in-law to look after your wife?”<sup>45</sup> implying in a self-deprecating way that she should have a man watching over her. At times, Sidney seems patronizing, making teasing comments such as “Really you must go out a little more – not too much, you know, or it might become a bad habit.”<sup>46</sup> While often their letters seem like harmless teasing, or evidence of ‘inside jokes’ between the couple, these words do little to mask how they viewed women’s assigned gender roles. And yet, despite these gendered comments, Isabelle continually demonstrated her independence and capabilities in managing the farm throughout the years of Sidney’s absence.

While she was more fortunate than many other women in that she had acquired both a hired hand and domestic help, the story of Isabelle Brook’s life during the First World War was not necessarily unique in western Canada. When Canada went to war alongside Britain on August 4, 1914, men immediately lined up to join the war effort. The Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) appealed to them for different reasons. British immigrants, like Sidney Brook, were eager to support their mother country. Because British immigrants were more likely to be involved in the war effort, this thesis focuses specifically on these individuals, while

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<sup>44</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, March 1, 1917. This letter is a short paragraph, and Sidney cuts off the letter without offering any further explanation regarding this comment. It appears as though he was called away on other busy (or perhaps even fell asleep in the middle of writing). He does not write for another two weeks, remarking that he had been resting and did not have anything to write home about. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, March 18, 1917.

<sup>45</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-22, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 24, 1916.

<sup>46</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-17, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, July 26, 1917.

acknowledging that immigrants from other nations were also involved in the effort on the home front. Young and single Canadian men found the prospect of war exciting and were eager to travel overseas. There were more practical reasons to join the war effort as well. In the years prior to the declaration of war, Canada had dipped into a recession.<sup>47</sup> War provided jobs for unemployed men. Whatever the reason, thousands of men leapt at the chance to go overseas. While most of these men were single, many were not. Like Sidney Brook, they left wives and children behind. The Great War was long, and Canada's eagerness for battles eventually waned. By 1917 the Canadian government had lifted previously imposed enlistment restrictions, and opened debates over conscription, finally drafting soldiers near the end of the War. By the armistice on November 11, 1918, approximately 430,000 Canadians had served overseas.<sup>48</sup> 61,000 of these men never returned home.<sup>49</sup> Luckily, however, the story of Isabelle and Sidney ends well, with Sidney returning home, after having been removed from active combat due to being wounded in the arm by shrapnel, in 1918.

In the four long years of war, the absence of a large number of eligible working men created a labour shortage on the prairies. Compounded with an increase in grain production for the war effort and rising prices of this grain, many women in western Canada were left behind to fill positions vacated by husbands, sons, and other men. In western Canada, this work was primarily in the agricultural sector, rather than manufacturing industries.<sup>50</sup> As Bradford Rennie states in his book *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, "In the war years, wives did tasks formerly

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<sup>47</sup> Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*, Volume 1 (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2007), 22.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Manufacturing during the war primarily took place in Ontario and Quebec. Joan Sangster, "Mobilizing Women for War," in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 165-167.



done by their husband overseas – everything from ploughing to stooking.”<sup>51</sup> Nellie McClung believed that women were a vital source of support for the war effort. She therefore encouraged women to enter work not only in manufacturing industries, but also as female farm hands.<sup>52</sup> The women who did step outside the home into these positions were especially lauded for their efforts. The magazine *Everywoman's World* praised “pioneer women” on prairie farms that were able to use their resources and hard-working attitude for the benefit of the country.<sup>53</sup> These women were the backbone of the home front.

General farm hands were scarce in the prairie west during the Great War.<sup>54</sup> Linda Kealey writes that in response to the labour crisis, organizations like the United Farm Women of Alberta tried to recruit women to work in the farming industry.<sup>55</sup> Though not as successful as they might have hoped, these co-operatives recognized the necessity of bringing women into areas of work normally held by men. Because agriculture was a major industry on the Canadian prairies, participating in farm work was an integral way in which women could contribute to the war from the home front.<sup>56</sup> One article from the *Lethbridge Herald* acknowledged the work women had undertaken, saying:

In view of the strenuous times in which we are living the wonder is that so much has been accomplished. Women took men's places in the field last year, although help for the home was almost impossible to obtain . . . When the story of the Great War is told, we hope an honored place will be given to those who have striven not only to “keep the home fires burning,” but also to furnish food for the soldier lads at the front.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909-1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 78.

<sup>52</sup> Nellie McClung, “The Mobilization of Canadian Women,” *Everywoman's World* 8, no. 9 (Mar. 1918), 3.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Sangster, “Mobilizing Women for War,” 173-174.

<sup>55</sup> Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Incorporated, 1998), 207.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> “Alberta Farm Women Urged to Fight Famine,” *Lethbridge Herald*, January 22, 1918, page 12.

While a temporary shift, women's roles in agriculture were viewed as vital and unavoidable during the war, and given "an honored place."<sup>58</sup> As a result, women were praised for their patriotic work.<sup>59</sup> While in public memory this war work has been portrayed as a definitively changing moment for women in Canada both socially and politically, many scholars have begun to challenge this notion, arguing instead that women in post-war Canada reverted back to pre-war assigned gender roles.<sup>60</sup>

Farm women in Canada have not been ignored in historical scholarship. Nanci Langford's dissertation, for example, provides an in-depth study into the lives of female western Canadian homesteaders in the first half of the twentieth century. She provides a detailed look into the daily activities of women on the prairies. In her methodology, Langford explains that studying women in "the homesteading years" is difficult, because "women had neither the time or energy to record their lives."<sup>61</sup> This idea further explains why Isabelle's letters are so valuable and unique. Forced by circumstances to write to her husband, Isabelle provided a documentation of life for farm women during the war that might not otherwise exist. Through various interviews, Langford argues that homesteading life shaped immigrant women over time, and that "the 'new woman' of Canadian prairie culture was a woman with an identity formed in her past, reshaped to suit the demands and contradictions of settlement life."<sup>62</sup> The work women performed, Langford argues, demonstrates "how gendered identities are formulated through practice, that is, through the choices and possibilities of women's lives as they experience and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2005), 192.

<sup>60</sup> Sangster, "Mobilizing Women for War," 157-163.

<sup>61</sup> Nanci Langford, "First Generation and Lasting Impressions: The Gendered Identities of Prairie Homestead Women," (PhD Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1994), 8.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 175.

create them.”<sup>63</sup> In the case of the First World War, women’s identities were shaped through the redefinition of their work as patriotic.

Gender is a useful lens through which to study the roles of Canadian men and women during the First World War. Historian Joan Scott states in her article “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” that gender “becomes a way of denoting ‘cultural constructions’ – the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men.”<sup>64</sup> This thesis explores the construction of both masculine and feminine roles in the Prairie Provinces. Scott defines gender as “a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes,” and I use this framework to examine the ideal roles for men and women constructed by government, social leaders, and mainstream society.<sup>65</sup> Particularly, I examine the social construction of gender roles through economics, examining men and women’s working roles specifically in relation to the war.<sup>66</sup>

Marjorie Griffin Cohen has written extensively on women’s work in Ontario in her book *Women’s Work, Markets, and Economic Development*. Arguing that “women’s productive activities were crucial to Ontario development,” Cohen demonstrates that women’s work enabled men to “engage in production or waged labour,” much like crop production and farming on the prairies.<sup>67</sup> Sheila McManus examines this construction of gender on the prairies in her chapter “Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women.” Focusing on the Alberta women’s farm movement, McManus discusses the roles women played in agricultural settings in Alberta, arguing that women were navigating complicated roles between the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>64</sup> Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1056.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 1067.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 1068.

<sup>67</sup> Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women’s Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 4, 8.

“feminine” and the “masculine” work found on Albertan farms.<sup>68</sup> She argues that women’s work was based on the premise “separate but equal,” and this idea put farm women in a position of “racial and ethnic privilege,” but was less effective as a “radical political tool.”<sup>69</sup> While women were required to assist in fieldwork when necessary, farm women’s domestic work was kept within the realm of “appropriate femininity,” and the constructions of gender on the prairie were strictly delineated.<sup>70</sup> This argument echoes Langford’s discussion of a farm woman’s complicated identity. As Langford states, “Farm women found they had to be all things to all people at all times.”<sup>71</sup> This statement was nowhere more true than during the crisis of the First World War.

Sarah Carter has continued this study of homesteading women in western Canada in her recent book *Imperial Plots*. Her study focuses on the implicit masculinity of homesteading, and how “migrant women to Western Canada were deliberately and systematically denied this access to property and the right to manage their own land and resources.”<sup>72</sup> While homesteading seemed to represent masculinity, Carter demonstrates how women in western Canada built the West, according to European settlement efforts. She recognizes them as empire builders through their important work on the prairies.<sup>73</sup> Carter focuses her attention on the systematic denial of homestead land to women, arguing that “for British women to establish and operate their own homesteads and farms and work on the land was in direct contrast to their assigned role as models of domestic, feminine demeanour and deportment.”<sup>74</sup> While women continually demonstrated that they were perfectly capable of farm work – as evidenced particularly during

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<sup>68</sup> McManus, “Gender(ed) Tensions.”

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>71</sup> Langford, “First Generation and Lasting Impressions,” 163.

<sup>72</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 19.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

the crisis created by the First World War – Carter argues that few women owned “imperial plots” by the 1930s.<sup>75</sup> Many people feared that “farming would interfere with their ability to perform the most important work as wives and mothers.”<sup>76</sup> Western Canada was a place where the “‘traditional’ and ‘natural’ gender order was to be preserved.”<sup>77</sup> Carter briefly compares this preservation of gender roles to women’s work in munitions factories, which was deemed to be “unfeminine” work, but was also “excused due to the war.”<sup>78</sup> Farm work during the First World War confronted the gender roles assigned to women, but any inroads made were viewed as temporary in an effort to preserve these pre-war ideals, and women’s farm work was only recognized as patriotic specifically for the war effort.

Carter also argues that women farmers “challenged the deliberate crafting of Western Canada as a ‘manly space,’ where the building block and organizing principle was the authority of the white, property-holding, male head of household.”<sup>79</sup> In her article “No Place for a Woman,” Catherine Cavanaugh also explains that the West was “framed as a masculine enterprise,” but “the promise of the West is much more than the making of money. The search for wealth becomes a struggle for essential manhood.”<sup>80</sup> Women were therefore denied playing a part in this “struggle.” Denying women the same opportunities, Cavanaugh argues, “had the effect of making women’s work invisible.”<sup>81</sup> The war only served to highlight the work that women were already doing, bringing it to the forefront.

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>80</sup> Catherine A. Cavanaugh, “‘No Place for a Woman’: Engendering Western Canadian Settlement,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (Winter, 1997), 499.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 505.

Like Carter, Cavanaugh also argues that by demanding equal rights with men, “middle-class women . . . exclude[ed] other women on the basis of race, class, and ethnicity.”<sup>82</sup> Carter demonstrates that when campaigning for homesteads white, Anglo-Canadian farm women claimed that they (as British and Canadian-born women) had more right to homestead than did “foreigners.”<sup>83</sup> She lists the “undesirables” as including “Mormons, Ukrainians, Jews, Doukhobors, and Asians.”<sup>84</sup> The intent was to create an ideal British colony on the Canadian prairies. Bill Waiser writes in his book *Saskatchewan: A New History* that at the outset Saskatchewan was meant to be “a British province, peopled by British immigrants.”<sup>85</sup> However, he indicates that the “foreigner” population – those of neither Canadian nor British birth – numbered one-third of the Saskatchewan population by 1911.<sup>86</sup> As Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen have asserted, “Prairie Canada was not a melting pot.”<sup>87</sup> They argue that the opportunities presented by agriculture attracted more than just the British: Chinese immigrants, for example, followed the construction of the railways and “establish[ed] the mining industry,” while “Ukrainians, Russian Germans, Scandinavians, and Doukhobors” often built farms.<sup>88</sup> Whatever intentions were, western Canada was not a homogenous community of Anglo-Canadians. Immigrants from a variety of backgrounds threatened the ideal British colony, but the war presented an opportunity for Anglo-Canadians to assert their loyalty to the Empire. Isabelle and Sidney Brook fit solidly within this Anglo demographic.

Scholars of the First World War are increasingly interested in studying the roles of Canadian women. Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw’s edited collection *A Sisterhood of Suffering*

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 514.

<sup>83</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 277.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>85</sup> Waiser, 59.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>87</sup> Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 6.

*and Service*, for example, discusses women from Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War.<sup>89</sup> This book marks the first major attempt to gather information specifically about Canadian women during the war. Glassford and Shaw assert that the intention of their collection was to “bring together major elements of women’s wartime experience as a step towards meaningfully (re)inserting the female half of the population into the historical narratives of Canada and Newfoundland at war, from 1914 to 1918.”<sup>90</sup> While several of the chapters in this book focus on women’s work overseas, more chapters devote themselves to either woman’s work in voluntary groups, or in the work force. For example, Kori Street’s chapter on women in munitions factories and the banking industry examines the increasing involvement of women in this type of work over the course of the War.<sup>91</sup> She argues that women’s work varied according to their socio-economic background, and concludes that, while important, the work these women performed “did not shake the foundations of society.”<sup>92</sup> Street argues: “Women were not working to improve their position or to earn money and improve their day-to-day lives: they were serving the country.”<sup>93</sup> This statement reflects a major debate in the scholarship of women in the First World War over the extent of women’s changing gender roles during the war, which is a theme throughout Glassford and Shaw’s collection. This thesis examines this debate, arguing that the changes made on the prairies were largely temporary, and – as Street argues – reflected patriotic ideals, rather than an active attempt at changing traditional gender roles.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, ed. *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Kori Street, “Patriotic, Not Permanent: Attitudes about Women’s Making Bombs and Being Bankers,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, edited by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 148-170.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>94</sup> Margot Duley’s chapter in Glassford and Shaw’s collection specifically addresses how women were able to refashion their traditional work within the home into support work for the war.<sup>94</sup> She examines knitting in Newfoundland, discussing the ways in which this type of war work perpetuated gender roles.<sup>94</sup> Women did not step

Joan Sangster's chapter in *Canada and the First World War* addresses this debate as well. She examines women's work during the war, focusing primarily on women in Ontario munitions factories.<sup>95</sup> She argues that women's work in the War did not necessarily change women's "traditional" role in English-Canadian society.<sup>96</sup> Instead, Sangster insists that the role working women played during this time was much in line with pre-war ideals.<sup>97</sup> Men and women were often still restricted to their assigned gender roles. This particular chapter argues that gender roles largely remained the same despite the non-traditional labour women performed during the First World War, and therefore raises questions over history and popular memory. While Sangster argues that the Great War did not in fact change traditional gender roles, she finds that this idea has persisted in popular memory.<sup>98</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson adds to this discussion in her examination of women in the Second World War, arguing that "the mere fact, however, of a growing tendency for gainfully employed women to combine marriage and job was not in itself liberating," and that "the war . . . had not upset the sexual division of domestic labour whereby home exists as a place of leisure for men but of work and service for women."<sup>99</sup> This role was the same for women after the First World War, who were once again relegated to primarily domestic roles in post-war Canada.

According to Sangster, many groups, including socialists, did not want women to work. Paid labour was seen as a symbol of exploitation rather than liberation.<sup>100</sup> Sangster's chapter

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far out of their domestic role in this instance, but rather were able to remain within a domestic sphere in order to support the war effort. Margot Duley, "The Unquiet Knitters of Newfoundland: From Mothers of the Regiment to Mothers of the Nation," in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, edited by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

<sup>95</sup> Sangster, "Mobilizing Women for War," 168.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>99</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 216.

<sup>100</sup> Sangster, "Mobilizing Women for War," 171.



examines the precautions put in place, such as the hiring of “welfare supervisors,” that ensured working did not affect women’s morality.<sup>101</sup> However, Sangster’s work studying the war in Ontario leaves room for further investigation of other Canadian regions. Sarah Carter adds to this discussion, arguing that during the war, unlike in Ontario, prairie women were “steered away from field work and towards domestic work in farm homes” in an effort to keep western Canada masculine.<sup>102</sup> She states that this position was in contrast to Ontario’s leniency towards women’s work, as they allowed women into factories, and organized the “farmerettes” to assist on Ontario fruit farms. However, Carter also concurs with Sangster’s conclusion, demonstrating that this work was deemed “unfeminine,” and that it was “excused due to the war.”<sup>103</sup>

Terry Wilde’s chapter in Glassford and Shaw’s collection entitled “Freshettes, Farmerettes, and Feminine Fortitude at the University of Toronto during the First World War,” highlights women’s agricultural work in eastern Canada as farmerettes. Wilde presents an important question that resonates through the study of Canadian women on the home front: “If the fighting of wars has traditionally been framed as masculine, what becomes of civilian women during wartime?”<sup>104</sup> Wilde argues that the changes made by and influences of the University of Toronto women were temporary, and the “status quo” shifted back to pre-war ideals when the war ended.<sup>105</sup> Wilde focuses his discussion on women working on fruit and dairy farms in rural Ontario as emergency help for the ongoing labour shortage. While this non-traditional work was vitally important during the war, the changes did not last once soldiers returned from overseas.<sup>106</sup> Sangster echoes this argument in her article, arguing that farmerettes were used in “lighter” farm

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>102</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 344.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>104</sup> Terry Wilde, “Freshettes, Farmerettes, and Feminine Fortitude at the University of Toronto during the First World War,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, edited by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 75.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

work, “such as fruit-picking,” leaving men to do the harvesting.<sup>107</sup> In western Canada, attempts to maintain pre-war gender ideals were even more pronounced. While there were some smaller attempts to mobilize a land army, Carter argues that the government did not organize a formal land army because they did not want to be seen endorsing women working in the fields.<sup>108</sup> The hesitation to organize was again primarily because gender roles on the prairies were strictly delineated. The war challenged how people perceived these roles, but did not necessarily change the prevailing attitudes towards women’s position in society.

John Herd Thompson’s book *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* is an important inclusion to this historiography, as it offered the first comprehensive discussion of the effects of the First World War in the Prairie Provinces. Thompson explores a variety of topics pertaining to the war on the prairie home front, including the economy, clashes over race and class, conscription, and social reform on the prairies. His chapter on social reform and the war is particularly interesting in its discussion of women, prohibition and the suffrage movement, arguing that the war created an environment that could be “exploited” by members of the Social Gospel movement to achieve their goals.<sup>109</sup> However, this book may also have contributed to the prolonged popular memory that the war had a definitive effect on women’s roles on western Canadian society. For example, Thompson writes that the “dislocations of war won for some women a foothold in fields formerly reserved for men, and ended the traditional pattern of domestic service as the working-class woman’s only occupation.”<sup>110</sup> As Carter has shown, domestic service continued to be pushed long after the war as the primary place for women on

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<sup>107</sup> Sangster, “Mobilizing Women for War,” 174.

<sup>108</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 327-328.

<sup>109</sup> John Herd Thomson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1978), 98.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

western Canadian farms.<sup>111</sup> While Thompson's book provides a basis on which a discussion of the effects of war on western Canada can be examined, it does not provide a deep discussion of how farm women's working roles were refashioned, instead providing a cursory examination of women and the war. While Sarah Carter has done much to fill this gap, this thesis adds to the existing scholarship with an in-depth discussion of farm women specifically during the First World War.

Some scholars argue that the women's movement subsided during the war years. Carol Bacchi's influential book *Liberation Deferred?*, particularly her chapter "The Suffrage Fringe," helps situate western women within the English Canadian women's movement.<sup>112</sup> Here, Bacchi explores a division between farm women and eastern Canadian suffragists. In fact, Bacchi acknowledges the "distrust" that Violet McNaughton, president of the women's section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, had for eastern Canada. This distrust stemmed from differing economic interests, as women "interpreted the causes of their problems, especially their economic problems, differently."<sup>113</sup> Women were also heavily encouraged by farm men to join together in the farmer's movement in order for farmers as a whole to gain a political voice.<sup>114</sup> As Bacchi states, "the suffragists represented an urban professional and entrepreneurial elite; the farm women, a group of primary producers."<sup>115</sup> Western women believed their conditions were unique, and therefore thought of themselves as distinct from other Canadian women.

The idea of western Canadian farmers as a separate class found in Bacchi's account of western women is echoed in Bradford Rennie's book on the United Farmers and Farm Women

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<sup>111</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 365.

<sup>112</sup> Carol Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

of Alberta.<sup>116</sup> Rennie devotes an entire chapter to the farmer's movement in Alberta and the effects of the First World War. Delving into the growing "class consciousness" of farmers in Alberta, Rennie argues that prairie farmers identified themselves as a distinct class in Canadian society.<sup>117</sup> He states that the UFA completed "its movement building from 1914 to 1918," arguing that during this period the farmer's movement "doubled its membership, created a women section, and moulded a social ethic."<sup>118</sup> Farmers, he continues, and their "feeling of class opposition," were "strengthened by war-related experiences."<sup>119</sup> Through her letters, we can see how Isabelle Brook was a part of this growing movement. Rennie provides a detailed discussion of how women and gender played into the building of the Albertan farmer's movement during the war years. He determines that "farm women saw no contradiction between their equal rights and traditional causes."<sup>120</sup> This argument opens up a discussion of the unique form of feminism found on the Canadian prairies. It was an amalgamation of different ideals held by farm women.

Rennie expands more on the relationship between men and women in the UFA and UFWA, explaining the cooperation necessary between the genders in order for their farms to be successful.<sup>121</sup> However, he argues that this cooperation did not necessarily mean "equality."<sup>122</sup> Rennie argues that farmers – often women involved in the farmer's movement – were vocal advocates of maternal ideologies and maintaining their traditional "maternal" role in society.<sup>123</sup> Rennie's examination of the United Farm Women of Alberta and the relationships between genders within the farmer's movement provides a firm foundation on which to study the First World War's effects on the lives of individual farm women. His argument in particular provides

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<sup>116</sup> Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

a starting point to discuss the complicated roles women played during this period, as they navigated lines between refashioning their domestic work while taking over their husband's roles on the farm.

Rennie discusses the cooperation between sexes that became mutually beneficial in the growth of the farmer's and the women's movements in western Canada.<sup>124</sup> He argues that those within the movement perceived men and women as equal, despite the distinct gender roles men and women were required to play. Men and women were seen as functionally different, but Rennie argues that "women saw no contradiction in working for their class and sex, especially since the UFA endorsed their equal rights demands."<sup>125</sup> In time of war, women were eager to support Canada using "traditional" means, but were able to challenge these roles when needed on the farm.

Rennie asserts that the type of feminism found on the prairies was an amalgamation of both "equal rights" and "maternal" feminism.<sup>126</sup> In her dissertation "Ground for Common Action," Georgina Taylor redefines this unique type of feminism as "agrarian feminism," using the story of Violet McNaughton to define these feminist ideals.<sup>127</sup> Taylor argues that McNaughton's 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."<sup>128</sup> The partnership between men and women gave women a certain form of equality with men, one that many women in urban areas did not necessarily share. Men valued women's important role

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>126</sup> Georgina M. Taylor, "Ground for Common Action": Violet McNaughton's Agrarian Feminism And the Origins of the Farm Women's Movement in Canada," (PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1997).

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

on the farm, and therefore advocated for their equality not only within the farmer's movement, but also within the wider Canadian political arena.

Men and women supported each other's separate and common goals.<sup>129</sup> Women's important role on the farm afforded them an authoritative position in society, which they could use to advance their goals. Taylor argues that McNaughton's agrarian feminism "encouraged farm women to negotiate the conditions of their productive, reproductive, and community work in order to improve these conditions."<sup>130</sup> Taylor argues that McNaughton's agrarian feminism was

based on the idea that the first National Policy had to be radically revamped before farm women, their families and other Canadians could live well . . . [and] her feminism was aimed at improving the poor conditions in which farm women and their families lived by using the principles of agrarian co-operation.<sup>131</sup>

Women used their growing position within the farmer's movement to push forward their agenda for moral and practical improvements within farming communities. Agrarian feminism was unique in the cooperative opportunities with male farmers within the movement.

Co-operation, Rennie confirms, was an important element in the western Canadian farmer's movement. He argues that "class solidarity," or unity among members of the farming community, was important to members of the farm women's movement.<sup>132</sup> In addition, the farmer's movement generally supported women's rights, and as such, both genders were eager to co-operate in order to support each other's goals. Those within the movement believed that if women farmers gained the vote, farmers' goals would gain leverage. In addition, they perceived women as having "peacemaking, moral, and constructive tendencies" that would "be more

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<sup>129</sup> McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions," 135.

<sup>130</sup> Taylor, "Ground for Common Action," 12.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 116.

strongly felt in the world to balance male influences,” should women receive the vote.<sup>133</sup>

Although agrarian feminists stated that men and women were fundamentally different, they also believed that both genders were equally necessary in creating balance in the world. Nowhere was this idea clearer than in farm women’s experiences during the First World War, which is the focus of this study. Men and women had their mandated roles on prairie farms, but this role fluctuated in times of necessity – especially during the stresses of the war.

The situation in post-war Canada must also be addressed. After the war, soldiers returned to a country full of political turmoil and economic uncertainty. For example, Donald Avery argues that working-class conflict, unemployment, and ethnic tensions culminated in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.<sup>134</sup> There was a general distrust of Germans and Austro-Hungarians, as well as “disloyal aliens and those involved in socialist organizations.”<sup>135</sup> These ethnic tensions persisted through the mid-1920s, when the economy finally began to recover.<sup>136</sup> In addition, women found themselves in a period of flux. The war did help women achieve the vote, as they were enfranchised in order to push the conscription referendum through. But Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster have shown in their book *Beyond the Vote* that in the 1920s “some women worried that their recent suffrage victories had done little to alter Canadian politics.”<sup>137</sup> As Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw have demonstrated in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service*, “the 1918 Armistice returned society to a peacetime ‘normal’”, but women had not remained static for the duration of the war.<sup>138</sup> Women were a valuable part of the war effort from the home

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>134</sup> Donald Avery, “Ethnic and Class Relations in Western Canada: A Case Study of European Immigrants and Anglo-Canadian Nativism,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, edited by David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 284.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>137</sup> Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, ed, *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>138</sup> Glassford and Shaw, *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service*, 321.

front. By refashioning their work as “patriotic,” government officials and social leadership were able to construct women’s extra work as temporary. Women helped meet the needs of a labour shortage created by the war, then they were relegated back to ‘traditional’ gender roles in post-war Canada.

Building on the work of these scholars – particularly the work of Sarah Carter – this thesis seeks to provide an in-depth examination of one couple’s experiences of homesteading in western Canada during the First World War. This story will add to the understanding of rural life on the prairies, particularly the roles women negotiated. The basis for this thesis comes from Isabelle and Sidney’s wartime correspondence, found in the Brook family collection at the Glenbow Museum. These letters were donated by the Brooks’ daughter in-law, Irene (Glen) Brook, in 2005. They are an extensive collection, with Sidney sending ninety-four letters to Isabelle while on service, and Isabelle writing one hundred and nineteen. The couple tried to write each other at least once a week; however, this varies, particularly on Sidney’s end. In addition, sometimes one letter contains several days’ worth of information. When they got called away on other business, they would often just continue the letter later in the day, or even later in the week. In addition, length of these letters varies as well, with some being several pages, and others being constrained to one or two. Sidney’s letters are typically shorter than Isabelle’s, who often included more details about daily life in the Craigmyle community than Sidney did about details of the war. The collection also appears complete, with no noticeably missing pages or military censorship. Sidney, who purposefully left military details out of his letters, was good at self-censorship, and the military did not need to interfere.

Both Isabelle and Sidney’s letters survived the war. It is thus possible to get a more complete story of Isabelle Brook’s life while her husband was away. As Langford states, many



women were unable to write regularly, and it is even more rare to gain insight into the mind of a busy farm woman.<sup>139</sup> Under the wartime circumstances, Isabelle and Sidney's forced separation meant that Isabelle wrote more regularly than she otherwise might. The fact that Sidney carried her letters with him while on active duty overseas indicates that he cared very deeply for her and his family. Reading these letters, it appears as though the complete set survives, as there are no notable discrepancies or missing portions between letters. It is, however, impossible to tell to what extent Isabelle and Sidney censored themselves; at some points, it is clear that they are trying not to worry each other. In particular, this personal censorship is evident when Sidney is wounded in 1917, and when Isabelle takes ill after her son's death the same year, when they each appear to downplay exactly how badly they were feeling.<sup>140</sup> This censorship is a potential limitation of these sources – while they appear honest, it is probable that some things are left out of the letters. With little other textual evidence of Sidney and Isabelle during these years, it is also difficult to corroborate their stories.<sup>141</sup> Even so, Isabelle's story during the war years is the focal point of my thesis. I use both transcripts and the original letters as a foundation on which I discuss the experiences of rural women in western Canada – more specifically Alberta and Saskatchewan – during the First World War.

I use a variety of sources to put the Brooks' story into context and perspective. Using documents primarily from the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton, and the Saskatchewan Archives Board in Saskatoon, I focus my attention on rural women in the Prairie Provinces – most specifically Alberta and Saskatchewan – during the war. These sources include papers from the Red Cross Society, reports from the United Farm Women

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<sup>139</sup> Langford, "First Generation and Lasting Impressions," 8.

<sup>140</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-17, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letters to Isabelle Brook, July 11, 1917. Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1917.

<sup>141</sup> To date, no other secondary sources have been found that also use the Brook letters.

of Alberta, and Violet McNaughton's private correspondence to examine the context surrounding the Brook family letters. For each of these documents, I have focused on the war years. In addition, I use various articles from the *Grain Growers Guide*, which was originally published in Winnipeg and is now hosted by the University of Alberta on the database Peel's Prairie Provinces, to further examine how farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba responded to Canada's war effort. These sources help add context to the Brooks' story.

As with Carter's book *Imperial Plots*, this thesis most directly focuses on British immigrants and those of British heritage. This focus is not an attempt to erase the diverse history of western Canada, where Indigenous peoples had long been living and immigrants of diverse backgrounds settled. Rather, this attention is simply because the couple chosen for this study were British citizens – Sidney had immigrated to Canada in 1891, and Isabelle was born English-Canadian. In addition, through Isabelle Brook's letters we can infer that the community with which she associated was also primarily British, or at least loyal to the British Empire's cause for war. This thesis is thus constrained to focus specifically on these individuals.

This thesis argues that work on the prairies shifted to reflect patriotic ideals during the First World War. Isabelle and other women not only continued their domestic work within farm homes, but also moved into their husband's roles, maintaining the business and finances of the farm. In many cases, these women took over the outside work as well. This work was praised as supporting the war effort and the empire, but women had little choice, as labour was expensive and often hard to find. However short their work terms were, women were an essential part of supporting the war effort from the home front. Men's work reflected these ideas as well. Men's patriotic ideals were especially seen in the conscription crisis of 1917, where soldiers and farmers rivalled each other, each group believing their work supported the Empire the most.

Soldiers believed fighting was the most important, while farmers believed that producing food for the front was the backbone of the war effort.

The body of this thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter examines the ways in which women refashioned their domestic work into important patriotic work on the home front. Rationing food, for example, was seen as vital work, as demonstrated through the Red Cross guidelines and in reports from the UFWA. Much of this material comes from the Glenbow Museum and the Provincial Archives of Alberta, respectively. Women were also encouraged to knit for soldiers, and send parcels and letters away. This domestic war work directly supported the war effort, helping alleviate some of the CEF's logistical errors. The letters between Isabelle Brook and her husband Sidney form the basis for discussing the ways in which the war reshaped and challenged perceptions of gender norms in western Canada. Isabelle's experiences are related to those of other women in western Canada, particularly those of women involved with the farmer's movement during the war years. Women navigated the challenges presented by the First World War by refashioning their traditional domestic work into patriotic war work on the home front. This can especially be seen through the pages of the *Grain Growers Guide*, specifically the "Country Homemakers" section.

The second chapter discusses the agricultural roles women played during the war. This work includes business administration, which is defined as working with farm finances, hiring workers, working with crops and livestock, as well as involvement with the farmer's movement, and building property. This chapter begins with an examination of Isabelle's life as farm operator. Her story is corroborated by other women's stories, including Nellie Hunter's experiences farming in Sutherland SK. This chapter utilizes Violet McNaughton's correspondence, and her perceptions of women's working roles in agriculture. It examines the

labour crisis in greater depth, and the desperate need for female workers on farms. This chapter looks at organizations like the United Farm Women of Alberta and the women's section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers, and the ways in which they viewed women's work during the war, and how they advocated for women's important role on the prairie farms. This chapter discusses "agrarian exceptionalism," how farm women viewed themselves as distinct from urban women. This chapter argues that a shift in gender roles occurred temporarily as a result of the First World War. This shift provided a way for women to assert their position in western agricultural society, in addition to demonstrating their patriotism.

The third chapter focuses on western Canadian men and masculinity during the First World War, specifically addressing the debate over patriotism. This chapter examines how some men viewed their patriotism as best served in production work on western Canadian farms. It also discusses how other men – like Sidney Brook – determined that they best served the war effort by enlisting with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Again, the Brook letters are essential to this chapter, but rather than focusing on Isabelle, this chapter focuses on Sidney's letters, determining his attitude towards the war effort and conscription. This debate most strongly revealed itself in the conscription debates in western Canada in the late years of the First World War. Each side of this debate viewed masculinity differently.

This thesis argues that farm women in western Canada navigated different positions during the First World War, repurposing their domestic and farm work into a mark of patriotism and support for the British Empire. Like women, male soldiers and farmers tied their work to patriotic ideals, trying to prove the importance of their work in the service of the Empire. I examine the wider implications of women's refashioned roles during the war, specifically by addressing women's increased political participation through the success of the women's

suffrage movement in my conclusion. During this time, prairie women navigated a line between traditional and non-traditional work in the face of the conditions the war created. Isabelle Brook's letters help us understand the challenging roles farm women played during the First World War. By discussing her story in depth, my thesis adds to the current literature of farm women on the Canadian prairies. Examining these letters provide a better, fuller understanding of what some white women on the home front experienced during the First World War. Studying the role these women played helps us gain a better understanding of the ways in which gender roles were constructed, maintained, and fluctuated on Canadian prairie farms.

## Chapter 1

### Soldiers of the Home: Domestic Work on the Home Front

There was lots of love tucked away in that parcel sweetheart, but it was not packed with the happy light-hearted feelings I have packed other Christmas parcels. The joy of Christmas this year seems to be o'er shadowed. But may we hope another Christmas shall see us well and happy and all together again, dear. That first fruitcake I sent you was cooked overmuchly, so I baked another for this last parcel – hope it shall be a bit better. Those grey socks were none too dry when I packed them. I washed them to take the oiliness out of them, and they didn't have quite time to dry properly.

Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 7, 1916.<sup>1</sup>

For years, Isabelle Brook was responsible for the care of her family and husband through domestic work. On the farm, domestic labour extended beyond the home to include duties such as milking and gardening. This labour was centered around subsistence and caring for the family, while grain farming was meant for market production, and was thus deemed to be 'masculine' work. Sarah Carter has demonstrated this, arguing that women's farmyard work was deemed by authorities to be a "lighter" form of farm work, which did not challenge the "male ownership of land."<sup>2</sup> When the First World War erupted, these domestic duties remained uninterrupted. Some of this work was refashioned as patriotic, a special duty that supported the war effort and the troops abroad. Not only did this domestic "war work" appear to support the war effort, it also demonstrated support for the British Empire.<sup>3</sup> Social commentators eventually likened these women's domestic work to the work of soldiers on the battlefield. Isabelle may not have seen herself as patriotic, choosing to criticize the war rather than praise it, but she played an important role on the home front through her domestic labour.

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<sup>1</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-22, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 7, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 90.

<sup>3</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, ACC: 75.386/SE. "Calendar for 1919: With Photographs of Canadian Women War Workers," (Peace River, AB: Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, 1919).

Patriotism through domestic war work manifested itself in a variety of ways. Examples of women's war work included knitting, fundraising, sending letters and parcels to the front, and managing food conservation at home. Fundraising for wartime organizations like the Red Cross Society, the Patriotic Fund, and the Belgium Relief Fund were important ways in which women could use their organizing skills for the war effort. Knitting – specifically knitting socks – provided materials for soldiers overseas. Sending letters and parcels fell within a similar vein. But rationing and food conservation on the home front became a way for farm women to be recognized as soldiers of the home front. The government encouraged all women in general to perform this work, whether or not they had relations at the front. They portrayed it as a patriotic duty.

In their collection *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service*, Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw argue that “for most, supporting the war meant aiding the individual men fighting it, upholding the collective body of soldiers overseas, or justifying the deaths of those already fallen by winning the war.”<sup>4</sup> Women on the home front attempted to navigate the war, which often meant supporting soldiers from the home front and honouring those who died. Glassford and Shaw assert that this home front war work – in addition to combatting logistic issues – was a way to defend against the moral depravity caused by German “Huns” and the effects of war in Canada.<sup>5</sup> In her 1915 book *In Times Like These*, Nellie McClung asserted that the war was man's fault, but war work on the home front gave women opportunities to help right the wrongs men had created.<sup>6</sup> For McClung, the war became an additional source of justification to involve women in Canadian politics. While initially rejecting the war, McClung eventually began encouraging

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<sup>4</sup> Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, ed. “Introduction: Transformation in a Time of War?” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 11.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: McLeod & Allen, 1915), 11.

women to use their domestic talents to help the war effort, particularly through the work of the Red Cross.<sup>7</sup> Canadian women were not yet able to serve overseas in any capacities other than as nurses. Removed as they were from the actual fighting, war work provided an outlet for women on the home front. While this outlet was especially important for women with relatives fighting overseas, it extended to many other western women who wanted to demonstrate their support for both the Empire and the war. In addition to providing much needed contributions to the war effort, domestic war work was able to provide a distraction from the distance and harsh sacrifices of war.

Women whose husbands and sons left for war were seen as the giving the ultimate sacrifice for the country. For the first few years of war, women were encouraged to give their permission before husbands and sons enlisted.<sup>8</sup> One 1914 article in the *Edmonton Journal* entitled “Canada’s Brave Women” praised women for “not holding back from letting their sons or husbands go to the front.”<sup>9</sup> This article exemplified a federal decree that stated women must give permission for their husbands and sons to go to war.<sup>10</sup> Granting this permission was the perfect example of women’s sacrificial patriotism on the home front. A 1916 article “Prayer for Women in Time of War” demonstrates the public appreciation for women who “surrendered” their husbands and sons. The author writes

We pray Thee for the women of our Empire, who in surrendering their husbands and sons have given up more than life itself . . . May they know that the noblest of earth are in the fellowship of suffering. We pray Thee that this sacrifice of womanhood may not be in vain.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This change in attitude came when McClung’s son Jack enlisted for the war in 1915.

<sup>8</sup> Glassford and Shaw, ed. “Introduction: Transformation in a Time of War?” 13.

<sup>9</sup> “Western Canada Leads Dominion in Men for War,” *Edmonton Journal*, August 13, 1914, page 18.

<sup>10</sup> J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), 35.

<sup>11</sup> “Prayer for Women in Time of War,” *The Edmonton Journal*, January 1, 1916, page 6.



Women's sacrifice of their men was recognized not only by the public, but by government officials as well. Mrs. H. M. Tory, the President of the Women's Canadian Club, stated at the 1916 Women's Institutes Convention that "a bond of unity between us has been formed and a sense of oneness that will be of lasting value. Just as you women of the country have given your sons, we have given ours to stand side by side and to shed their blood, if need be, to protect our common heritage."<sup>12</sup> Women were praised for the sacrifice of men close to them, which tied them closely to the war effort.

The Red Cross Society was a particularly important organization on the home front where women were able to use their abilities. This organization symbolized the ultimate Canadian sacrifice and, in particular, the sacrifice made by wives and mothers. In a poem entitled "The Red Cross" published by the *Calgary Daily Herald* in 1915, J. P. Bushlen uses intense religious imagery to depict women sacrificing their children, much like Jesus' mother Mary sacrificed her child in Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Demonstrating that the soldier's sacrifice was for the greater good, he writes:

Where men were facing death,  
Defeat and earthly loss,  
I saw a glowing image rise.  
The image of a cross.

Upon it hung a Man.  
Made perfect for the race.  
And lo! I saw a woman kneel  
In sorrow at the base.

Before me as I gazed  
Another cross appeared-  
A cross on which a million men  
Had died, beloved, revered.

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<sup>12</sup> "Report of the Second Annual Convention: Women's Institutes of Alberta, 1916," page 14, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, ACC: PR2000.949/8.

<sup>13</sup> J.P. Bushlen, "The Red Cross," *Calgary Daily Herald*, January 8, 1915, page 10.

And here she knelt again.  
The woman, as before –  
E'er faithful to the cause of man,  
The love, the sons she bore.

One other cross of woe  
The vision showed to me –  
Made red with blood of woman's heart,  
And there, alone, was she!<sup>14</sup>

Maternalism and religious imagery remained favourite themes for Canadian propagandists for the duration of the war. The idea of the mother country sacrificing her soldier sons was a popular image. In her chapter “'Twas You, Mother, Made Me a Man,” Lynn Kennedy examines motherhood imagery used in the promotion of the war in Canada. Focusing on the work of Canadian poets during the war, Kennedy argues that “authors and artists, as well as government officials, demanded of Canadian women a more activist maternal role, with representations of maternal sacrifice meant to inspire the sacrifice of others.”<sup>15</sup> She connects these motherhood sentiments with Canadian nationalism, and the growth of a national identity during the war.<sup>16</sup> Canadian culture celebrated motherhood, and as a result, it was utilized as a way to rally support for the war effort, and justify the war's causes.

But sacrifice and patriotic duty went beyond sacrificing men, and developed into domestic work in service of the Empire. Knitting was an especially important form of war work, which women across Canada were encouraged to partake. As Alison Norman made clear in her chapter “In Defense of the Empire,” knitting socks was vital for the war effort, as “trench foot was a serious concern for soldiers who spent days and weeks in the cold wet trenches,” and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Lynn Kennedy, “'Twas You, Mother, Made Me a Man”: The Motherhood Motif in the Poetry of the First World War,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, edited by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 272.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

“wearing clean, dry socks was an important way to combat the condition.”<sup>17</sup> Socks and other comforts were in high demand at the front, and women across the country were encouraged to devote their domestic abilities and extra time to knitting socks.<sup>18</sup> The socks sent by Canadian knitters, one 1916 article in *The Edmonton Journal* pointed out, helped “in the prevention of ‘trench foot’ against which we have to take all possible prevention. A dry pair in time may save men’s feet.”<sup>19</sup>

In his letters, Sidney Brook described the care taken to dry the socks to avoid this affliction.<sup>20</sup> He wrote to Isabelle often about his gratefulness at receiving socks from friends and family, including from his four-year-old son, Lorne.<sup>21</sup> Clean, dry socks were essential, and providing this material good was therefore a patriotic duty. The government itself encouraged this service, as it alleviated some of the logistics of providing these materials for soldiers.<sup>22</sup> Nellie McClung wrote that “since the war broke out women have done a great deal of knitting . . . It is the desire to help, to care for, to minister; it is the same spirit which inspires our nurses to go out and bind up the wounded and care for the dying.”<sup>23</sup> Women’s maternal instincts were thought to drive the production of knitted goods. It was an extension of their gender-assigned duties as wives and mothers.

The role of women in wartime Newfoundland mirrored that of their western counterparts. In her chapter “The Unquiet Knitters of Newfoundland” Margot Duley examines women’s

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<sup>17</sup> Alison Norman, “In Defense of the Empire: The Six Nations of the Grand River and the Great War,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, edited by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 37-38.

<sup>18</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M8228-261, Red Cross Fonds, “Winter 1918 War Work: Containing Official Instructions for Red Cross Supplies and Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Comforts,” Pamphlet, Canadian War Contingent Association, 1918.

<sup>19</sup> “Knitters Must Insure Troops Against ‘Trench Foot,’” *The Edmonton Journal*, January 12, 1916, page 11.

<sup>20</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, December 14, 1917.

<sup>21</sup> Presumably, it was Isabelle who knit these socks. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, January 23, 1917.

<sup>22</sup> Glassford and Shaw, “Introduction,” 11.

<sup>23</sup> McClung, *In Times Like These*, 26.

contributions through “traditional” work, like knitting. She argues, “while the First World War stimulated a change in Newfoundland women’s conceptions of the public importance of their work, it remained almost entirely ‘traditional.’”<sup>24</sup> Duley demonstrates the “essential” aid women’s activities on the home front could provide.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in western Canada women used their traditional role and skills to perform patriotic duties, and thereby provided an essential service through their “comfort production” and “fundraising” for the war effort.<sup>26</sup> Women took pride in this work, recognizing the help they provided.

This sense of duty could also be found throughout western Canada, and women were eager to participate. Organizations across the country leapt at the opportunity to contribute wherever they could. For example, Alison Norman has shown that women organized on the Six Nations Grand River Reserve to provide knitted items and other goods for soldiers.<sup>27</sup> Knitting clubs organized in western Canada as well to send items overseas. Local branches of the UFWA and the WGGGA, for example, organized often to do “sewing and knitting as their part of the war work.”<sup>28</sup> Women in western Canada had often organized to support each other in their work, as creating communities helped end isolation many homesteaders faced.<sup>29</sup> But during the war, many women shifted their community focus into assisting the war effort. Articles from *The Grain Growers Guide* reporting on these communities likely spread patriotic ideas by highlighting items that were knit, sewn, or donated to the war effort. For example, the Truax, Saskatchewan, Women Grain Growers gathered “11 pairs of pillow cases, 10 suits of pyjamas, 9 pairs of sheets

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<sup>24</sup> Margot Duley, “The Unquiet Knitters of Newfoundland: From Mothers of the Regiment to Mothers of the Nation,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, edited by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Norman, “In Defense of the Empire,” 29-50.

<sup>28</sup> “Good Red Cross Work, *The Grain Growers Guide*, June 7, 1916, page 31, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/06/07/31/>.

<sup>29</sup> Nanci Langford, “First Generation and Lasting Impressions: The Gendered Identities of Prairie Homestead Women,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1994), 101, 108.

and \$14.00 in cash” for the Red Cross Society.<sup>30</sup> Kamsack, Saskatchewan WGGGA wrote to the *Guide* to report on the work done by women in their community. They wrote:

the work was done by our members, who now number 21: 13 pairs of sox, five hospital shirts, six suits pyjamas, 39 wash cloths and \$22.40 in money as the proceeds of a sale of tea, sandwiches and buttermilk at our annual picnic. We are now planning on serving a 10 cent tea and ice cream on August 11 for the benefit of the Y.M.C.A. war work.<sup>31</sup>

Domestic war work in Canada became a community-driven effort. Women organized effectively to support the war effort through fundraising socials and donations, which fulfilled both practical and emotional needs for women’s groups.

Domestic war work was an extension of the maternally gendered position in which women were defined. In a speech before the United Farm Women of Alberta in 1916, Nellie McClung discussed the traditional but patriotic role of women within support work, particularly work with the Red Cross Society. She stated

And so to women we leave the great task of the healing and binding. I like the picture of the woman in Red Cross work, making bandages, making comforts. Everywhere they are doing this work; it is typical; it is women’s work; I like to think of that, that everyone of us, even though we are not in communication with the first line trenches that we are in the back trenches trying to keep the home fires burning, to keep alive the fire and the warm glow of international friendship, trying to teach that internationalism which is greater than patriotism, trying to eliminate narrow patriotism which teaches us to love our own and hate every other.<sup>32</sup>

While a radical when it came to her ideas on internationalism, McClung held more traditional ideas regarding women’s roles. For McClung, this work was important for the war, but was also still “women’s work.”<sup>33</sup> In their biography of Nellie McClung, Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis state that, while she espoused some pacifist ideas, McClung “diverged from her true pacifist

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<sup>30</sup> “Patriotic Truax,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, August 22, 1917, page 25, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/08/22/25/>.

<sup>31</sup> “All Round Patriotism,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, October 3, 1917, page 31, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/10/03/31/>.

<sup>32</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR2003.302/SE, Nellie McClung, “Address by Mrs. Nellie McClung,” *United Farmers of Alberta: Annual Report and Year Book, 1916* (Calgary: Alberta Job Printing Department, 1917), 177.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

friends because, while still abhorring war, she came to accept the present conflict as a battle between good and evil” – or, the British Empire and the Germans, respectively.<sup>34</sup> McClung believed it was important for women to “keep the home fires burning” from the home front, and was proud of the women who were able to step up and use their maternal characteristics to help soldiers overseas.<sup>35</sup> This work also demonstrated women’s importance in creating a harmonic society. Support work like knitting and volunteering was, for at least some maternal feminists like McClung, the ideal part for Canadian women to play in the war.

This home front war work was also reflected in fundraising opportunities for women. Women’s organizations, such as the United Farm Women of Alberta, the women’s section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, the Women’s Canadian Club, and the Women’s Institutes, were instrumental in organizing and fundraising for organizations like the Patriotic Fund, the Red Cross Society, and the Belgium Relief Fund. They believed in contributing funds for the war, and even chastised women for not becoming involved. For example, the secretary of the UFWA H. Zella Spencer argued that the reason women abstained from this service was from “lack of interest.”<sup>36</sup> She chastised these women, and attempted to guilt them into helping with the war effort.<sup>37</sup>

Some women, however, may not have had a direct connection to the war, contributing to their lack of interest or even pacifist ideas. For example, members of the historic pacifist churches – Mennonites, Quakers, etc. – did not lend their support to the war effort based on their

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Hallett and Marilyn Davis, *Firing the Heather: The Life and Times of Nellie McClung* (Saskatoon: Fifth House Ltd., 1993), 144.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, PR2003.302/SE, H. Zella Spencer, “Report of the Secretary of the U.F.W.A.,” *United Farmers of Alberta: Annual Report and Year Book, 1916* (Calgary: Alberta Job Printing Department, 1917), 131.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

religious ideas.<sup>38</sup> In addition, John English, writing on political leadership during the First World War, states that Canada was “a nation where those of non-British background constituted over 40 per cent of the population,” and that they, along with many individuals of British background as well, “did not share the particular expression of British-Canadian nationalism” that was reflected in many individuals’ support for the war effort.<sup>39</sup> Not all women, then, shared the same patriotic passion as many of the most vocal community leaders did. Isabelle, for example, seemed to care more for her family than for the war effort itself. However, as this war work increasingly became used as a symbol of patriotism, women within farming organizations appeared to feel displeasure towards those who had not become involved. These organizations, most of which were strongly tied to the British Empire, therefore encouraged women to become involved in wartime activities.<sup>40</sup>

But these organizations did more than support soldiers abroad; they supported those on the home front as well. Support workers included women like Isabelle Brook. While the army took care of its men, the risks of war were always apparent. Almost as soon as the war began, it became clear that certain provisions had to be put in place for families and dependents prior to men leaving for active service.<sup>41</sup> The Canadian government promised a separation allowance that would be awarded on a weekly basis to soldiers’ families.<sup>42</sup> According to Desmond Morton, the

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<sup>38</sup> Amy J. Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 98.

<sup>39</sup> John English, “Political Leadership in the First World War,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, edited by David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 91.

<sup>40</sup> As an example, the Women’s Canadian Club of Calgary had specific requirements for membership, specifically “Any woman, at least eighteen years of age, who is a British born, a British Subject, or whose husband is a British Subject, and is in sympathy with the objects of the Club.” Those who were not tied to Britain were admitted on a probationary basis. The purpose of this club was to promote Canadian ideals, which for the club members meant British ideals. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-6849, Women’s Canadian Club of Calgary Fonds, “Women’s Canadian Club of Calgary Pamphlet and Clippings, c. 1920 and n.d, 34.

<sup>41</sup> Desmond Morton, “Supporting Soldiers’ Families: Separation Allowance, Assigned Pay, and the Unexpected,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 194.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

amount from the allowance ranged from twenty to sixty dollars, depending on the rank of the soldier.<sup>43</sup> Families could also glean a certain amount from local Patriotic Fund committees to supplement their allowances.<sup>44</sup> Women in local communities often organized and fundraised for the Patriotic Fund as part of their war work.

Sidney Brook wrote about the Patriotic Fund in letters to Isabelle. While stationed at Sarcee Camp, Calgary, in 1916, he directed his wife in filling out her application to receive allowances from the Fund. For example, he asked her to send their children's birth certificates to him, and also to fill out and sign an application form.<sup>45</sup> He also wrote to her of the separation allowance from the government, explaining that the money was to be sent to her while he was away.<sup>46</sup> While Sidney was fighting overseas, Isabelle received approximately thirty dollars per month from these funds.<sup>47</sup> Although she was the recipient of this fund, her letters attest that she also attended fundraisers organized by women's groups.<sup>48</sup> In addition to attending these socials, Isabelle may have also volunteered her time.<sup>49</sup> It was a part of being a member of the community. Fundraising often involved organizing tea and bake sales, and even quilting. Isabelle may have also contributed modest materials to these fundraising socials. Much of the money raised by women's organizations went to the Patriotic Fund, which helped support other women and their children who were more directly affected by the war. Reports flooded the *Grain Growers Guide* during the war years discussing money raised for the Fund, to which the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 199, 200.

<sup>45</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-15, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, July 6, 1916.

<sup>46</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-15, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, August 2, 1916.

<sup>47</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-22, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 26, 1916.

<sup>48</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, ACC: PR2000.949/8. "Report of the Second Annual Convention: Women's Institutes of Alberta, 1916," page 6.

<sup>49</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-22, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 4, 1916.



“farmers of Western Canada” had “contributed generously.”<sup>50</sup> These reports reflect the general support for the war across the prairies, at least among those reading the *Grain Growers Guide*, which appears to have taken a largely pro-British Empire stance in its articles.

Involvement with the Red Cross Society became a priority for women in western Canada throughout the war. The Red Cross provided “a properly organized channel for personal service to the suffering men,” a prospect appealing to women on the home front.<sup>51</sup> Work with the organization presented an opportunity not only to contribute to the war effort, but also gave women a way to reach out to their neighbours and community, easing the loneliness that they may have felt if isolated in rural areas. For example, the Normanton Women Grain Growers in Saskatchewan wrote to the *Grain Growers Guide* in 1916 that “the pie social was a great success and not less than forty dollars was made. To aid the Red Cross Society the members are making a quilt, which will be sold and the proceeds will be sent to the society.”<sup>52</sup> Isabelle commented on the donations given to the Red Cross in letters to her husband, denoting their presence within the small Albertan community. In 1917, for example, she comments on the “Red Cross fowl supper,” remarking that they fundraised “over two hundred dollars.”<sup>53</sup> This is a large amount, suggesting that the community was largely supportive of the war effort. This letter suggests that Isabelle directly supported the war effort despite her misgivings, which will be discussed further in the following chapter. A social activity as much as a patriotic one, fundraising for the Red

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<sup>50</sup> “The Red Cross Fund,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, November 3, 1915, page 5, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1915/11/03/5/>.

<sup>51</sup> “A Red Cross Catechism,” *Oyen News*, February 2, 1916, page 5, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/OYN/1916/02/02/5/>.

<sup>52</sup> “A Good Family Feeling,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, June 21, 1916, page 23, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/06/21/23/>.

<sup>53</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1917.

Cross not only provided for soldiers overseas, but also created a community of war workers within rural areas in the Prairie Provinces.

This community-driven war work was often undertaken to ensure that Canadian soldiers were well cared for. An installment in 1917 of the magazine *Everywoman's World* commented on how “loving hands” helped soldiers overseas.<sup>54</sup> Care packages were a more direct way for women to support soldiers, and could include a variety of materials, including candles, handkerchiefs, and shoelaces.<sup>55</sup> Isabelle often included cake and pastries in her parcels. These were small items soldiers often lacked, and gave war work a more personal touch. Efforts were also made to ensure that Canadian soldiers taken prisoner received packages from home. For example, a 1917 article from the *Lethbridge Herald* reported on parcel packaging for Canadian prisoners of war in Germany.<sup>56</sup> In this case, it was the “Central Prisoners of War Committee” run by the Red Cross Association, that organized material care for the welfare of Albertan prisoners in “enemy countries.”<sup>57</sup> This article explained the actions of the Committee and the Red Cross in preparing the thousands of parcels sent to prisoners of war.<sup>58</sup> These care parcels served as a reminder of home by providing small comforts for soldiers, such as chocolates, sugar, tea, beef and salmon tins, and other small luxuries.<sup>59</sup>

Isabelle Brook sent countless parcels to Sidney, filled with goodies to eat and comforts Sidney needed while in the trenches. At one point, when Sidney grew concerned with wasting materials and foodstuffs from home on him, Isabelle responded

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<sup>54</sup> Laura E. Nixon, “What Loving Hands are Doing: The Spirit of Women who are Working for Our Heroes Overseas Through the Women’s Institutes – Illustrated by a Talk with Mrs. Kitchen of the St. George Branch,” *Everywoman's World* 8, no. 4 (Oct. 1917), 12.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> Adele M. Gianelli, “Packing Parcels for our Prisoners in Germany,” *Lethbridge Herald*, pg. 12, May 5, 1917.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

As to discontinuing sending the parcels as you suggested I have no notion of doing so. It is little enough we can do for you my dear, even with sending all the parcels we can. It gives me pleasure to bundle a parcel off to you. I suppose the contents do not go very far, but a remembrance from home may help brighten the way a bit.<sup>60</sup>

These packages were indeed well received. Sidney and the other soldiers delighted in the attention they received from home. He wrote in a 1917 letter:

I would have written on Friday when I got your last dated Dec 15, only you had mentioned two parcels neither of which I had received until yesterday when a very nice cake came to hand – many, many thanks, my love. There is nothing the boys (including yours) appreciate so much as a parcel from home.<sup>61</sup>

For Sidney, his delight was “not altogether for the contents,” but also for the “indescribable affection” that came with the packages Isabelle compiled with great care.<sup>62</sup> The support farm women sent from the home front connected soldiers with their families. They were an important contribution to the war, but also served to connect those at home with their loved ones overseas. But when communities such as the Red Cross Society undertook this work, as in the case of the Central Prisoners of War Committee, it took on a patriotic role. For example, letter writing was seen as a way to support the war effort, because it helped raise the morale of the troops. One initiative by the Women’s Press Club of Alberta was to send a weekly newsletter to soldiers at the front “thus keeping them in touch with the homeland.”<sup>63</sup> Sending care parcels and writing letters was an extension of the domestic duties women already performed within the home. In addition to keeping soldiers in touch with Canada, it was also a way for women to demonstrate their dedication to the war effort and the soldiers overseas.

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<sup>60</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-25, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, May 29, 1917.

<sup>61</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, January 7, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, January 23, 1917.

<sup>63</sup> “Press Women Pray for Suspension of Liquor Licenses; Also Arrange to Send Weekly Letter to Soldiers,” *The Edmonton Journal*, August 20, 1914, page 6.

This type of war work – knitting, fundraising socials, sending parcels overseas, etc. – was likely done primarily by middle-class women, who would have had more time for these tasks than women who needed to work out of economic necessity. Isabelle Brook likely fell within this demographic, although typically, farmers were part of a more distinct agrarian class, straddling the line between middle and working-class. She and Sidney owned two pieces of property – the farm, and their house in Craigmyle. Jeffrey Taylor asserts that farmers, like the Brooks, owned their means of production, rather than relying solely on waged labour.<sup>64</sup> The farm was their primary source of income, meaning that Isabelle did not need to seek wage labour to survive. Taylor writes, “unlike workers, who were dispossessed of their means of subsistence and had no choice but to sell their labour power in order to subsist, farmers had access to land and could theoretically provide some or all of their subsistence.”<sup>65</sup> This ownership of land separated Isabelle from working-class women, but while she perhaps had more means to take part in this domestic war work, she lacked time, occupied as she was with her five young children.

Women not only needed to care for soldiers during the war; they also needed to continue caring for the daily responsibilities of the home. It was in the home where women truly refashioned their duties to support the war effort. While at the start of the war people in western Canada did not anticipate “soup kitchens and bread lines,” food shortages at the front began to appear in later years of the war, and steps were taken to ration food on the home front.<sup>66</sup> Rationing fell into the realm of housewives’ work on the home front, as they were primarily in charge of the family’s food supplies. Just as Ian Mosby argues in his book *Food Will Win the War*, which focuses on the Second World War in Canada, “food became central to the very idea

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<sup>64</sup> Jeffrey Taylor, “Capitalist Development, Forms of Labour, and Class Formation in Prairie Canada” in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, edited by Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 172.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “Calgary Optimistic Despite Big War,” *Calgary Herald*, pg. 2, August 5, 1914.

of the ‘home front,’ a concept that itself depended on the notion that what was once private and domestic needed to be mobilized in order to serve a larger public good.”<sup>67</sup> Rationing was an important aspect of the patriotic contributions by women in the First World War. In 1917, the United Farm Women of Alberta stated that “the woman who is handling the food supply in the home is equal in importance to the man who handles the gun on the battlefield.”<sup>68</sup>

Many individuals on the home front shared this belief in the importance of conserving food and materials. The Red Cross Society specifically targeted Canadian housewives by issuing handbooks “containing official instructions for Red Cross Supplies and Soldiers’ Comforts.” These handbooks advised women on rationing, knitting and writing letters to soldiers, and on what items to include in parcels.<sup>69</sup> It is likely that Isabelle Brook and other women in rural western Canadian communities either heard of or saw for themselves these guidelines organized by the Red Cross Society and the Canadian Food Board. These handbooks played on the willingness of women to assist from the home front. A 1918 message from the Canada Food Board in a Red Cross Society handbook stated that:

It is incumbent upon all women, whether they belong to organized bodies or not, that they do their utmost to relieve the pressure on the flour barrel, and the Food Board in simplifying matters for them by the arrangements it has made for the manufacture in Canada of ample supplies of corn flour, barley flour, and other substitutes. The use of these should not be limited to the regulations of the Board, but every woman should make a point of trying them out in all her home cooking. The recipe book on bread-making issued by the Board and sold at five cents a copy indicates how the best use of the substitutes may be made.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ian Mosby, *Food Will Win the War: The Politics, Culture, and Science of Food on Canada’s Home Front* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014), 98.

<sup>68</sup> United Farm Women of Alberta, “To the United Farm Women of Alberta,” August 8, 1917, *The Grain Growers Guide*, page 19, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/08/08/19/>.

<sup>69</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M8228-261, Red Cross Fonds, “Winter 1918 War Work: Containing Official Instructions for Red Cross Supplies and Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Comforts,” Pamphlet, Canadian War Contingent Association, 1918. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M8228-261, Red Cross Fonds, “The Canadian Red Cross Society, Charter: By-Laws, Regulations, and Rules, 1916,” Handbook.

<sup>70</sup> “Winter 1918 War Work.”

Wheat was in particularly short supply, and the Food Board – at the same time as they encouraged an increase in wheat production on western Canadian farms – encouraged women to substitute other types of flours as much as possible. Fearing her husband’s ability to pay for things overseas, Isabelle Brook remarked that “things are jumping up so in price here,” particularly flour, which was “6.65 here now they say.”<sup>71</sup> Sugar was also in high demand, although the Food Board assured women that there was “a sufficiency to stand all the canning and preserving that Canadian women are willing to take upon themselves.”<sup>72</sup> Women would therefore be able to continue their winter preparations as normal. Despite these warnings, Isabelle continued to bake pastries and cakes for her family, as well as sending them overseas to Sidney. For Isabelle, providing for her husband was more important than rationing flour and sugar. This suggests that Isabelle may have been more devoted to caring for her husband and family than she was to the actual war effort. While Isabelle resisted the orders, homemakers were still encouraged to ration food during the First World War.

In some areas of Canada, this patriotic demonstration through the kitchen became more formal over time. In 1917, “The Country Homemakers” page in *The Grain Growers Guide* discussed “food pledges,” which had been put forward by Ontario MLA W.J. Hanna for the purpose of encouraging homemakers to conserve food.<sup>73</sup> Western farm women regarded these food pledges with skepticism. They were unsure how effective these pledges could be, and disliked the idea of the government becoming involved in their home lives. Nevertheless, many recognized that “the essential obligation upon Canadian housewives today is to conserve food

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<sup>71</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-25, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, May 1, 1917,

<sup>72</sup> “Winter 1918 War Work.”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

that our fighting armies may be maintained in unimpaired strength.”<sup>74</sup> Food conservation called for a concerted effort on prairie homes. In these pages women discussed the benefits of fundraising for the Red Cross Society using baking and tea sales, but felt that “if in making that money we destroy, and the consumption of unnecessary food is nothing short of destruction, what is even more necessary to our men than money, then it must be discontinued.”<sup>75</sup> In response to the issue of the food pledge, Irene Parlby stated “If the women of Canada were thoroughly impressed with the necessity for the conservation of food then it seems to me their patriotism should make the signing of the pledge cards unnecessary,” but that if women did sign, it might advertise the importance of food conservation to more women.<sup>76</sup> Food conservation was deemed one of the most effective and important ways women on the home front could support the war. Many women in western Canada were eager enough to participate, and government involvement was deemed unnecessary.

Recipes and encouragement to ration food were directed towards the “women of Canada,” whose “work is of vital importance and the kitchen dress has become a uniform in which you may serve the Empire and humanity even as your men in the King’s uniform.”<sup>77</sup> Linda Quiney, in her study on Canadian nursing sisters in the Great War, states that the nursing uniform was “infused with the same representative power that fired the passion of the newly enlisted military recruit.”<sup>78</sup> In the same way, arguing that women had a “uniform” in the kitchen – their aprons – gave a sense of importance and organization similar to soldiers in the CEF.

There was a sense that women were the military might of the kitchens. This was where their war

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “Hot Breads,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, October 17, 1917, page 35, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/10/17/35/>.

<sup>78</sup> Linda Quiney, “Gendering Patriotism: Canadian Volunteer Nurses as the Female “Soldiers” of the Great War,” in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War*, edited by Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 112.

took place. In 1917, Leona Barrett published an article in the *Grain Growers Guide* addressed to the United Farm Women of Alberta, expressing:

The woman who is handling the food supply in the home is equal in importance to the man who handles the gun on the battlefield. The triumph of the soldier depends upon the efficiency with which you, as housewives, conserve the food supplies so that hunger be not added to the ranks of the foe.<sup>79</sup>

Women, just like soldiers, had both a uniform (the apron) and a gun (the food) in their service on the home front. As a result, these women were able to assert their patriotism for the British Empire and the war effort. Conserving food was an extension of work within the home, but through it women could establish their equality with Canadian soldiers.

At a 1916 convention for the Alberta Women's Institutes, the Honourable Duncan Marshall, the Alberta Minister of Agriculture stated that women "have been patriotically and earnestly and vigilantly working at it all the time, and that is the kind of work that counts. It is the persistent work of the women of the country who have been carrying on this work without any cessation ever since the war began."<sup>80</sup> The government encouraged this type of supportive "war work", because it not only kept up morale but also helped to keep troops supplied.<sup>81</sup> At the same convention Alberta Premier Arthur Sifton stated:

The work that has been done during the last two years, and most particularly in connection with the war – Red Cross movement, and also in connection with the various patriotic movements – which has flowed from the centres of the women's organizations, has been simply wonderful, and the women who have taken the responsibility for doing this are entitled to great credit.<sup>82</sup>

Women received recognition for their war work in knitting, fundraising, and food conservation.

Social authorities emphasized the care of soldiers overseas, and the maintenance of the domestic

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<sup>79</sup> Leona Barrett, "To the United Farm Women of Alberta," *The Grain Growers Guide*, August 8, 1917, page 19, University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/08/08/19/>.

<sup>80</sup> "Report of the Second Annual Convention," 9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.



sphere on the home front. War work, such as the examples presented here, was not necessarily unique to women in western Canada. These patriotic duties connected farm women with others across Canada, including those in urban areas. However, farm women viewed their work as a continuation of their traditional duties on the farms. Through this work, women were presented as soldiers of the home. While this chapter has discussed one facet of women's contributions to the war effort, the next chapter will discuss how women also took over positions on the farm.

## Chapter 2

### **Soldiers of the Field: Women's Patriotic Farm Work in Western Canada**

In a wartime letter to the WSGGA president Violet McNaughton, vice-president Zoa Haight wrote: "I call it patriotic if a woman can do a man's work & thus release a man for war work in greater production."<sup>1</sup> During the war, many farm women across the Prairie Provinces adopted this attitude. In the case of the Brook family, Isabelle performed a patriotic act by taking over the management of her farm, thus freeing her husband from his agricultural duties to take up service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Sidney was apparently very grateful for the relief from farm work, believing that fighting overseas was his duty. In some ways – at least during training – it appears that he enjoyed being a soldier more than he enjoyed being a farmer.<sup>2</sup> Isabelle, however, likely did not see her work as a service to the country. Rather, she appears to have been more devoted to her farm and family than to the war effort itself. Although she does not explicitly state so in her letters, it is entirely likely that she never wanted Sidney to join the CEF. Whenever she mentions the war, for example, it is never in reference to the necessity or 'glory' of it. Instead, Isabelle continually refers to the war as "awful" and "insane."<sup>3</sup> This phrasing suggests that she was not in favour of the war, but was instead responding to the crisis it (and Sidney's absence) created for her and her children. Her devotion was less to the war and the British Empire, and more to her farm, children, and husband. Even so Isabelle's actions on the farm supported the war effort by allowing her husband to become a soldier, and at the same time maintained the production of wheat necessary for domestic and international demand.

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<sup>1</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon, A1, E.21, McNaughton Papers, "Female Help for the Farms," Zoa Haight, letter to Violet McNaughton, n.d.

<sup>2</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076- (13-18), Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letters to Isabelle Brook.

<sup>3</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-22. Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letters to Sidney Brook, November 26, 1916 and December 7, 1916.

When necessary, particularly during harvest season, prairie farm women often worked alongside men in the fields.<sup>4</sup> During the war, the absence of men became even more pronounced, and more women had to work in the fields for longer periods. The war highlighted this work, which had been largely invisible (or even systematically ignored).<sup>5</sup> Many officials refashioned this work as specifically patriotic in an effort to maintain pre-war gender ideals.<sup>6</sup> By emphasizing this field work as temporary, the government made any changes to the gendered order less intimidating. Cultural authorities, particularly those involved with farming organizations, encouraged women to work on farms and fields in an effort to alleviate an intense labour crisis facing rural communities.<sup>7</sup> Despite the lack of an organized farm labour movement in the Prairie Provinces, more women moved into roles typically reserved for men in order to help relieve this labour shortage.<sup>8</sup>

While focused specifically on Isabelle Brook's story, this chapter also examines the broader experiences of farm women through an examination of the intersection between the women's movement, the farmer's movement, and the First World War. Articles from the *Grain Growers Guide*, reports from the annual convention of the Alberta Women's Institutes as well as the United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, and various personal and professional letters from Violet McNaughton's collection, aid in understanding the movement of women into traditionally male-defined roles on farms in western Canada. I discuss elements of 'agrarian exceptionalism,' where farm women described themselves as distinct from other women in Canada, specifically urban women. While many urban women in eastern Canada were employed

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<sup>4</sup> Sheila McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women, 1905-1929," found in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History*, edited by Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 130.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 337.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

in manufacturing industries (the Canadian War Museum states that the Imperial Munitions Board hired 30,000 women to work in their factories), rural women on prairie farms believed their role to be especially patriotic.<sup>9</sup> Providing food for the Empire, they believed, made them uniquely suited to ‘keep the home fires burning’ on the Canadian home front. Food, after all, was necessary to basic survival. This idea gave rise to the belief that farmers became the ‘breadwinners’ of the Empire through wheat production, which will be argued in the following chapter.<sup>10</sup> While some men tried to take advantage of the situation – for example, one man advertised that he would “take charge when farmer is at front” for a “monthly wage and share of profit” – most wives and mothers were shrewd, managing the farms vacated by husbands and sons.<sup>11</sup> By playing an increasing role in agriculture, these women respectably challenged gender roles on the prairies.

By taking control of the Brook farm, Isabelle Brook challenged these gender roles. Fortunately, Isabelle had a hired hand, mostly referred to as “Jennings” in her letters, to help her with outdoor labour, and as a result she likely did not work much in the fields herself.<sup>12</sup> Hired help was often expensive and even more difficult to acquire during the war. Sarah Carter states that farm workers “pressed their advantage,” demanding higher wages due to the acute labour shortage.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that Isabelle and Sidney had some access to extra financial resources. The money Isabelle received from the Patriotic Fund may have helped secure labour. In

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<sup>9</sup> “War Economy – Finance and War Production,” Canadian War Museum, accessed May 1, 2017 <http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/life-at-home-during-the-war/the-war-economy/finance-and-war-production/>.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>11</sup> “Experienced Famer, 44 years,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, August 16, 1916, page 24. University of Alberta, Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/08/16/24/>.

<sup>12</sup> “Jennings” (his first name was likely “Ed”) likely did not live on the farm, only visiting when necessary. It appears as though he may have had his own farm in the area as well, and rented some land from the Brook family. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-26, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, August 19, 1917.

<sup>13</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 337.

comparison, Isabelle's friend Florence Lavers, who had older children that could help on the farm, did not have extra hired help.<sup>14</sup> Having hired hands does not mean, however, that the Brooks were especially unique, as many farmers hired help – both outdoor and domestic – to work on their farms. Isabelle, for example, mentions some of her neighbours who also managed to acquire extra help.<sup>15</sup> Historian Jeffrey Taylor asserts, however, that most workers on rural farms came from within families.<sup>16</sup> Isabelle's children were too young to help in the fields, and neither she nor Sidney had relatives living with them in Craigmyle, necessitating hiring a farmhand. Jennings appears to have been hired even before Sidney was away, as Isabelle reminisces in her letters of times when the three of them would share cocoa and talk in the evenings.<sup>17</sup> Isabelle also had a hired "girl," named Lillian Lee in her letters, for domestic help, but Lillian appears to have only been hired after Isabelle's son's death in 1917.<sup>18</sup> After Arnott's death, Isabelle took ill (perhaps suffering from a form of depression, although this is unclear), and likely hired her "girl" to help her cope with the mounting workload.

Despite not working directly in the fields, by managing the farm Isabelle Brook challenged the strict gender delineation of the Prairie Provinces. While Isabelle often sought advice at the start of his absence, and Sidney inquired about the state of affairs, eventually the distance and length of time between correspondences grew too great.<sup>19</sup> His trust in Isabelle's

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<sup>14</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1917.

<sup>15</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-25, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, July 14, 1917.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Taylor, "Capitalist Development, Forms of Labour, and Class Formation in Prairie Canada" in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, edited by Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 174.

<sup>17</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-23, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, January 26, 1917.

<sup>18</sup> It is unfortunately difficult to determine Lillian Lee's ethnicity, as no other record of her has yet been found. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 26, 1917.

<sup>19</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-15, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, October 25, 1916.

abilities was significant. Sidney remarked several times throughout his letters how relieved he was that he had no farm-related worries.<sup>20</sup> While these comments were often said in jest and often during training in England when Sidney did not actually have to endure the trenches, they suggest that he completely trusted Isabelle's capabilities. He often assured Isabelle he was having "the time of his life" in England, even joking with Isabelle that if they did not have to make a living off the farm, they could move to England.<sup>21</sup> Sidney also may have intended these jokes as reassurance that he was well and safe. Over the course of the war, however, his attitude changed. Once shifting from the ease of training to the harsh realities of the trenches, and unable to be with his wife after the death of their seven-year-old son, Arnott, in 1917, Sidney just wished to be back home in Craigmyle.

Sidney was seemingly pleased that Isabelle took over the farm. While she did have many questions at the start of the war, Sidney's trust in Isabelle suggests that she likely worked closely with him on the farm prior to the war. Sidney ensured that the control of their crops was entirely in her hands, even writing to the Great West Insurance Company on her behalf.<sup>22</sup> Isabelle kept him involved, even sending him "a bit of wheat off our farm thousands of miles away," but the work was hers.<sup>23</sup> Isabelle occupied a space that women in western Canada had rarely trespassed into.<sup>24</sup> For Isabelle, this work primarily consisted of managing the farm work, supervising her

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<sup>20</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, July 9, 1916.

<sup>21</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-15, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, November 5, 1916.

<sup>22</sup> This also would have protected her in the event of his death. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, July 27, 1916.

<sup>23</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-26, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, August 6, 1917.

<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that women had never entered this area of work. Georgina Binnie-Clark owned her own farm, and many other women had to assist on farms when labour was expensive or unavailable, or husbands and sons were away. Georgina Binnie-Clark, *Wheat and Woman*, introduction by Susan Jackel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979). According to Sarah Carter, Binnie-Clark became a strong advocate for, and an example of, women's ability to farm. Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 245-286.

hired hands, renting out property, and selling her crops and livestock when the time came.<sup>25</sup>

Aside from often remarking that she was tired, Isabelle never complained at the heavy workload she faced. Her efforts did not go unnoticed either; one of her sisters-in-law wrote to Sidney, remarking that Isabelle was a “brick” and a “marvel,” called so for her ability to cope with the “incessant toil” of life on the prairies.<sup>26</sup>

Living in Craigmyle, Isabelle needed to take special trips out of town to see the Brook farm and check on her crops. In one of her letters, Isabelle lamented that she and Sidney did not yet own a car, saying: “Soon everyone will have one but us.”<sup>27</sup> She often relied on friends to take her out to see her land, and she reported these trips to Sidney:

To-day Lorne and I had a little automobile ride in Mr. Bell’s car. Mr. F. & us went out to the farm to see the crop—Jennings told Mr. F. yesterday it was not good, but wanted him to go out and have a look at it. It seems too bad—it has truly been ruined by the frost—the whole of the east field was cut before Jennings got around to see it & stook it, but it’s not worth stooking, or very little of it – just a little around the edge of the flat field isn’t too bad—the other small pieces are very good. I think Jennings estimated we might get 200 bushels. Quite a disappointment isn’t it? Still there’s not much use worrying a great deal about it, there are greater things than crops to think about.<sup>28</sup>

It appears as though “Mr. F” was Mr. Farrow, who makes an appearance throughout the Brook letters, and seems to be the Brooks’ close family friend and neighbour, rather than a hired hand. Years later, in 1944, Isabelle even wrote a biography of Mr. Farrow for the *Hanna Herald*, stressing his importance to the town of Craigmyle. While not giving a specific reason why he did not go to war himself, she states that he became the local postmaster at the start of the war, a position that he maintained until his retirement in 1927. His exact age at the time of the First

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<sup>25</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076 (20-28), Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letters to Sidney Brook, 1916-1919.

<sup>26</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-17, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, October 14, 1917.

<sup>27</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-25, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, May 13, 1917.

<sup>28</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-21, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, September 20, 1916.

World War is difficult to determine, but it can be inferred from the biography that he was around fifty or sixty years of age at the start of the war, and was likely too old to enlist.<sup>29</sup> His wife, only named as Mrs. F. and Mrs. Farrow in the letters, was often at Isabelle's home, sometimes helping her around the home, particularly after Isabelle's baby, Alice, was born in 1916. She was also mentioned as just keeping Isabelle company. For example, Isabelle recounts times when the two would knit together in the evenings.<sup>30</sup> In Sidney's absence, the Farrowes were part of Isabelle's important support system, and she (and Jennings) likely trusted Mr. Farrow for an opinion on their destroyed crops.

Isabelle dealt with the financial blow of a disappointing crop with aplomb, perhaps because of the extra income afforded them by the Patriotic Fund and the Separation Allowance.

Isabelle navigated whatever money came in:

Our funds keep us going with necessities – none to put into luxuries or fine clothes tho'. – I've had no new dresses, or shoes or hat or anything like that. Still I'm not complaining – I think we're being given quite a good allowance. If I was not trying to finish the house, and pay one or two little accounts I think I could save some. My last Patriotic cheque was more than I expected \$32.50 – \$30 was what I expected it to be. You see I had it advanced \$5 in the fall when I found our crop was a failure, and this other \$7.50 is since we have another to keep. The cheques come regularly.<sup>31</sup>

The \$32.50 appears to have been a one-time mistake, as Isabelle testifies in later letters that she received \$30.<sup>32</sup> In today's dollars, Isabelle was receiving approximately \$472 from the Patriotic Fund per month.<sup>33</sup> Isabelle asserts that this extra money helped her bear the financial burden of destroyed crops and an absent husband. In any case, Isabelle preferred to focus on her husband's safety abroad rather than dwell on the crop. This particular crop failure in 1916 was due to frost,

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<sup>29</sup> *Delia Craigmyle Saga* (Lethbridge, AB: Southern Printing Company, 1970), 673-675.

<sup>30</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-22, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 15, 1916.

<sup>31</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-23, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, January 5, 1917.

<sup>32</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, February 12, 1917.

<sup>33</sup> "1917 Dollars in 2017 Dollars," *Canadian Inflation Calculator*, Accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.in2013dollars.com/1917-CAD-in-2017>.



which had swept through and damaged the crops before Isabelle and her hired men were able to harvest it. One year later, in 1917, the Brooks' crops were damaged by a heavy hailstorm. Afterwards, Isabelle reassured Sidney that their oats were still "better than the average around the country."<sup>34</sup>

Despite setbacks, Isabelle remained positive. While remaining cheerful in her letters may have been an attempt not to worry Sidney while he was away, Isabelle also displayed qualities admired by farmers and farm women in western Canada by continually proving her ability to persevere and adapt to a "challenging new environment."<sup>35</sup> Not only was this ideal reflected in her calm reaction to damaged crops and lack of surplus income, but also in how well she managed her income. In some cases, she often cut out her own wants and needs – even refraining from buying herself new ink in order to ensure more important items were purchased – to make sure the family remained afloat in times of financial crisis.<sup>36</sup>

Renting out their property was another important source of income for Isabelle. She reported to Sidney, who had asked about their tenants:

[Jennings] said Lavers hadn't much crop land and would like our 8 acres. And he told them to ask me. When I saw him I told him I wouldn't have anything to do with them. I'd look to him for to see it was properly cultivated and for the 1/4 rental. I got \$25 for it.<sup>37</sup>

Despite being close friends with the Lavers' family, this objective decision against them appears to be completely business-related, made in the best interests of the Brook family. Isabelle relied on her own knowledge, rather than relying overmuch on the opinions of other farmers.<sup>38</sup> While managing the household resources was part of the assigned gender role placed on women,

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<sup>34</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-26, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, August 6, 1917.

<sup>35</sup> McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions," 127.

<sup>36</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-21, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, October 14, 1916.

<sup>37</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 16, 1917.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

managing the sale of crops and renting out property was not.<sup>39</sup> Isabelle slipped into this role with ease, confident in her decisions when relating them to Sidney. He, for his part, rarely questioned her farm-related decisions.

While Isabelle was independent, she was also involved with the Craigmyle farming community, which helped support her. Community in western Canada was always an important part of rural life. Even Georgina Binnie-Clark, a noted female homesteader in Saskatchewan writing just prior to the First World War, declared in her autobiography *Wheat and Woman* that she had neighbours, brothers, and hired hands assisting her in her farm work – and she did not have a young family to care for.<sup>40</sup> Farming communities were rendered even more essential with the challenges presented by the First World War. Isabelle recognized the assistance she received from neighbours and friends, who especially helped when Isabelle faced the birth of one child, and the loss of another. Neighbours respected the sacrifice she and Sidney Brook made. For example, “the Honorable Boreland came in, and asked if we’d like to have a pig’s head for headcheese, and he’d bring in another piece of the meat too – wouldn’t take anything for it because Mr. Brook was at the Front.”<sup>41</sup> This assistance from the community – through car rides and extra food – was important, particularly because Isabelle had young children.

Isabelle felt compassion towards the women who did not have access to the same amount of help that she did. In one instance, after the Brook’s crop had been damaged by frost in 1917, Isabelle wrote:

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<sup>39</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon, A1, E.92, McNaughton Papers, Mrs. O. Cooper, “Letter to all Local Secretaries,” September 22, 1915.

<sup>40</sup> Susan Jackel, “Introduction,” in Georgina Binnie-Clark, *Wheat and Woman* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), 227.

<sup>41</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1917.

Poor Mrs. Lavers had not much of a crop this year. 480 bushels. And she says all their potatoes are in the ground frozen. It's too bad. Of course others lost their potatoes this fall too. But Lavers do not get any help from others that we do in many little ways.<sup>42</sup>

The community may have taken more pity on Isabelle because she had so many small children. Florence Lavers appears to have not received the same help Isabelle did, but her children were slightly older than Isabelle's. Her oldest son, Fred (or "Freddie"), was fourteen years old when his father left for war, and was able to help his mother run the farm.<sup>43</sup> In addition, there is no mention of any life-changing events (like births and deaths of children) that could have disrupted Florence's work, as they did Isabelle's. Help was available to her in a different form, although it appears as though Florence shouldered the majority of the farm work.<sup>44</sup>

Isabelle and Florence Lavers had a particularly close relationship. Florence and her family had come to Alberta from England in 1906. After living briefly in Calgary, they decided to homestead near Craigmyle.<sup>45</sup> In 1916, Frederick Husband Lavers joined up with the 113<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, the same battalion in which Sidney Brook enlisted.<sup>46</sup> The two men, along with one other man with a wife left in Craigmyle, Sergeant David George Finlay, spent some of the war together.<sup>47</sup> Lavers was discharged sooner than Sidney, sometime in early 1918.<sup>48</sup> With their husbands away at war, these women were forced into similar situations. They often passed on details about each other's husbands – specifically when one woman's husband responded quicker than the other's. They also offered to help each other. For example,

Isabelle

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<sup>42</sup> Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1917.

<sup>43</sup> *Delia Craigmyle Saga*, 843.

<sup>44</sup> Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, November 4, 1917.

<sup>45</sup> *Delia Craigmyle Saga*, 843.

<sup>46</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5442 – 3, Frederick Husband Lavers, "Attestation Paper," May 24, 1916.

<sup>47</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3085 – 25, David George Finlay, "Attestation Paper," May 3, 1916.

<sup>48</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 5, 1917.

had a letter from Mrs. Lavers in Calgary to-day, saying she was coming back soon, and asked if they might come in here for the balance of the night & until they got the horses & some coal & had things warmed up at home. She's dreading going back, for she says the house is terribly cold . . . She wouldn't live in the city tho' she says, "the prairie for me."<sup>49</sup>

Despite the hardships of homesteading, Mrs. Lavers, it appears, was drawn to life on the prairie.

After visiting with "that Mrs. Robinson," Florence was ready to return home.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps this was because she and Frederick had built their home and raised their family. Perhaps she was trying to convince both herself and Isabelle that she enjoyed farming despite its hardships. In any case, the prairie life was intrinsically tied to her identity as a farm woman.<sup>51</sup>

Isabelle, like most other farm women in western Canada before, during, and after the war, did outside work regularly. This work was typically situated around subsistence.<sup>52</sup> Bettina Bradbury argues in her book *Working Families* that this work "was vital to daily survival and to the reproduction of the working class."<sup>53</sup> This type of work, Bradbury states, helped women both save money and earn cash.<sup>54</sup> Although Isabelle and Sidney fit more firmly into the growing distinct agrarian class, Isabelle, like working class women, needed to work in order to support her family. For example, before and during the war Isabelle retained responsibility for the family's cow:

Yesterday I had to tether the cow out because she took a notion no place was quite so good to feed on as this bit of wheat here. But she hasn't bothered it at all, – she's as fat as butter – too fat indeed – been feeding on that bit of oats – but she don't know how to appreciate a good thing when she gets it, so she has to be on a rope now.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-23, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, January 15, 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Nanci Langford, "First Generation and Lasting Impressions: The Gendered Identities of Prairie Homestead Women," (PhD Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1994), 7.

<sup>52</sup> McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions," 130.

<sup>53</sup> Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 13-14.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>55</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-20, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, August 1, 1916.

Even though this cow was a “good deal” in the town, Isabelle was reluctant to sell her. She must have, however, because long after the family moved into town, Isabelle mused: “I often wonder now what I’d do if I had a cow to milk & tether out rain or shine, chickens to look after, and probably a few sweet dear pigs to get into mischief, what I’d ever do. Of course even now I don’t have any idle moments – I’m never done – but things don’t pile up quite so bad.”<sup>56</sup> Isabelle’s letters do not provide any specific reasons for this decision to sell the cow. Perhaps in an effort to simplify life for herself, and because the crops had failed and the family lacked funds, Isabelle chose to begin selling off the family’s livestock. Women’s outdoor labour that contributed to daily subsistence on farms was vital work, meant to care for the immediate needs of farming families. Isabelle repeatedly made references to her garden, which she proudly worked to provide food for her family, even if she often had to fend off the livestock of her neighbours:

We had our first green peas to-day. Pretty good considering Mr. McGregor is trying to pasture his cow on our garden. He’s a pretty small man I think. If we are here next year I hope to have the lot fenced. Crawford’s hens do their share of cleaning off the radishes and poppies. We have quite a lot of poppies & sweet peas in bloom now.<sup>57</sup>

Farm women were accustomed to working outdoors to provide food and resources for their families. As the war continued women had to expand their outdoor work beyond subsistence and into labour for market production in order to continue caring for their families. They had to refashion their work to meet the demands of wartime Canada.

Other women in western Canada shared a similar experience with Isabelle Brook. For example, Ellen “Nellie” Hunter from Sutherland, Saskatchewan was left on the barren prairie with a newborn child – a similar situation to Isabelle. Her husband John “Jack” Hunter enlisted

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<sup>56</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-20, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, August 1, 1916.

<sup>57</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-25, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, July 31, 1917.

with the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion in November of 1915.<sup>58</sup> Nellie was “living on the farm alone 12 miles from medical aide,” and wartime photographs with Nellie and her daughter, Jean, clearly show that the farm they lived on was in the middle of the prairie, with limited access to amenities.<sup>59</sup> In letters from her husband, Jack, it appears as though she was also in charge of the outside work on their farm, with no mention of any hired workers. He stated in one letter, for example, “Well Nell I hope you get the wheat threshed and get it sold too.”<sup>60</sup> He, like Sidney Brook to Isabelle at the beginning of his service, instructed her as well: “I hope you get the cattle sold all right Nell and about the wheat I would sell it right away if I was you.”<sup>61</sup> Nellie’s side of the wartime correspondence is unfortunately largely unavailable, aside from a few fragments of letters. Jack Hunter’s letters, however, clearly suggest that the care of the farm was entirely in her hands. In one 1917 letter Jack writes: “you never say how much wheat there was. I am glad you have got pretty near all the cattle away now so that will be off your head.”<sup>62</sup> Nellie, it appears, was largely in charge of the outside labour. She likely performed at least some of this work herself, as no mention of hired help appears in these letters. Nellie, like Isabelle, had to manage the property, the finances, and her family in the absence of her husband.<sup>63</sup>

Isabelle was involved with the United Farmers of Alberta. Craigmyle, it appears, did not have a local branch of the United Farm Women of Alberta, so women like Isabelle instead

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<sup>58</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-’993/166, Box 4633 – 2, John Galloway Hunter, “Attestation Paper,” November 19, 1915.

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix, Figure 1. City of Saskatoon Archives, Saskatoon, Acc 2014-010, Box 6, Foster Family Correspondence (to Nell and John), ca. 1902-1920, Maggie Foster, letter to Ellen Hunter, July 20, 1918.

<sup>60</sup> City of Saskatoon Archives, Saskatoon, I.2 Letters to Ellen A.C. Hunter, 1899-1959, Jack Hunter, letter to Ellen Hunter, ca. 1916.

<sup>61</sup> City of Saskatoon Archives, Saskatoon, I.2 Letters to Ellen A.C. Hunter, 1899-1959, Jack Hunter, letter to Ellen Hunter, January 4, 1917.

<sup>62</sup> City of Saskatoon Archives, Saskatoon, I.2 Letters to Ellen A.C. Hunter, 1899-1959, Jack Hunter, letter to Ellen Hunter, January 28, 1917.

<sup>63</sup> Perhaps the experiences of running the farm came in useful when, after the stock market crash of 1929, Jack Hunter abandoned the farm to Nellie and moved to British Columbia. He stayed in touch with Nellie in the years following, but never returned. The farm was Nellie’s. This was discovered in conversations with an archivist at the City of Saskatoon Archives.

attended meetings of the UFA.<sup>64</sup> Her commitment to the farming community in her area may have even influenced her decision to vote against conscription in 1917.<sup>65</sup> It appears as though, over time, Isabelle became more devoted to the farmer's movement than the actual war effort. The cooperation between men and women in these farming organizations was important not only in helping farms function on the prairies despite the war, but also in opening doors for women to increase their political participation within the Prairie Provinces.

Demand for wheat increased during this period, mobilizing farming organizations. Advertisements repeatedly ran in *The Grain Growers Guide* decreeing "The Empire's Demands for Food Are Greater This Year Than Last!" and that it was the responsibility of western Canadian farmers to meet the demands and "sow and reap a large crop."<sup>66</sup> Historian Bill Waiser argues that the "feeding of Allied Armies created a seemingly insatiable demand for wheat and other farm items at record-high prices."<sup>67</sup> By providing food for the Empire, prairie farmers – including the Brooks – were able to cash in on the high prices. Farming organizations, such as the Manitoba Grain Grower's Association, endorsed the Canadian war effort. MGGGA president R.C. Henders pledged that:

We desire in this, the first farmers' parliament assembled since the outbreak of the war, to assure our government and the government of Great Britain, that the agriculturalists of the empire will be found in their wonted places, and will be prepared to contribute their full share of men and money in order that the results of this war shall be a triumph of the principles which we so very highly prize.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-28, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, February 18, 1918.

<sup>65</sup> This will be discussed further in the following chapter. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, April 4, 1918.

<sup>66</sup> Advertisement, *The Grain Growers Guide*, April 12, 1916, page 31, University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/04/12/31/>.

<sup>67</sup> Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2005), 208.

<sup>68</sup> R.C. Henders, "Henders' Presidential Address," *The Grain Growers Guide*, January 20, 1915, page 7, University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1915/01/20/7/>.

While some farmers felt as though they best served the war effort by working farms on the home front and thus supplying wheat for the Empire, others, like Sidney Brook, felt that service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force was their patriotic duty.<sup>69</sup> This decision may have been a particularly easy for Sidney, as it appears as though he was exhausted with homesteading life.<sup>70</sup> As a British immigrant, he may have also been looking for a way to return home to England.

As pressure to produce crops increased, more labour was needed. In order to preserve pre-war gender roles, emphasis was first placed on appealing to men's sense of patriotic duty. Farmers believed their contributions were vital to winning the war. One page-long advertisement called "We Cannot Achieve Victory Without Food," argued that

The Canadian farmer and the Canadian farmhand now have the opportunity to make an effective reply to the enemy's present onslaughts by bending their undivided energies to the increased production of those food supplies for which we depend to such vital extent upon your great Dominion.<sup>71</sup>

This was the responsibility of western Canadian farmers: to meet the demands placed on them by the federal government and the British Empire to produce more wheat crops. Directed towards men, this advertisement appealed directly to farmers' senses of patriotic duty. Some also attempted to appeal to women to take up work in other industries in order to free up men for the farming work force. SGGa president J.A. Maharg, for example, questioned whether female labour "could be substituted for male labour" so that men could take up work in the fields in Saskatchewan.<sup>72</sup> As Carter has demonstrated, there was an active attempt to prevent too many women from becoming field hands, in order to keep the gendered structure of the prairies

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<sup>69</sup> This conflict will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

<sup>70</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, March 1, 1917.

<sup>71</sup> "Lord Rhondda Cables: "We Cannot Achieve Victory Without Food." *The Grain Growers Guide*, May 1, 1918, page 2, University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1918/05/01/2/>.

<sup>72</sup> J.A. Maharg, "Maharg's Presidential Address," *The Grain Growers Guide* February 23, 1916, page 7, University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/02/23/7/>.



intact.<sup>73</sup>

But appealing to only men was not enough. By the later years of the war, specifically in 1917, farm labour in western Canada was intensely difficult to find, and farming organizations increasingly pressured women to join the farming work force. Advertisers billed this work as patriotic, hoping that it might entice more women to join. While women often did field work in times of necessity, it is clear that the numbers in which they helped on the fields was a unique wartime phenomenon. One photograph in *The Grain Growers Guide* depicts a group of Saskatchewan women, huddled and posing for the camera, with a caption reading: “Seven of these Keeler, Sask., girls drove binders all harvest. Several others drove grain wagons. In the evenings they practised for a Minstrel Show which netted them for the Red Cross \$162.”<sup>74</sup> The description on this photograph exemplifies the multiple ways in which women contributed to the war effort. More specifically, the image shows how women moved into field work on the farms specifically to fill gaps in the work force and maintain wheat production.

While historian Sheila McManus argues that farm women often left their traditional work and moved into outdoor spaces when required, the photograph and its prominence in *The Grain Growers Guide* indicates that women working on the farm in 1917 was an uncommon situation, or at the very least was not usually advertised to the public as it was during the war.<sup>75</sup> At the 1916 Annual United Farmers of Alberta Convention, UFWA President Irene Parlby stated that

In many cases also the women have been called on to do extra work on the farm, on account of the shortage of labor; this situation is likely to be intensified during the

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<sup>73</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 344.

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix, Figure 2. “Are We Down-Hearted? No!” *The Grain Growers Guide*, November 21, 1917, page 10, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/11/21/10/>.

<sup>75</sup> McManus, “Gender(ed) Tensions,” 130.

coming year, if the farms are still allowed to remain the happy hunting ground of the recruiting officer.<sup>76</sup>

This statement may have been in reference to the ongoing conscription debate, which many farmers worried would take men away from farms to make them soldiers overseas. Sarah Carter argues that female labourers were actually discouraged from taking jobs in the fear that if women took male jobs, conscription in Canada would become more likely.<sup>77</sup> In this speech, however, Parlby asserts that women's work was completely necessary in an effort to fill the gaps left by men who had already gone to war. As more farmers and farm hands were recruited as soldiers, more women worked as farm labourers.

While many people supported women's outdoor work on farms, others insisted that it was unsuitable for women. The Idaleen WWGA, for example, held a debate discussing "Is Outdoor Work Suitable for Women."<sup>78</sup> The members, while determining that working in "barns and fields" was "roughening" work, eventually agreed that women's work on farms "depended upon circumstances and temperament."<sup>79</sup> Because women were generally perceived as incapable of hard labour, there was a fear that tough field work would masculinize them. The author of this article agreed that women should only help in outdoor labour in extenuating circumstances, such as when husbands and soldiers went overseas and left no other help behind. Some feared the potential social changes that could occur after the war should a woman leave her assigned gender role during it.<sup>80</sup> One author of a *Didsbury Pioneer* article believed that working women would not be content "to lapse again into an aimless security with nothing in front of them save,

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<sup>76</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, PR 2003.0302/SE, Irene Parlby, "Report of the President of the U.F.W.A. to Women's Section," *United Farmers of Alberta: Annual Report, 1916*, (Calgary: Alberta Job Printing Department, 1917), 125.

<sup>77</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 337.

<sup>78</sup> F.M. Hutchinson, "Outdoor or Indoor Work," *The Grain Growers Guide*, December 23, 1914, page 21, University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1914/12/23/21/>.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 100-102.

perhaps, loveless marriage, or that combat with social conditions which is likely to end in their own ruin.”<sup>81</sup> The author hoped that after the war, gender roles would return to pre-war norms as quickly as possible, and that women’s field work would not disrupt the gendered order.

Because many people feared the sweeping changes in the gendered order that might occur, no major attempt was made at organizing a female agricultural labour movement.<sup>82</sup> This was unlike Ontario and Britain, where each jurisdiction organized female agricultural farm hands. England, which created the Women’s Land Army, called back Georgina Binnie-Clark, who had created a sensation in Saskatchewan when she owned and operated her own farm, at the start of the war to help the government train female farm labourers.<sup>83</sup> Historian Bonnie White writes that the WLA was not only organized as an attempt to “solve the real problem of the dwindling work force,” but was also part of a larger women’s movement to make women’s work in agriculture permanent.<sup>84</sup> This endeavor was unfortunately not successful, as there was an attempt to revert back to pre-war gender roles immediately after the armistice, when soldiers began returning to the farms.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, in western Canada, women made little headway in securing their right to own and operate farms in post-war Canada.<sup>86</sup> But even though no formal female farm hand labour movement organized on the prairies, women still moved to work in the fields. While hope existed that permanent changes would be made, patriotism and supporting Canada’s war effort were the primary motivators for movement into fieldwork and farm management.

The labour crisis on the prairies grew so great that women in urban areas were encouraged to come to farms on the prairies to provide domestic help, so that farm women would

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<sup>81</sup> “The Sphere of Woman,” *Didsbury Pioneer*, July 5, 1916, page 7, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/DBP/1916/07/05/7/Ar00705.html>.

<sup>82</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 327.

<sup>83</sup> Susan Jackel, “Introduction,” xxviii.

<sup>84</sup> Bonnie White, *The Women’s Land Army in First World War Britain* (United Kingdom: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) 1, 2.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>86</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 354, 372.

be free for field work. Domestic help had always been difficult to find in rural areas in western Canada, but the problem intensified during the war years, when more women were able to find work in other industries rather than in service.<sup>87</sup> Advertisements ran in city newspapers, asking for domestic help on the farms. One 1915 *Calgary Daily Herald* advertisement stated: “The demand for domestic help exceeds the supply of the clamoring we hear for employment for women.”<sup>88</sup> Even Isabelle Brook had a “hired girl,” one that, it appears, she would have fired if she could have but for the fact she would be unable to acquire another one if she was let go.<sup>89</sup> Lillian Lee, it seems, had taken off work one too many times because she was “sick.”<sup>90</sup>

Historian Carter writes that domestic labour on farms was one of the primary ways women were encouraged to help with the war effort. She asserts that, in an effort to keep the West ‘masculine,’ women who wanted to assist in the war effort were “steered away from field work and towards domestic work in farm homes.”<sup>91</sup> When farm women reached out to urban women to help ease the labour crisis, they particularly emphasized helping within the farm home, rather than in the field. Domestic labour was a difficult job, as Binnie-Clark writes in her memoir *Wheat and Woman*, demonstrating the immense amount of work that accompanied feeding farm crews.<sup>92</sup> Isabelle also mentions her responsibility to feed her farm hand, Jennings.<sup>93</sup> Hiring extra domestic help was thus important in helping farm women run their farms, as some of this extra work could be alleviated. Hired help gave women more freedom to run their farms.

Urban women were specifically asked to help with domestic labour by both the

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<sup>87</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.21 McNaughton Papers, “Female Help for the Farms,” Thomas Molloy, letter to Violet McNaughton, April 3, 1918.

<sup>88</sup> “Places for Domestic,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, January 2, 1915, page 4.

<sup>89</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 5, 1917.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 344.

<sup>92</sup> Binnie-Clark, *Wheat and Woman*, 42-43.

<sup>93</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-20, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, August 6, 1916.

government and female farming organizations. Thomas Molloy, Saskatchewan's Commissioner of Labour, determined that getting eastern Canadian women to help on the farms in western Canada was unlikely. He stated that this problem was largely because of "the exorbitant wages being paid to girls in the munition factories of the east have, together with other factors, practically depleted the supply of female help."<sup>94</sup> This meant that finding help outside of the Prairie Provinces would be difficult, but those in cities might be willing to help.<sup>95</sup> He asserted to Violet McNaughton that:

I am of the opinion that a considerable number of women may be secured for the harvest and threshing seasons and also that it may be possible to secure temporary help for our farm homes during the summer in order to tide over illness and fatigue which our farm women meet from time to time. I have discussed this matter with a number of our city women and there would seem to be need of a better understanding between the city and country women, especially as to conditions of employment and also of accommodation.<sup>96</sup>

Rather than involving government, Molloy wanted city and farm women to cooperate together to alleviate the labour crisis. Class cooperation in western Canada was necessary when, according to Molloy, work on farms was not as appealing to eastern women as working in munitions factories.<sup>97</sup>

Appealing to patriotism was a way for farm women to reach out to urban women for help. In a letter to Violet McNaughton, Zoa Haight wrote: "One question I would push the city women who are anxious to help country women is 'Is your Patriotism great enough to allow you to go where you are much needed be it shack or palace?'"<sup>98</sup> Margaret Flatt, the then-president of the Women's section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, implored "town women" to "volunteer for work in farm homes during the coming harvest and threshing," so that farm

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas Molloy, letter to Violet McNaughton, April 3, 1918.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon, A1, E.21, McNaughton Papers, "Female Help for the Farms," Zoe Haight, letter to Violet McNaughton, n.d.

women could be spared from their domestic work to work the fields.<sup>99</sup> She stipulated that this would be “purely patriotic work, and should be undertaken in this spirit.”<sup>100</sup> Flatt also stressed the lack of “proper accommodation,” particularly emphasizing the “scarcity of water.” She hoped that only those who were able to “put up with these hardships” would volunteer.<sup>101</sup> Flatt recognized that farming life was often more difficult and devoid of conveniences that could be found in cities, and therefore emphasized the patriotic nature of the work in the hopes that more women would be willing to volunteer.

In a second letter, Flatt urged farm women to be patient with the urban women who might respond to the call and come to help them.<sup>102</sup> She stated:

Undoubtedly the women from urban centres will respond to this as a patriotic call to national service, and will willingly render such assistance as lies in their power. However it is the duty of the farm women to meet this response in a like patriotic spirit, remembering that the help offered will be according to the ability to serve and not according to the accepted standards of domestic help on the farm. That is, the work will require to be home tasks such as they are accustomed to and not milking or other out door labor to which the majority are entirely unaccustomed.<sup>103</sup>

These fascinating letters served to distinguish the work of farm women from that of urban women. Their domestic work often included more difficult tasks than could be found in urban homes, such as gardening, milking, and butter making, in addition to cooking massive amounts of food for threshing and harvest crews. Flatt was concerned that urban women would not be used to or strong enough for the work required in rural homes. In addition, accommodation was a potential fear for urban women, as conditions on farms were often worse than in urban areas, and women would also be required to stay with strange families, rather than living in a separate

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<sup>99</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.92 McNaughton Papers, Margaret Flatt, letter, “Appeal to Town Women.”

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.21, McNaughton Papers, “Female Help for the Farms,” Margaret Flatt, “Circular Letter to Farm Women,” n.d.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

residence. But by stressing the patriotic nature of the work, Flatt hoped to encourage more women to come out to rural areas.

Class differences existed between farm women and urban women. Farmers owned their means of production, which often – but not always – meant that they did not need to seek outside wage labour for subsistence, but were rather able to provide for themselves through the farm.<sup>104</sup> This land ownership already placed many farm women in a separate class from waged workers, who needed to seek labour in order to survive. However, farm women were also required to work not only within the home, but also around the farmyard and in the field, and as this chapter has argued, they also had to preside over farm management. This work meant that most farm women were also in a separate class from many middle-class urban women, who did not necessarily need to work outside the home at all.<sup>105</sup> However, as Nanci Langford has asserted, the aspiration was to keep women from hard outdoor labour: “to the male farmer dependence on the free farm labour of your wife meant you were not successful enough as a farmer to relieve her of this labour by hiring a man to do it.”<sup>106</sup> The mark of a middle-class farmer was that women would no longer need to help outdoors. During the war, Isabelle Brook performed labour outside the home through her work as farm manager. She also kept livestock and worked her garden. Perhaps the move into town and Isabelle’s subsequent separation from the land marks the start of becoming true middle-class farmers. However, this transition would not have been entirely completed until Sidney returned home from war and Isabelle was relieved from her farm-related responsibilities.

Some farmers and farm women in western Canada straddled the line between working class and middle class Canadians. They increasingly thought of themselves as a distinct class.

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<sup>104</sup> Taylor, “Capitalist Development, Forms of Labour, and Class Formation in Prairie Canada,” 174.

<sup>105</sup> Carol Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?: The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 4.

<sup>106</sup> Langford, “First Generation and Lasting Impressions: The Gendered Identities of Prairie Homestead Women,” 67.

Historian Bradford Rennie calls this idea the “agrarian myth,” arguing that farmers thought of themselves as “the source of national prosperity and virtue.”<sup>107</sup> The Farmers’ Platform of 1916 stated that agriculture was “the first industry in Canada.”<sup>108</sup> This belief served to help separate farmers from other working classes, and it was around this idea that the farmer’s movement began to grow. As evidenced by Flatt’s letters, this ‘agrarian exceptionalism’ was evident within female farming organizations as well. From the farm women’s perspective, their work took precedence over the work of urban women, particularly during harvest season. In this sense, patriotism divided the two groups of women, rather than uniting them.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine how many urban women reached out to assist those on farms. Finding willing women proved difficult. Molloy wrote in a letter to Violet McNaughton in August 1917 that:

with such a large demand for female help as exists in this province, and with the possibility of securing but comparatively few girls, that a considerable percentage of our farm women will be disappointed unless we are very careful not to unnecessarily brighten their hopes, therefore, our publicity campaign at this end, we feel, should be conducted in the most conservative manner.<sup>109</sup>

Many women were indeed disappointed at the lack of female farm hands able to come to western Canada to help alleviate the labour crisis. For example, Lena Beaton from Herschel, Saskatchewan, named only Mrs. Malcolm Beaton in her letter, wrote to Erma Stocking in February of 1917, desperately seeking help for the coming spring and summer.<sup>110</sup> Eighteen-year-old Malcolm Beaton from Herschel had enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1916. His mother was likely seeking help when her son went away to war, leaving her short-handed on

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<sup>107</sup> Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909-1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>108</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.9, McNaughton Papers, “Copy of Farmer’s Platform,” November, 1916.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Molloy, letter to Violet McNaughton, August 17, 1917.

<sup>110</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.21, McNaughton Papers, “Female Help for the Farms,” Mrs. Malcolm Beaton, letter to Miss Stocking, February 18, 1917.



the farm.<sup>111</sup> Erma Stocking replied to Beaton, saying that farm hands were difficult to acquire, as women were being kept for the munitions factories.<sup>112</sup>

Co-operatives, like the United Farm Women of Alberta, were partially successful in bringing some young women westward from Ontario as female farm hands. At first, there was hope that “several thousand girls” might come, but that hope soon faded as many who had come “to that province [Ontario] in the years immediately preceding the war and who are now anxious, on account of the conditions in the east, to come west.”<sup>113</sup> Some young women did come, and were eager to be placed on farms as outdoor workers. Emma Kingshott, for example, was looking specifically for outdoor farm work in Saskatchewan.<sup>114</sup> She appears to have been placed on a farm in Red Deer, Alberta, a few months later.<sup>115</sup>

However, not as many women were able to come westward as had originally been hoped. A similar labour crisis existed in Ontario, and therefore many promised young women did not make the journey westward. Erma Stocking sent a desperate inquiry to Molloy asking:

In accordance with a resolution passed at the Provincial Convention of Women Grain Growers in which Government assistance was asked for in the securing of female as well as male help for the farm, I beg to inquire as to whether any steps in this direction have been taken . . . One of the means toward the desired end is to secure harvest excursion rates for women who come into the country for work. The added influx of men greatly increase the burden of the farm wife and any means of helping her means much for the welfare of the farm home.<sup>116</sup>

The lack of government involvement in organizing female labour, it appears, contributed to the

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<sup>111</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 544 – 13, Malcolm Beaton, “Attestation Paper.”

<sup>112</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.21, McNaughton Papers, “Female Help for the Farms,” Miss Stocking, letter to Mrs. Malcolm Beaton, February 26, 1917.

<sup>113</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.21, McNaughton Papers, “Female Help for the Farms,” Thomas Molloy, letter to Violet McNaughton, August 17, 1917.

<sup>114</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.21, McNaughton Papers, “Female Help for the Farms,” Cora Hind, letter to Violet McNaughton, March 15, 1918.

<sup>115</sup> “Local and District Intelligence.” *Red Deer News*, July 31, 1918, page 12, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/RDN/1918/07/31/12/>.

<sup>116</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.21, McNaughton Papers, “Female Help for the Farms,” Erma Stocking, letter to Thomas Molloy, July 11, 1917.

lack of women that actually came from eastern Canada and urban areas to help. Farm woman Louise Burbank wrote a letter to Violet McNaughton in 1918, arguing that women would be glad to help on western farms, but they had no details as to where they could be placed, how they should get there, and when they should arrive.<sup>117</sup> There was difficulty, for example, in finding funding to subsidize these women's fares, as evidenced by Stocking's letter to Molloy.<sup>118</sup> These types of problems continually plagued attempts to acquire help for the farms.

UFWA president Irene Parlby discussed the issue of the farm labour problem with Violet McNaughton. In a letter from Parlby to McNaughton, she reported she had attempted to cooperate with members of the Women's Institutes in Calgary on the hired help problem in rural Alberta. She called her attempt a "hopeless failure."<sup>119</sup> The labour crisis remained, keeping many farm women exhaustingly busy for the duration of the war. Women, in a move of solidarity, banded together. Parlby remarked at a UFA convention in 1916 that: "During the past year, in spite of the strain of labor shortage, and the efforts the women are making in patriotic work, our organization has shown a steady, continuous growth."<sup>120</sup> The war was important in solidifying women's involvement in the farmer's movement. Farmers openly supported farm women's rights, particularly the right to vote, as they could potentially strengthen the agrarian movement.<sup>121</sup>

By refashioning farm work as patriotic, members of the farm women's movement were able to distinguish the abilities and lives of farm women from those of their urban counterparts.

In a 1917 article for *The Grain Growers Guide*, Nellie McClung wrote:

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<sup>117</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, McNaughton Papers, Louise Burbank, letter to Violet McNaughton, April 23, 1918.

<sup>118</sup> Erma Stocking, letter to Thomas Molloy, July 11, 1917.

<sup>119</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.54, McNaughton Papers, Irene Parlby, letter to Violet McNaughton, September 19, 1916.

<sup>120</sup> Irene Parlby, "Report of the President of the U.F.W.A. to Women's Section," 125.

<sup>121</sup> Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 114.

I like to think that the coming of women into the political life of Canada has helped to bring about a fairer, more unprejudiced element. Women have not the political prejudices of men, nor the bitterness born of past campaigns. Also they have a single-mindedness, they never get away from the human side of every question: I am speaking, of course, of the real women, not of the parasite, who never did a day's work, or ate a meal that was not paid for by someone else; but they are disappearing every day, and splendid, noble-souled women appearing in their places.<sup>122</sup>

McClung, who often defended women's rights to farm in western Canada, uses harsh language in this article to assert that working women, specifically farm women in this instance, were "real women," and were deserving of the new vote that was bestowed on them provincially in 1916.<sup>123</sup> She appealed to the hard-working nature of farm women by asserting that they were, in a sense, better and more deserving than women in cities, calling those women who did not work "parasites," implying that they lived off the work of others. Those in agrarian industries, particularly those involved in wheat production for the war effort, believed that they stood apart from the rest of the country, as exceptional members of Canadian society and the backbone of the Empire.

The war provided the farm women's movement with other benefits as well. One *Grain Growers Guide* article observed that the war had forced women to examine their roles more critically:

Mrs. Parlby pointed out that as a result of the war women were coming out of their quiet homes and peaceful lives and doing deeds of heroism trying to save something out of the wreckage for the generations yet to be born . . . One great advantage of this war, however, is going to be that women are sitting up and taking notice and thinking things out for themselves.<sup>124</sup>

Sarah Carter elaborates on this sentiment. While there was a deliberate attempt in post-war

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<sup>122</sup> Nellie McClung, "Loyalty," *The Grain Growers Guide*, December 5, 1917, page 18. University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017

<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/12/05/18/>.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> "Alberta Women's Institute: The Premier's Welcome," *The Grain Growers Guide*, March 8, 1916, page 29. University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017

<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/03/08/29/>.

Canada to systematically deny women the right to farm in an aggressive attempt to return to pre-war gender ideals, women remained optimistic about the changes that the war could potentially bring.<sup>125</sup> Despite the fact that this optimism faded in the years after the war, it is clear that many farm women, like Irene Parlby, believed that women in Canada were indeed changing as a result of their wartime efforts. While they may have changed, the rigid gender roles in which they were placed did not.

During the First World War, women needed to take over roles typically reserved for men in order to survive. Isabelle Brook, for example, took control of the farm, working diligently to manage her family's crops, finances, rental property, and hired hands. While Isabelle may not have seen her work as such, this work was often refashioned as patriotic by the government and the community. Over the course of the war, Isabelle began aligning more with the farmer's movement than the actual war effort.<sup>126</sup> Any field work women performed was billed as a temporary shift in an effort to maintain pre-war gender ideals. As Carter has demonstrated, many feared the changes to prairie society if women's fieldwork was encouraged and made permanent.<sup>127</sup> Isabelle was likely encouraged to relinquish her work to Sidney once he returned from war. Even so, many women were praised for the work they undertook in the name of the Empire. The war highlighted their work, bringing it briefly to the forefront rather than keeping it invisible. In particular, farming organizations applauded women's farm work. Isabelle Brook's story, and the stories of other farm women and the farmer's movement around her, help us understand this period of flux. This work was meant to specifically support the war effort through their field work and farm management. Women themselves, if Isabelle Brook is a representation, viewed their work as in their family's best interests.

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<sup>125</sup> Carter, *Imperial Plots*, 328.

<sup>126</sup> This will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

## Chapter 3

### **Soldiers and Breadwinners: Masculinity and Patriotism in Western Canada**

Writing to his wife, Isabelle, at his departure from New Brunswick for England, Sidney Brook wrote a passionate explanation of his decision to go to war with the 113<sup>th</sup> ‘Lethbridge Highlanders’:

I shed no tears, dearie, but it wasn't that I couldn't, it was (a thousand more “good byes” ring the air) some test of my courage and sweetheart I believe it was the greatest test I'll ever be put to. I know it was hard for you too and you showed wonderful courage. I want you to be always full of courage so when I return we shall live the happiest lives of any. My seat mates were just saying that we will not have the miserable feeling in years to come that we shirked our “bit”, no! we have the satisfaction that we have volunteered – if our brothers everywhere are going to the war, why we'll not hide at home because it's easier.<sup>1</sup>

Isabelle Brook was left in Craigmyle, responsible for five children and the family farm. Sidney traded his duties as a farmer and a father for a higher calling, his patriotic duty to Canada and the British Empire. It was the duty of men, he and his companions believed, to answer the call of war and enlist, thereby becoming protectors of freedom, peace, and the British Empire.<sup>2</sup> This sacrifice gave soldiers the idea that they were ‘better’ than their counterparts who were able but unwilling to go to war. Not everyone in western Canada, however, shared this idea, and these ideas would become particularly divisive in the later years of the First World War.

This chapter explores the divide between western Canadian farmers and soldiers during the First World War, specifically their respective perceptions of masculinity. This chapter examines the conscription crisis of 1917 to exemplify how farmers and soldiers from the Prairie Provinces demonstrated the shared beliefs of traditional masculinity. What follows are two sides of the debate: the farmers versus the soldiers. Each group believed that its chosen path offered

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<sup>1</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-14, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, September 24, 1916.

<sup>2</sup> Coming to the defense of the Empire was especially important, given that Sidney Brook had been born in Brighton, England. His family remained in Brighton – in a sense he was defending his home. See Introduction.

the best way western Canadian men could serve their country. The wartime letters of Sidney Brook are paramount to this discussion, as he was both a soldier and a farmer. Isabelle, too, was clearly influenced in her role as a farmer, in addition to being a soldier's wife. In the letters, she exhibits more sympathy towards farmers who chose to remain in Canada than Sidney.

Historian Cecilia Danysk describes masculinity in western Canada as complex, with “not one masculine identity, but many.”<sup>3</sup> During the First World War, men defined their masculinity differently, according to their vocations. For example, Sidney was a forty-four-year-old British immigrant and devout Methodist who had been farming in western Canada since his early twenties. He, and other Canadian soldiers like him, believed that ideal masculinity during the war lay in fighting, while farmers believed physical work on the farm was essential in being the ‘breadwinners’ for a devastated wartime Britain. This chapter also illustrates that because many western Canadian farmers identified as a distinct group from other Canadians, they deemed themselves worthy of exclusion from the draft imposed in 1917 and 1918. This debate eventually led to growing tensions between the Prairie Provinces and Ottawa.

At the start of the war, many Canadians embraced the role Canada was to play. Thousands of men quickly lined up to join the war effort.<sup>4</sup> In his article “Manhood and the Militia Myth,” Mike O’Brien argues that increasingly over the Victorian period, “manliness” was equated with being a “warrior.”<sup>5</sup> He explores the increasing glorification of war in the years prior to the First World War. With war came the prospect of proving one’s manliness. For many men, becoming a soldier became a symbol of masculinity, as well as a way to display maturity.<sup>6</sup> Other

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<sup>3</sup> Cecilia Danysk, “‘A Bachelor’s Paradise’: Homesteaders, Hired Hands, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1880-1930,” in *Making Western Canada: Essays on European and Colonization and Settlement*, edited by Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), 155.

<sup>4</sup> Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> Mike O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914.” *Labour/Le Travail* 42 (Fall 1998), 119.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

reasons also brought men to war. Amy Shaw writes that “the rising popularity of imperialism and the influence of social Darwinism cultivated an ideal masculinity in which intellectualism was subordinated to physical robustness and a patriotic team spirit.”<sup>7</sup> The physical nature of farming and soldiering was appealing to many men, and defined their masculinity.

Because of the direct connection of the war with the British Empire, British immigrants made up the large portion of those who immediately enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Indeed, Jeffrey Keshen estimates that nearly the entire first contingent to leave Canada was made up of young British immigrants.<sup>8</sup> While Canada did have battalions made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, Sidney Brook – as well as his Craigmyle companion Frederick Lavers – followed this trend. Sidney did not immediately enlist for the war, instead waiting until 1916, the reason for which is addressed later in this chapter. However, Sidney and his companions were British immigrants, with strong ties to the Empire and a personal conviction that the war was an attack on their personal beliefs and ideals.<sup>9</sup> This sense of duty was tied to ideas of masculinity, through which men were mandated to protect and care for their homes and families, and their country.<sup>10</sup>

Many, like Sidney, believed the war had a just cause, and therefore were willing to support the British Empire in the fight.<sup>11</sup> A 1915 article from the *Lethbridge Herald* stated, “It is our war,” remarking that it was the job of the British Empire to defend smaller nations and

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<sup>7</sup> Amy Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1996), 40.

<sup>9</sup> Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1098 – 4, Sidney Brook, “Attestation Paper,” May 18, 1916. Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5442 – 3, Frederick Husband Lavers, “Attestation Paper.” May 24, 1916.

<sup>10</sup> Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 50.

<sup>11</sup> John English, “Political Leadership in the First World War,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, edited by David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 77.

prevent German occupation.<sup>12</sup> Sidney Brook wrote in April 1918, “Whats [sic] the use of living if we cannot have liberty + righteousness throughout the land?”<sup>13</sup> He, like other farmers in western Canada, believed “the existence of free institutions and British ideals to be at stake” making involvement in the war a personal endeavor.<sup>14</sup> Portraying the war as righteous provided a justification for Canadians to enter the war.<sup>15</sup> It also provided a means for the Canadian government to justify alienating certain immigrants from enemy nations. In particular, Austro-Hungarian and German immigrants were demonized by Anglo-Canadians.<sup>16</sup> They presented a threat to the “British ideals” some believed to be at the core of Canadian society. In his book *Park Prisoners*, Bill Waiser discusses how these immigrants were eventually interned as prisoners of war, and put to work building national parks in Canada.<sup>17</sup> This labour in turn reinforced the idea of building a strong, Anglo-centric Canada. Focusing on British ideals filled men and women with patriotic fervor, making it impossible for even some pacifists to ignore the war.<sup>18</sup> Some individuals thought the war was righteous. Others felt it presented an adventurous opportunity – a way to prove their manhood.<sup>19</sup> And still others went out of necessity, looking for

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<sup>12</sup> “Entering Our Second Year of War,” *Lethbridge Herald*, pg. 4, August 4, 1915.

<sup>13</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-18, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, April 4, 1918.

<sup>14</sup> Herman F. Holler, “Favors Imported Goods,” *The Grain Growers’ Guide*, April 21, 1915, page 14, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1915/04/21/14/>.

<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, this portrayal also justified turning on fellow immigrants who came from perceived enemy territory. Eventually, this led to disenfranchisement and even internment around Canada.

<sup>16</sup> Donald Avery, “Ethnic and Class Relations in Western Canada during the First World War: A Case Study of European Immigrants and Anglo-Canadian Nativism,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, edited by David Mackenzie (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2005), 275-276.

<sup>17</sup> Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946* (Markham: Fifth House Ltd., 1995),

<sup>18</sup> Suffragists like Nellie McClung were noted pacifists. However, they believed in supporting the war, hoping that eventually peace would come. Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (Toronto: McLeod & Allen, 1915), 10-22.

<sup>19</sup> Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 2-3.



work in an economic downturn.<sup>20</sup> In many cases, the support for the war reflected masculine ideals – whether patriotism, adventure, or employment.

Others, however, did not believe that this was “their” war. For example, German and Austro-Hungarian immigrants particularly found themselves increasingly isolated over the course of the war. Despite the fact that it was rare for these immigrants to show open hostility towards other Canadians, many were classified as “enemy aliens” and interned in camps for the war’s duration.<sup>21</sup> The Wartime Elections Act of 1917 disenfranchised these men, along with conscientious objectors.<sup>22</sup> Mennonite immigrants were a particularly large cultural group in western Canada, and, as part of the religiously pacifist church, conscientiously objected to the war.<sup>23</sup> In her book *Crisis of Conscience*, Amy Shaw argues that denying these individuals the right to vote and enfranchising female relatives of soldiers was emasculating.<sup>24</sup>

Disenfranchisement was an explicit statement that they did not exhibit “appropriate masculine behavior.”<sup>25</sup> Supporting the war meant displaying Canadian ideals, particularly those regarding masculinity.

Even many women involved in the women’s movement originally held pacifist ideas. Those in the movement did not uniformly support the war – it was often only until they were either personally affected or sought to end the war completely that they supported Canada’s involvement in it.<sup>26</sup> Many women, like Irene Parlby, believed that war was a by-product of male

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>21</sup> Bohdan S. Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada During the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 26.

<sup>22</sup> Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>26</sup> Nellie McClung’s son, Jack McClung, was a member of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, forcing McClung to support the war effort. Nelle Oosterom, “Nellie McClung and the Great War,” *Canada’s History*, 2016. <http://www.canadashistory.ca/Magazine/Online-Extension/Articles/Nellie-McClung-and-the-Great-War>.

dominance in politics, and women were necessary in “meliorating influence in politics.”<sup>27</sup>

Western Canada was not a homogenous place entirely composed of British immigrants, but was an ethnically diverse region. According to Donald Avery, 31.5% of those who lived in the western provinces at the turn of the twentieth century were born non-British or Canadian.<sup>28</sup>

Howard and Tamara Palmer state that by 1911, 26% of Alberta’s population was British-born, while approximately 20% was “German or central and eastern European origin.”<sup>29</sup> Bill Waiser states that in Saskatchewan, “according to the 1911 census, Germans and Austro-Hungarians constituted, after the British, the second (68,628) and third (41,651) largest immigrant groups, respectively, in the province.”<sup>30</sup> Waiser also states that there were numerous “ethnic enclaves” of Doukhobors, Mennonites, and Ukrainians settling in rural Saskatchewan.<sup>31</sup> However, because it was largely a British majority in these provinces, including both British immigrants and those who were Canadian-born but of British ancestry, they tended to wield social control, touting their Anglo-centric ideals. As a result, those who went to war often looked on those who did not with derision or contempt.

Men were not only enticed by the prospect based on their ties to Britain. War also offered a promise of excitement for many young men, as well as employment during the recession.

Historian Terry Copp states that the Canadian army offered an important source of income for men, particularly those trying to escape “the dull routines of work or the harsh experience of

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<sup>27</sup> Catherine Cavanaugh, “Irene Marryat Parlby: An “Imperial Daughter” in the Canadian West, 1896-1934,” in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women’s History*, edited by Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 109.

<sup>28</sup> Avery, “Ethnic and Class Relations,” 275.

<sup>29</sup> Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, “The Great War and After: The Fervant Years, 1914-1921,” in *Alberta, a New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990), 168, 173.

<sup>30</sup> Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2005), 194.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

unemployment.”<sup>32</sup> Prior to the war, western Canada had sunk from an economic boom to a slump.<sup>33</sup> This left a large number of workers in the Canadian west without work. Joining the war as a soldier gave work to thousands of individuals otherwise unemployed. Waiser argues that in some cases, “the tug of patriotism . . . was often cited to mask [a soldier’s] failure at homesteading or inability to find steady work.”<sup>34</sup> He cites that “one-fifth of the Canadian Expeditionary Force fled long-term unemployment.”<sup>35</sup> The war offered a chance of adventure and escape. It gave young men a chance to prove their ‘manliness,’ rather than be emasculated by unemployment. Enlisting with the CEF also offered British immigrants the chance to return home, when they otherwise would be unable to visit. Initially, recruiters had their pick of volunteers. They were able to choose younger, unmarried men to fill their battalions. In addition, they had specific weight, height and health requirements for men to meet.<sup>36</sup> The majority of the Canadian population supported the war, and in 1915 the government confidently believed they would not have trouble meeting the threshold of 250,000 promised men.<sup>37</sup>

Many people in western Canada were caught up in the romanticism and glory of the war. However, they often took different paths to display their enthusiasm. Sidney Brook’s personal convictions are likely what led him to enlist with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Given Sidney’s enthusiasm for the righteousness of the war, it is likely that he tried to enlist at the beginning of the war. But his age and health problems, namely his need for dentures, and status

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<sup>32</sup> Terry Copp, “The Military Effort, 1914-1918,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, edited by David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 39.

<sup>33</sup> Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 187.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> J. L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), 35.

as a married farmer, prevented him from enlisting.<sup>38</sup> Once the enthusiasm for the war began to wane by 1916, the government gradually became more desperate for volunteers and changed the criteria for enlistment.<sup>39</sup> In addition, while a wife's permission was needed in order to enlist at the start of the war, this condition was lifted by 1915.<sup>40</sup> It is possible that Isabelle had prevented Sidney from enlisting at the start of the war.<sup>41</sup> Initially Sidney Brook was, by all accounts, an eager, enthusiastic soldier. He enlisted in 1916, only regretting his decision when he was wounded in the arm in 1917, and when his son Arnott died shortly afterwards.

The Honorable Robert Borden increased the promised number of troops to 500,000 by 1916.<sup>42</sup> The timing was perfect for forty-four-year-old Sidney Brook to enlist with the 113<sup>th</sup> Battalion. For Sidney, this work remained a patriotic duty. He remarked numerous times throughout his letters that he wished for peace, even hoping during his training that he would not need to go overseas at all.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Sidney generally seemed excited by the prospect of war and the possibility of returning to his birth country. After leaving his training at Sarcee Camp, Calgary, in the autumn of 1916, Sidney wrote:

Altogether the march thro Calgary was far from a sad parting – the streets were lined on either side – the crowd cheered and the soldiers cheered – wherever chance afforded it the girls and women + often young boys + girls would grab our hands + shake whilst we marched – after we were in the train a great many of the ladies – young + old came along the coaches + shook hands with us as we leaned out of the windows, many of them remarking that they would like to come along.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> These he got while training at Sarcee Camp, after having multiple teeth pulled. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, July 21, 1916.

<sup>39</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 56.

<sup>41</sup> I find this doubtful, given that Isabelle seems relatively supportive of her husband in her letters to him.

<sup>42</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 36.

<sup>43</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds. Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, August 2, 1916.

<sup>44</sup> M-9076-14, Brook Family Fonds, Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, September 19, 1916.

As the events in this letter suggest, from the outside, it appeared as though the country was united in its defense of the ‘British ideals’ Anglo-Canadians believed were the nation’s birthright.

Bill Waiser states that “enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force was strong across the prairie west.”<sup>45</sup> Alberta, the province in which Isabelle and Sidney made their home, had one of the highest enlistment rates in Canada, according to Howard and Tamara Palmer in their book *Alberta, A New History*.<sup>46</sup> Out of a total population of 470,000 in the province of Alberta, 45,136 Albertans joined as soldiers.<sup>47</sup> This number represented approximately ten percent of all individuals, totaling about one-third of all eligible men.<sup>48</sup> While Waiser argues that Saskatchewan residents romanticized the notion of the war and eagerly supported it, the province actually had a lower enlistment rate than the rest of the country, at approximately twenty-three percent of eligible men.<sup>49</sup> This low rate may have been because of the high number of “enemy aliens” and conscientious objectors within the province. Manitoba, on the other hand, had the highest, with almost fifty percent of all available men enlisting with the Canadian Expeditionary Force.<sup>50</sup> These numbers are significant, given that Manitoba even surpassed Ontario in percentage of men provided for the war – Ontario sat at approximately thirty-six percent enlistment.<sup>51</sup> Many men in the Prairie Provinces directly supported the war effort by enlisting as soldiers. However, some resistance towards recruitment remained. Farming was the

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<sup>45</sup> Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 186.

<sup>46</sup> Palmer and Palmer, *Alberta: A New History*, 167.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 188. Marc Leroux, “Enlistments in the CEF by Province,” *Canadian Great War Project*, July 16, 2010. <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/writing/enlistmentFigures.asp>.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Leroux, “Enlistments in the CEF by Province,” <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/writing/enlistmentFigures.asp>.

predominant occupation for men in these three provinces. While many soldiers came from the prairies, many more believed their first priority was maintaining their family farms.

As the war continued, pressure was increasingly placed on men to enlist with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. However, many men in western Canada maintained that they served the Empire more effectively from the home front, continuing their wheat production work on farms. Believing that agriculture was “the basic industry upon which the success of all other industries primarily depends,” farmers in western Canada attempted to assert their importance to the war effort as producers rather than fighters.<sup>52</sup> The war strengthened this belief in agrarian exceptionalism, as the Canadian government pressured farmers to increase the amount of grain they produced in order to relieve tensions in Great Britain over intense food shortages. The lack of available wheat overseas was an unfortunate result of total war.<sup>53</sup>

*The Grain Growers Guide* published numerous advertisements in the war years advocating “Patriotism and Production.”<sup>54</sup> These advertisements stated that agricultural producers in Europe became “consumers, – worse still, they have become destroyers of food,” and were thus causing a production problem within Canada.<sup>55</sup> In this sense, farmers in western Canada became the “breadwinners” of Europe, saving them from certain destruction. Historian John Tosh explores the themes of British masculinity in his article “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society.” Here Tosh argues that in this period men and women were separated into spheres, with women “dedicated to domestic duties” and men becoming relegated to the

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<sup>52</sup> Saskatchewan Archives Board, A1 E.9, McNaughton Papers, “Copy of Farmer’s Platform,” November, 1916.

<sup>53</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 36.

<sup>54</sup> “Patriotism and Production,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, February 17, 1915, page 39, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017  
<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1915/02/17/39/>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

“bread-winner” role.<sup>56</sup> In the First World War, farmers “being encouraged by patriotism and a promise of high prices for their grain, responded fully to the request of the Dominion government and produced an enormous amount of grain.”<sup>57</sup> Supporting the British Empire through food production became a way for many male farmers to assert their patriotism and their support of the war effort without leaving the home front.

However important the work of farmers was, many in Canada and those stationed overseas – particularly soldiers like Sidney Brook – believed remaining behind in western Canada was a cowardly act. While some believed that continuing production on farms was the best way to demonstrate patriotism, others insisted that becoming a soldier was the highest form of patriotism. One *Grain Growers Guide* contributor wrote: “The patriotism of the soldier is the greatest of all patriotism. He sacrifices everything for the cause, expecting nothing by the honor of serving his country and seldom if ever does he get any more than he expects.”<sup>58</sup> These two primary ways of contributing to the war effort in western Canada conflicted with each other.

Tension grew increasingly between farmers and soldiers as the war dragged on. Farmers wanted to be recognized for the production work they felt the Canadian government ignored. According to one author in the *Grain Growers Guide*, farm hands should be paid at the same rate as soldiers:

Now I believe that if the government grades the pay of the soldier, why should not it grade the pay of farm help. I think from \$30 to \$35 a month would be fair. If the soldier gets \$1.10 a day for the work he is doing towards assisting the Empire, I don't see why we as farmers should have to pay our hired help any more than that . . . We farmers are

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<sup>56</sup> John Tosh, “Masculinities in an Industrializing Society: Britain, 1800-1914,” *Journal of British Studies*, 22, no. 2 (April 2005), 332-330-342.

<sup>57</sup> “Free Wheat,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, February 9, 1916. Page 16, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/02/09/16/>.

<sup>58</sup> “The Country Homemakers,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, April 26, 1916, page 10, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/04/26/10/>.

doing just as much to assist the Empire in this time of peril by producing the sinews of war as the soldiers are who are fighting our battles for us.<sup>59</sup>

This farmer believed that soldiers were indeed sacrificing themselves to save those who remained on the home front. However, he also draws parallels with his own work and its challenges. Because women's work on the farms was still portrayed as a temporary necessity rather than typical, articles such as this typically referred to farming as men's work. Men were the primary source of outdoor farm labour. To support their cause they constructed farming as patriotic, thus equating themselves to soldiers on the battlefield. This view may have been naïve, and was certainly not received well by soldiers or other parts of English-Canada. However, it was important for these farmers to have their production work acknowledged by the government. Western Canadian soldiers who voluntarily left their farms for overseas military service met this, perhaps understandably, with some indignation.

The Canadian federal government repeatedly attempted to appeal to the farmers of western Canada by granting concessions. The first was that soldiers in training would receive "harvest furloughs," so that they could return home at harvest and help their families.<sup>60</sup> It was hoped that this furlough would provide farmers with the comfort that their farms would be taken care of while they were in training. Sidney Brook tried to take advantage of this furlough, but it was repeatedly put off until it was too late, and his battalion was called up for service overseas: "I don't like to make any fuss about it now as I mean to come out in Harvest for 30 days if such passes are issued at all to 113th. But this also seems so uncertain, it makes me feel like many

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<sup>59</sup> William Miller, "Farm Help Problem," *The Grain Growers Guide*, May 3, 1916, page 14, University of Alberta: Peel's Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017  
<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/05/03/14/>.

<sup>60</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 56. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, August 24, 1916.



others here, that if we cannot have passes we'll take them."<sup>61</sup> There was general frustration within the camp at the lack of promised harvest furloughs. Although he received a pass and briefly visited his family, Sidney was not granted enough time to assist much with the harvest. It may be inferred then that the harvest furlough was not as successful in appealing to farmers as the government may have hoped.

The second concession by the Canadian government was in direct relation to conscription. Believing that they could get western Canadian votes if farmers were assured they and their sons would be exempted from compulsory military service, Borden assured farmers they would not be included in the draft.<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, after the Union government was voted in and men began applying for exemptions, the government became increasingly aware that they still had difficulty meeting the required number of recruits. As such, all exemptions were cancelled, and farmers were called up for service in 1918 along with other men across western Canada.<sup>63</sup> Many farmers and farm families were angered by this betrayal.

Farmers believed they should have been exempt from conscription because of the crucial work they did producing crops for the British Empire. They believed themselves exceptional from the rest of Canadian workers. This sense of superiority was perhaps naïve, as it minimized the contributions made by other workers across the country. Exceptionalism was a particularly unique belief among farmers, as they were largely untouched by the demands of munitions factories and other wartime industries. Since labour shortages already plagued western Canada, this problem was compounded by the government's insistence that all efforts should be made to produce more wheat for the British Empire. As a result, more farm women in western Canada

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<sup>61</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, August 2, 1916. Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-13, Brook Family Fonds, Lt. Col. A.W. Pryce-Jones, letter to Sidney Brook, September 5, 1916.

<sup>62</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 66.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

had little choice but to shift gears and work in the fields.<sup>64</sup> However, this shift was not the ideal, as most farmers at the time believed that both men and women needed to play different roles to create strong, productive farms.<sup>65</sup> Georgina Taylor asserts that agrarian feminists like Violet McNaughton believed that farming was a partnership, and men and women needed to separate their roles in order to finish all the work farms required.<sup>66</sup> In addition, as Sarah Carter has shown, this farm work was deemed to be a marker of masculinity, as work in the fields as a provider was part of building farms as “manly space[s].”<sup>67</sup> Keeping men behind to work in the fields therefore kept the ideal prairie gender order. To prevent too many women from having to work outdoors to alleviate the labour crisis, farmers sought to keep male farm hands from enlisting or being drafted. They needed their help to meet the demands the government placed on them. It was not that farmers did not praise soldiers. Rather, it was a desire to have their home front contributions recognized as equal with the sacrifice of soldiers. While soldiers were openly hostile to those who opposed conscription, farmers in western Canada may have opposed conscription for themselves, but they remained loyal to the war effort. Their crops and hard work, they believed, was equally vital to success.

Western Canadian farmers campaigned against conscription, trying to keep as many able-bodied men on the farms as possible. At first, many farmers who wrote into the *Grain Growers Guide* supported conscription of wealth and “selective” conscription of men.<sup>68</sup> The United Farmers of Alberta carried this resolution to the *Guide* in 1916, stating:

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<sup>64</sup> Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 114. See Chapter 2.

<sup>65</sup> Danysk, ““A Bachelor’s Paradise,”” 155.

<sup>66</sup> Georgina M. Taylor, ““Ground for Common Action”: Violet McNaughton’s Agrarian Feminism And the Origins of the Farm Women’s Movement in Canada,” (PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1997), 11-12.

<sup>67</sup> Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 288.

<sup>68</sup> “On the Conscription Issue,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, July 25, 1917, page 11, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017  
<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/07/25/11/>.

Resolved, that we, the Board of Directors of the United Farmers of Alberta, in executive assembled, hereby affirm our belief in the principle of the selective conscription of men to carry on the war, and the conscription of wealth for the same purpose.<sup>69</sup>

“Selective conscription” was intended to keep farmers on the land, and let those in other industries become soldiers. The conscription of wealth, farmers believed, would ensure that the sacrifice of war would be equally distributed among Canadians. Both western and Ontario farmers believed that some industrialists were profiting too much from the war, and wanted to ensure that they also sacrificed.<sup>70</sup> It is clear, as the conscription debate intensified in 1917, that farming organizations like the UFA believed that “selective” meant all eligible males except for those working in the agricultural industry. They believed that the federal government was ignoring western Canada. Such a perception introduced challenges to the relationship between Ottawa and the Prairie Provinces.<sup>71</sup>

Articles flooded the *Grain Growers Guide*, advocating that farmers performed the best service for the British Empire and the Great War effort if they remained on western farms. For example, one source wrote:

Discussion on the two great problems of labor shortage and beef shortage developed of course during the discussion and resolutions were passed which were designed to help out in the solution of these two troubles. The first dealt with experienced farm labor. It was, “That while the members of this conference are fully aware of the military necessities yet we have been assured the necessity of provisioning the allies and the allied army is the paramount obligation of Canada; that therefore, trained farmers, farmers’ sons and farm help in view of the situation are of greatest national service if allowed to remain in their present occupation.”<sup>72</sup>

Despite the fact that farmers were “of great national service,” they still had difficulty finding enough men to work the fields. Already facing a labour crisis, they were increasingly fearful of

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 121.

<sup>71</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 98.

<sup>72</sup> “The Labor Problem,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, December 5, 1917, page 42, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017  
<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/12/05/42/>.

the threat of conscription:

Preparing for 1918 Crop: The lack of labor during the last year or two has been the most serious curtailing factor, as it has been impossible to give the same thorough preparation to the land, and without that preparation crops cannot be expected in Western Canada, especially in dry seasons. With an enforcement of conscription this will become doubly serious if many men should be called from agriculture. Meantime if we are to carry on the war successfully we must have food.<sup>73</sup>

Conscription was a very real problem that the farmers thought the government had allowed them to be exempt from. When the federal government suddenly cancelled all exemptions in March of 1918, the labour question intensified. Historian J.L. Granatstein writes that, after the government lifted the exemptions, farmers across the country – from both the Prairie Provinces and Ontario – “descended on Parliament Hill,” but were not met favourably by Borden’s government.<sup>74</sup> The press also “sneered” at the farmers’ “complaints.”<sup>75</sup> While in the end only 24,132 conscripts actually arrived in France, Granatstein argues that “farmers would not forget their treatment in Ottawa or the way they had been portrayed in the press, and the political implications of conscription would have a major effect of farm politics well into the 1920s.”<sup>76</sup> As Rennie has shown in his study of the UFA, the farmers politicized their movement in the 1920s, launching what he terms “the agrarian revolt.”<sup>77</sup> Ottawa’s treatment of farmers during the conscription crisis only served to further separate farmers from urbanites, making them even more of a distinct class within Canada.

The conscription debate of 1917 and 1918 became an area through which men could discuss – often heatedly – their issues of the way to properly serve the Empire. Historian Amy Shaw argues that pacifism was largely left out of the conscription debate. Instead, “pro-

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<sup>73</sup> “Preparing for the 1918 Crop,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, August 1, 1917, page 5, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1917/08/01/5/>.

<sup>74</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 92.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 93, 98.

<sup>77</sup> Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 179.

conscriptionists talked of efficiency and equality,” while “anti-conscriptionists countered with predictions of social division and labour strife.”<sup>78</sup> While farmers insisted that they were fulfilling an important need for the war effort, others maintained they were shirking their patriotic duties by remaining on the home front. One 1916 article, titled “Men Hiding Behind Skirts,” stated

Dear Miss Beynon: – You are deserving of credit for saying a word on behalf of our boys who have not yet enlisted . . . but the young boy of eighteen or twenty has a better right to be allowed to live a little longer than the older shirker has to dodge behind the protection of his wife’s skirts . . . If we had a surplus of men in Canada conscription would be the proper thing, but as it is there will be thousands of acres of land not cropped next year, because of lack of help. I am a farmer, and right now need help badly; so do my neighbours.<sup>79</sup>

The author of this letter clearly believed that older men who were not farming should have enlisted over the conscription of farmers’ sons. Francis Marion Beynon, editor of “The Country Homemakers” pages of the *Grain Growers Guide*, was an advocate for conscription early on in the debate, perhaps because she believed women were fully capable of taking over work on the farms, as so many had already done. However, most prairie farmers believed they needed to retain young men for farm hands more than the government needed young men on the battlefield. In their minds, they were the breadwinners of the Canadian war effort.

Sidney and Isabelle exemplify both sides of the western Canadian conscription debate. Sidney was largely confused that a debate even existed in western Canada, believing wholeheartedly in the good service of the military and the masculine duty of all able men in Canada:

I have not quite understood you in some references to the state of things in Canada – surely no one has any idea of opposing Conscription? May the men of Quebec be brought to realize that we are fighting for their liberty. Before I enlisted I said that no man should fight in my place and I have taken my place in the ranks and fought for the liberty of my

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<sup>78</sup> Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience*, 26.

<sup>79</sup> J. Burns, “Men Hiding Behind Skirts” *The Grain Growers Guide*, February 2, 1916, page 10, University of Alberta: Peel’s Prairie Provinces, 2003-2009, accessed June 1, 2017 <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/GGG/1916/02/02/10/>.

home children + the Empire Let all other men do likewise.<sup>80</sup>

Quebec opposed conscription based on its people's struggle for "a distinctive language, culture, and society," which was often threatened by the Anglo-Canadian majority, in addition to their desire to keep men in production.<sup>81</sup> Sidney focused his attention on Quebec's opposition, rather than acknowledging that prairie farmers also opposed conscription. Sidney and other soldiers believed that serving overseas was directly related to their positions as fathers and husbands. In their view, it was their job to protect their wives and children, and this protectiveness extended to the threat posed by the Germans in Europe. Men who 'shirked' their soldier duty, therefore, were betraying what men were supposed to be in Canadian society.

Recently wounded by shrapnel to the arm during a battle "related to Vimy Ridge," Sidney was not discharged, but reassigned to be a "Mess Room Corporal" in late 1917.<sup>82</sup> His wounded arm, unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately, as, in a way, it kept him safe – prevented him from returning to active combat. Once Sidney's son passed away, he was eager to return home.<sup>83</sup> However, he was not given leave. He was to remain in Britain for the remainder of his service, until he was discharged in June 1918. This fueled his anger towards those who chose to stay at home in Canada rather than enlisting or allowing themselves to stand for the draft. In April 1918 he wrote an especially angry letter to Isabelle:

If not for my loving young wife and children I'd return to France until the finish – Whats [sic] the use of living if we cannot have liberty + righteousness throughout the land? And

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<sup>80</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-17, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, September 23, 1917. *Delia Craigmyle Saga* (Lethbridge, AB: Southern Printing Company, 1970), 677.

<sup>81</sup> Jeffrey Cormier and Phillipe Couton, "Civil Society, Mobilization, and Communal Violence: Quebec and Ireland, 1890-1920," *The Sociological Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 493.

<sup>82</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-17, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, November 23, 1917.

<sup>83</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-17, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, November 8, 1917.

where's the real man who will stay at home in comfort while his neighbor fights and spills blood for the stay-at-home.<sup>84</sup>

While he was likely aware of the labour shortage facing farmers, he believed it was less important than the active service. For him, farmers who remained on the home front were not “real men.” Perhaps because he already had a capable wife caring for the farm, clearly trusting her with its management, Sidney believed soldiers were more important to the war effort than were farmers. He continued his letter, saying “Down with slackers! Down with anticonscriptionists! Down with the cold-footed ones! Down with the fellows with a yellow streak all up the back!”<sup>85</sup> Despite being in Canada since his early twenties, Sidney had strong ties to the Empire. He missed his family, but it appears as though he enjoyed being a soldier more than he ever enjoyed farming.<sup>86</sup> After witnessing the carnage of the trenches, Sidney's motivations regarding the conscription debate are clear; he wanted help for himself and his comrades.

Isabelle, it appears, disagreed with Sidney. She wrote

According to the last papers Conscription has been practically introduced into Canada. What do you think of that? A disgrace to the men of Canada I think. But will no doubt be welcomed by all the poor fellows in the trenches enduring everything for these same “unwilling” ones at home. When will the end of it all ever be?<sup>87</sup>

She seemed to believe that conscription was a necessary evil, deeply influenced by her husband's plight at the front. She was not, however, as strongly tied to the Empire as Sidney, having been born in Manitoba. Isabelle had also remained behind with farmers and was involved with the farmer's movement through the UFA. In the 1917 election, she did not cast a vote for the Union

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<sup>84</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-18. Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, April 4, 1918.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-16, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, March 1, 1917.

<sup>87</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-25, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, May 24, 1917.

government, which supported conscription. Instead, she voted for the Non-Partisan League candidate, writing to Sidney that “the non-partisan H. Galbraith gets my vote.”<sup>88</sup> Daniel H. Galbraith, who lost federally in the 1917 election, would later be elected as a member of the United Farmers of Alberta government in 1921.<sup>89</sup> Isabelle’s vote demonstrates that she politically supported the farmer’s movement, rather than the war effort. Her political opinions remained independent from her husband’s, despite his anger. A few months later, Sidney patronized her for not voting in favour of conscription: “I am very sorry, my sweetheart, to remember that the only vote you had in life was not cast for Conscription! Of course its hard to understand wives and Mothers.”<sup>90</sup> In this comment, Sidney belittles his wife’s opinion, angry with her for not supporting conscription. Perhaps he felt it was a personal betrayal. It was certainly a shock, as he barely acknowledges any opposition to conscription from the prairies. But Isabelle does not seem to back down from her opinion. She demonstrated her independence through voting. It appears as though Isabelle, both a farmer and a soldier’s wife, remained conflicted over the implications of conscription – both if it was implemented, and if it was not.

Canadian men in the early twentieth century were supposed to be “protectors” and “breadwinners.”<sup>91</sup> At the outset of the First World War, a split was made as people attempted to reconcile what the appropriate way to demonstrate their masculine patriotism in service to the nation. For some, like Sidney Brook, the choice was obvious. Directly supporting the war by enlisting with the Canadian Expeditionary Force demonstrated masculine bravery. It was a way to demonstrate his courage, in addition to protecting his family’s liberty. It also gave him an

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<sup>88</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-27, Brook Family Fonds, Isabelle Brook, letter to Sidney Brook, December 16, 1917.

<sup>89</sup> “Daniel H. Galbraith,” *Legislative Assembly of Alberta*, September 14, 2017, <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/NET/index.aspx?p=memberprofile&mid=0131>.

<sup>90</sup> Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, April 4, 1918.

<sup>91</sup> O’Brien, “Manhood and Militia Myth,” 121.



opportunity to visit his family in Britain. Perhaps he also felt an obligation to the family he had left behind in England when he immigrated to Canada. Farmers, on the other hand, believed they best demonstrated their masculinity by remaining the breadwinners for not only their families, but also the British Empire as a whole. While many women tried to help alleviate the labour problem, it is clear that many men in western Canada continued to believe that this position was their assigned role in society. Farmers, despite the belief that they provided an essential service to the war effort, were now included in the conscription effort. This debate complicated the relationship between western farmers and the federal government, and would have long term political implications.<sup>92</sup> The First World War challenged how individuals viewed masculinity. Soldiers supporting conscription believed they exemplified ideal masculinity. Meanwhile, farmers believed they supported the Empire just as much as the soldiers, but in a different capacity. As Canadians debated conscription, prairie farmers increasingly distinguished themselves from other Canadians, with their view that they were a distinct group within Canadian society.

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<sup>92</sup> Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 98.

## Conclusion

Dearest, If we hadn't been disappointed several times we might call these my last days in England, but we are not sure of very much in this life and it would be most foolish for either of us to say that I am coming home, when both my feet are on the boat I'll feel pretty sure about it, and not till then.<sup>1</sup>

Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, March 11, 1918

On June 21, 1918, Sidney Brook was officially discharged from the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In their letters, the pair does not comment much on his homecoming, perhaps out of slight cynicism for the army's timetable and priorities. The Brooks feared that Sidney would not actually arrive home by the date set. However, Sidney finally made it back home by the spring of 1918. It appears as though their reunion was happy once he finally reached Alberta. The family eventually had two more children, Mabel and Roy, and Sidney continued to farm north of Craigmyle until he retired in 1939.<sup>2</sup> For all his complaints about farming in his letters and his apparent relief at being a soldier rather than a farmer, Sidney became a prominent farmer in Craigmyle. In fact, he became the first president of the local Farmers Union of Alberta chapter.<sup>3</sup> In 1957, Sidney passed away at the age of 86. Isabelle remained in Craigmyle until 1962, when she finally sold their home and moved to Calgary, likely to join her oldest son, Gordon. Isabelle passed away in 1966, at the age of 79.<sup>4</sup>

Isabelle Brook may not have viewed her actions during the First World War as patriotic, like farm women's organizations and social reformers often advertised. Instead, supporting the war from the home front was personal and necessary. There was no choice but to take over the care of the farm in her husband's absence; it was her livelihood. Her domestic war work was also

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<sup>1</sup> Glenbow Archives, Calgary, M-9076-18, Brook Family Fonds, Sidney Brook, letter to Isabelle Brook, March 11, 1918.

<sup>2</sup> *Delia Craigmyle Saga* (Lethbridge, AB: Southern Printing Company, 1970), 677.

<sup>3</sup> Glenbow Archives, M-9076-66, Brook Family Fonds, "Literary Ramblings of C.I.B.: Sidney Brook, Obituary," Scrapbook. 1934-1965.

<sup>4</sup> *Delia Craigmyle Saga*, 677.

personal. By supporting the Red Cross, helping to fundraise, knitting socks, sending parcels, and conserving food, Isabelle was directly supporting Sidney and other soldiers overseas. Her war work was personal, and there is no indication in her letters that she thought much of the political repercussions of her work. Other farm women, however, focused on the potential advancements women could make by harnessing their patriotic war work.

In 1916, women in the Prairie Provinces were granted the right to vote, beginning with Manitoba in January, Saskatchewan in March, and Alberta in April. Suffragist and social reformer Nellie McClung clearly believed that women's involvement in the war had helped them attain the vote. In her 1916 address to the UFWA soon after women received the vote she stated:

Now, we believe that women have been discovered more or less since the war began. You know we always knew ourselves that we were here; we always knew that we had hands to work and brains to think and hearts to love; we always knew that we were a national asset but there were some people that had not realized it yet, statesman particularly . . . Now, in a peculiar way women have been discovered to be a war asset. Over in England where so many women are taking the places of men, even Mr. Asquith, who cannot be said to be an enthusiast on the subject of women, admits that women are very valuable in time of war.<sup>5</sup>

Patriotic war work gave women a space to be recognized as important members of Canadian society. Women were indeed a 'war asset,' using their work in both domestic production and farm work to support the war effort. As demonstrated in this thesis, some women had to step outside of their gender roles – culturally assigned by the government, authorities within the farmer's movement, etc. – in an effort to help strengthen the farming economy. Farm women were always instrumental in building homesteads on the prairies. It was not unusual for these women to leave their domestic positions to help with field work when labour was short. But during the First World War extended absences of the men caused major labour shortages,

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<sup>5</sup> Provincial Archives of Alberta, PR2003.302/SE. Nellie McClung, "Address by Mrs. Nellie McClung," *United Farmers of Alberta: Annual Report and Year Book, 1916* (Calgary: Alberta Job Printing Department, 1917), 171.

making it more necessary for women to step into these roles full-time. This work – as well as work within the home – was specifically refashioned as patriotic. As Ruth Pierson writes in her discussion of women in the Second World War, “the call to patriotism, to sacrifice for the nation at war, to loyalty and service to the troops fighting overseas – that appeal dominated the recruitment of women workers from beginning to end.”<sup>6</sup> She states that, while the government and civic officials were aware that women were entering the work force based on economic need, they still emphasized the patriotic nature of the work.<sup>7</sup> Reframing the work as patriotic served not only to help recruit women to the work force, but also helped emphasize the social necessity but temporary nature of the work.<sup>8</sup> During the First World War, some social reformers, like Nellie McClung, harnessed these patriotic ideals to assert their political voice.

Social reformers and politicians alike praised these women for supporting the British Empire from the home front. In a report chronicling the meeting of the Alberta Women’s Institute, Irene Parlby was recorded as saying that war work included “deeds of heroism.”<sup>9</sup> “One great advantage of this war,” Parlby stated, “is going to be that women are sitting up and taking notice and thinking things out for themselves.”<sup>10</sup> Parlby believed that the war changed the social environment of the prairies, forcing women into the public sphere. With the war as rationale, women were now given permission to lend their voices to politics.

While some people believed that the war changed women’s position in society, it is more likely that gaining the vote was instead part of a more gradual trend towards suffrage.<sup>11</sup> The war also provided a rationale for the women’s vote, as women with soldiers overseas were needed to

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<sup>6</sup> Ruth Roach Pierson, *They’re Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 47.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>9</sup> “Alberta Women’s Institute: The Premier’s Welcome,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, March 8, 1916, page 29.

<sup>10</sup> “Alberta Women’s Institute: Fraternal Greetings,” *The Grain Growers Guide*, March 8, 1916, page 29.

<sup>11</sup> Joan Sangster, “Mobilizing Women for War,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 184.

swing the conscription referendum. Women had always been working within homes and on fields and farms; this work was just a part of homesteading on the Canadian prairie. But, as Bettina Bradbury argues, women's domestic labour was "less visible, [hidden] in the household."<sup>12</sup> The First World War changed this invisibility by highlighting how essential women's work was and reframing it in a patriotic light. The war was the catalyst by which women became recognized. By refashioning their work as patriotic, women were able to demonstrate their support for the Empire and assert their importance to society on the home front. However, as Carter has demonstrated, these changes were not permanent, and the struggle for women's right to homestead in the Prairie Provinces continued in the decades following the war.<sup>13</sup> Despite all that women did during the war, there was still an attempt to make their work invisible once again.

Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw have asserted in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service* that "women's experiences of this period remain largely obscure."<sup>14</sup> This thesis addresses this omission by highlighting farm women in the Prairie Provinces and their experiences of the war. Studying farm women has limitations because farm women's letters, for example, remain limited. This is, of course, why Isabelle Brook's story is so valuable to this study. While she may have been far from the average farm women – she had access to farm and domestic help, and demonstrated loyalty not only to her soldier husband, but to the farmer's movement during the conscription vote – Isabelle's story sheds light on the experiences of farm women during the war. There is also more room for investigation into the experiences of women who moved from urban

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<sup>12</sup> Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 219.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Carter, *Imperial Plots: Women, Land, and the Spadework of British Colonialism on the Canadian Prairies*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2016), 349-373.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, ed. "Introduction: Transformation in a Time of War?" in *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland During the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012), 4.

areas to assist on farms. These women have proven difficult to track, as few records followed female workers during the war. Few women had the leisure time to commit their thoughts to diaries.

During the First World War, Canadian women and men from the Prairie Provinces refashioned their assigned, gendered working roles. While this could demonstrate their support for the war effort and the British Empire, it also ensured that these temporary shifts helped recruit women and men into necessary wartime work. Women's war work is often presented as part of the suffrage history; however, examining the role of women during the First World War is important for other reasons. The enthusiasm with which many western Canadian farmers supported the war effort demonstrates the prevalence of Anglo-centric Canadian ideals in the provinces. For some, the war was personal. For others, their war work was a way to "prove" their importance to society. Women were able to demonstrate that they were the backbone of the farms while men chose to demonstrate their 'manliness' through their work. However, soldiers from western Canada returned to a country full of uncertainty and political strife. Ethnic and regional tensions and unemployment rates rose sharply after the war. Additionally, the turmoil caused by the Spanish flu compounded the post-war crisis.<sup>15</sup> The First World War and the period afterwards was a time of flux. The contributions and experiences of these men and women helped solidify the organized agricultural community within the Prairie Provinces. In particular, these farmers increasingly believed that they were a distinct class, and were essential to Canada's political fabric. Isabelle and Sidney Brook's story helps advance our understanding of this dynamic period of conflict and organization even further.

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<sup>15</sup> Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 2005), 226-227, 231-232.

## Appendix



Figure 1. City of Saskatoon Archives, Saskatoon, Acc 2014-010, Box 6, Foster Family Fonds, “Ellen with Baby Jean, Summer 1917,” Scrapbook compiled by Jean Ellen Foster.



Figure 2. “Are We Down-Hearted? No!” *The Grain Growers’ Guide*, November 21, 1917, Page 10.

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