"Divine Discontent": Women, Identity, and the Western Producer

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by
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This thesis is a study of the construction of identity of farm women on the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer from 1930 to 1939. It is an examination of how farm women drew upon and challenged traditional concepts of women's work roles on the farm to create a collective identity more practical to the reality of their everyday experiences. During the Great Depression, women's work roles took on greater importance, and farm women sought greater recognition and appreciation of the value of their labour. They turned to the "Mainly For Women" pages, which were edited by fellow farm woman Violet McNaughton, to discuss and debate their reproductive, productive, and community work. Since the material published on the pages was largely written by farm women, the pages revealed the qualities that united them as a group as well as how they perceived themselves as a collective.
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INTRODUCTION

The Great Depression, Its ‘Invisible’ Farm Women, and The Construction of Identity

"I have often thought how like a mirror is the Mail Bag, reflecting the minds and ideas of its readers," wrote "Judy O'Grady" in a letter to the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer in the spring of 1938. "O'Grady", a frequent contributor to the Mail Bag section, voiced the opinion of many farm women who read the same pages. The Western Producer, a popular farming newspaper during the Great Depression of the 1930s, devoted several pages in each issue to the concerns of farm women in western Canada. Under the direction of the women's editor, Violet McNaughton, these pages spoke volumes about how women on western farms survived the most trying decade in Canadian rural history. Through letters, articles, and columns, farm women wrote about their experiences, debated issues, and shared their common concerns. The pages consequently fostered a collective identity for farm women who were isolated by the—

1The Western Producer [WP], 21 April 1938, 11.

2The Western Producer was first published under the name the Progressive on August 27, 1923. In the words of its editor, Pat Waldron, it was intended "as a propagandist organ for the farmers' movement." (Garry Lawrence Fairbairn, From Prairie Roots: The Remarkable Story of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984), 125.) Just over a year later, when the paper sought the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool as a sponsor, the Progressive changed its name so the public would not confuse it as a publication of the Progressive political party. The first issue of the Western Producer appeared on September 18, 1924. It remained an organ for the farm movement, was non-partisan in status, supported co-operative marketing, and provided news about the Wheat Pool supplied by Wheat Pool officials. Other than this, the paper maintained editorial independence. (See Fairbairn, From Prairie Roots, 126). For further information on the history of the Western Producer see Keith Dryden, The Western Producer's First Half Century (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1973).
geography of farm life and who were affected by the devastating economic conditions of their decade. Those who sought refuge in the words of the "Mainly For Women" pages found solace and solidarity in the knowledge that they were not alone.

The identity of farm women that was shaped on the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer during the 1930s is not easily or simply defined. The pages reflect that the lives of the farm women who wrote to and read the pages were intricate and multifaceted. In spite of this complexity, the collective identity of farm women was based on a foundation of shared premises. Most obviously, the pages were written in English. Therefore, in order for farm women to participate in the creation of identity on the pages they had to be English-speaking. The pages were also directed to an audience of women who shared a common idea of what it meant to be a farm woman. The pages show that to be a farm woman one had to live on farm, work on farm, and probably be married to a farmer but this was not always the case. Widows, farmer's daughters, or other women who kept house for farmers such as sisters could also be classified as farm women. Unmarried women who operated their own farms and lesbian women cannot |

3For the purpose of this thesis, I use social scientist Vern Bullough's definition of identity: "Self-concept involves both a personal identity acquisition and a social one. Both terms need definition. A social identity in this case is defined as the individual's knowledge that he or she belongs to certain social groups and membership in such groups has emotional and value significance for him or her. Social groups can be based on sex, nationality, religion or any number of categories. On the other hand, a personal identity refers to specific attributes of the individual such as feelings of competence, bodily attributes, ways of relating to others, psychological characteristics, personal tastes, and so on. Although personal and social identity usually function side by side as the self-concept, it is also possible that the social identity can on occasion function nearly to the exclusion of personal identity, particularly among groups who experience discrimination." Vern Bullough, Science in the Bedroom: A History of Sex Research (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 223-4.
easily be found on the pages. Although the pages were written by and for farm women, their audience was a limited one and the identity created on the pages was not an identity that was applicable to all western Canadian farm women.

The farm women who wrote to and read the pages also shared common concerns about the work they performed on farms. In fact, the identity that can be extracted from the "Mainly For Women" pages during the 1930s is largely centered on women's work roles. Women's work on the farm took on a greater importance as the economic situation of many farms began to worsen. Farm women used the pages to discuss the types of work they were involved in and to valuate the work they did. Women's work is commonly divided into three areas: reproductive work, productive work, and community work.\(^4\) Reproductive work involves the unpaid work women perform in creating and maintaining their families and in caring for themselves; productive work involves work for which women receive a wage, profit, or exchange, or the raising of products for their own families; community work entails the unpaid work women perform in the

\(^4\)Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners," unpublished M.A. thesis (History), University of Saskatchewan, 1983, 8. Taylor provides an extensive footnote which traces the division of women's work to Marxist and Neo-Marxist theorists. In order to develop a conceptual framework for studying women's work, theorists such as Frederick Engels, August Bebel, Simone De Beauvoir, and Juliet Mitchell were responsible for defining productive and reproductive work. Taylor further notes that non-Marxist historians such as Veronica Strong-Boag have contributed to the framework by studying the involvement of women in unpaid work in the community. For other references of the categorization of women's work see Paula Bourne (ed.), Women's Paid and Unpaid Work (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985); Pat Armstrong and Hugh Armstrong, Theorizing Women's Work (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990).
community. The editor of the "Mainly For Women" pages similarly broke down women's work in an essay prepared for a Grain Growers' Association Convention. She wrote:

Women's work on the prairie may be divided into two classes. Productive & unproductive labor. Productive labor is that which contributes toward the maintenance of the home - butter-making, poultry-rearing, gardening and often pig raising is left mainly with her. Unproductive labor is the daily toil, the housework, baking, washing, mending, cooking all perhaps performed in one room, with unbearable heat in the summer, then perhaps wheat to guard against intruding cattle or help to give in the hayfield when labor runs short, and added to this the care of one or more babies. Prairie men may work hard, there may be chores early and late, but never later than the woman, besides there is eight hours rest per day on many of the implements. I would rather disk than bake any day.

Although McNaughton did not specifically identify community work as a form of women's work on the prairie, she did write of the importance of women to their communities in that same essay.

While this categorization of women's work is frequently used in the examination of women and work, it must be emphasized that such a distinct division between these three categories of work is for the purpose of analysis only. The reproductive, productive and community work of farm women often overlaps more so than it does for middle class urban women. The economic hardships of the Depression made women's services essential in all three realms of women's work, and consequently, the traditional female

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5This use of the term "productive" to describe work that is done for wage or exchange is in no way meant to imply that reproductive or community work is unproductive.

6Saskatchewan Archives Board [SAB], McNaughton Papers, A1, E72, "The Prairie Woman," undated. [Emphasis in original].
occupation of the domestic realm became even more blurred by the demands of daily life on western farms. Thus, the Depression era is an excellent time period in which to study identity as the arduous economic circumstances accentuated the diverse nature of women's roles and identities.

This thesis explores how farm women created an identity for themselves which reflected the realities of their everyday lives through the "Mainly For Women" pages. The pages were unique in their construction in that they were "conducted" by a farm woman for farm women, and the material on the pages was largely written by farm women. The first chapter will examine the distinctive qualities of the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer as a source for identity. It will also explore the role of McNaughton as editor of the pages and the part she played in the construction of that identity. The next three chapters will then investigate the kinds of work farm women participated in during the Depression, why it was important to them, and how that work was discussed on the pages. The pages served as a vital mode of communication for farm women during the 1930s through which they both reinforced and challenged traditional gender identities for women on farms.

The invisibility of women, and farm women in particular, in Depression histories has been the impetus for this study. Simply put, the history on farm women is scarce. Traditionally, the experiences of women have been left out of the portrait of the Depression that historians have attempted to recreate. In spite of the tremendous impact

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7 The header of each edition of the "Mainly For Women" pages stated that the pages were "conducted by Mrs. Violet McNaughton."
the Depression had on all aspects of women's lives, early academic portraits of the decade were limited by historians' narrow perspectives of what constituted historical significance. First, many of the works are national in their outlook; few focus only on the effect of the Depression in the rural setting of western Canada. More significantly, the majority of these histories have centered on the economic and political consequences of the stock market crash, falling wheat prices, and drought of the 1930s. Not surprisingly, this portion of the story has been dominated by male characters. Any Depression history will tell you that politicians, farmers, and businessmen all suffered the dire consequences of the decade's financial constraints; their active role in the history of the period has been well recorded. In fact, most histories of the Canadian and American West suffer from similar one-dimensional interpretations. In her introduction to *The Women's West*, historian Susan Armitage recounts how traditional interpretations of western settlement are dominated by anecdotes of male homesteaders, with little or no account of the role

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9John Herd Thompson, "Writing About Agriculture," in *Writing About Canada: A Handbook for Modern Canadian History*, ed. John Schultz (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall Canada, Inc., 1990), 107. Thompson states that there have been few agricultural histories written about rural women. He states that "the most fruitful line of enquiry would seem to be an examination of women's economic role in the production process on the farm."
women played in the acquisition and farming of western land.\textsuperscript{10} Armitage refers to the American West as "Hisland", an accurate identification of the West if one is to consider the mythical and legendary quality of the initial histories of the area.\textsuperscript{11}

Gail Cuthbert Brandt and Naomi Black argue a similar point in their study of farm women and feminism after the Second World War. Brandt and Black contend that conventional histories portray farm women as little more than helpmates "of the brawny tillers of the soil who conquered the forests and settled the fertile plains."\textsuperscript{12} To remedy

\textsuperscript{10}Berton's \textit{The Great Depression} has an interesting quotation at the beginning of the book from the March 18, 1933 edition of the Winnipeg Free Press. The author hypothesizes how future historians would look at the thirties: "The historian of the future, when he writes about Canada and the Great Depression, will comment upon the remarkable ineptitude of Canadian public men when faced with this emergency. He will write of the obstinate refusal of governments to face realities; of their pitiful and tragic tactics of 'passing the buck' to one another; and of their childish expectation that providence, or some power external to themselves, would come to their rescue and save them from the consequences of their refusal to look into the future, foresee events that loomed black in the sky, plain to be seen, and take such steps as were possible to mitigate the fury of the storm. The severity of the condemnation will be measured by the extent of the power which was not used and the responsibility that was denied." This author is correct. In fact, this statement characterizes many of the histories that have been written about the Depression. It also correctly identifies the majority of historical scholars as male. As the gender of the historians has changed so too have the interpretations of the 1930s. Page not numbered.


this situation, women's historians have attempted to document and analyze women's roles and thereby construct "a realistic western history." While for the most part these histories have been successful in producing women as active agents in western history, they have been plagued by problems similar to the ones they originally set out to overcome.

The history that does exist on farm women in Canada during the Depression era is narrow in its analysis. Little of it is directly related to the everyday lives of farm women, and even less zeroes in directly on the decade of the 1930s in the prairie provinces. Much of the history focuses instead on the interwar years and is centered on the feminism of the suffrage movement. Veronica Strong-Boag's article on urban and rural prairie women and feminism during the Depression, for example, explores the shift

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13 Armitage, "Through Women's Eyes," 14. The inclusion of women as active agents within the historical canon has not been an easy task. Even after twenty years of scholarship Gail Cuthbert Brandt echoes the same concerns in a 1991 article entitled "Postmodern Patchwork: Some Recent Trends in the Writing of Women's History in Canada." She comments on the still segregated nature of women's history and notes the challenges historians of both sexes are facing in integrating the recent scholarship concerning the history of women into a more satisfying and complete account of the Canadian past. Gail Cuthbert Brandt, "Postmodern Patchwork: Some Recent Trends in the Writing of Women's History in Canada," Canadian Historical Review 4 (1991): 470.

in feminist thought following the suffrage movement from equal rights to maternal
feminism. Strong-Boag is critical of other historians who claim that the suffrage
movement was a failure and uses the feminism of farm women to prove her point. She
takes to task historians Carol Bacchi, Catherine Cleverdon, and John Thompson for
suggesting that feminism took a back seat to economics during the Depression. She also
criticizes these historians for dichotomizing women's lives into public and private sectors
and for ignoring the feminism of the woman's sphere, a feminism steeped in maternity
and domesticity.

More recent historical scholarship has attempted to address the concerns Strong-

15 Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness of Hauling a Double Load:
Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie," Journal of Canadian Studies

16 Brandt and Black, "Il en faut un peu" Farm Women and Feminism in Québec and
France Since 1945," 17. They point out that maternal feminism has been identified by
historians as "limiting women's potential by defining them in relation to a domestic role
thought of as necessarily subservient." For examples see Carol Bacchi, Liberation
Deferred? The Ideas of English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918 (Toronto: University of
Toronto Press, 1976), p. viii. Bacchi states that "the limitations on this type of feminism
[maternal feminism] are fairly obvious. In fact it could be maintained that arguments of
this nature confirmed and strengthened the view that woman's domestic virtues were her
chief contribution to the world, and this in turn hindered the growth in opportunities for
women in other spheres in the post-suffrage era."; See also John Thompson and Allen
Seager, Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart), 69-
75; Catherine Lyle Cleverdon, The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada (Toronto:
University of Toronto Press, 1950); Linda Kealey, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim:
Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s to 1920 (Toronto: The National Women's Press,
1979); Strong-Boag also identifies her early work as being one of the guilty ones. See
Veronica Strong-Boag, "Canada's Women Doctors: Feminism Constrained," in A Not
Unreasonable Claim, Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s, ed. L. Kealey
(Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979). See also Veronica Strong-Boag, The Parliament
of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929 (Ottawa: National
Museums of Canada, 1976).
Boag has voiced. Some studies have emphasized a continuity between first wave feminism and that of the interwar period, while others, like Strong-Boag, have validated the maternal feminism of farm women by emphasizing the economic restrictions placed on women during the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{17} The division into and examination of feminism in separate and, in many ways, opposing categories, however, is problematic. For example, while Strong-Boag’s analysis of the significance of economic restraints on the farm woman of the Depression is critical to understanding the feminism of the period, her study is also guilty of the dichotomizing that she criticizes in earlier works. Not only does Strong-Boag chastise historians for the "superimposition of three dichotomies: political/apolitical, public/private, male/female" and the consequent dismissal of the feminism of the 1920s and 1930s, but she strengthens the element of a false dichotomy herself by reinforcing the division between maternal and equal rights feminism.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{18}Carol Bacchi, "Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage," in A Not Unreasonable Claim, Linda Kealey ed. (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979). Bacchi’s analysis of the failure of the suffrage movement in this article "Divided Allegiances: The Response of Farm and Labour Women to Suffrage" is based on a similar dichotomization. She contends that farm and labour groups were unable to see eye to eye with middle class, Protestant suffragists because of differing economic interests. Consequently, the groups could not unite and the suffrage movement failed in its attempts
To separate the domestic from the public realm for farm women, especially during difficult economic times, is nearly impossible. Farm life for women often dictates a fine line between public and private because their labour is utilized where it is necessary, regardless of tradition. Productive and reproductive work is often difficult to separate; the lines between domestic and market operations are seldom distinct.\textsuperscript{19} The work women perform to sustain the family is necessary in the maintenance of the farm itself. During the Depression, these roles became even more blurred. The responsibilities of farm women diversified and expanded to fulfil an urgent need for survival. Economic conditions, just as much as tradition, dictated the roles women played and often they were just as much in public as in private spheres.

Over the last ten years, historians have begun to recognize the impossibility of generalizing the human experience and have begun to re-examine the theoretical and methodological foundations of their discipline. Feminists have been inspired by post-structuralism to examine the women's historical canon and to look at the role women have played in the creation of that history.\textsuperscript{20} Women's historians like Joan Scott, Denise Riley, to improve society for women. Bacchi's analysis places class and gender at opposite ends of the spectrum as if one is unable to be both of the farming class and a woman at the same time - your loyalties must belong to one but not the other. This dichotomization parallels Strong-Boag's maternal versus equal rights division.

\textsuperscript{19}Brandt and Black, "Il en faut un peu," 78.

\textsuperscript{20}Chad Gaffield's work in Canadian history is a prime example of this new approach outside of the field of women's history. The introduction to his recent collection of readings on Post-Confederation Canada is based on the concept of construction within history. Gaffield is concerned not only with how individuals and groups make history but with how historians in turn reconstruct that history. Chad Gaffield, \textit{Constructing Modern Canada: Readings in Post-Confederation History} (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman Ltd, 1994), xv-xvi.
and Catherine Hall see post-structuralist theory as a way to deal with the methodological and theoretical problems that plague women's history. What these historians propose is the application of post-structuralist thought to the historical process in order to contextualize gender. Through this theoretical approach, these historians have "found a new way of analyzing constructions of meaning and relationships of power that called unitary, universal categories into question and historicized concepts otherwise treated as natural (such as man/woman) or absolute (such as equality or justice)." This theoretical approach is based on an analysis of language as a meaning-constituting system, and it attempts to extract from language an understanding of power relationships as complex and multifaceted concepts. Joan Scott's analysis of the relationship between post-structuralism and history is worth quoting in its entirety:

Post-structuralists...offer a distinctive way of studying [meaning] in their emphasis on its variability, its volatility, and the political nature of its construction. If the meanings of concepts are taken to be unstable, open to contest and redefinition, then they require vigilant repetition, reassertion, and implementation by those who have endorsed one or another definition. Instead of attributing a transparent and shared meaning to cultural concepts, post-structuralists insist that meanings are not fixed in a culture's lexicon but are rather dynamic, always potentially in flux. Their study therefore calls for attention to the conflictual processes that establish meanings, to the ways in which such concepts as gender acquire the appearance of fixity, to the challenges posed for normative social definitions, and to the ways these challenges are met -- in other words, to the play of force involved in any society's construction and implementation of meanings: to politics.


The discipline of history then becomes more than just a record of the past; it is central to the production of knowledge that shapes our sense of identity. Post-structuralism has given historians the methodological and theoretical tools to study identity more thoroughly.

In the *Gender of Breadwinners*, Joy Parr argues that social theory has been notorious for streamlining identity into polarized and antagonistic elements of difference. The "galloping pairs" of class/gender, male/female, market/non-market, and public/private have ironically settled the dust on the "contested terrain" of identity by assuming "that everything falls into one category or another, but cannot belong to more than one category at the same time." Parr claims that the "honorable and honored practice" of giving priority to one of these facets of being over the others is a common but impractical habit within historical cultural studies. In fact, she contends that it "betrays the wholeness of consciousness and experience. Life as we live it is not subdivided...

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23 Ibid., 2, 10.


25This term is used by Jeffery Taylor in "Theoretical and Practical Ideologies in the Making of Early Twentieth-Century Manitoba Farm Men," *Prairie Forum* 17 (Spring 1992): 15. "To begin with, following Gramsci, ideology should be seen as a contested terrain, demanding constant organization and intervention by both dominant and subordinate social groups. But, taking account of Althusser, the epistemological distance between subject and object must be recognized. There is no direct relation between social being and social identity; rather, as discourse theory suggests, identity is shaped through intermediate languages and discourses. It is here that ideologies are formed."

sequentially. We exist simultaneously, rather than sequentially...”

Kobena Mercer agrees; it is no longer possible to use simple binary oppositions in theorizing about identity. The historian's ability to theorize

questions of identity and difference is limited by the all-too-familiar "race, class, gender" mantra, which is really only a weak version of liberal multiculturalism....[T]he challenge is to go beyond the atomistic and essentialist logic of 'identity politics' in which differences are dealt with only one-at-a-time and which therefore ignores the conflicts and contradictions that arise in the relations within and between the various movements, agents, and actors in contemporary forms of democratic antagonism.28

Thus, post-structuralist feminist historians want to broaden the experience of historical agents to reflect the multiplicity of their individual and collective experiences. Historians can do that by avoiding the simplistic categorization of humankind into polarized groups. Historians must also continue to recognize the importance of history in the creation of identity. In fact, the discipline itself is "a participant in the production of knowledge" that shapes the meaning of historical concepts such as class and gender.29

While it is important to record history holistically, historians must also be conscious of its influence in the defining of who we are and how we perceive ourselves. As Scott has observed, "[f]eminist history then becomes not just an attempt to correct or supplement an incomplete record of the past but a way of critically understanding how history

27Ibid., 8.


29Scott, Gender and the Politics of History, 2.
operates as a site of the production of gender knowledge."\textsuperscript{30}

Parr's study of two working class towns in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Ontario provides an excellent example of the kind of history that the merger between post-structural theory and earlier historical writing can produce. Parr illustrates how through time and space concepts of manliness and womanliness were constructed and reconstructed. She examines how gender was influenced by class, region, and ethnicity and argues that these concepts fluctuated in terms of prominence within an individual's existence: "The character and precedence of class and gender identities are a matter of history, not universals but specificities, which by their particularities present pressing questions for research."\textsuperscript{31} Denise Riley's examination of the category of women and its relationship to the feminist movement also emphasizes the changing nature of "women" as a category over time and underlines the undeniable influence history has had on the construction of identity:

"women" is historically, discursively constructed, and always relatively to other categories which themselves change; 'women' is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned, so that the apparent continuity of the subject of 'women' isn't to be relied on; 'women' is both synchronically and diachronically erratic as a collectivity, while for

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 10. See also Catherine Hall's understanding of feminist history. She says: "Feminist history, in my understanding of it, has moved a long way. Its object of study is no longer only women, if indeed it ever was, but its forms of analysis are distinctively feminist. It takes gender as one, but not the only, crucial axis of power. Its characteristics are as much to do with its form as its content - its divisions and differences (which have scarcely been represented here but which have provided a vital impetus), its engagement with politics, its sense of a constituency beyond the academic, its self-reflectivity, its commitment." Catherine Hall, \textit{White, Male and Middle Class} (New York: Routledge, 1992), 34.

\textsuperscript{31}Parr, \textit{The Gender of Breadwinners}, 10-11.
the individual, 'being a woman' is also inconstant, and can't provide an ontological foundation.\textsuperscript{32}

Catherine Hall also believes gender is historically constructed:

Masculinities and feminities are thus historically specific and we can trace the changes over time in the definitions which have been in play and in power. What it means to be a man or a woman is not given at birth, but constructed in culture and constructed through difference.\textsuperscript{33}

These three historians contend that concrete conclusions about gender and class concepts are impossible to reach. Trying to pin down a universal meaning for these abstractions is like trying to nail jelly to a wall. Historians need to acknowledge that social identities, both individual and collective, are relative to time and region, among other factors. Such recognition will bring history one step closer to capturing the intricacies and realities of its subjects' lives.

Since post-structuralism and the study of identity are relatively new to history, the historiography on farm women and identity also comprises quite a short list.\textsuperscript{34} Pamela Tyler's "The Ideal Rural Southern Woman as Seen By Progressive Farmer in the 1930s"

\textsuperscript{32}Riley, "Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988), 2.

\textsuperscript{33}Hall, White, Male and Middle Class, 25.

\textsuperscript{34}For studies on women and identity see Hall, White, Male and Middleclass: Explorations in Feminism and History; Scott, Gender and the Politics of History; Riley, "Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History; Parr, The Gender of Breadwinners; Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990); Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
is an analysis of the historical construction of American rural women's identity.\textsuperscript{35} Tyler, however, focused largely on the prescriptive literature of the period.\textsuperscript{36} The identity Tyler constructed consequently does not reflect the lives all Southern farm women may have actually lived; rather, images of women emerge that have a very limited corresponding reality. Thus, the identity is one-dimensional and somewhat meaningless. While Tyler's article brings the issue of identity to the attention of the reader, it fails to offer a thorough examination of the correlation between a prescriptively constructed identity and its intended audience and it avoids the multiplicity and complexity of identity.

In a more recent publication, Cecilia Danysk looks at the concept of bachelorhood in the prairie west from the early days of settlement to the 1930s. While her essay focuses only on masculine identities, it is important because it illustrates how identities are constructed and reconstructed based on traditional and more practical aspects of everyday life. Her paper analyzes how a bachelor identity was constructed by both traditional concepts of bachelorhood and new qualities of bachelorhood that were fostered "as men sought validation and self-worth in the work they undertook to build a new


\textsuperscript{36}Patricia Branca warns against prescriptive literature as an historical source. She asks historians to consider of whom their sources are representative and cautions them to acknowledge a possible disparity between the intentions of the authors and the interests of the readers. Patricia Branca, \textit{Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home} (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 17.
west." Danysk documents that as western Canadian society moved from "pioneer self-sufficiency to a mature agrarian economy" so too did the identity of the male settler. Young, unmarried men venturing West to settle the untamed land of the prairie were considered hardworking males of substantial physical prowess who were self-reliant, adventurous, thrifty, and acceptably uncivilized. As the pioneer era came to a close, so too did this particular conjunction of ideal in an appropriate bachelor. At this point, the social position of bachelors began to be more narrowly defined by their economic status. Hired farm hands without land and families were perceived as being unambitious, and the status of bachelorhood declined. Their identities departed from the dominant ideology of a mature agricultural economy, and they came under attack. Hired hands consequently began to reconstruct their identities based on the more practical experiences of their everyday lives. By drawing on past notions of bachelorhood, such as independence, and by concentrating on the immediate issues that influenced their daily lives, such as suitable wages and the need for suitable employment, hired men reshaped the concept of "bachelorhood" to fit the realities of their everyday lives.


38Ibid., 164-165.

39Ibid., 166.

40Ibid., 168.

41Ibid., 175.

42Ibid., 174.
Jeffery Taylor's *Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Agricultural Knowledge and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890-1925* also acknowledges the interplay of traditional and non-traditional experiences in the construction of identity. Like Danysk's work, Taylor's study focuses for the most part on men, and, like Tyler's work, it is largely concerned with prescriptive literature. Taylor's analysis is also limited by his focus on class and gender. Unlike Hall, Parr, and Scott, Taylor overlooks the essentials elements of race and ethnicity and other categories of identity. In spite of these weaknesses, Taylor's book is theoretically significant in that it examines how dominant and subordinate ideologies are constructed and how identities are produced by these ideologies. He analyzes the curriculum of the Manitoba Agricultural College to reveal a dominant ideology behind the construction of 'farmer' in Manitoba from 1890 to 1925. He also identifies corresponding subordinate ideologies that emerge from those in the agricultural community who resisted such beliefs. For Taylor, "ideology refers to the production and transformation of meaning, which occurs in the realm of ideas" and he differentiates between two specific types of ideology. The dominant ideology is the mainstream, conservative ideas of the dominant element in society. This ideology often manifests itself in a theoretical form "where objects of knowledge are conceptually defined" but rarely have a practical application. Taylor argues that the portion of society which

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44 Ibid
produces this dominant ideology is often an intellectual one. 45

Ideology, according to Taylor, must "be seen as a contested social terrain." 46 A dominant ideology is often challenged by those who do not think it applicable to their lifestyles, and an ideology of resistance, or a subordinate ideology, is created in response to the irrelevant nature of aspects of the dominant beliefs. Subordinate ideologies are often practical ones in that they usually "[operate] in the realm of people's everyday experiences, addressing them as individuals and as members of social collectivities." 47 Subordinate individuals, ones who "are addressed as exploited and as potential agents of resistance and social change", act as the catalyst for ideologies of resistance. 48 Through both theoretical and practical ideologies and through institutional structures, such as newspapers, these individuals create a critical ideology, one that challenges dominant beliefs. A critical ideology produces "a complex rhetoric binding together, in a systematic way, shared premises, analytical routines, strategic options and programmatic demands." 49 Taylor contends that this critical ideology is "able to mobilize a constituency by constructing a personal and collective identity in opposition to dominant ideologies." 50 If, however, this identity does not have meaning, "it will lose its ability to create identities

45Ibid., 86.
46Ibid., 16.
47Ibid.
48Ibid., 17.
49Ibid., 18.
50Ibid.
and mobilize people." Taylor categorizes female agrarianism in Manitoba from 1890 to 1925 as one of the critical ideologies that emerged in reaction to the dominant ideology of male agrarian and middle-class feminist agitation. He contends that the farm press played a crucial part in the creation of this ideology as it "provided a forum for readers to discuss and assess their own experiences as farm wives and daughters."  

This thesis explores the ideology and identity of a subordinate group, farm women in the Canadian west, through one of the most widely distributed farm newspapers of the Depression era. Careful reading of the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer for the period 1930 to 1939 reveals how a critical ideology was created and maintained through a media source. Each issue of the Producer from the beginning of the decade to the end is rich in insights about the work women performed on the farm. Letters, articles, and columns written by farm women documented their common concerns about the jobs they did as well as their points of dissension. While their labour on the farm and in the farming community was for the most part customary in nature, the discussion of that work on the "Mainly For Women" pages defied that traditional quality. Farm women sought recognition and appreciation for the value of their work through the pages, and they used them as a forum in which they tried to expand the boundaries of what it meant to be a "farm woman" during the Great Depression.

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 109.
53 In preparation for this thesis, I conscientiously read each issue of the "Mainly For Women" pages from 1930 to 1939 and prepared an extensive database that classifies each letter, article, and column on the pages based on the division of women's work into reproductive, productive, and community work.
This thesis, like the "Mainly For Women" pages themselves, is also intended to give voice to a silent survivor of the Depression -- the farm woman. Because the pages are so plentiful in information and because they resonate the voices of farm women, they are a rare find for feminist scholars. They offer insight into the experiences of historical agents who are often overlooked because of a lack of adequate sources. Even more remarkably, they document the thoughts and ideas of a group of women united by their gender and their farming experiences over a ten-year period and track how these women challenged and drew upon traditional gender roles. They provide unprecedented insight into the lives of farm women in western Canada during the Great Depression and have the ability to give farm women their rightful place in Canadian history.
CHAPTER ONE

"One Needs to Be a Diplomat": The Pages, Their Editor, and Their Readers

Throughout the 1930s, the header for the "Mainly For Women" pages in the Western Producer referred to the pages as being "conducted by Mrs. Violet McNaughton." This choice of words aptly described McNaughton's role as editor of the women's section of the paper because it implied that she was a guiding force, rather than the only force, behind the creation and publication of the pages. Understanding McNaughton's function in the production of the newspaper is vital to comprehending the identity that the "Mainly For Women" pages reflected. If McNaughton were too domineering in her editorial practice, then her identity, and not that of her readers, would surface. As a farm woman herself, however, McNaughton was extremely aware of the importance of the pages to the women who read them. She consistently maintained throughout the decade that the pages carried their voices. While one cannot deny that she was heavily involved in the production of the pages, McNaughton's work as editor was a labour of love and she was truly dedicated to making the "Mainly For Women" pages a reflection of the farm women who read them.

The unique features of the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Producer make it a prime candidate for the study of identity. First, the majority of the articles were written by farm women themselves, thus making the extraction of identity less complicated than if the articles had been written by urban journalists. Secondly, the structure of the pages and many of the columns that became prominent in the 1930s were often suggested by the readers. McNaughton was respectful of her readership's needs in a newspaper and
often consulted with subscribers when considering additions or deletions of material. For example, the "ABC of Economics" column was started in 1931 after a suggestion from a farm woman who lamented the fact that she knew little of economics and found that she had even less time to spend browsing through books to learn the subject on her own. In the spring of 1932, McNaughton sent out a questionnaire to readers asking how the pages could be improved. The same year, Zoa Haight's small column on gardening was given an entire page because of readership demand. While McNaughton had the final say in the selection of material printed on the pages, she was cautious in those choices, often keeping in mind that she wanted the "Mainly for Women" pages to belong to the farm women.

The uniqueness of its editor also makes the "Mainly For Women" pages a gem amongst newspaper sources for the study of identity. McNaughton's role as women's editor for a rural paper was enhanced by her personal experience; she was, after all, a farm woman herself. In 1909 McNaughton began homesteading near Harris, Saskatchewan with her husband, John, and became an active participant in local, national, and international farm organizations. Between 1913 and 1914 she served as the catalyst for the establishment of the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (WS-SGGA). In her term as president of that organization from 1914 to 1918, McNaughton became even more aware of the concerns of farm women. While her career as a journalist played a significant role in her life during the 1930s, McNaughton

still worked on the farm along side her husband. During that time, the McNaughtons, like many other farm families in their district, struggled to keep their land. The Producer recognized the value these life experiences brought to McNaughton's editorial capabilities. In the fall of 1931 the paper ran a list of "Reasons Why Every Farmer Should Be a Subscriber to The Western Producer." Reason eleven read: "Because no farm newspaper in Canada has so much claim to the esteem of farm women. The editor of the women's department is a past president of the Saskatchewan farm women's organization and is internationally known for her practical contributions to the service of rural women." Because she endured the same trials and tribulations that her readers experienced, she understood and appreciated not only the importance of the pages to the farming community but the fact that the pages really belonged to the farm women who read them. "...[T]his is our paper," she wrote in a 1932 editorial, "backed only by our own interest, not those of high finance..."

Despite these unique characteristics, the pages were still the final product of the editor. Therefore, it is necessary to examine more closely the "Mainly For Women" pages themselves and McNaughton's part in those pages in order to understand thoroughly her involvement in the construction of identity. The pages began with a "Call to Women Readers" in April of 1925. When McNaughton became editor of the women's pages at that time, she requested her female readers in the farming community to change the

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3WP, 1 October 1931, 5.

4The Western Producer [WP], 24 March 1932, 10.
Western Producer from "a farmer's paper" to a "farm" one.\(^5\) McNaughton asked her reading public "to cooperate with me in using this page for discussion of efforts that we can make to attack our share of economic problems and important social ones, too." Her ultimate goal was to "unite and organize" the "will-power" of the 15,000 women readers of the paper in order to "attack" their most "pressing problems." McNaughton attempted to do this two ways. First, she intended to give women readers a voice and she demonstrated this not only within her call to women readers but also in her strong encouragement for women to take an active role in society. During the 1930s, McNaughton encouraged women to vote in the 1930 federal election; she asked women to sign anti-war petitions for a Disarmament Conference in February of 1932; she persuaded them to write to the International Co-operative Women's Guild to share their stories about leisure time activities in the summer of 1935; and, in 1937, she urged her readers to participate in a State Medical Questionnaire.

In addition to the voice that the "Mainly for Women" pages offered farm women, they also played a vital role in educating them to use that voice effectively. In her call to women readers, McNaughton used the phrase "to live a life" and often repeated the same words throughout her time as editor. The phrase is taken from English economist Josiah Stamp's comments on education. Stamp believed that "education has a threefold purpose. It should fit to get a living, to live a life, to mould a world."\(^6\) McNaughton's

\(^5\)WP, 9 April 1925, 11.

\(^6\)Josiah Stamp, "Graduation in Social Judgement," an inaugural lecture at the University College of Wales, Sir Josiah Stamp, We Live and Learn - Addresses on Education (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1938), 3. This information comes from
adoption of Stamp's words summarized her own philosophy behind the creation and construction of the "Mainly For Women" pages. Not only did she believe it was important for the Western Producer to help farm women improve their standard of living, she also hoped that it would improve the quality of their lives. McNaughton believed that the material printed on the pages would aid women in forming a sense of social identity, a "circle" of friends as she referred to it, that would ultimately have influence beyond their own farming communities.

The pages were quite uniform in their structure and format throughout the decade. They comprised about fifteen to twenty percent, or four to six pages, of each issue of the paper. McNaughton had a short column in every issue, and it was always positioned in the upper left hand corner of the first page. This column offered McNaughton the opportunity to voice her editorial opinions on a weekly basis. She usually offered thought-provoking words on other articles in the pages and often invited readers to comment on her thoughts. The Mail Bag, another constant and prominent feature of the "Mainly For Women" pages, featured letters to the editor about various subjects and was often the site for social commentary and heated debate. It was a significant feature of the pages as it served as a way for readers to express their thoughts and concerns about issues.

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Georgina Taylor's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. Taylor is responsible for making this connection between Stamp and McNaughton. Taylor notes that Stamp used the statement "to live a life" in several addresses contained in the book noted. Also see Shelia Steer's discussion of McNaughton's "to live a life" philosophy. Shelia Steer, "Violet McNaughton and the Struggle for the Cooperative Society" in Educating For a Brighter New Day: Women's Organizations as Learning Sites, ed. Michael R. Welton (School of Education, Dalhousie University: Halifax, 1992), 148-149.

7See Appendix A for a sample layout of pages.
relevant to their lives. Many times the Mail Bag dominated the pages. In 1937, for example, when western Canadians were facing the hardest year of the Depression, the Mail Bag generally overshadowed all other material on the women's pages.

Regular and prominent columns could also be found on the women's pages. Zoa Haight's gardening column was a reader favourite on the "Mainly For Women" pages. While the column began just as that, a column in the 1920s, response from readership pushed McNaughton to turn an entire page over to Haight and in 1932 the "How Does Your Garden Grow?" page was born. The United Farm Women of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) and the Homemakers' Clubs also had columns throughout the decade to update readers on the happenings of these rural women's organizations. These columns were written by women who participated in the organizations. Finally, the last page of the "Mainly For Women" section usually contained syndicated articles on health, beauty, and lifestyle. Columns by Dr. Royal S. Copeland, a former commissioner of health for New York City, and Winnifred Black, a syndicated columnist, were constant features in the issues of the 1930s.

While the structure of the pages was similar, their content and mood certainly were not. Guided by readership demand, McNaughton was responsible for placing articles and columns on the pages that served a variety of interests and concerns. Her distinctive personality and experience can also be found sprinkled through her editorials, columns and notes. The pages themselves, however, do not reveal the extent of McNaughton's role as editor in the creation of identity on the pages. Rather, it is her personal papers that provide a far more detailed account of her involvement with the
This correspondence with readers and contributors shows how she constructed the pages, why she chose the material she did, and how she interacted with her audience. It is details of these activities that best uncover the role McNaughton played in piecing together the "Mainly For Women" pages and that best resolve whether she constructed the identity that the pages reflect or whether she merely served as a vehicle for the expression of that identity.

McNaughton generally searched for material that her readers would first and foremost be interested in. She attempted to appeal to as wide an audience as possible and was careful not to narrowly characterize the farm women who read the "Mainly For Women" pages. Thus, she included material that related to many aspects of women's lives, including reproductive, productive, and community work, and she encouraged her readers to form and voice opinions of their own based on their experiences. In spite of this somewhat all encompassing approach to the women who contributed to and read the pages, McNaughton was sensitive to the overworked, under-resourced farm woman who eagerly combed the pages for household hints and domestic tips. She noted most women were captivated by articles about the home. In a 1932 letter, McNaughton told S.E. Selby that when she offered two educated city women a copy of the Producer, they skipped the information on public affairs to read the syndicated pages and cake recipes instead. McNaughton noted that these were not isolated instances. "All the time I am coming across instances like that," she wrote, "and I think you will agree that if you bring out the

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8Saskatchewan Archives Board [SAB], McNaughton Papers, A1, D55, McNaughton to Pepper, December 18, 1939. McNaughton's policy was to respond to all who took the time to write to her.
majority of the women in your district you will find that you can't sustain interest in politics or questions involving individual study continuously. The work must be more nearly related to every day life..."9 Readers agreed with McNaughton's observations. Anna Martinson wrote to McNaughton that "to my mind it is wise to keep the Page helpful to our daily toil rather than political."10 In fact, articles about reproductive work comprised a large portion of the pages during the 1930s.

Not all were interested strictly in household hints. "Judy O'Grady", a pseudonym for Dorise Nielsen, was a prolific political contributor to the pages. "O'Grady's" contributions to the pages were more often publicly oriented than privately or domestically oriented. After submitting a wonderful piece on how many 1930s women were still confined by "the bustle and boned stays of Victorianism", "O'Grady" was asked to write something more relevant to the readers of the pages. McNaughton asked:

I wonder would you care to try to reach some of the very domestic women by writing on some topic of purely home interest and perhaps getting in a little wider appeal on the matters so near your heart. The "corset" letter did that to a great extent but was not tied down quite so closely to the kitchen stove of today. There is a certain class of reader who only reads the purely homemaking stuff and we need their interest in other things, don't you think? This is merely a suggestion and please ignore it if it doesn't appeal for after all we each have the privilege to express ourselves "according to the order of our being."11

"O'Grady" responded to McNaughton's request. "As for your suggestion about cook stoves & domestic things," she wrote, "It does seem that perhaps such letters would reach

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9Ibid., A1, E89, McNaughton to Mrs. S.E. Selby, October 1, 1932.
10Ibid., A1, D49, Martinson to McNaughton, May 7, 1936.
11Ibid., A1, D53, McNaughton to Nielsen, November 12, 1938.
more people...however...I'm such an undomesticated person, that I would only display my ignorance were I to write letters of that kind. All I do not know about cook stoves would fill volumes. I had better admit it."\(^{12}\) In spite of McNaughton's request, "O'Grady" continued to write on non-domestic issues, and McNaughton continued to publish them.

This exchange between McNaughton and "O'Grady" underlines the editor's attempt to accommodate an assortment of readers and contributors and also emphasizes the variety in the interests of farm women who turned to the pages. McNaughton was aware that some of her readers were just as interested in domestic information as others were in political information. While she may have preferred to publish more information on reproductive work, she did not solely concentrate her pages on household hints for, as "O'Grady's" letter showed, some farm women were also interested in politics. Rather, McNaughton accepted an array of contributions in order to appeal to the multiple interests of her readers and presented these contributions in such a way that they were not directed to only one aspect of her audience. For example, in 1930, McNaughton approached Laura Jamieson for some information on the peace movement. She wrote:

"...I am taking the liberty of sending you an S.O.S. call to ask if you should have any items by you which you could furnish me with in the way of poems, human interest stories, little simple summaries of world conditions at this time or anything which you personally think would make an appeal to those who are not so keenly interested in the work for peace. I feel I am in danger of running material which might interest peace workers but that would only be a case of preaching to the converted.\(^{13}\)"

Since her readers were various, so were the stories and the ways in which they were

\(^{12}\)Ibid., A1, D53, Nielsen to McNaughton, November 23, 1938.

\(^{13}\)Ibid., A1, D34, McNaughton to Jamieson, October 9, 1930. [Emphasis in original]
presented. In this way, the pages were reflective of the mixed audience that read them.

The letters that McNaughton received for publication on the pages had to withstand the crucial test of her editing standards. In a few instances, letters were printed more or less as they were submitted. Almost all, however, experienced some kind of revision. For example, an excerpt from a December 14, 1937 letter to McNaughton from a Claudia Langerok, also known as a "Southerner", shows the ways in which McNaughton changed correspondence when she published it in the pages. A portion of the original of the published letter read:

I wonder sometimes if very many women are in the same position that I am in. Today is Dec. 14. I went to church November 7 and since [sic] then I have seen not one woman and and [sic] only one man besides Oscar. Before that it was 3 months when I saw only one woman. I seldom get anything to read, but even lots of reading cannot compensate for lack of woman companionship. Oscar does not understand. He is always going around to different neighbors on business but I am alone week after week, month after month, with nobody to talk too [sic] except Oscar and children. Is it any wonder I often feel as if I am going crazy? I hope to go to the Christmas tree but then it is unlikely I'll see another soul until spring, unless a very mild day should come when we are going to town for our groceries. Sometimes it seems as tho [sic] I can't possibly go on. I am very high tempered and have short patience and having no interests outside our tar-paper shack does not improve my disposition very much.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, A1, D37, Langerok to McNaughton, December 14, 1937.}

The portion of the published version read:

I wonder sometimes if very many women are in the same position that I am in. I went to church on Nov. 7 and since then I have not seen one woman and only one man besides my husband. Before that it was three months during which I saw only one woman. I seldom get anything to read but even lots of reading cannot compensate for the lack of woman-companionship. My husband naturally gets out more as he has to go to the different neighbors on business, but I am alone week after week,
month after month with no one to talk to except the family. Sometimes I feel as if I am going crazy. I am very highly strung and have little patience, and having no interests outside our tar-paper shack does not improve my disposition very much.\(^{15}\)

These particular excerpts illustrate how McNaughton's editorial pen changed the letters that she published. She often impersonalized the letters so that the circumstances of the letters could not be used to recognize the readers who wrote using pen names. She also removed reference to the time at which the letter was written, as this had the potential to cause confusion for the readers if the letter was not published for sometime after it was originally received. For example, the original version of the letter was dated December 14, 1937. It was not published until the January 6, 1938 edition of the pages. She also took care to grammatically and stylistically prepare the letters for publication.

While these changes undeniably altered the letters themselves, they did not change the essence of the comments that were being made. The content of "Southerner's" version of the letter (the published version) contained the essence of Claudia Langerok's version (the original version), and the message of isolation and desperation was not lost in McNaughton's translation of the letter to the printed page. The changes McNaughton made were the responsible actions of an editor trying to organize and assemble the pages for a reading audience. What is significant is that the concerns of the letter's author can still be heard loud and clear even after McNaughton intervened.

Not all letters that were sent to McNaughton for the pages were published. McNaughton's policy of responding to those who took the time to write the pages left a

\(^{15}\)WP, 6 January 1938, 11.
trail of reasons why McNaughton would not publish certain material in the pages. The reasons she gave were consistent throughout the decade. First, some letters were simply too long. McNaughton refused to publish Alice Butala's July 29, 1938 letter on relief because it was eight pages long and simply unmanageable for the Mail Bag column. She also commented that the letter, a commentary on the dire drought conditions in Saskatchewan, "leaves a feeling with the reader that the author is prejudiced and that the picture is incomplete." McNaughton did offer to have the letter typed for Butala so that she could submit it somewhere else to be published.

McNaughton was also careful not to publish letters that she and others at the paper judged factually incorrect or insufficiently substantiated. Simple disparities in truths were enough for McNaughton to reject a letter or to delete a portion of a letter for publication. For example, "Jenny Pringle's" September 4, 1935 letter to McNaughton quoted selling prices of cattle. "You may wonder," wrote McNaughton, "why I did not publish all of your recent letter but I submitted your information about your cow to our Agricultural Editor and he thought the facts were not quite sufficient to explain the spread in the cost and selling price...I hope you won't mind me expressing opinions on this but if by chance we give any even slightly misleading figures it always defeats the argument."

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16SAB, McNaughton Papers, A1, D16, McNaughton to Butala, July 29, 1938.

17Ibid.

18Ibid., A1, D58, McNaughton to Sanders, September 13, 1935; SAB McNaughton Papers. Also see SAB, McNaughton Papers, A1, D22, McNaughton to East, November 3, 1937. McNaughton wrote to East that: "I was going to publish your letter of August 13th and noticed your statement re Canada coming near to civil war in 1917 owing to her entering the Great War. I am afraid lady that I could not publish that letter without more definite quotation from the Grain Growers Guide. I am thinking you must be referring
McNaughton's rejection of Annie Hollis' March 8, 1939 letter to the editor was also based on the unreliability of "facts." Hollis read with "mixed feelings" a letter published earlier in the pages about the ritual service of purification for women after they had given birth. She responded hostilely to the letter claiming that such a practice was "degrading to all women, to parenthood, whether of father or mother, and to the Church; not to mention Common Sense." McNaughton, however, did not publish Hollis's letter. Her response to Hollis explained her reasoning: "The reason was that I read the service over most carefully and could not find anything that bore out your statement. Probably some ministers have put that interpretation on the service, but as it is not actually in the prayer book, I thought it scarcely fair to use it.

A portion of Sophia Dixon's United Farm Women's column was rejected because of factual and philosophical concerns McNaughton had with Dixon's comments. McNaughton disagreed with Dixon's choice of words in her explanation of the state of Quebec's attitude at the time although I never heard that it was likely to lead to such a crisis." Also see SAB, McNaughton Papers, A1, D22, McNaughton to East, July 5, 1938. "Many thanks for the point you make in your letter to the Mail Bag particularly regarding rehabilitation. I was very sorry I could not publish your letter in full but I added a little from your own letter to make up. You see if you had made the direct statement that there are at least 16 paid relief agents and over 100 road supervisors that statement would likely have been challenged and I was not sure that you had the exact proof even though you felt sure of what you were saying. So, I do hope you will understand why I left it out."

19Ibid., A1, D27, McNaughton to Hollis, March 8, 1939.

20WP, 2 March 1939, 11.

21SAB, McNaughton Papers, A1, D27, Hollis to McNaughton, March 8, 1939.

22Ibid., A1, D27, McNaughton to Hollis, June 19, 1939
the farm women's movement in Canada. Dixon chose a quotation from J.S. Woodsworth to illustrate her argument that middle and upper class women were out of touch with the needs of their working class counterparts. She contended that those who worked in back breaking conditions were the most effective in bringing about reforms to improve farm women's lives. McNaughton believed this philosophy to be dated and subsequently omitted part of Woodsworth's quotation from Dixon's column. She wrote:

I am afraid you are going to wonder what has happened to part of your contribution for next week's U.F.W.C. column but I took the liberty of delting [sic] the first two paragraphs.... I really hate to touch your stuff but just today it is so important that Mr. Woodsworth should not be misunderstood that I considered him first. I think he would agree that the 'society' woman has changed quite a bit from the description he gives. For one thing too many of them are feeling the same economic pinch as the woman with the wash-tub. Any way I hope you will appreciate my motive even though you disagree with my action.23

These types of editorial decision reflect McNaughton's desire to create a page that spoke accurately of the women it was meant to represent. Her reasons for rejecting pieces based on inaccuracy were valid. What is most interesting about McNaughton's decisions in

23Ibid., A1, D19, McNaughton to Dixon, October 13th, 1933. The part of the submitted quotation that was not published was attached to the back of the letter that McNaughton wrote to Dixon. The quotation was from "Inspiration in a Wash-tub" in On the Waterfront by J.S. Woodsworth (1918) and what was not published read: "Of course, in practice, hand work and brain work are never absolutely divorced. The hand worker thinks -- if not about his work then about other things. The one who probably suffers most is the so-called brain worker, who, so far as his work is concerned, is often out of touch with the actual conditions of the lives that he is supposed to direct. Is it any wonder that the politics he initiates often fail to work? Yet it is to him -- the professional leader -- that we generally look for inspirations.

Let us look at these two women. There is the one -- a busy mother bending over a wash tub. Here is the other -- a "society" woman, childless, but a member of half a dozen clubs and "patriotic" organizations. To which of them should...

The published version of Dixon's submission can be found at WP, 19 October 1933, 11.
most of these cases is that she still printed the portions of the letters that she did not question. She still allowed the contributors the chance to speak through the pages.

Letters were also rejected for other reasons. McNaughton refused to publish letters that had the potential to directly offend other readers. In December 8, 1937, McNaughton explained to Zoa Haight that she could not publish the names of the countries at war that Haight listed in a paragraph on pacifism:

as we have such a large number of German subscribers who are quite innocent of their country's sins but who come in for a lot of criticism when the question of Spain arises. There is really no connection but there are people who would like to see things made difficult for any of our foreign groups and so capitalize [on] the occasion. I am sure you will understand and I think you will agree with me that it is equally as important to have Peace between racial groups in Canada as Peace in the countries at war in the world at large.24

Similarly, McNaughton would not tolerate specific personal criticisms of other readers. She also refused outright to publish letters that broke the bonds of secrecy regarding pen names. For example, Ida Leite of Battleford, Saskatchewan wrote a scathing letter to McNaughton in response to "Astrid's" letter that appeared on the pages in the summer of 1937. Leite did not identify "Astrid" but gave personal information and circumstances that could lead to the identification of "Astrid."25 Unable to publish the letter, McNaughton encouraged the woman to write to "Astrid" personally if she believed she knew who she was. She wrote: "If you feel positive you know who 'Astrid' is might I suggest that you write her telling her that you have guessed that she wrote the letter

24Ibid., A1, D24, McNaughton to Haight, December 8, 1937.

25Ibid., A1, D37, Miss Ida Leite to McNaughton, undated letter.
referred to and that she was incorrectly informed about the councillor setting the dogs on a half-breed. That is the only point in your letter that has anything to do with the subject brought up in 'Astrid's' letter. The other matters are purely personal." McNaughton emphasized that "there is a very strict newspaper rule that no person's real name should be given out if they write under a pen name. Therefore even if you think you know the identity of "Astrid" I could not publish a letter dealing so entirely with personal matters because it would look as though the newspaper had broken its rule." The issue, surprisingly, did not stop there. McNaughton encouraged Leite to write directly to the Mail Bag with the concerns about "half-breeds" she had with "Astrid's" letter. McNaughton advised: "...I think it is a very important question, but we must keep to issues and not bring in personalities."26

Another contributor attempted to use the Mail Bag to launch a personal attack against a well-known "Mainly For Women" contributor. I. L. Britton wrote McNaughton in March of 1939 accusing "Jenny Pringle" of living too extravagantly, of not being grateful for what she had, and of leading her Producer readers astray with her stories of hardship and trying conditions. McNaughton refused to publish such a personal attack. She wrote thanking Britton for her letter to the Mail Bag but stated that she could not publish the letter as submitted as it gave "a little wrong impression of 'Jenny Pringle'." McNaughton continued to write that she would be glad to publish any opinions Britton might have on the question of relief - which was the bone of contention she had with "Pringle" - "but tying them up with a criticism of 'Jenny Pringle' is a little too personal

26Ibid., A1, D37, McNaughton to Miss Ida Leite, August 10, 1937.
for publication." McNaughton also offered to print Britton's letter if she would give her permission to delete the personal references to "Pringle."  

Britton responded by giving specific details of "Jenny Pringle's" exploits over the years. She claimed to have known "Jenny Pringle" for twelve years and wrote that she heard "a group of 25 women laugh at the crazy letters ['Jenny Pringle'] writes and at the Producer for being taken in and publishing them."  

"Isn't it time this Jenny Pringle stuff was stopped," she asked McNaughton. "Most readers get a kick out of the Producer being dumb enough to publish it because this is 1939 with Gov't [sic] pamphlets on cheap nourishing meals and good Doctors giving good advice if we use our brains." McNaughton disagreed with Britton's portrait of "Jenny Pringle" as she had visited "Pringle" in B.C. and published her letters because "Pringle" was representative of many women readers of the Producer.

These two particular incidents of McNaughton rejecting personal criticisms illustrate her editorial philosophies when it came to the "Mainly For Women" pages. First, she did not publish personal attacks as such criticisms had the potential to divide readers and possibly to spread untruths, and this was not the purpose of the pages. Secondly, while McNaughton disagreed with the approach these writers took, she chose not to silence them completely. Rather she diplomatically gave them the option to

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27Ibid., A1, D58 (2), McNaughton to Britton, March 29, 1939.

28Ibid., A1, D58 (2) Britton to McNaughton, undated letter.

29Ibid.

30Ibid., A1, D58 (2) McNaughton to Britton, April 6, 1939.
redirect their responses to the issues at hand. In her final response to Britton on the "Jenny Pringle" issue, McNaughton reemphasized the fact that while she disagreed with Britton's interpretation of "Pringle", she would "be glad to publish [her] letters, after deleting the personal references, and hope that [she will] come again."31

These various examples of how McNaughton edited the letters reveal the depth and degree of McNaughton's involvement in the creation of identity on the pages. She was concerned with both the content and form of the letters that were sent to her and edited the material to reflect the philosophies she wanted the pages to reflect. She was concerned to publish letters that were stylistically and grammatically correct. She required that letters not be too long and that they did not prove too biased in their explanation of a situation. She strove for truth and accuracy, and attempted to maintain a general sense of unity and peace amongst her readers by refusing to publish material that she thought would directly offend any particular reader or group of readers. Most importantly, she wanted the letters to reflect as accurately as possible the intent and tone of their authors. As she wrote to Alice Butala in 1937, "I will do my best not to omit anything vital."32 But because McNaughton recognized the importance of the pages to farm women and because she was so well tuned with their needs, she strove to produce a newspaper that projected an accurate voice for farm women. Her actions were consequently unobtrusive in terms of how they affected identity.

These editorial choices were generally well accepted by those whose letters were

31Ibid.

32Ibid., A1, D16, McNaughton to Butala, December 13, 1937.
published, and this endorsement affirms that farm women accepted McNaughton's role on the pages. Most approved of the decisions she made and agreed with the rules she applied when choosing to accept a piece for publication. For example, Mrs. Ted East wrote to McNaughton "I can quite understand you not wanting to print my letter [on Canada coming near to civil war in 1917] 'as is'. I have rewritten it also sending another I have all ready [sic] written. It is hard for me to write clearly on this subject as my blood just boils when I think of what is going on." On November 9, 1937 she wrote: "I am always quite satisfied with your treatment of my letters because you read them as they would be read by others while I read them as I write them which is a different thing for it seems I cannot seem to put my ideas very clearly." Annie Hollis was also grateful for McNaughton's careful editorial qualities. When McNaughton did not publish her letter on the ritual service for the purification of women, Hollis thanked McNaughton. She wrote that she did not read the church service over herself because she did not have a prayer book.

Some readers were not so gracious with McNaughton's decisions to interfere in their attempts to communicate with the reading audience. McNaughton's rejection of Alice Butala's eight-page letter led Butala to openly criticize McNaughton for her approach to the pages. Butala argued that McNaughton would be more effective in the

33Ibid., A1, D22, East to McNaughton, undated.
34Ibid., November 9, 1937.
fight to change the conditions farm women faced if she got "to the root of the problem" rather than emphasizing that women try to operate with the little resources that were available:

... [D]o you find your readers responding with any degree of enthusiasm? No you don't. Write about our murdered babies, our dirty little shacks, our disgusting penal institutions our social get togethers where men, women & small children engage in a drunken brawl. That's the culture of our rural areas. This is the loudly blared nobility of poverty. I know you admire the Jenny Pringle type. So did I, but even she is beginning to crack. Enough sledge-hammer blows and the stoutest skull must give way.37

Despite this criticism, Butala added that McNaughton's critique of her contributions did not offend her. She thought McNaughton "conduct[ed] a very nice little page."38

In 1933 Gertrude Telford, President of the Homemakers' Clubs in Saskatchewan, suggested submitting a series of articles under the title "One Serious Thought." After reading the third and fourth of Telford's contributions, McNaughton wrote to her claiming that her articles had "branched off in a field of direct propaganda" more suitable for the Mail Bag than the Homemakers' column, to which Telford made frequent contributions. McNaughton argued that these particular submissions were "really editorial comment" and that "if we allow such comment to one person...there are many others who would feel entitled to the same freedom of expression...."39 Telford was "surprised at the tone" of

36Ibid., A1, D16, Butala to McNaughton, undated letter.

37Ibid.

38Ibid., A1, D19, Butala to McNaughton, August, 1938.

39Ibid., A1, E39, McNaughton to Telford, February 17, 1933.
McNaughton's letter for she meant the contributions to be separate from her Homemakers' involvement and added "since when has an idea that differs from the Editor's become propaganda!" She asked "for what are our newspapers [sic] if not for the candid expression of opinion....I had hoped for better things from such a people's paper as the Western Producer." Space for expression, answered McNaughton, was to be found in the Mail Bag or, if Telford wished, a separate column, for which McNaughton could not guarantee weekly space.

Perhaps the biggest critic of McNaughton's editorial style, as well as her philosophical approach to the newspaper, was Mr. L.J. Pepper. A frequent contributor to the pages, Pepper was a stubborn commentator on McNaughton's attitude toward the economic conditions farm women were facing. Pepper believed farm women needed to launch a more aggressive attack against government and other institutions in order to improve their situation rather than spending their time idly exchanging "hard time hints" on the pages of the Western Producer. He also believed that as editor of the "Mainly For Women" pages McNaughton had the opportunity to lead women in this movement toward change. In the summer of 1937 he asserted that:

In my opinion you have for 8 years been shirking your duties. At any rate you have not in my opinion been using your unique opportunity, all the special facilities at your hand in the cause of needy women of Western Canada. In that case and to the extent of your failure to use every weapon within your grasp I look upon you as my enemy, and as one who is to that extent opposing my efforts to secure a better system....And if you are not

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40 SAB, McNaughton Papers, A1, E89, Telford to McNaughton, February 27, 1933.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., A1, E89, McNaughton to Telford, March 10, 1933.
going to use your section of the Producer to the fullest of your power and to the utmost of your facilities and opportunity, not to teach submission and defeat, but to instill resistance in the minds of your women readers then in my opinion you are failing the women and double-crossing them. And that makes you my enemy and from my enemies I will accept no forgiveness...

Pepper believed McNaughton should resign her position because, he explained, her "section of the paper has been marked by signal failure." He claimed:

I believe that in the interest of Sask. society as a whole an [sic] of your fellow women in particular you should resign your position. Surely in the thousands of women living in poverty in that province one could be found to give greater punch and fighting activity to your section than you have done. I think the time is ripe. If I were living in Sask. I would use all of my influence to have you replaced. I believe you to be a detriment to the cause of the women, and these letters [on how to use Russian thistle as a vegetable] prove my contention.

Pepper blamed McNaughton's shortcomings on her editing style. He criticized her for returning letters to him because of their religious content. "You say you might have returned a letter of mine which would only have started a useless religious controversy [sic]," he wrote in August of 1937. "How do you know what controversy [sic] is going to be useless? Have we any more harmful [sic] or derogatory influence to fight than the apathy and indifference due to religion? Is there any way to abolish the slave mind which prevents organization for better things without exterminating those influences which make for slavery?" He continued to write that the columns on the page "do not

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43Ibid., A1, D55, Pepper to McNaughton, August 18, 1937.

44Ibid., A1, D55, Pepper to McNaughton, September 18, 1937.

45Ibid.

46Ibid., A1, D55, Pepper to McNaughton, August 18, 1937.
favor the discussion of subjects other than cheaper methods of living except on rare occasions." This approach, he commented, does nothing "...to arouse the women to resist the growing demoralization and gradual sinking to unspeakable depths of slavery and degredation [sic]." "Of course," he declared, "we have different ideas, and I am trying to show you that I do not approve of yours."47

McNaughton's response to Pepper's consistent criticisms throughout the decade was consistent with her philosophies regarding the pages themselves. She refused to publish Pepper's letters that contained interpretations of the Bible because if she did so for him, then she would have to do the same for everyone and the demand would simply be overwhelming.48 In spite of her refusal, she still encouraged Pepper to submit pieces about religion. "I'll still be glad to hear from you," she wrote, "on matters such as the failures and successes of applied Christianity, or even the social or anti-social (as you may see it) implications of religious belief in general."49

McNaughton also responded bluntly to Pepper's criticisms of the appearance of jokes on the "Mainly For Women" pages. He proclaimed that if McNaughton was "alive to [her] opportunities and RESPONSIBILITIES" the page would not feature jokes and "cheap recipes." Pepper asked McNaughton to set aside "the policy of the Producer" and consider "What is the need of the farm women? And how best can the Women's page

47Ibid.

48Ibid., A1, D55, McNaughton to Pepper, November 10, 1939.

49Ibid. [Emphasis in original]
McNaughton's reply to Pepper embodied a far more realistic understanding of the needs of her readers than Pepper displayed in his letters. She replied:

Mr. Pepper, I really don't think you understand conditions. When people are worn and worried they come to the place where they simply have to turn somewhere for relaxation, and if they cannot find it on the women's pages, they are likely to pass up the serious matters being discussed there. I believe that if farm women knew of anything they could do right in their own homes to protest against conditions they would do it, but most of the things suggested call for organized effort, requiring a good deal of outside work, and just now it is more difficult than ever to get out and assist in this way....We have to take people as they are, and it is very difficult for a great many to read serious material.\(^5\)

McNaughton shouldered Pepper's criticism more heavily than that of her other readers. The consistency and strength of his comments caused her grief. His relentless campaign against her began to wear away at her sense of editorial responsibility. She wrote to him in December of 1939 that she was beginning to regret adopting the policy of acknowledging letters to the Mail Bag. She noted that the editor of the Open Forum, the Mail Bag equivalent of the rest of the paper, did not do so. McNaughton felt that it was important to respond to the people who spent time and money sending letters. "But letters like yours," she remarked, "make me realize how much simpler it would be if I merely chose those suitable for publication and put the rest in the wastepaper basket. Instead of this I have tried to leave the discussion as wide open as I possibly could, and to be fair to those who particularly wished to use it for their own form of

\(^{50}\)Ibid., A1, D55, Pepper to McNaughton, March 13, 1939.

\(^{51}\)Ibid., A1, D55, McNaughton to Pepper, April 13, 1939.
propaganda...."52 Yet McNaughton still managed to keep an open mind to Pepper's situation. She ended the letter by noting that she realized he was "handicapped by living far from organized movements and activities and [was] perhaps finding it more difficult to appreciate any other side of discussion...." McNaughton none the less appreciated his contributions and commended him for "a fine piece of work in trying to help the Saskatchewan women to think," yet she also emphasized that he "certainly [did] not make co-operation easy."53

McNaughton was genuinely aware of the value of the material her contributors brought to the pages, even if they were as difficult to get along with as the gadfly Mr. Pepper. She saw the pages as an extension of the lives of those who read them and continuously encouraged all who read the pages to contribute, whether she supported their arguments or not. Some readers submitted material that she rejected, some that she edited, and some that were "an eye-opener" to herself and her readers.54 Because of the importance of these contributions to the existence of the pages, McNaughton took the time to write her contributors and readers and thank them for their articles and offer thoughts and comments on their writing. Thus, her role as editor extended far beyond that of a traditional editor. The strong interdependent nature of the relationship between the readers and the "Mainly For Women" pages combined with McNaughton's own personal experience and involvement in the farming community made McNaughton reach

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52Ibid., A1, D55, McNaughton to Pepper, December 18, 1939.

53Ibid., A1, D55, Pepper to McNaughton, February 28, 1939.

54Ibid., A1, D27, McNaughton to Hollis, May 10, 1938.
McNaughton's successor, Rose Ducie, spoke of the impact McNaughton had on her readers in a 1954 CBC Radio Broadcast:

But to get back to the people who came and wrote, there were lonely isolated folk who just wanted a friend, discouraged old people and young people who needed advice, newcomers with little English and some of Canada's own native people. The time came when I wasn't in the least surprised to find that Mrs. Mac had had a finger in the pie -- community progress competitions, old age pensions, a school for the deaf, betters [sic] libraries for the prairie -- in fact she was usually up to the elbows.

Once catch Mrs. Mac's interest and sympathies and she would go to no end of trouble in order to help. No possibility was too faint to follow up, she was not deterred by indifference. What an uncanny way she had of seizing upon a suggestion. There was the elderly lady from Alberta who wrote to the paper suggesting an old age pension petition. How Mrs. Mac watched the reaction, and shrewdly warning readers that a half-hearted effort would defeat its own end had a petition printed. Nearly 60,000 signatures went down to Ottawa. Mrs. Mac never underestimated what one determined individual could accomplish. And why should she? She had her own life on which to look back. 

It may be as one contributor pointed out that McNaughton was just "in a convenient position to have our troubles unloaded on to you." McNaughton, however, seized that opportunity to do as much as she could, both through the paper and through her role as editor of the "Mainly For Women" pages. For example, in 1937 she wrote to J.T. Hull, an editor at the *Western Producer* offices in Winnipeg asking for particulars on behalf of a Manitoba reader on how to adopt a baby girl. Throughout the decade she renewed subscriptions for readers who could not afford the *Producer* with money provided

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55Ibid., A1, C1, Transcript of CBC Radio Broadcast, 1954.

56Ibid., A1, D37, Langerok to McNaughton, undated letter.

57Ibid., A1, E88, McNaughton to Hull, May 15, 1937.
by Mrs. J. Bell of Ontario. McNaughton also helped Bell send parcels to needy contributors who wrote to the pages for McNaughton's help.58

In some instances her commitment to her readers was more far reaching than a subscription or some simple advice. For example, McNaughton's correspondence with M. Bendall of Cochin, Saskatchewan began after Bendall wrote the pages describing the dire circumstances she faced as a single parent unable to receive relief. Bendall, whose farmer husband had had two illegitimate children with the hired girl, had left her husband, was ineligible for relief, and was not capable of working to support her three children.59 McNaughton took on an active role in trying to change legislation so that women would be entitled to some resources if they left their husbands. She consulted a "lawyer friend" on behalf of Bendall and approached the problem as though they faced the issue together. "I think this is something we should try to agitate for and try to get an amendment to the present act covering mother's allowances," she wrote to Bendall. "So in the meantime we'll just keep on working on this question."60

McNaughton's commitment to Bendall's situation came from her belief that in writing the letters Bendall was "doing a great deal to help others besides [herself]."61

58Ibid., A1, D49, McNaughton to Martinson, April 22, 1936; Ibid., A1, D49, McNaughton to Martinson, July 2, 1937; Ibid., A1, D7, McNaughton to Bell, December 29, 1939; Ibid., A1, D7, McNaughton to Bell, December 8, 1933; Ibid., A1, D7, McNaughton to Bell, January 10, 1934.

59Ibid., A1, D8, McNaughton to Toevs, October 27, 1938.

60Ibid., A1, D8, McNaughton to Bendall, August 25, 1938.

61Ibid., A1, D8, McNaughton to Bendall, July 15, 1938.
There are "many other women who I am sure need similar help" she told Bendall.\textsuperscript{62} Bendall was equally grateful to McNaughton for her interest. In an August 8, 1938 letter she wrote: "It is very good of you to take so much interest in my case, and I am sure I am only too glad to give any information I can."\textsuperscript{63}

McNaughton and "Jenny Pringle", a pseudonym for Velma Sanders, also developed an enduring relationship through their correspondence. "Pringle" wrote to the pages regularly and was famous among her fellow readers.\textsuperscript{64} A large number of her letters published on the pages simply tell of "Pringle's" life. They documented her move from Saskatchewan to Innisfail, Alberta in the early 1930s and then on to British Columbia later in the decade. This relocation was a direct result of the conditions on the prairies. But regardless of location, "Pringle" was an avid reader of the pages. Her 1934 Christmas money went to buy a subscription to the paper. "As we are still strangers here [in Innisfail]," she wrote to McNaughton, "I would be very lonesome without my papers and letters."\textsuperscript{65} "We do without so much now that to spare money for papers seems almost impossible, yet they are our only link with the world and keep people from sinking into a rut entirely...."\textsuperscript{66} She also used the pages as a way to communicate with friends and family she had left behind in other parts of the Canadian West calling them a "stamp

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., A1, D8, Bendall to McNaughton, August 15, 1938.

\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., Bendall to McNaughton, August 8, 1938.

\textsuperscript{64}Ibid., A1, D58, McNaughton to Sanders, December 24, 1937.

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., A1, D58, Sanders to McNaughton, undated.

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid.
saver" she utilized to keep in touch with "[a]ll the old friends in both Sask. and Alta." 67

The McNaughton-"Pringle" relationship appeared to be reciprocal. As much as "Pringle" relied on the comfort of McNaughton's letters and her page, McNaughton enjoyed receiving "Pringle's" letters. McNaughton was very apologetic to "Pringle" in a July 9, 1936 letter for not answering "Pringle's" May 20th letter. She pondered:

I wonder what you think of me not answering yours of May 20th before but between extra work and conventions correspondence has fallen terribly behind and we are not through yet. This does not mean that I don't love to have your letters for I do. I am so keenly interested in your efforts and I have a firm conviction that ultimately you are going to come out on top. You have so much initiative and are so willing to do the best that is possible at the time. 68

McNaughton also recognized the value of "Pringle's" letters to the page's readers: "Your letters always give a fellow a lift. You seem to have a knack of encouraging folks, whether we deserve it or not!" 69 In addition McNaughton saw the wider appeal of "Pringle's" experiences to her fellow readers. McNaughton related to I.L. Britton, a critic of "Pringle's", that she has been very glad to publish "Jenny Pringle's" letters because at the time they moved to Alberta, I was receiving so many worried letters from people in the drought areas, wondering whether they should stay or move on. "Jenny Pringle" represents the more restless type who moves on, and I thought that her experiences would be helpful indeed in answering letters from many who were doubtful whether to stay on the prairie or move to B.C. 70

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67 Ibid., A1, D58, Sanders to McNaughton, September 3, 1937.
68 Ibid., A1, D58, McNaughton to Sanders, July 9, 1936.
69 Ibid., A1, D58, McNaughton to Sanders, October 9, 1937.
70 Ibid., A1, D58 (2) McNaughton to Britton, April 6, 1939.
Thus, "Pringle" represented a larger reading audience that McNaughton believed would be interested in these kinds of stories.

McNaughton certainly did not get a chance to visit all of her readers, as she did with "Jenny Pringle" in British Columbia in 1938,\textsuperscript{71} yet she still attempted to familiarize herself with a large and diverse reading audience. "There are a number of contributors like Jenny Pringle," she told Butala "whom I have never met but seem to know so well that I have forgotten I haven't."\textsuperscript{72} Familiarizing herself with her audience allowed McNaughton to better serve her readers collectively. She recognized her readers as a group that shared specific characteristics and shaped her pages to reflect those qualities. First and foremost, these women were farmers. They lived on farms, some were raised on farms, they were married to farmers, and they worked on farms. This portion of the readership's identity was especially important in a decade when the farming community was so devastated by economic conditions. Secondly, McNaughton focused her pages on the work that these readers did as women on those farms. The challenge that the Depression brought to the reproductive, productive, and community work of women during the 1930s bound them together. As a farm woman herself, McNaughton recognized and solidified that bond through the pages.

Beyond the obvious elements of English-language proficiency, a shared experience of farm life, and gender found on the pages, it is impossible to identify individually the group of farm women who subscribed to and prescribed the philosophies of the "Mainly

\textsuperscript{71}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., A1, D16, McNaughton to Butala, September 10, year not specified.
For Women" pages. This effort is hampered by two problems. First, records that might indicate the ethnicity, race, and religion of the readers do not exist. This information is difficult to piece together given the widespread use of pen names. Contributors who submitted letters under a pseudonym sought privacy and were afforded the luxury of speaking their minds without fear of retribution from their neighbours. In fact, it became a strict newspaper rule that McNaughton would not identify those who chose to use a pen name. The use of pseudonyms, however, raises several issues in studying

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73The following is a list of pen names that have been matched with real authors through the McNaughton Papers housed at the Saskatchewan Archives Board.

"Honestly Poor and Fairly Proud" - Mrs. I.L. Britton, Leney, SK
"Still Wondering" - Marguerite Bendall, Cochin, SK
"Sabra", "Grannie" - Zoa Haight Keller, SK
"Jenny Pringle" - Velma Sanders, Innisfail, AB; Nelson, BC; Queen's Bay, BC
"Cheerio", "English Canuck" - Mrs. Ted East, Orkney, SK
"A Poor Loser", "Astrid", "Southerner" - Claudia Langerok, Cando, SK
"Anonymous", "A Fisherman's Daughter" - Winnifred Lumb
"Judy O'Grady" - Dorise Nielsen, Norbury, SK
"Old Timer", "Pioneer" - Anna Martinson, Elbow, SK
"Maple Leaf No. 2", "Thistle Seed" - Mrs. L.C. Shoebredge, North Portal, SK

74McNaughton changed Mrs. Ted East's pen name to "English Canuck" for her "as you would not wish to have your schedule [budget] under your own name." SAB, McNaughton Papers, A1, D22, McNaughton to East, February 1, 1938; Also see Ibid., A1, D27, Hollis to McNaughton, March 8, 1939. "I hope you won't think it cowardly if I don't sign my name or want my residence mentioned. I have good reasons. I have been waiting [sic] an opportunity to touch on this subject & now it has come. I hope you can use the letter. I don't think it too outspoken -- do you? I realise lots of 'good' religious folks might object! Why? I can't say."

75Ibid., A1, E89, McNaughton to Burgess, April 4, 1939. "I was awfully sorry that I couldn't even write and explain to the lady who sent it, so if she happens to be a friend of yours, will you explain this to her. It is a strict newspaper rule that anyone using a pen-name must give their real name and address, the latter of course being kept strictly confidential. I'm continually drawing attention to this in the pages, but still the anonymous letters come in, and cause me a good deal of worry."
identity. It can be difficult to tell the gender of a writer with a pseudonym. Some chose their own pen names; others let McNaughton assign them. Some even used the same name as other contributors using pseudonyms. Those who did not use pen names used the surname of their husbands and their own ethnicity was often lost in the traditions of patriarchy. The analysis of names can be complicated when it comes to trying to give general statements about a group's identity. In spite of the irony that exists in the search for group identity among assumed individual identities, the pen names allowed contributors to speak their true voices, ones that otherwise might not have been heard.

What you can tell from the pages is that McNaughton did her best to construct her pages so that they reflected the diversity of her readers. She included a variety of ethnic recipes. She told of various ways cultural groups celebrated Christmas. She wrote of the International Country Women of the World, a international farm women's organization. She included articles that described how other women in the world were battling the Depression. The pages certainly testified to the numerous characteristics of their readers. They also reflected, however, the commonality of its readers. McNaughton noted that "our paper is published for a very specific purpose and that is to bind the farmers of the west of all classes and creeds together in a solid group for the advancement of their

76 Ibid., A1, D49, Martinson to McNaughton, November 28, 1937. Anna Martinson made an interesting comment on the shared use of pen names. She wrote: "It interested me too, when I read a letter on the Page, so much my own that I wondered at it signed 'Old Timer' - my pen name at that. I can't find it just now but I was of the same mind you might tell her." This statement reflects a sense of collective identity amongst the readers of and contributors to the pages.
economic interests."\(^{77}\) The "Mainly For Women" pages certainly held true to that same purpose.

Without question McNaughton played a significant role in the construction of a group identity for the farm women who read the pages during the 1930s. Yet, at the same time, her rare qualities made her invisible. McNaughton was an active editor who was dedicated to her work, intimate with her readers, and sensitive to the power of her medium. These same characteristics also gave her the ability to accurately represent the collective identity of the readers of the "Mainly For Women" pages. Audience response to McNaughton's editorial influence illustrated the level of confidence the readers had in McNaughton's ability to capture their identity. While she was not without critics, McNaughton gave fair page space to those who disagreed with her, and she understood the importance of those comments. This untraditional approach to editing made McNaughton much more of a mediator than an editor. In fact, in a 1933 letter to Irene Parlby commenting on the letters she received from farm women on the inefficiency of the Relief Committee, she recognized her own role as that of a diplomat. She concluded: "One needs to be a diplomat to be fair to all sides in answering this correspondence which is my particular business."\(^{78}\) In this way, she employed sincerity and honesty in representing farm women on the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer, and in looking at those pages in more detail, one can come to a better understanding of just what it meant to be a farm woman during the Great Depression.

\(^{77}\)Ibid., A1, E89, McNaughton to Mrs. M.E. Aldous, March 2, 1936.

\(^{78}\)Ibid., A1, D54 (2) McNaughton to Parlby, December 1, 1933.
CHAPTER TWO

"I am a Worker, Not a Drone": Constructing and Reconstructing Reproductive Work Identities

In April 1926, *Maclean's* magazine carried a brief article, "Mothering the Prairies", which explored the role of Violet McNaughton in establishing organizations for women on farms in Saskatchewan. As the title of the article implied, McNaughton was seen as a mother figure: a persistent, practical woman who gave birth to the farm women's organizations of the West. Although McNaughton never had any children of her own, she was well acquainted with the cumbersome workload motherhood meant to a farm woman. In her role as women's editor, McNaughton not only came to embody the characteristics commonly associated with a nurturing mother, but she provided a much needed forum for farm women to discuss motherhood and other aspects of their reproductive work. She gently guided farm women to recognize and appreciate the value of their reproductive work as wives and mothers. But because that work changed so much during the decade, the pages also served as a medium for farm women to collectively redefine what it meant to be a wife, a mother, and a woman during the Great Depression. Thus, reproductive work received the care and concern it merited in a 1930s rural newspaper -- an act that has rarely been matched since.¹

¹History is one discipline that is slowly catching up to McNaughton's lead. The last two decades have seen a remarkable increase in the number of historical analyses of women and their work. Most notably, the role of women in the public sphere has been greatly documented. While much of this research deserves praise for bringing the work of women throughout history to the forefront, the complexity of women's work has not been fully acknowledged. The domestic work women perform has for the most part remained undiscovered. Sociologist Margrit Eichler contends that the invisibility of housework is primarily due to the unvalued nature of domestic work. Margrit Eichler,
Reproductive work can be defined as the work women perform in biologically reproducing and in maintaining their families and in caring for themselves.\(^2\) Studying the reproductive work of farm women reveals how central women's work in the home can be to the operation of a larger economic venture. Women provided, and still do provide, a valuable source of labour to the farming industry both within the home and beyond. In their study of women's roles in agriculture during the 1920s and 1930s, sociologists Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora argue that women and families absorbed the economic risk on farms by providing sources of diversification and by supplying a

"The Connection Between Paid and Unpaid Labour" in *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Paula Bourne (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985) 62-65. Eichler states that domestic work has been viewed as trivial for two reasons. First, since it is work performed by women, it has historically had little value. Second, within the patriarchal structure of the family, housework has an apparent non-economic value; it is a responsibility of a woman to care for her home and her family while her husband earns a living in the public sphere. As more women have entered the workforce, domestic tasks such as child care have gained a greater economic worth. Men and women are now paying for the amenities that once had no direct monetary value and domestic work has taken on greater importance. As scholars have more recently recognized, domestic labour is as significant to the operation of society as work outside the home. Historian Veronica Strong-Boag argues "it is largely women's toil in housework...which underpins the larger system of socio-economic relationships, whether it be as in Canada's last century and one half, commercial, industrial, or financial capitalism." Veronica Strong-Boag, "Discovering the Home: The Last 150 Years of Domestic Work in Canada," in *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Paula Bourne (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985) 35-60, 55. In order to understand the complexity of women's working experience, historians must pay greater attention not only to the toil of women in the workplace, but to the work of women in the kitchen.

\(^2\)Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners," Unpublished M.A. Thesis (History), University of Saskatchewan, 1983, 8. Taylor provides an extensive footnote which traces the division of women's work to Marxist and Neo-Marxist theorists. Also see Veronica Strong-Boag, "Discovering the Home," 39-41 for a more in depth definition of reproductive work.
"hidden but necessary work" that ultimately allowed farms to function. They also contend that women's contribution to the farming industry on the Great Plains was part of a "firm agrarian ideology that the family working in harmony as a production unit is the best possible way of life, even though that unit may be defined by the male in the household."4

Reproductive work has been central to the definition of "woman" throughout time. Their roles as mothers and as housewives have been deemed "natural, divinely inspired, and biologically determined."5 Western Canadian farm women in early twentieth-century society were certainly aware of this ideology.6 An ideal Canadian woman was to keep the home fires burning while her husband pursued an income in the public realm. Few farm women in the Canadian West, however, were "ideal" women in this sense since the division of public and private spheres was less of a reality within the farming community than in other work-related communities. This is not to say that farm women of the 1930s did not feel the restraints of an ideology of separate spheres. Reproductive work

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4Ibid., 197.


6See Jeffery Taylor's Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Agricultural Knowledge and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890-1925 (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1994), 78, 108. Taylor's work is an examination of how "ideal" farming men and women were created. According to the literature and teachings of the professionals at the Manitoba Agricultural College, the ideal farm wife was in partnership with her husband on the farm. She was portrayed as a scientifically trained professional who was the "archetypal rural domestic worker" in both the home and community.
consumed most of these farm women's time; more often than not a woman's domestic responsibilities far outweighed her other work responsibilities. Farm women were often steeped in child-bearing and child-rearing work and domestic management, and these reproductive tasks were vital to the operation and maintenance of the farm itself. Her reproductive work was difficult to separate from her productive contributions to the farm.7

In light of the diversity of their working roles, farm women redefined their reproductive roles based on the reality of their existence. Since their work environment was not as rigidly defined by the sexual division of labour as other women's, farm work provided women a foundation on which to build a culture of resistance, one that drew upon and challenged traditional hierarchies of power and redefined what it meant to be a woman.8 Through media sources such as the Western Producer, farm women managed to create more appropriate work identities, ones that reflected the roles they fulfilled in their everyday work.

Farm women used the pages of the Western Producer as a forum to discuss their diverse roles within the home, on the farm, and within the community. Reproductive work, however, was easily the most talked about subject on the pages. For many farm

7"Productive contributions" is used here to describe the work women perform on the farm for which they receive a wage, profit, or exchange, or the raising of products for their own family.

8See Taylor, Fashioning Farmers, 108-116. Taylor provides an analysis of "female agrarianism." He examines how farm women used rural newspapers to construct a subordinate ideology. Flora and Flora contend that the female culture of resistance manifests itself differently depending upon each member's position within the family and the ethnicity of the family. Flora and Flora, "Structure of Agriculture and Women's Culture in the Great Plains," 201.
woman, the roles of mother and of wife formed the core of their identity so it is to be expected that many women wrote to the paper detailing their family experiences. But reproductive work also underwent a vast amount of change during the Great Depression, and the pages allowed women to share ways to cope with the situation. The "Mainly For Women" pages were established to help women readers of the Western Producer "attack" their most "pressing problems." During the 1930s, reproductive work was certainly one of the more "pressing problems" farm women faced. Financial disaster left many women to manage household budgets on as little as ten dollars of relief money a month. In a 1930 spring editorial, McNaughton encouraged her women readers to use the pages as a forum for discussion about reproductive work: "While the world is making up its mind what to do with our wheat," she wrote, "perhaps we may, through cooperation in our pages, plan the best way to get results from our by-products [and to satisfy our home needs] with the least amount of effort."

For many farming people, the home and family became a refuge from the relentless reality of the Depression, and it was farm women who bore the responsibilities of unifying the family. A.L. Hollis reminded readers in an October 15, 1931 letter to the paper that it was a homemaker's job "to retain and develop...the intimate and individual features of family life" despite the threatening changes of industrialism. Rural families,

9The Western Producer [WP], 9 April 1925, 11.
10WP, 20 August 1931, 10.
11WP, 3 April 1930, 16.
12WP, 15 October 1931, 15.
according to one contributor, epitomized "the wholesomeness of structure and functioning." This same contributor warned that farm women must stop taking the "sanctity of the family" for granted. In 1932, "For Justice" suggested that co-operation should be the basis of maintaining the family. She argued that women often bore the burden of caring for the family and called for both men and women to recognize the family as a "mutual aid concern" in the rebuilding of society.

While many women who contributed to the on-going discussion about the sanctity of the rural family agreed with the principle that family lent an element of stability in the stresses of the Depression, many contributors were also aware of the unrecognized workload this required of farm women. For example, one of the most prominent debates that took place throughout the decade centered on the status and economic value of women's reproductive work on the farm. In a December 4, 1930 letter, A.L. Hollis, a prolific contributor to the "Mainly For Women" pages, argued that although reproductive work was "habitually classed by statisticians as 'unoccupied', anybody acquainted with the daily lives of working class mothers knows that they are in fact very fully occupied." Incensed by the non-recognition of housewives as an occupational group by Canadian census takers, Hollis maintained in a later letter that "[i]f the home is still to be regarded as the foundation social unit of our modern society, then the status of the domestic worker

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13 WP, 14 May 1931, 17.

14 WP, 27 October 1932, 10.

15 WP, 4 December 1930, 22.
must be raised, and recognized by society and the state." In 1936, she again noted that housework was excluded from the census and explained to her readers that "probably farming is the only occupation remaining where the home is still an economic unit - men, women and even children assisting by their labor in producing the farm income."

Many farm women agreed with Hollis's analysis of the state of housework on western Canadian farms. One contributor replied to Hollis's letters campaigning for the recognition of housework by stating, "I am a worker, not a drone. A Jack of all trades has nothing on the average farm woman." Another contributor took the argument one step further and demanded wages in return for housework. "Our slogan," she wrote, "should be 'No money, no marriage' for unmarried women, and 'No wages, no babies' for married women. Then we could demand what we wanted from a scared stiff government. Let us stop rocking the cradle for a change, for we can rule the world instead."

In 1937, J.H.F. from Saskatchewan contended that stopping of the cradle would have profound effects on the nation as a whole. "Take away the housewife and her economically valuable work everywhere," she claimed, "and the country would be in an uproar much worse than that caused by the combined strikes and troubles in any

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16 WP, 11 December 1930, 23.
17 WP, 3 September 1936, 10. The 1996 Census was the first time the work of housewives was recognized. Carol Lees, a Saskatchewan woman, was instrumental in the fight for this recognition through her community work in the Canadian Homemakers' Clubs.
18 WP, 1 October 1936, 11.
While the non-recognition of farm women's work was a grave injustice, farm women who performed the back-breaking labour knew the extent of their contributions. On August 4, 1932, "A Prairie Mother" poetically interpreted the role her work played in maintaining her family. She wrote: "in one of Mrs. McClung's books a housekeeping wife and mother resented the census man putting a wavy line under 'occupation' until she noticed how much like a silken thread it looked. Then she realized that she really was the silken thread that kept the whole family strung together." Few acquainted with the position of western Canadian farm women during the 1930s would argue against "A Prairie Mother's" claim. Women on farms were certainly the silken thread that wove the family together and the tremendous workload they faced warranted public recognition. The depressed economic conditions of the 1930s, however, truly intensified the exhausting conditions under which farm women worked. For most of these women, practicality in their reproductive work became a necessity and creativity became a refined skill. In January 1936, "Cheerio 14" submitted an interesting letter to the Mail Bag that revealed this dual nature of a farm woman's reproductive identity during the Depression. She mused:

I believe we mothers of the prairie are dual [sic] personalities too. It is Martha who makes the relief stretch out but it is Mary who fashions a rose out of that odd piece of tissue paper. It is Martha who cooks the beans and bread but it is Mary who thinks of that funny joke or that lovely song, while they are cooking. I sometimes think Mary is more necessary than

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20 WP, 22 July 1937, 11.

21 WP, 4 August 1932, 10.
Martha [in] these hard times for, after all, it is our sense of humor and love of beautiful things that acts as a sauce for the beans and bacon, a sauce which increases the more you use it.22

This personification of the differing work identities of farm women underlined both the direness of the economic situation faced by women trying to run households on the farm and the expectation that they must still do these tasks beautifully and in good humour, in spite of the obstacles in their path, in order to provide their family with some sense of stability and optimism.

Marriage, the union that brought many farm women to the land, was often discussed on the "Mainly for Women" pages. Some saw it as a partnership23; others likened it to slavery. In March 1933, Mrs. J. Walton of Wadena, Saskatchewan sent in an article entitled "How to Preserve a Husband." She began with a warning not to spoil a husband by "mismanagement." The author believed all husbands were "really delicious when properly treated." Advice was given in terms of choosing a husband: "Be sure you select him yourself," Walton suggested, "as tastes differ." She also advised hopeful brides "not [to] go to the market for [her husband] as the best are always brought to the door." For cooking, the author recommended "[tying the husband] in the kettle by a strong silk cord called comfort as the one called duty is apt to be weak and he is liable to fly out of the kettle and be burned and crusty on the edges since, like crabs and lobsters, you have to cook him alive." Women were also forewarned that "if [their husbands] sputter and fizzle do not be anxious; some... do this until they are quite done." The recipe concluded

22WP, 23 January 1936, 11.

23WP, 20 April 1933, 10.
with a warning: "Do not stick any sharp instruments into him to see if he is becoming tender... You cannot fail to know when he is done... If [treated well], you will find him very digestible, agreeing nicely with you and the children and he will keep as long as you want unless you become careless and set him in too cold a place."²⁴

Not all contributors found their husbands so easy to manage. In a December 14, 1933 letter, one reader stated that "women's slavery starts with marriage."²⁵ Her advice to all women entering marriage is to leave your husband before you have any children as he is not a real fifty-fifty partner. Legally he controls the property acquired after marriage that you may both have worked for -- you own nothing. Farmer's wives feel this particularly as they work so hard and go without so much....There should be a different marriage system. Because a man and woman decide to live together it should not mean that he is the head of the house, and the chancellor of the exchequer. If the wife works in the home and raises a family, she should not take the inferior position, but should be legally as able to use the income and go and come as freely as any two girls or men sharing an apartment.²⁶

"Sue Scapegrace" was similarly critical of marriage as an unequal economic partnership. In the summer of 1934 she wrote that "[i]t is rather incongruous to see a man smarting with the sense of capitalistic injustice, trying to snatch his purse from the capitalist with one hand while he holds it out of his partner's reach with the other." She continued by asking why the province of Saskatchewan had "more labour-saving devices per farmer than any other province, and less-labour-saving machinery per farm housewife than any other province."²⁷ A McNaughton editorial entitled "How to Be Happy Though Married"

²⁴WP, 9 March 1933, 10.
²⁵WP, 14 December 1933, 15.
²⁶Ibid.
²⁷WP, 16 August 1934, 8.
described the economic partnership within marriage as interpreted by H.G. Wells. Wells argued that a poor wife is a happy wife. He wrote:

The struggle to get on keeps [women] animated. Nowadays, what can a woman do with her superfluous energy if she is safe financially? In more primitive times she fulfilled her biological destiny by bearing children until she was exhausted. She bore and reared them by the dozen -- or she died early. And she had all the hard domestic chores to do. Now her life is completely changed. In our civilized state, women are relieved of excessive child-bearing. Even in the worst cases, a woman's domestic duties today are light compared to what they once were. So most married women are now left with time and energy on their hands.28

A.L. Hollis appropriately replied to Mr. Wells's assessment in the following issue. "H.G. Wells," she bluntly wrote, "evidently does not know much of conditions on the average Canadian farm."29

Although economic equilibrium in marriage was a topic often discussed on the pages, it was a state rarely reached between husband and wife. In some relationships this rift led to separation and divorce. McNaughton was aware of these realities in the lives of her readers and tried to encourage discussion on the pages about these topics. One of her editorials featured a controversial report on marriage breakup in which McNaughton reprinted Dr. Paul Popenoe's explanation of unsuccessful marriages. Popenoe, director of the Institute of Family Relations in New York, reported that "[m]arriages in which the wife is boss go on the rocks more often than those in which the male dominated."30 Divorce itself was discussed on the "Mainly For Women" pages as

28WP, 6 December 1934, 10.

29WP, 3 January 1935, 8.

30WP, 30 August 1934, 10.
a possibility for farm women trapped in dreadful marriages. Debates took place in the Mail Bag section of the pages over the circumstances in which it was proper for women to leave their husbands. One of McNaughton's editorials even provided statistical information regarding divorce. In 1939, she quoted an American study that found one in five marriages ended in divorce in the United States; this same study also claimed "men are more to blame for marriage going on the rocks than women" as they "have no conception of what marriage is like when they go into it and afterwards are not satisfied."

Another interesting column in the pages during the 1930s discussed how marriage shaped the identity of its readers and contributors. When women entered into marriage, they were expected to take the surnames of their husbands. The editor of the page was unsure of the exact form of the name to use when publishing the identity of the contributor. McNaughton's column is worth quoting in its entirety:

The next convention I attend I'm going to bring in a resolution asking Canadian married women to adopt a new form of address. The present term "Mrs." causes me lots of trouble. For instance, a member sends in an article for our columns signed Amelia Jones. That's fine; but the next week a letter comes from Amelia Jones to say that somebody has written and addressed her as Miss Amelia Jones when she is really "Mrs." so will I append the prefix next time. That's fine, too, and I am glad to comply, but soon I receive another letter from Mrs. Amelia Jones. Some of the neighbors have told her that she is posing in print as a widow because she is really Mrs. John Jones, so will I correct this mistake next time. Of course I will, and do, but the next communication is a letter to the Mail Bag, so as the name is at the end I publish the signature as (Mrs.) John Jones. But this won't do because

31See WP, 23 June 1938, 11; WP, 14 July 1938, 11.

32WP, 9 March 1939, 12.
(Mrs.) John Jones wants her own Christian name at the end of a letter. I explain that this brings up her former objections. So Amelia Jones replies that in future, whether at the head or tail of a contribution, she will remain Mrs. John Jones, whereupon I reply that to sign a letter as such is not good form. But Mrs. John has decided. She does not care for form so much as for correct identity - and that's that.

Result, in trying to oblige Mrs. John Jones I accidently let one or two letters through from "Mrs. Anne Smith," and Mrs. Smith turns out to be more sensitive about good form than identity. Also she sometimes writes as Mrs. J. and sometimes Mrs. A. Smith, and someone is sure to want to know if Mrs. A. Smith of Smithville, is also Mrs. J. Smith. Finally I get a fine contribution from J. Brown, presumably, I think, "Mrs.", until a courteous letter explains that it's from "myself" - James Brown.

Needless to say these requests for adjustment are from a number of readers, but I think you will agree that women need a form of address more suitable to modern life. The real solution, I think, is for Amelia Jones to be Amelia Jones at all times. John Jones doesn't have to tell the world he's married - that's his own personal business, so why should Amelia? What do you think? In the meantime will you kindly sign your name just as you wish it to appear in print? Thank you. 33

This editorial poses some interesting problems for a study on identity. First, it addresses the issue of matrimonial identity. It reveals a woman's relationship with a man can literally reshape not only her own identity but others' perceptions of her identity with a simple prefix and a name change. Secondly, McNaughton's editorial alludes to potential problems in identifying the individuals who contributed to the pages. If contributors are constantly changing their names, it can be difficult to trace the arguments of certain writers. Thirdly, it brings to light possible questions regarding the reliability of the identity that can be extracted from these pages. Does identity change with a name? McNaughton's request that contributors sign their names in the manner that they would like them published, however, lays any significant questioning of the reliability of identity

33WP, 30 June 1932, 10.
relating to naming on these pages to rest. McNaughton is asking her contributors to assert their own identities through their own chosen names, whether they are married or not.

For most farm women, childbirth often followed the bonds of holy matrimony and so child-bearing and child-rearing techniques were frequently discussed on the "Mainly for Women" pages. The number of children was a significant determinant in the amount of work a woman had to perform. Large families were not uncommon at this time. In fact, information regarding birth control could not legally be distributed. Talk of birth control on the pages during the 1930s was consequently rare. Instead, the discussion tip-toed around the issue of birth control by suggesting that parents should think twice about bringing another baby into the world. A.L.H. submitted an article in 1930 that contained quotations from M.D. Stocks' "The Case for Family Endowment." Stocks underlined the lack of sympathy the government had for farm women and their reproductive responsibilities:

She may be adequately equipped for the performance of her job [as a mother] - she may be, and often is, most inadequately equipped. Journalists and poets will write movingly of the sacredness of her function. Experts will instruct her in mother-craft. Militarists will conscript the produce of her labor and call hungrily for more. But the suggestion that the bearing of six children requires larger disposable resources than the bearing of one child provokes vague murmurings about individual responsibility. And the demand that the mother shall by virtue of her

34 For example, see WP, 27 August 1931, 10. Also see WP, 2 August 1934, 10. McNaughton recounted a story of a California couple who took out insurance against twins. She wondered what it could be that would stand in the way of a couple wanting twins.

35 A.L.H. is Annie Hollis.
motherhood and in proportion to the volume of her maternal exertions, exercise a direct claim to a share in the national income remains unfulfilled [sic]. 36

Most talk of children centered around child care. The acquisition of a Maternity Grant was the first responsible step a destitute woman could take to ensure the proper care of her newborn. Maternity Grants in Saskatchewan were given at the discretion of the Deputy Minister of Public Health in Regina as an economic supplement to new mothers and their infants. 37 A grant of $25 or less was given to destitute expectant mothers in "outlying districts of the province." 38 The grant was issued from 1920 until September 2, 1931, when the Provincial government ran out of funds. 39 In the absence of the grant, McNaughton first encouraged women to apply to the Lieutenant Governor's Fund for a "layette for the baby and other necessities for the confinement" instead of

36 WP, 4 December 1930, 22.
37 Saskatchewan was the only province to give out Maternity Grants. WP, 5 January 1939, 9.
38 WP, 15 October 1931, 10. A complete definition of the objective of the grant can be found in a McNaughton editorial. She wrote "The Saskatchewan Department of Public Health, states that the objective of this grant is the reduction of maternal and infant mortality by assisting in providing medical attention for those mothers living remote from a city, town or village where a physician is resident and who are financially unable to secure the necessities for the confinement or services of a physician. The grant may be paid directly to the hospital which cares for her, the physician or nurse who attends her, or to the expectant mother herself or partly to either in such manner and proportion as the Minister of Public Health may decide.
In order that the grant may be a practical measure in the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, its authorization is contingent on medical care, including [sic] pre-natal and post-natal examinations as well as the actual care at the time of the confinement..." WP, 14 November 1935, 11.
money for medical treatment. Then in 1933 she notified women that the Department of Public Health had put together a maternity package for expectant mothers. The Maternity Grant returned in 1934.

Infant and maternal mortality rates were high during the 1930s. In an address on "Maternal Mortality" delivered at the 1929 United Farm Women's University Week, Dr. Lillian A. Chase claimed that 5,990 women in Saskatchewan "lacked attention during that more prosperous period [the 1920s]." McNaughton added her own comments to these statistics by wondering "how many are likely to go without adequate care these difficult days?" McNaughton consequently made it her mission to advertise publicly the availability of the Maternity Grant through her weekly editorials. On numerous occasions, McNaughton advocated for the public awareness of this program, as exemplified by her editorials in the weeks of February 3, March 3, April 30, May 27, and August 26.

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40 WP, 4 February 1932, 10. See also WP, 29 September 1932, 10, for a letter from Mrs. H. Johnson of Phippen, Saskatchewan. Johnson submitted a letter complaining that the "Maternity Package" she received was worth only $3.42 not the $10.00 she was expecting.

41 WP, 2 March 1933, 10. In this editorial McNaughton said the package was worth $2.90, not $10.00.

42 In a 1936 editorial McNaughton advertises a pamphlet available to her readers entitled "Need Our Mothers Die?" See WP, 13 February 1936, 11.

43 WP, 30 April 1931, 19.

44 For example see WP, 3 December 1936, 11; WP, 27 May 1937, 11; WP 30 April 1931, 19; WP 23 July 1931, 10; WP, 15 October 1931, 10; WP, 2 March 1933, 10; WP, 12 December 1935, 11; WP, 3 December 1936, 11; WP, 27 May 1937, 11; WP 26 August 1937, 11; WP 5 January 1939, 9. Many readers also wrote in to the Mail Bag wanting to publicize the Maternity Grant so that women would apply for it. See WP, 4 December 1930, 20. McNaughton's concern with publicizing the grant went beyond just helping expectant mothers. She was also concerned with publicizing the general state of health care for women in rural areas. McNaughton encouraged farm women to discuss issues of midwifery and health care in rural areas in groups or just read about such material for "personal study." WP, 26 August 1937, 11.
occasions she gave women the information needed to apply for the grant. Many readers specifically wrote in requesting information on the grant itself.\(^{45}\) Not all who were deserving of the Maternity Grant and who applied for one received one though. In September of 1931, "Anxious" wrote that while the family had no cash for groceries, they were not considered destitute enough to qualify for the grant.\(^{46}\) McNaughton was all too aware of the dire poverty many women were living in and encouraged expectant mothers to apply for the grant. One particular McNaughton editorial recognized those health care workers who were donating their services. This same 1933 editorial reported that the maternal mortality rate was down to five per 1000 live births. McNaughton encouraged her readers to "continue to protest against any further curtailment of state health services. This is specially women's work, don't you think?"\(^{47}\)

Articles and letters about children also focussed on proper rearing. Nutrition, for example, was a common topic for mothers since the economic restraints of the Depression made a well-balanced meal a rarity.\(^{48}\) Seasoned child experts, such as Dr. Royal S. Copeland, doled out advice on how to produce the perfect children. Royal S. Copeland, a United States Senator from New York and a former Commissioner of Health for New York City, had a weekly syndicated column on child-rearing that was a constant

\(^{45}\)For example see WP, 23 October 1930, 10; WP, 21 May 1931, 10.

\(^{46}\)WP, 10 September 1931, 10.

\(^{47}\)WP, 7 September 1933, 8. Some of McNaughton's readers agreed that changing the medical system was a woman's responsibility. Mrs. J.R. Wilcox of Forget, Saskatchewan believed that women needed to initiate any reforms that were to be made. She also gives statistics on maternal mortality.

\(^{48}\)For example see WP, 26 February 1930, 14; WP, 2 September 1937, 9.
throughout the decade. Copeland tackled numerous issues from influenza\textsuperscript{49} to "Sweets---And the Child's Diet."\textsuperscript{50} The column usually appeared on the last page of the "Mainly for Women" page and often moved beyond child issues to deal with the health and welfare of the mother.

Appealing to higher authorities such as Copeland was certainly one way for farm women to learn about how to raise children. Many preferred the advice of their peers, however. In 1931 "Another Mother" suggested a place on the pages where mothers could exchange suggestions and experiences. Most of the advice handed out to mothers is by people who never had any children of their own, and this advice needs to be taken with a few grains of salt. It is said that more inexperienced people feel perfectly capable of training children than any other animal, and of all animals from the flea to the elephant, a child is hardest to train.\textsuperscript{51}

While no specifically designated column ever emerged, various farm women sent in random articles and letters that addressed issues about child care. For example, Edith D. Dixon submitted an article entitled "Insist on Obedience" explaining the necessities of disciplining children.\textsuperscript{52} McNaughton's column in September of 1930 examined "Why Some Children Tell Lies!"\textsuperscript{53} Articles and letters were also submitted on topics such as

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{WP}, 29 January 1931, 27.

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{WP}, 4 December 1930, 20.

\textsuperscript{51}\textit{WP}, 6 August 1931, 10.

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{WP}, 3 July 1930, 10. Also see \textit{WP}, 21 February 1935, 13; \textit{WP}, 4 April, 1935, 11; \textit{WP}, 30 May 1935, 10; \textit{WP} 27 June 1935, 11.

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{WP}, 18 September 1930, 14.
children's education and morality.\textsuperscript{54}

One of the most powerful discussions regarding women as child-bearers and child-rearers took place within the economic, social, and political context of the decade. Many farm women strongly believed in their positions as role models for their children within the family unit and felt responsible for promoting change within society at large. In 1931 G.V.F. asked what responsible woman could bring a child into such an unpromising world:

\begin{quote}
Woman, the life giver, take heed! What use your suffering, in bringing your child into the world, your loving care, in infancy, your self-denial for his education and the hopes you build for his future, if there is no future when manhood or womanhood is attained?...

Women! your place is in the home. God knows we need the little mother, but your place is also taking an interest in the affairs of your country so that your family can make a living and take their place in the world. It is your duty as a mother to see that after you have spent part of a lifetime moulding a good citizen, that this mould is not broken on the wheel of life by the bogey of unemployment, etc. \textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

In a February 11, 1937 letter to the Mail Bag, "Elizabeth Margaret" asked women to rise "[n]ot as political body, but as mothers, homemakers, crusaders, builders of Canada, and demand our Canadian heritage for ourselves and our children." She argued that farm women and their families deserved "[h]appy contented homes...a just return for the husband's and family's labor....Are you ready as a woman and a mother," she asked, "to

\textsuperscript{54} WP, 21 May 1931, 10. This McNaughton editorial quoted Sophia Dixon's suggestion to set up a parent education column on the pages. McNaughton believed this was a good idea for she believed parents were often less trained than teachers for dealing with children. See also WP, 20 April 1933, 10; WP, 30 November 1933, 10.

\textsuperscript{55} WP, 22 January 1931, 14; WP, 5 March 1931, 14.

\textsuperscript{56} WP, 3 September 1931, 15.
do more than be angry? Let our anger supported by our fortitude drive us into action." She ended her letter with the motto "the hand that rocks the cradle, rules the world," a phrase adopted by many other farm women tired of living "like the slave woman of old." Incidents of women, both urban and rural, challenging the system were published in the pages of the Producer. For example, in a February 3, 1938 editorial, McNaughton recounted how housewives in England were agitating for change. "Women of the nation [England] are making history," she reported. They are "uniting as never before in a single cause -- a great mass campaign against the rising cost of living. Their petition to be presented to the prime minister will be one of the largest and most representative on record." McNaughton recognized that her readers would most likely be interested in such a story because many of them believed farm women could help to improve their own situations. This particular story alerted farm women in western Canada to the possibilities of activism. Whether agitating for change in the state of health care in the province or lobbying for the recognition of housework as an occupation, farm women could actively pursue a better life for themselves and their children. For "out of the wash tub are coming the dreams of a new social order in which washday will not be the back-breaking, nerve-wrecking day it now it [sic]."

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57 WP, 11 February 1937, 11.
58 WP, 29 June 1939, 11.
59 WP, 3 February 1938, 11.
60 WP, 19 October 1933, 11. These words originally appeared in J.S. Woodsworth's "On the Waterfront." The quotation was submitted by Sophia Dixon.
While many contributors encouraged the "Mainly For Women" readers to "wake up to their equal responsibility as co-citizens with their men and reason for themselves and take an intelligent interest in the affairs of their government," immediate change in this respect was not a realistic goal.61 Thus, farm women turned to the pages of the Producer for advice as to how to improve their conditions at hand. The problems and solutions published on the pages were as varied as the women who wrote and read them. Most agreed, however, that the critical nature of the economic circumstances that many farming families faced brought the needs of their children to the forefront. Several contributors to the pages reminded their readers that the often overwhelming responsibility of parenting was not simply a woman's duty. In a series of articles issued by the National Kindergarten Association in the United States and published on the "Mainly For Women" pages, both mothers and fathers were reminded of their roles as parents: "Children are the gifts of God to parents, not to mothers alone. The dual relationship and the dual responsibility prove the equality of the sexes, in that each has his or her part to perform in the making of character, through inheritance, through teaching, and above all, through living."62 Some farm women agreed. In a 1932 letter, "For Justice" tied the obligations of parenthood and the overwhelming workload farm women faced to the need for change in society:

Too many men (and, of course, some women) fail to recognize that the family is, or should be, a mutual aid concern, the parents sharing equally its cares and responsibilities. In particular, the burden of worry is liable

61WP, 3 September 1931, 10.

62WP, 30 April 1931, 22.
to fall more heavily on the shoulders of the woman....Now, while this state of family affairs is bad enough at any time, in the present crisis we need to preserve a united front and to close up every gap in our ranks....And in this war we women have a double responsibility, a double opportunity. Using our own votes, the weapons of today, as wives and mothers, we can also help forge the weapons of tomorrow. We can do our part in helping to make the home the unit in the building up of the new society.63

While not a mother herself, McNaughton certainly recognized the significant burden mothers in western Canada faced. In a May 6, 1937 article, she quoted the words of Reverend Charles Francis Potter from New York who condemned Mother's Day. He referred to the show of appreciation for mothers only once a year as "a modern form of laziness. Better a regular letter every week throughout the year than a modern burst of extravagant attention to mother for one day only."64 McNaughton agreed: she believed mothers should be honored everyday.65

When not discussing the overwhelming workload motherhood brought to a farm woman, contributors frequently talked about household drudgery on the "Mainly for Women" pages. Most farm women were overrun with household chores and found little time for themselves. A March 6, 1930 column by Laura Wright surveyed Saskatchewan farm women asking for a time breakdown of their daily tasks. It was estimated that the minimum day of work for farm women was twelve hours based on a family with three adults and four children, the oldest being eight.66 One topic discussed was how

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63WP, 27 October 1932, 10.
64WP, 6 May 1937, 11.
65Ibid.
66WP, 6 March 1930, 17.
technological advances could diminish the drudgery of farm women. In the spring of 1930, McNaughton encouraged her readers to install a running water system and included blueprints to build an inexpensive device so women would not have to spend time and physical energy hauling water from a well.\(^67\) She also included articles on arranging the kitchen for efficiency\(^68\) and the benefits of being a "Systematic Housewife."\(^69\)

McNaughton made it one of her special concerns to "lighten the labor of farm women."\(^70\) In 1932, she sent a questionnaire to her readers asking for the type of information they would most like to see on the pages. The readers responded with the need for more information on labour-saving devices. "Next in order came health, household hints, water supply and cooking recipes, while away down followed sewage disposal. Little interest was indicated in reading, book reviews, and home decorating."\(^71\) While McNaughton recognized that "[t]he replies may not have been numerous enough to generally express readers' desires...they showed that many people realize that power,

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\(^{67}\)WP, 15 May 1930, 14; WP, 22 May 1930, 21; WP, 5 June 1930, 21; WP, 28 August 1930, 14; WP, 25 September 1930, 14; WP, 1 September 1938, 11. This last editorial marks the revival of the running water scheme as a lack of funds prevented many women from actually building a system. For this reason, McNaughton decided to leave the project alone from 1930 to 1938, when some farm families had more money for such luxuries.

\(^{68}\)WP, 24 April 1930, 21. This American author of this article advises her readers on the moving of food within the kitchen. She claims that for optimal efficiency within the kitchen food should only be moved from left to right.

\(^{69}\)WP, 8 May 1930, 21.

\(^{70}\)WP, 13 February 1930, 10.

\(^{71}\)WP, 5 May 1932, 10.
or at least automatic devices, should eliminate the ceaseless drudgery in housekeeping."

McNaughton also alerted her readers to the possible dangers of domestic labour. A 1934 editorial about a nineteen-year-old girl dying in a gasoline explosion while doing laundry emphasized the hazards that farm women could face in unsafe working conditions.

Later editorials encouraged farm women to swap information on safe and effective labour-saving devices and on how to take short cuts through everyday tasks. Letters to the editor included ideas on how to efficiently iron, roll cookies, clean silver, wash, and cook. "[b]ecause, after all, no matter how long the depression lasts or what happens to field and garden, the homemaker still has her job -- only more so."

Improved technology and labour-saving devices on the farm had the potential to bring an increased amount of leisure time for women. With little or no money to spend

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72Ibid.

73WP, 8 February 1934, 10.

74For example, see McNaughton's editorial on how to make an ice box without ice. WP, 28 July 1932, 10; WP, 18 November 1937, 11. Also see WP, 22 March 1934, 10 for how to make daily shortcuts.

75WP, 9 June 1932, 10.

76Ibid.

77See WP, 27 September 1934, 10 for an argument that McNaughton makes in favour of technology. She is referring to another article published on the same page, "Mankind Is Trapped" by John Steven McGroarty from the Los Angeles Sunday Magazine, in which the author argues that "mankind is moving backwards in mind and body instead of improving" because humanity is no longer using its hands. McNaughton argues that with technology people would "be able to find means of using our leisure that would give hands and legs -- and brains, too -- enough physical and mental occupation to restore this 'balance of nature' we may be needing, and in a much more expressive and enjoyable form." In a 1938 editorial, McNaughton tells her readers not to fear the "revival of handicrafts as a reactionary step" against technology. "[T]he machine has come to stay,"
on such machinery, however, leisure time was still a prized commodity. Wright's 1930 article estimated that farm women were allowed only one hour of recreation time a week.\textsuperscript{78} In 1935, the International Co-operative Women's Guild sponsored a contest on leisure activity. Farm women were invited to submit letters describing how they spent their free time or how they would like to if they could afford the luxury of leisure time. Most women responded by wishing for time to read, sew, or garden. "A Manitoba Mac" submitted an article in 1939 confessing that when she had a few spare minutes she would lie down and relax "instead of plodding away all the time."\textsuperscript{79}

Whether for education or for pleasure, reading was one leisure time activity many farm women participated in. The reading of the newspaper itself was a leisure activity for many busy farm women.\textsuperscript{80} Historian Mary Kinnear argues, however, that newspaper and magazines offered farm women much more than just entertainment. They were educational sources for everything from household hints to news of community she wrote, "and all should enjoy the benefits it can confer -- it is part of our social heritage. But the cultural value of handicrafts remains and let us do all in our power to encourage arts and handicrafts with which to enrich our daily lives." WP, 15 September 1938, 11.

\textsuperscript{78} WP, 6 March 1930, 17.

\textsuperscript{79} WP, 5 October 1939, 11.

\textsuperscript{80} Mary Kinnear, "'Do you want your daughter to marry a farmer?': Women's Work on the Farm, 1922" in Canadian Papers in Rural History Volume VI, ed. Donald Akenson (Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press, 1988), 147. Kinnear's study of a survey administered by the United Farm Women of Manitoba (UFWM) in 1922 reveals that only two percent of respondents said they "took no newspapers." Fifty-three percent replied that they took one newspaper and twenty-five percent replied that they received two newspapers.
organizations. As well, they provided "a conduit to the wider world of women who were either isolated or living in very small communities."81 Contributors to the Producer believed the knowledge gained through reading could be used to help solve their economic problems. For others it provided a means of escape -- at least momentarily. The Open Shelf Library was a relief measure that was frequently advertised on the "Mainly For Women" pages. A rural library service that began in 1917, it offered its subscribers the opportunity to read hundreds of books that were idly sitting on the shelves of the legislative library. McNaughton encouraged her readers to make use of this service during the Depression.82 In 1930, she also attempted to inspire her readers to read by beginning a column entitled "The Book Shelf." "The Book Shelf" was created as a way to organize a postal reading circle in which four or five members circulated a book and exchanged their criticisms and comments.

Gardening was another form of leisure and reproductive work that was given enormous attention on the "Mainly For Women" pages. Zoa Haight's "How Does Your Garden Grow?" page was an extremely successful feature on gardening techniques and experiences, and the page provided many valuable resources for its readers. First, gardening was a way to produce food for the family. Secondly, gardening was one of the leisure time activities that many farm women could afford to participate in because it was a form of reproductive work that yet brought many of them great joy. In a 1931 letter to Haight that was published in the column, "Thistle Seed" said that she "[found] more

81Ibid., 146.
82WP, 8 October 1931, 10.
hope in what the garden might be than anything the prairies have to offer. The garden was something that a farm woman cultivated on her own and most contributors to Haight's column exhibited a great deal of pride in their work. Finally, gardening was a way to beautify the home. Flowers and vegetation made a stark, drought-ridden prairie farm house more bearable for the farm women who had to live in them. But the discussion of gardening on the pages had an influence that extended beyond the exchange of hints over flowers and vegetables. For example, a North Saskatchewan contributor saw her garden as a way to happiness:

It is an entrancing sight filling me with gaiety when I am happy, comforting me in the grey hours, renewing my courage when things seem too hard. It fits one's every mood. The glowing colors, dancing and flashing of the morning light, give me a holiday feeling no hard day's work can daunt, and the scents that rise at dusk recall memories from the past. I can never express all a garden means to me. I have no car, no buggy even; I never get away; it is three years since I was in town; I live in a log cabine [sic] with household gods in keeping, and yet I think happiness does not escape me. I have lived in different circumstances with many social contacts, but I believe I experience deeper satisfaction now than then, and in this my flowers play a most important part.

Gardening ultimately helped women overcome an extreme sense of isolation by allowing

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83WP, 19 February 1931, 19.

84Ibid. Here "Thistle Seed" replies to an earlier column where Haight claimed that a man's place was in the vegetable garden. "Thistle Seed" responded by stating that "after all my years in the west, I really cannot name five men who are even enough interested in the garden to walk through it. That is amongst real farmers, yet when town friends come out I find quite the reverse the case."

85WP, 21 August 1930, 14.
them to converse and exchange information. Some critics attacked gardening as an inappropriate way for a woman to spend her spare time. Sceptics saw the garden as more drudgery. In response to a February 1936 radio address on the problems faced by farm women given by Zoa Haight, one farm woman wondered why Haight tried to overwork women by encouraging them to raise their own produce rather than encouraging them to buy from "market gardeners and nurseries and fruit growers going broke." Haight responded by emphasizing that gardening not only fed starving families, but turned a house into a home. "Gardening isn't slavery to most people," she wrote, "there is no need to carry it to that length."

Discussion on the pages about making the house a home extended beyond the exchange of gardening tips. During the Depression, the home served as a refuge from the severity of the economic crisis. A farm woman was to maintain a delicate balance between balancing the budget and adorning the residence. Columns, letters, and articles on the "Mainly For Women" pages addressed some of the problems farm women faced in maintaining their homes. "Agatha", who wrote to the pages in June of 1932, said she was "starved for beauty." She quoted a Colorado farmer's reply to government questions:

86 WP, 9 June 1932, 10. "Agatha" wrote that "farm women, starved for beauty" could use gardening as a way to escape isolation. "Our flower lovers," she wrote, "are doing more than they realize to satisfy the soul hunger for beauty...They have shared their seeds and many a lone spot will blossom like a rose this year because of that kindly spirit of sharing."

87 WP, 26 March 1936, 11.

88 Ibid.
"The average farm houses are prisons and women, prisoners -- trustees of course, but prisoners nevertheless, made such by conditions over which they have no control." 89

"Agatha" and her fellow readers were searching for ways to turn prisons into palaces on a limited budget. Letters and articles shared tips on how to renovate walls at little cost, 90 do spring cleaning, 91 enhance farm home floors, 92 and redecorate your home in one hour. 93 McNaughton even shared with her readers how the Japanese avoided "the dust problem" by packing away their treasures and admiring only one at a time so that they had less to clean. 94

The "Mainly For Women" pages were also filled with articles on reproductive work that addressed the care of farm women themselves. In such difficult and trying times, the emotional endurance of farm women was often tested. The state of mind of some farm women was as barren as the drought-ridden prairies. The pages addressed this constant worry that drove some women to the edge. "Cheerio 14" wrote that women must be careful not to sacrifice their own peace of mind for their family:

Are we women being 'good to ourselves.' We cannot be good to our families unless we are good to ourselves. If we worry and try to do too much (to save outside help) we will fray our nerves and spoil our health;

89WP, 9 June 1932, 10.
90WP, 24 May 1934, 10.
91WP, 14 March 1935, 11. This editorial by McNaughton encouraged her readers to share house cleaning hints.
92WP, 6 February 1936, 11.
93WP, 23 July 1936, 10.
94WP, 20 May 1937, 11.
the children then wonder why mother is so cranky. Some mothers go without food these hard times in case there is not enough to go around but believe me it does not pay. Far better for everyone to share, unless the man of the house works hard then of course he needs more. The whole family is worse off in the end if mother has stinted herself so that she has no stamina left. Let us be good to ourselves this winter....We may be hungry for bread but there is no need to go hungry for something to think about. Let us relax from the summer's rush, put worry on one side and as Mrs. McClung says in one of her articles, let's stop trying to push the street car with our feet. It won't go any faster, neither will our troubles grow any smaller for our worrying. Let each one think for himself and when election time comes, which will be soon, he and she will be ready to vote for the party they think will be best for the country.95

In a 1937 letter, "Tired of Being a Fool" scolded farm women who worried about inconsequential things such as the appearance of their homes: "Why worry about a house until you have a house worth worrying about? If it's a question of dusting or reading the worthwhile parts of The Western Producer, The Producer wins. I'd much rather my neighbor found a little dust in my house than dust and cobwebs in my brain when now, of all times, we need clear brains."96

The pages also approached the emotional health of their readers from the perspective of the woman within the farm woman. For example, McNaughton published material that contained ways for women to improve upon their physical beauty. Some syndicated information was included on the pages. For example, in a 1936 editorial entitled "Can a Girl Dress on $77.75 a Year?", McNaughton made light of the fact that "many 'business girls' in New York said this budget was impossible." She ended her

95WP, 2 November 1933, 10.
96WP, 26 August 1937, 11.
editorial by asking if the clothing budget for a family, as estimated by Christian Science Monitor, of "$214 for an average family compare[s] with the prairie farm family clothing needs."97 Other pieces were written with the limited budget of farm women in mind. Sewing patterns were offered for women to make their own clothes, recipes were given for moisturizers, and special attention was given the "harshness of prairie life on a farm woman's beauty."98 This emphasis on farm women looking good and feeling good within the "Mainly For Women" pages must be placed within the context of the editor's emphasis on the mental health of her readers. McNaughton was extremely aware of the toll the Depression was taking on the lives of many farm women and her recognition of the problem extended beyond the fact that farm women "worried." In December of 1932 she published a United Farm Women column containing statistical information on the number of female patients admitted to the Battleford Mental Hospital from April 30, 1925. One hundred and thirty-three patients were admitted from 1931 to 1932 -- a number "far greater" than at any other time.99 In a 1935 editorial McNaughton brought "Depression Shock" to the attention of her readers. "We must not wait," she wrote "until a person has gone completely over the cliff into insanity and then send him [or her] to

97WP, 26 March 1936, 11.

98A debate took place in 1936 on the pages about whether or not farm women should wear cosmetics. The debate began with a McNaughton editorial where she asked if cosmetics were necessary. WP, 2 April 1936, 11. One contributor pointed out the harshness of the prairie climate on a woman's skin and argued that cosmetics are a woman's "method of retaining her self-respect in the face of all odds." WP, 30 April 1936, 11. Another contributor submitted a letter arguing that women who wear cosmetics are living a lie. WP, 21 May 1931 11.

99WP, 29 December 1932, 15.
a mental hospital. We can all do a little preventative work by holding out the hand of friendship so that those who are staying at home brooding over their worries will feel tempted to come out and seek the fellowship of their neighbors."

The "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer offered the hand of friendship and the sense of community so many farm women needed during the 1930s. Through recipes, gardening tips, beauty hints, maternity care, marital advice and a host of other topics, contributors to the pages shared their knowledge and experience of their reproductive work. But by engaging in discussion and debate, women also sought greater recognition for that work. The Depression increased the importance of a woman's work to the maintenance of the farm, and women actively pursued due acknowledgment and appreciation for their contributions. Yet it was also important to farm women to reconstruct their work roles in the family and in the home since that work changed so much during the 1930s. The practicality of their everyday lives did not allow them to be restricted by narrowly defined ideas of women, marriage, and motherhood. Instead, farm women used the "Mainly For Women" pages to reinvent their social identity by exploring the realities of their daily work.

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100 WP, 30 May 1935, 10.

CHAPTER THREE

"Ties That Will Bind": Community Work and the Construction of Community

"Ties That Will Bind" appeared as the title of one of McNaughton's editorial columns on the "Mainly For Women" pages during the summer of 1931. In the piece, McNaughton reflected on the success of the fourth annual Farm Women's University Week held at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon that June. The common adversity of depressed economic times, she reported, briefly united farm women for a single week in the Saskatchewan city where household hints were exchanged, political debate flared, and friendships were renewed and made. For McNaughton and many farm women like her, community work and the discussion of that work on the "Mainly For Women" pages enabled farm women in western Canada to better survive both physically and emotionally the depressed conditions of the decade. At the same time, involvement in this kind of work and the use of the pages as a forum to discuss their common adversities created a common identity for women on farms that dared and defied the Depression in the Canadian West.

Community work can simply be defined as the unpaid work women perform in the community. The "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer from 1930

1The Western Producer [WP], 18 June 1931, 10.

2Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners," Unpublished M.A. Thesis (History), University of Saskatchewan, 1983, 8. Historical studies of women's involvement in unpaid community work have traditionally been focussed on the history of women's organizations. For example, see Paula Bourne, The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929 (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976). Even so, Paula Bourne notes that for the most part Canadian women who have
to 1939 showcased a variety of different types of community work. Farm women's organizations and clubs, such as the United Farm Women and the Homemakers' Clubs, were prominent community groups that appeared on the pages. Community work also involved participation in the political arena, in the peace movement, and in the farm movement. It involved relief work, educational reform, and religious work. It took the form of reading circles, gardening groups, and sewing clubs. Community work was local, national, and international.

In bringing people together, in particular women, community work served several purposes. It combatted isolation and, at the same time, was a source of leisure. It educated and entertained its participants. During the Depression, community work also became a platform from which farm women campaigned for social, political, and economic change. It offered a voice to a large number of farm women and a large portion of the farming community who were dissatisfied with the current conditions. Most importantly, community work was central to the formation of community itself. Farm women who participated in organizations and groups reinforced a common bond among themselves and solidified their identity in the process. The Western Producer served to re-affirm that common bond. It was a forum for the discussion of the impact that farm women could have on their communities and was vital in the creation of community itself, in that it brought women in the West together despite the physical

distances that separated them.

For those farm women who participated in community work, it was important for them to maintain a delicate balance between their reproductive tasks and their community involvement. A.L. Hollis noted:

One of the chief problems then facing all homemakers is, how to retain and develop, under modern conditions, the intimate and individual features of family life, and yet to train ourselves and our young people to share in the duties and privileges of the life of the community. Industrial development has altered the task of the homemaker; our ideals of family and social responsibility are being enlarged. If the home is to remain the foundation unit of society, we must develop a form of social life which shall embrace all that is best for complete living both in the home and in the community.³

Contributors to the "Mainly for Women" pages emphasized the necessity for women to participate in community work, while still addressing the needs of their families. Community work and reproductive work were not independent of each other. In fact, they were intricately linked. In many instances, the experience of a woman within the farm family served as the primary stimulus for her participation in community work. A woman's roles as wife and mother were often her greatest motivation to seek change. That activism was in turn usually directed toward improving both her life and the lives of those in her family and in the extended farming family. Mrs. H.A. sent out an alarming letter to mothers in May of 1933. "Women, Mothers, wake up, before it is too late," she cried. "We must do everything possible in our power to bring about better living conditions for all of us. It practically lies in our own hands."⁴

³WP, 15 October 1931, 15.

⁴WP, 11 May 1933, 10.
While the conditions farm women faced were a legitimate motivation for becoming active in the community during the thirties, women often did not do so. The community work they performed from 1930 to 1939 was contingent upon a variety of circumstances and time restraints. The largest work roles farm women fulfilled were those of a reproductive nature. Women on farms were first and foremost mothers and wives; only second were they individuals. Roles within the community were often sacrificed for the sake of the farm and family. As well, women lived on farms that were often miles from neighbours and from rural community centres. Without the existence of a community, the idea of community work was illogical. Economic conditions also served as an impediment to the involvement of women in the community. Rarely could farm women afford the costs of participating in activities.

These obstacles had an adverse effect on the participation of farm women in community work, and the combination of never-ending drudgery, geographical seclusion, and dire economic times often led to extreme isolation. In January of 1938, a "Southerner" complained that she was "alone week after week, month after month with no one to talk to except the family." The Forgotten Woman's experiences were similar to "Southerner's." She wondered if urban women ever gave a thought to their counterparts in rural areas. She described her experience on the farm as "a feeling that one has been shoved out of life; some call it a living death." Community work was important to farm women as a weapon in the battle against

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5 WP, 6 January 1938, 11.
6 WP, 8 February 1934, 10.
isolation. In 1930 "Margo" offered readers a cure for the loneliness and the worry that often went hand in hand with isolation. "It is a fact that women spending so much time alone," she wrote, "are apt to brood over conditions, and it is good to get together sometimes for a change, either at a women's meeting, or to gather at a neighbour's to make a quilt, or anywhere that brings us together for exchange of ideas."7 "Margo" noted that it was easier to get out in the summer, but argued that it was equally satisfying to "brave the elements" of winter in order to socialize with other women. "Persuade the good man to look after the children for an afternoon, put on moccasins, and tramp over to a neighbor's for an hour or two, and you come back feeling refreshed in mind and body and far better able to cope with work ahead; there is nothing like contact with other human beings to dispel a fit of the blues."8 "The remedy," remarked "Agatha" in 1932, "lies in self effort to lift ourselves out of the gloom. In doing little things to help others our own life is enriched. First of all stands neighborliness!"9

The "Mainly For Women" pages played a vital role in recognizing the importance of community work to the physical and emotional well-being of the farm women and the strength of the farming community. They also played an integral part in creating community by bringing together women from across the farming areas of the West. The editor was a crusader in creating a sense of fellowship among her readers as she promoted

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7WP, 26 June 1930, 14.
8Ibid.
9WP, 9 June 1932, 17.
the pages as a way to bring together "a company of kindred spirits."\textsuperscript{10} As 1938 winter set in, for example, McNaughton reminded her readers that the "Mainly For Women" pages were "a gathering place where friends drop in to chat and whenever possible, to do a neighbourly act. Whether you write about patches or permanents or less personal matters we are glad to hear from you. Whatever your racial or religious background we welcome you to our circle."\textsuperscript{11} This "Mainly For Women" community, or "circle" as McNaughton often referred to it, served as a support group, among other things, for farm women in their bid to "escape the monotony" of everyday life.\textsuperscript{12} Likewise, contributors saw community work as the road to better things and used the pages to emphasize the value of that work to the farming community and to farm women. "Beta Ray" told her readers to "go right after it, learn all about it, master it, make it your own, and life will never again be dull. For this progress of mastery will have shown vistas of new roads which you will be eager to explore."\textsuperscript{13} In a recipe for living, "Judy O'Grady" encouraged farm women to ignore the excuse that they do not have time for community work. She recommended: "be yourself part of the great pulse of the world, beating -- beating -- forget death and live."\textsuperscript{14} One of the most convincing arguments in favour of farm women squeezing community work into their busy lives, however, was that laid forth by

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{WP}, 3 December 1931, 10.

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{WP}, 29 September 1938, 11.

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{WP}, 26 March 1936, 13.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{WP}, 18 May 1939, 11.
both McNaughton and Annie Hollis. Both asked: "Who will mind the farm women's business if she won't get out and help look after it herself?"15

The pages featured several different themes in regard to community work over the decade. Perhaps the longest, fiercest, and most encompassing debate on the pages during the 1930s dealt with the initiative of farm women to participate in community activities and organizations. The origins of the discussion can be traced back to several McNaughton editorials that were published early in the decade. Many of her editorials encouraged women to write in and share their methods of coping with the Depression.16

In November of 1930, McNaughton published a lengthy contribution from "Co-operator" on how she had used a young steer to keep the cost of living down. "Co-operator" summarized the mood of the paper itself and underlined the fundamental attitude of farm women during the decade in her analysis of how women should handle the situations they were facing:

so it is up to us to make the best of what we have. But while doing that we should at the same time be determined that we are going to make our voices heard. Doing the best we can does not mean that we should be contented. I have just read that there are two kinds of discontent -- "Divine Discontent" that works and want [sic] to improve conditions and "Discontent" that grumbles and whines and makes life a sad and doleful ditty.

So let us make up our minds that we are going to be discontented but that it is going to be "Divine Discontent," while we are trying to make the best of what we have to keep down expenses....17

15For Hollis's quotation see WP, 3 September 1936, 10. For McNaughton's quotation see WP, 6 August 1936, 10.

16See WP, 16 October 1930, 14 and WP, 20 November 1930, 14.

17WP, 20 November 1930, 20.
McNaughton's own approach to the dire economic circumstances many farm women faced mirrored "Co-operator's." She encouraged women to make the best of the situation at hand. In a 1931 editorial entitled "Resignation, Indignation, Determination," McNaughton observed:

Here we are in Western Canada caught in a web of circumstances over which, at the present moment, we have no control. In thousands of farm homes there is no money and no prospects of any -- in hundreds of cases there is no money and no possibility of obtaining credit. This means being compelled to exist on the barest necessities for perhaps some time to come. So, why not make these necessities, whether whole wheat, milk, or garden produce, as attractive as possible? The more we conserve our resources the better condition we will be in to fight our way out of our difficulties. This does not mean resignation but determination.  

In a later editorial she inquired; "Can we do better work towards helping to find the remedy for our present ills by sitting at home this winter with only the light of the kitchen fire to guide us, or shall we swap recipes for home-made candles, and by their light read more thought-provoking stories like "Samuel the Seeker" or write our ideas to the A.B.C. of Economics column or the 'Mail Bag'." Her readers often agreed with her. "My contention," stated Mrs. Marie Barton of Davidson, Saskatchewan, "is that by making the best of what means we have will tide us over while we work to attain the solution to these vital problems."  

According to one prolific contributor, Mr. L.J. Pepper of Bear Flats, British Columbia, "divine discontent" was the problem, not the solution. Pepper, one of the

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18WP, 12 March 1931, 14.
19WP, 27 August 1931, 10.
20WP, 11 June 1931, 15.
many male readers and contributors to the aptly titled "Mainly For Women" pages, was
don't satisfied with the strategy farm women had adopted in combatting the Depression.
He criticized farm women for their slavish minds -- minds that were incapable of
agitating for change, that accepted conditions without question. He observed,

In reading the letters on your page this fall, I have been struck and
discouraged by the hopeless attitude of the farm women of Saskatchewan.
They seem to be ready to accept any conditions and sink to almost any
level...the slave mind of these women of the prairie says they must
submit....Slave to the worn out ideals of a past age of individual property
and the money system....Except for our stupid slave-mindedness these
families could all be enjoying all the food, clothing and luxuries which
even this year Canada has produced so abundantly. I never believed the
story of the woman's guilt in the garden of Eden, but I do believe that the
conservative, slavish mind of the prairie women is going to be the reason
for the hopeless struggle with debt poverty and lowered standards of living
which is facing these people as they try to win back to their former
position in the next ten years.

Pepper critically spoke out against McNaughton in 1937 "because of [her] attitude for
years in advising the women to submit and cheapen their living standards." Pepper
claimed that McNaughton had a prime opportunity as editor of the women's pages of the
Western Producer "to build up resistance to the demoralizing influences of poverty."
"Instead," argued Pepper, "you have almost continually aided and abetted the sinister
influences of poverty by helping to lower and cheapen the already too low living
standards of western homes."

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21For Pepper's own in depth definition of a "slave mind" see WP, 4 November 1937, 11.

22WP, 31 December 1931, 10.

23WP, 19 August 1937, 9.

24Ibid.
One possible solution, according to Pepper, was strike action by farm women.25 All farm women had to do "is demand of the governments and financial bosses the right to raise their standard of living from the lowest to the level of the best, or at least the average."26 Pepper suggested women withhold their labour if their demands were not met. "All that is necessary is to get rid of our slave minds and organize. Fight our fear, our timidity, refused [sic] to patch and mend and do without, refuse to submit and exist on bare necessities. And refuse to have our children raised in an atmosphere of submission and serfdom, and a continuance of our slavemindedness."27

The reaction to Pepper was mixed. Some agreed with his criticisms of farm women;28 others were quick to point out the flaws in his reasoning. Those who disagreed with Pepper could be heard loud and clear in the Mail Bag throughout the decade. Mrs. C.M.R. of Strome, Alberta, challenged Pepper on his criticisms of McNaughton. She commented: "I support our editor in her campaign for better and cheaper foods for children and while J. Pepper [sic], and others, are fighting it is up to us prairie mothers to fight too and while we are fighting to do the best we can for our children with the little we can have at hand."29 "Still Hopeful" argued against Pepper on his idea of a women's

25 A letter from "Jenny Pringle" in 1937 noted that Pepper very seldom offered solutions to the issues farm women were facing. See WP, 16 September 1937, 11.

26 WP, 26 March 1931, 14.

27 ibid.

28 For example see WP, 4 February 1932, 10; WP, 5 May 1932, 10; WP, 16 June 1932, 10.

29 WP, 2 September 1937, 9.
strike. She wrote that only those closest to women would be hurt if they went on strike. A.L.H. claimed that the slave mind that Pepper spoke of is a quality inherent in many people -- not just prairie women. "Slavish minds, Mr. Pepper, are not peculiar to prairie women; they exist also among prairie men." She claimed that the cause of slavish minds among women is primarily related to the "masculine attitude" toward women -- that women are "ignorant." A.L.H. believed "that many farm women are thinking on present economic conditions and trying to discover why such things should be in the midst of 'over-production' and after years of hard work." She reminded Pepper not to "be too hard on the prairie women; they are carrying a very heavy load and perhaps thankfulness even for small mercies may be a better safety valve than too much worrying and grouching." A woman writing under the pseudonym "Another Slave Mind" also replied to Pepper's letter in the fall of 1933. She wrote:

Isn't he just running true to form, ladies? How men like to shift responsibility and blame on the women. Does he ever stop to think that these same slave-minds are exactly what men have wanted us to have for centuries? And that it is only the last 25 years or so that women have enjoyed any freedom of mind whatever? Does he forget how hard they had to fight to get even a franchise?....Can you expect us to drop our shackles over night? They had us so slave-minded we didn't even know it. Even our mothers taught us that we should be lady-like and that taking part in a public meeting was rather vulgar. And many of our women still agree; although I think many of them are still controlled by husbands who won't stand for their wives taking an active interest in public affairs or

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30 WP, 16 July 1931, 10.

31 A.L.H. is Annie Hollis.

32 WP, 28 January 1932, 10.

33 Ibid. See also WP, 15 June 1933, 13; WP, 28 December 1933, 9; WP, 11 January 1934, 10; WP, 26 November 1936, 14.
even their own business. Women might get their eyes opened if they did. They are still only tools for men. Their part is to be nice to look at (more food for men's vanity), to entertain their friends and be satisfied to loll around and play bridge and pass the time....Women are blamed for the present depression....We are extravagant when we should save and save where we should be extravagant and so on, when we have had absolutely nothing to do with it. Men are running the world. What man would admit being ever advised by a woman. No, it is man alone [who] got us into this mess, but don't fear, Mr. Pepper, women are going to play a larger part in getting us out of it.34

Letters of this nature were not uncommon. As the sex that dominated the political and economic arenas, men bore the brunt of the responsibility in the eyes of many farm women. "Mrs. Frank S." professed that "if all women went out of the home and tried to straighten out the mess the men have got themselves into I know that women could set this big prairie in order again."35 In 1932, however, "December" argued women's problems were their own fault because they did not take an interest in community affairs.36 These letters illustrate that readers were searching for someone to blame for their situation. Men were blaming women, women were blaming men, and women were blaming women. The cause of the Depression had become gender-related. Most contributors saw their problems as a direct result of government inefficiency and corruption; government was male and thus men were the source of the problem. Criticizing them though had done little to change everyday circumstances. In blaming women for the current situation, contributors like Pepper attempted to put the solution in

34WP, 23 November 1933, 10. Also see WP, 10 March 1932, 10; WP, 3 March 1932, 10.

35WP, 10 March 1932, 10.

36WP, 3 March 1932, 10.
the hands of the people themselves, especially women. In taking up arms, in attempting to change the system, he argued, women will in turn improve the lives of their children and their husbands.

Whether farm women agreed with Pepper's line of argument or not, many recognized the value of his basic premise -- that women needed to take action. While they did not for the most part like his approach, most responded to him by taking his comments as a challenge. "Mr. Pepper was also correct when he said in a letter some time ago, 'Women won't change,'" wrote "Poppy" in 1933. "That I take as a challenge to women."37 "Judy O'Grady" encouraged her readers to "stir up to activity and spread your own enthusiasm like a vigourous germ among the inactive and apathetic women, so taking your rightful place in the evolutionary process which is taking place in our time."38 Rising to the challenge and "getting us out of it" was truly the common concern of all who read the "Mainly For Women" pages. The reaction Pepper elicited throughout the decade reinforced the persistence of women in battling the obstacles, including Pepper himself, that stood in the way of an improved standard of living. But while it was true that some of Pepper's criticisms were valid, he failed to recognize the complexity of the experience many of them faced. Isolation, economic circumstances, and endless household and family responsibilities were overlooked by Pepper. For the most part, farm women agreed with McNaughton in her claims that discontent must be divine. Many, however, also agreed with Pepper's words that activism within the larger farming

37WP, 27 July 1933, 10.

38WP, 25 February 1937, 11.
community was the only route to any change.

During the 1930s, the *Western Producer* was filled with articles and letters on the way women could most effectively become involved in the community. The root of the problem, as most farm families perceived it, was capitalism, and the most practical way to defeat capitalism, according to the contributors to the "Mainly For Women" pages, was to defeat the current governing parties and replace them with socialist politicians. The additional support of female voters in the West would serve to strengthen the farm vote, thus increasing the election possibility of parties sensitive to farming issues. Therefore, political involvement became one of the most discussed forms of community contribution during the decade. Farm women were often scorned by readers like Mr. Pepper for not being politically active. According to the numerous letters that were published on the pages throughout the decade, women were not running for parliamentary or legislative positions, women were not voting, and women were generally uneducated about politics. Most contributors used their letters to bring these issues to the attention of others and attempt to find some solutions to the lack of female involvement in the political sphere.

Women in Canada had only received the federal franchise in 1918. It was not until 1921 that women were actually eligible to run as candidates in political elections. In 1921, Agnes Macphail of the United Farmers of Ontario was elected to the House of Commons. From 1921 to 1950 only four other women were elected: Dorise Nielsen and Gladys Strum from Saskatchewan, Cora Taylor Casselman from Alberta, and Martha

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39Native women in Canada were not able to vote until 1960.
Black from the Yukon. A 1930 McNaughton editorial posed the question "Why Not Women in Politics?" Responses to that question included a lack of money and the responsibilities of a family. An unidentified author also submitted an article in 1930 addressing McNaughton's question. In noting that only one woman sat in the House of Commons and none in the Saskatchewan Legislature, the author argued that women did not run or were not elected because their capability was questioned. This author asserted that women were in fact very capable in their ability to represent constituents and that they should not let obstacles, such as money, stop them.

If women were not running for political positions, they were at least to exercise their right to vote. The potential political power that farm women wielded was a hot topic of discussion on the "Mainly For Women" pages. Some farm women theorized that their votes were best cast in support of farm parties. "Prairie Farmer's Wife" suggested that farmers should vote for a farmer party. She criticized farmers for losing themselves in the promises of new roads and forgetting about good prices. Agnes Coe similarly argued that women were needed in the Saskatchewan Farmers' Political Association if the organization was ever to accomplish its goals. In a January 1931 address to the Canwood

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41 WP, 6 February 1930, 16.
42 Ibid.
43 WP, 13 February 1930, 16.
44 WP, 22 May 1930, 21.
45 WP, 20 August 1931, 10.
Homemakers' Club, Alice Turton argued that women's political power was weak because it was divided among the political parties that were already in existence. She likened the situation to the home:

You know how men mess up and disarrange things in the home and you have to turn to and straighten things, well it seems to me they have messed up the world like they do the house when left a week or two to batch it, and it is necessary that we women get down to business and clean things up. Only by acting as an independent group can we influence government and legislation, avoiding affiliation with any one political party but cooperating with all who will assist us to attain our aim and ideal of 'peace,' 'justice,' 'prosperity,' and 'contentment' will we get anywhere, only by keeping free ourselves shall we make men free.  

Florence Parrot of Lac Cardinal, Alberta, took the relationship between politics and the home one step further. She argued that political power begins in the home.  

"Not until we realize that national evils have their roots in ourselves as individuals and are prepared to deal with these matters as a personal problem will any effectual and permanent good be accomplished." She claimed that women had "the whole matter in our power if we so willed without going any further than our own door. We can make that old saying 'the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world' a great truth."  

Like Turton, "Industrialist" advocated that women act as an independent group.

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47 Also see WP, 3 September 1931, 15. G.V.F. wrote "Women! your place is in the home. God knows we need the little mother, but your place is also taking an interest in the affairs of your country so that your family can make a living and take their place in the world. It is your duty as a mother to see that after you have spent part of a lifetime moulding a good citizen, that this mould is not broken on the wheel of life by the bogey of unemployment, etc."  
48 WP, 16 November 1933, 16.  
49 Ibid.
This supposition, however, rested on a much more radical foundation. "Industrialist" argued that women should not take part in politics but should "banish such organization." Industrialist" contended: "The beginning of political differences arose when men imagined a superiority over women. Our civilization is saturated with that belief, is largely based on it. The so-called emancipation of women which has been taking place within the last generation is wholly a farce. The invitation for women to enter politics is nothing more than a strengthening of the scheme for the building up of a privileged minority." Annie L. Hollis replied to Industrialist's comments by arguing that women did need to enter the established political system in order to clean it up.

The party of choice for the majority of contributors to the "Mainly For Women" pages was the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation party. A planned economy was strongly favoured within the farming community in the West as it was in keeping with the co-operative solutions advocated by many contributors to the social, economic, and political crises that farm families faced. Arthur Stratton briefly defined socialism for his readers in 1935: "socialism means a way of life where all people co-operate to work for the common good and no one will be able to live in idleness and luxury from the work of others." Advocates of socialism encouraged women on farms in western Canada to

50 WP, 7 August 1930, 14.
51 Ibid.
52 WP, 28 August 1930, 14.
53 WP, 26 December 1935, 8.
join "the front line trenches in this fight against Capitalism." A new economic order was envisioned by many supporters as a result of the defeat of capitalism. For example, "Judy O'Grady" likened the world to the human body in her argument in favour of change. She claimed that like the body, the world needs change so that the bloodstream, or economic system, can properly nourish the body. "O'Grady" believed the right source of energy could be found in the C.C.F. party. Within that new political order, women's work would attain economic importance. Annie Hollis suggested that the housewife would have a "recognized status" in a new social order "that proposes to return to every worker the full value of his or her toil." Many contributors also emphasized the improved standard of life that non-capitalist systems could bring to women on farms. In his argument in favour of a communism, for example, Bert Huffman of Delburne, Alberta reminded his readers that the maternal mortality rate was much higher in Canada than it was in the U.S.S.R.

Of course not all who wrote to the "Mainly For Women" pages supported socialism or communism. 1937, the worst year of the Depression in the West, witnessed an intense debate between communists and anti-communists in the Mail Bag section of the pages. In fact, for most of the year, this dispute dominated the Mail Bag and the Mail Bag in turn dominated the "Mainly For Women" pages. Those who were openly anti-

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54 WP, 17 May 1934, 10.
56 WP, 22 November 1934, 15.
57 WP, 19 January 1939, 11.
communist often likened communism to ungodliness. In general, anti-communists often substituted Christianity as a viable solution to the social, political, and economic problems farmers were facing. For example, "Another Believer" argued better conditions could be found in the scriptures, not in the preaching of communism or fascism.\(^{58}\) Fascism was rarely discussed on the pages as an alternative to communism. For the most part, it was not an option in any form. When it was discussed, fascism was labelled "catastrophic" and it was viewed as a threat to achieving any kind of viable economic stability in Canada.\(^{59}\) Social Credit was more favourably received as an alternative to communism than fascism. "Jenny Pringle" submitted a string of letters in 1935 in favour of the Social Credit victory in Alberta.\(^{60}\) In contrast, Margaret Dickson noted that "Social Credit might have succeeded twenty-five years ago but now we need something much more drastic...Social credit does not touch the real evils that are ruining the world today...."\(^{61}\)

In spite of the obvious differences in opinion about which way to vote or how women could best capitalize on the vote, the majority of writers included the same simple message to farm women in their letters: educate yourself and exercise your right to cast a ballot. In 1938, when a contributor heard a radio broadcast that blasted women for knowing nothing about politics, she was outraged. The broadcaster quoted another woman

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\(^{58}\)WP, 3 June 1937, 11. Also see WP, 10 June 1937, 11.

\(^{59}\)For example see WP, 24 September 1936, 10.


\(^{61}\)WP, 2 May 1935, 11.
who stated that "[women] either voted as they were told [usually by their husbands] or because the candidate had some physical attraction which appealed to them." Stunned by the comment, the contributor wrote: "When I recovered my mental equilibrium so that my brain functioned normally again I wondered if woman was woman's worst enemy...."

In order to use their political franchise most effectively, farm women were encouraged by their peers to educate themselves about the political issues they faced as farmers and as women. Jette R. Walker of Rosetown believed that: "[Women] are sadly in need of wider education in the use of our franchise and until intelligence becomes the first and most important appeal to the women of Canada we hope to make but slow progress along the lines of political economy." Thus, women were not only encouraged to employ their political power during provincial and federal elections, but were lectured as to how to turn their political involvement into a lifestyle choice. Farm women's organizations were encouraged to "unite and pool your resources, and your several abilities, and make your meetings as large as possible so as to create the greatest enthusiasm and initiative" in the political arena. The Homemakers' Clubs responded by putting the political involvement

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62 WP, 21 April 1938, 11. See also WP, 7 December 1933, 8; WP, 31 May 1934, 10; WP, 13 December 1934, 10.

63 For example an article entitled "Politics for Women: A British M.P. Voices Her Views" outlined many of Eleanor Rathbone's concerns about women's issues in politics, such as The Housing Act and The Nationality of Married Women Bill, that were of interest to women. WP, 29 January 1931, 21.

64 WP, 2 May 1935, 11.

65 WP, 24 July 1930, 14.

66 WP, 14 April 1938, 11.
of women at the forefront of many of their agendas. Readers were also encouraged to integrate politics into their daily lives. For example, in the spring of 1930, Annie Hollis likened the household budget to the national budget. McNaughton also tried to bring political issues closer to home for women voters. She invited women to follow issues delivered in the 1930 Speech from the Throne that were relevant to them. The speech forecasted legislation of special interest to women dealing with the office of the official guardian, amendments to the School Act, the care and training of mental defectives, and a cancer program. "As organized women," she suggested, "we have given much time and thought to these questions; we should follow their fate closely this session and, if necessary, let our legislators know we have worth-while opinions concerning them."

Since an overhauled economic and political structure could not happen overnight, many farm women turned to other forms of community work to seek out more immediate solutions to the problems they faced. Relief work was one avenue of community involvement that was more instantly gratifying for farm women than political participation. A constant discussion took place about the scarcity and sacrifice many farm families faced, and the general mood of this exchange was grim. Contributors were rarely hopeful of any improvement in the situation. "Another Prairie Mother" noted that

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67 An address given by Mrs. Alice Turton to a meeting of the Canwood Homemaker's Club in January of 1931 was entitled "Women and Legislation." WP, 22 January 1931, 20.

68 WP, 22 May 1930, 31.

69 WP, 13 February 1930, 16.
"dreams are about all we can afford" in 1935. Mrs. E.C.F. reported how her springtime optimism turned to summertime cynicism year after year as she "watch[ed] one thing after another wither and die under another terrific season of drought." She wondered, along with Annie Hollis, "is it wise to continue putting in seed year after year in the south?"

The January 4, 1934 issue of the Producer featured a heart-wrenching story of "The Glidden Family Suicide Pact." Finding it difficult to get relief, a farm family in Glidden, Saskatchewan decided upon suicide. While the child of the two parents died of carbon monoxide poisoning, the adults were unsuccessful in their suicide attempt and ultimately faced murder charges in the death of their son. The author of the article used this example to emphasize both the direness of the situation farm families faced and the heartlessness of "corporations or governments which, callous of human emotions and human experiences, have brought about, or permitted, conditions which have made life valueless to great numbers, not alone in Saskatchewan, but throughout the so called civilized world."

The disparaging comments about the realities of the economic situation in the West were often accompanied by remarks on the inability of relief to satisfy the needs of its recipients. "Relief as issued just barely supplies groceries. In many cases it doesn't

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70WP, 18 July 1935, 11.
71WP, 27 August 1936, 10.
72Ibid.
73WP, 4 January 1934, 13.
cover them unless one is fortunate enough to have something to sell..." wrote Mrs. E.C.F.74 "Also a Prairie Mother" submitted a detailed budget in 1931 of how her relief money was spent: "I have received relief for three months and have tried different budgets but have never managed to make it last the full thirty days."75 The solution, according to many readers, was community co-operation. In 1932, McNaughton advised: "let us co-operate in making the proposed remedies for this winter's distress as widely known as possible so that even isolated cases may not suffer."76 Through columns and editorials, contributors to the pages encouraged those who had extra to donate their time, goods, and suggestions for those who were suffering. The pages were offered by McNaughton as a forum to exchange this information. A "Hard Time Hints" column was established to swap information on home-made cheese and tanning calf skin for harness leather among many other things.77 "Just Me" shared her suggestion in the Mail Bag of using a flour sack to make a bra and panty set.78 McNaughton even recommended organizing community events such as "Hard Times" parties for women to get together to share information.79 Other women wrote in about how they contributed to the needy by

74WP, 27 August 1936, 10.
75WP, 20 August 1931, 10.
76WP, 29 September, 1932, 10.
77WP, 17 December 1931, 15.
78WP, 12 November 1931, 10.
79WP, 19 November 1931, 10.
sewing clothes. "Pioneer Settler" detailed how she often dipped into her button jar to make clothing for relief bundles in her area. This volunteer effort on the part of farm women emphasized the fact that even though only half of Saskatchewan's population, approximately 500,000 to 600,000 people, was on relief in 1937 "in some form or other this calamity involves everyone in Canada."82

The administration of relief was a common topic on the "Mainly For Women" pages. At the onset of the Depression, relief in Saskatchewan was considered a local problem to be administered by municipalities. As the decade wore on and as the need for relief increased, administration quickly moved to provincial authorities. In 1931, the Saskatchewan Relief Commission was established for the "purpose of relieving distress and providing employment" and the responsibility of addressing the needs of destitute farmers fell into the hands of the province. Relief itself was administered in two forms, direct relief and farm relief. Direct relief consisted of basic necessities such as clothing, food, and fuel. Farm relief referred to aid given to farmers to help continue farming or to re-establish their farms. As the economic situation of farmers worsened throughout the decade, the Saskatchewan Voluntary Relief Committee was organized to supplement direct relief. It was a charitable organization that distributed carloads of fruit, vegetables,

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80 Ibid.

81 WP, 27 February 1936, 11.

82 WP, 2 September 1937, 9.


84 Ibid., 42.
and clothing to those most in need inside the distress areas. The Red Cross, the Wheat Pool, and the United Farmers of Canada were also involved with the effort to collect and distribute goods. These organizations united in a province-wide scheme in 1930 to administer charitable relief to families in Saskatchewan.

Farm women throughout the decade wrote to the pages commenting on the distribution of relief by these volunteer organizations. Some were appreciative: "Discouraged" was thankful for the ray of hope that the Red Cross, the Wheat Pool, and the United Farm women brought to Saskatchewan farmers through their relief efforts. Others were critical. Complaints were written about the distribution of the donated carloads of fruit and vegetables. "A Victim" wrote to the pages in January of 1937 telling of how she had to pay for donated apples. "Invalid" pointed out the injustice of donated relief by using the example that no candy was given to rural children who resided outside of the school district at the local community Christmas concert even though rural people supported the village stores. "Yours for Justice" argued that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police should supervise the administration of charitable relief as people with no

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85 Ibid., 47. Also see WP, 13 October 1932, 10.

86 WP, 30 October 1930, 20. For example, Pearl Johnston of the United Farm Women encouraged women to sew garments from old bolts of cloth or to "make-over" clothes. She also asked municipalities to buy materials from within Saskatchewan and make them available at a reasonable cost to families in need.

87 WP, 4 December 1930, 20.

88 WP, 7 January 1937, 11.

89 WP, 4 February 1937, 11.
need for relief were notorious for helping themselves to the goods on rail cars. The criticism of the distribution of donated relief goods extended to the entire concept of relief as well. While thankful for relief as it saved her family from starvation, one woman declared: "I know quite well that had it not been for governmental assistance we would have starved to death, but I'm not very grateful. If there were actual famine I would cheerfully bear my share of suffering, but there is plenty for all. Enough coal to keep hell hot two million years...yet we find women who consider it a virtue to pick cow chips." 

A large portion of the discussion about relief on the "Mainly For Women" pages centered around the undesirability of receiving welfare. In many instances farmers were simply too embarrassed to apply for government funding so they attempted to make do with what they had. Farm women used relief as a catalyst on the pages to spark debate about the problems that forced farm families to turn to relief in the first place. Once again, the inequalities of a capitalist economic system took the brunt of the criticism. Farm women were particularly dissatisfied with the government's attempts at social assistance where women were concerned. One contributor noted that all of the relief planning was done for men and not women. One writer lamented the fact that while the claim is "women and children first", women are the ones who have to sacrifice all in times of need. For example, it was married women who lost their jobs to men, and no

90WP, 8 April 1937, 11.
91WP, 12 January 1939, 11.
92WP, 11 February 1932, 10.
relief camps were established for women. The solution to all of these problems, according to some, was to unite forces in order to combat the Depression. In 1938, "A Farm Woman" encouraged her readers to "organize and stick together and ask for a decent relief check or cash check every month and instead of a starvation diet get enough to eat for once." Another reader advocated using the mind to feed the stomach. But again, changing the system was a long-term goal. Active minds and healthy bodies were better able to contribute to their communities but they were not to happen overnight.

Farm women's contribution to the relief effort constituted a significant community endeavour. They were responsible for the production, collection, and distribution of many donated goods. In providing families with basic necessities, however, farm women were also responsible for strengthening the idea of community amongst the farming people of the West. Collectively, these women challenged the Depression in their attempt to help other members of their community. The "Mainly For Women" pages also played a significant role in re-affirming a sense of collectivity, camaraderie, and common identity among farm women. The pages were crucial to this task in that they provided a medium for an exchange of information and for discussion. Through this vehicle, relief was extended to include not just those who received it but also those who managed it. Ultimately, the efforts of individuals and organizations alike to collect and distribute donated goods, as well as their efforts to publicize and discuss that work on the "Mainly

93 Ibid.
94 WP, 6 August 1936, 10.
95 WP, 24 March 1938, 11.
For Women" pages, were crucial to the maintenance of a unified farm community in the West.

Farm women's organizations offered another means for women to become involved in the community. The "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer contained weekly columns written by farm women on the happenings of both the United Farm Women (UFW) and the Homemakers' Clubs. The United Farm Women was the women's section of the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatchewan Section (UFCSS). Established in 1926, when the unification of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association and the Farmers' Union of Canada produced the United Farmers of Canada (UFC), the United Farm Women served to address issues that spoke to both their farming needs and their gender. The UFW was responsible for pushing legislation in the public realm during the late 1920s and early 1930s (such as the Natural Products Marketing Act, the Farm Creditors Act, and the Farm Loan Act) and for recognizing the needs of the farm woman in the private sphere (such as the Mothers' Pension Act and the Devolution of Estates Act). During the Depression, the UFW continued its commitment to public issues that affected farm women, such as educational reform, equitable taxation, and state medical care, among many other things. But the UFW "also acted on the need for same-sex

96Cheryle Jahn, "'Class, Gender and Agrarian Socialism': The United Farm Women of Saskatchewan, 1926-1931," Prairie Forum 19 (Fall 1994): 190, 196-197. The Mothers' Pension Act allocated funds to deserted women and the Devolution of Estates Act entitled a wife to one-half rather than one-third of her husband's estate.

97See Presidential Address given by Pearl Johnston to the fourth annual convention of the women's section of the UFC, Saskatchewan Section in 1930. WP, 27 February 1930, 18.
identification in measures intended to provide social, intellectual, and even economic
comfort among farm women."

The presence of the group on the Western Producer pages served several important
purposes. First, it reinforced the value of women's involvement in their communities.
By participating in organizations like the UFW, farm women could bring about real
change in their everyday lives. Secondly, the column warded off the isolation that many
farm women experienced. It kept "Mainly For Women" readers in touch with what the
UFW were discussing at their local meetings and, in this way, helped to combat the daily
isolation and drudgery women on farms battled. Most significantly, however, the work
of the UFW strengthened the idea of the common bond that united farm women in such
organizations in the first place. For example, Farm Women's Week, hosted annually at
the University of Saskatchewan by the United Farm Women, reinforced the sense of
commonality and community among farm women in Western Canada. The first Farm
Women's Week, held June 28, 1928 was orchestrated "in order to create a greater interest
in women's work in the home, in the community and finally to show women ways and
means of bettering conditions in their own province as well." Seminars were held on

98 Jahn, "Class, Gender and Agrarian Socialism," 199.

99 Ibid. Jahn noted that "the group's mere presence was often seem by farm women as
a means of escaping their day-to-day drudgery. As one farm woman exprssed it, 'a
meeting with the UFCSS [women's section] is a pleasant change of entertainment.' In this
sense, the women's section of the UFCSS gave farm women a chance to socialize as well
as to organize for change."

100 WP, 5 June 1930, 19.
numerous topics including peace, the wheat situation, state medical care, and child care.\textsuperscript{101}

In her 1930 Presidential Address in Saskatoon, Pearl Johnston reminded the conference delegates that "collectivity for the common good" was important in "times of necessity."\textsuperscript{102} She believed that the impact of community involvement extended far beyond the conference itself. Johnston stated that

\begin{quote}
  in the many activities in which we as women members are deeply interested, may we realize that we have a great responsibility to perform -- a responsibility that does not end until we have seen the accomplishment of the various ideals for which we stand. May we realize that it is our duty as citizens of this great province of ours to stand shoulder to shoulder with the men in their struggle for the economic emancipation of all those engaged in agriculture.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

Beyond the goals of change that were so prevalent throughout every conference during the 1930s, Farm Women's Week also had a more practical purpose. It got women off the farm. "The opportunity to live, if even for a few days at one of the beauty spots of Saskatchewan," wrote Pearl Johnston, "fills our women with enthusiasm for the rest of the year, making them better citizens, better co-operators in their community, broadening their outlook on life." Because of the dire economic situation and the burdensome work load farm women had to contend with on a daily basis, attendance was not always high. In spite of such problems, the women at Farm Women's Week in 1930 recognized the benefit of such an event. The conference delegates unanimously agreed "that Farm Women's University Week be continued as an annual event under all

\textsuperscript{101}WP, 10 July 1930, 16.
\textsuperscript{102}WP, 3 July 1930, 9.
\textsuperscript{103}Ibid.
circumstances', the unquestioned decision being that the benefit derived from this assembly was so great we couldn't afford not to have it.\textsuperscript{104}

During the weeks leading up to and following Farm Women's Week, the "Mainly For Women" pages were flooded with information about the week's events. Discussion about the event spilled over from the UFW column to include the Mail Bag and McNaughton's weekly editorial. As editor, McNaughton made it her mission to cover pre-conference advertising, to encourage women to attend, and to give a summary of the week's events following the conference for those who were not able to attend. Contributors also submitted letters about how they managed to save enough money for room and board to make the trip to Saskatoon\textsuperscript{105} or how their husbands lent a hand to help them make the journey.\textsuperscript{106} Men were even encouraged to attend; McNaughton reminded her readers in 1933 that the invitation for Farm Women's Week stood for men too.\textsuperscript{107} The publication of this material on the pages served to bring Farm Women's Week and the other work of the UFW to the attention of the readers. By doing so, the "Mainly For Women" pages played a significant role in uniting farm women for such events and bringing those who could not attend a little closer to the experience through its coverage on the pages.

\textsuperscript{104}WP, 10 July 1930, 16.

\textsuperscript{105}WP, 9 July 1931, 10; Also see WP, 12 June 1930, 19.

\textsuperscript{106}WP, 13 April 1933, 10.

\textsuperscript{107}WP, 1 June 1933, 9. Jahn, "'Class, Gender and Agrarian Socialism,'" 190. Jahn's article underlines that the UFW often worked in co-operation with the UFC. Class united them at times when gender played a lesser role.
The Homemakers' Club was another popular farm women's organization during the Depression that had a featured column on the "Mainly For Women" pages. The parent organization for the clubs in Saskatchewan, the Women's Institutes, was established in 1897 by Ontario farm woman Adelaide Hoodless. Hoodless' primary intent was to instruct rural women how to raise "the general standards of health of our people." A McNaughton editorial in 1931 outlined the reasons that Homemakers' Clubs (as the WI's came to be known in Saskatchewan) were established. "[T]he rural woman," she argued, "was entitled to her share of educational advantages for which the whole people paid, and that she was not getting it, that the rural woman was as important in the rural economy as the farmer, the feeding of young children as that of young calves, and that the loneliness and isolation of farm women should be lessened by the chances of meeting together regularly." Like the United Farm Women, the Homemakers clubs held regular local meetings, as well as an annual conference at the University in June. They also kept Producer readers updated on local meetings and conventions through a weekly column on the "Mainly For Women" pages.

The Homemakers' Clubs were much more focussed than the UFW on the reproductive work women performed at home. The clubs were "to promote that knowledge of household science which shall lead to the improvement in household architecture with special attention to home sanitation, to a better understanding of economics and hygienic value of food and fuels, and to a more scientific care of

\[ \text{108 Alison Prentice and others, eds., Canadian Women: A History, 183.} \]

\[ \text{109 WP, 25 June 1931, 10.} \]
children..."\(^{110}\) While the columns of the Homemakers' Clubs that appeared on the
"Mainly For Women" pages during the 1930s addressed issues similar to those of the
UFW, such as agriculture, home and school, child welfare, peace, and public health,\(^{111}\) the organization placed more of an emphasis on the domestic work women performed in
their homes. An article entitled "The Homemakers: Woman’s Part in Agriculture" that
appeared in a 1935 issue of the Producer summarized the Homemakers' philosophies
towards a woman's role on the farm. Although the author of the article painted a portrait
of farm women as essential to the farming industry, she constructed the image of the farm
woman as a helper for her husband. She insisted that farm women should take time to
care for farm animals, to brighten the farm home, and to plant trees and shrubs. She also
advocated that women must gain knowledge by visiting each other's homes, by reading,
and by taking interest in local agricultural societies, experimental farms, the Agricultural
College and the University, and farm bulletins. "These are all ways," she wrote, "well
within the reach of all in which we can live up to our first and God-given name - Man's
Helpmeet - and do a Woman's Part in Agriculture."\(^{112}\) Some were critical of this constant
emphasis on women's work by the Homemakers'. In 1939, "A Manitoba Mac" wrote:
"The W.I. tries to help rural women but I notice they are always trying to get us to do
more work. If they really want to help us why don't they teach us how to get along

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\(^{110}\) Prentice and others, eds., _Canadian Women: A History_, 183.

\(^{111}\) _WP_, 25 June 1931, 15.

\(^{112}\) _WP_, 17 October 1935, 23.
without working so hard. Most farm women are already overworked."

Despite the limited focus of the Homemakers' Clubs, they were instrumental in trying to improve conditions for farm women through a co-operative outlook. The title of an article summarizing the reports delivered at the Homemakers' Convention in 1931, "Building a New Rural Civilization," epitomized the approach the Homemakers took to the position of women in the farming community. The Homemakers also stressed their global links with the Associated Country Women of the World in this effort as well as their international attempts to promote world peace. These transcontinental connections fostered a more unified sense of community among farm women throughout the world. McNaughton noted that "to read [the news and notes of other Women's Institutes on the "Mainly For Women" pages] is to better realize the many problems and interests women have in common, whether they live under the Northern Star or the Southern Cross. Thousands of women, of every race and color, linked up in international organizations are promoting a spirit of international friendliness, the value of which we can but dimly realize." The local farm woman still formed the heart of the organization, however, and combatting isolation and drudgery was a primary goal. The Homemakers' Annual Convention was a holiday for one woman in 1930. "I had to do

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113WP, 5 October 1939, 11.
114WP, 25 June 1931, 15.
115WP, 4 June 1936, 12.
116WP, 1 May 1930, 19.
117Ibid., 14.
three days work in one, to leave everything ready for husband and children -- so that I could come here for a few days' rest." By attending local meetings and by reading the news on Women's Institutes around the world, farm women were able to re-establish friendships and share common experiences. Ultimately, it was through this effort for the community that farm women re-affirmed their collective identity.

The influence and magnitude of an international community were also strongly felt in the western Canadian farm woman's struggle for peace. Throughout the decade, the "Mainly For Women" pages documented the push for peace by farm women in the western provinces and beyond. The pages revealed that the movement had cultivated an international community that extended beyond farm women to include women from all backgrounds. Those farm women who wrote to the pages claimed their support for peace based on their roles as mothers. Disgusted with the government's use of their children as "cannon fodder," contributors protested against war. "Peace and Plenty" blamed the last war on the over-production of babies. She argued that Agnes Macphail was the "true exponent of peace" because of her push for access to birth control. "A Woman of the People" argued that there was no humane reason to bring a child into the world: "What is the use of bearing and rearing children only for such conditions as obtain today -- poverty, suicide, murder, prison, etc., or victims of poison gas, cannon fodder or living dead in many shapes and forms, in order to gratify the rapacious greed

\[\text{118WP, 17 July 1930, 19.}\]

\[\text{119WP, 13 March 1930, 16.}\]
of capitalists?"¹²⁰ "Judy O'Grady" reminded women of the power they wielded to prevent future wars: "the hands that refuse to rock the cradle may yet rule the destiny of nations."¹²¹

The ability of women to prevent war, according to the contributors to the pages, was immense. This enormous task extended beyond the refusal to bear children. Advocates of peace used the "Mainly For Women" pages to instruct readers how to go about contributing to the peace effort. The suggestions were endless. Education was the first step necessary to bring about world peace. First, women had to educate themselves about the state of international affairs in order to further the peace movement. McNaughton suggested study groups to achieve that task.¹²² Contributors to the pages were also concerned about the quality of education that children were receiving both in the home and in the classroom. Letters were published advocating the elimination of cadet training,¹²³ the revision of school textbooks, and the study of the peace pact in the classroom.¹²⁴ Mothers were reminded of their influence in the home and were asked to teach their own children the value of peace.¹²⁵ Disarming the nursery of war-like toys was one important angle McNaughton believed should be included in the attack on the war

¹²⁰*WP*, 6 April 1933, 10.
¹²¹*WP*, 3 June 1937, 11.
¹²²*WP*, 11 November 1937, 11.
¹²³See *WP*, 6 March 1930, 16; *WP*, 8 May 1930, 20.
¹²⁴*WP*, 20 February 1930, 17.
¹²⁵*WP*, 9 July 1931, 10.
problem. Farm women were also asked to show their support for peace by signing petitions. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) organized a Petition for World Disarmament that was presented at the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva in 1932. An October 1931 update on the petition campaign reported that 11,902 signatures had been gathered. McNaughton used the good news about the petition to encourage farm women to organize more activities to bring disarmament to the attention of the community. Farm women were also asked to write to their member of parliament to express their views on how he or she should vote regarding military expenditure. Numerous suggestions can be found on the pages in an attempt to persuade farm women to actively participate in the community effort against war. Farm women were encouraged to do whatever it took to eradicate the notion of war from the minds of their families and their communities.

The press was also credited with the power to avert war during the Depression. McNaughton acknowledged the influence of journalists in bringing the issue of peace to the attention of the public. In 1933, she commented on the success of a peace pamphlet, "The Secret International," in turning more and more individuals to pacifism. She argued

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126 WP, 2 January 1936, 8.

127 Farm women were active in canvassing for signatures for this petition. See WP, 14 April 1932, 14 for a list of the canvassers who passed the one hundred mark in collecting signatures.

128 WP, 22 October 1931, 10.


130 See McNaughton's Armistice Day editorial that is dedicated to ways individuals could further peace. WP, 11 November 1937, 11.
"the publication of this pamphlet was a great work but equally encouraging is the large number of journals that have given it favourable comment and so advertise its existence to a world wide public. The power of the press has again been demonstrated." The "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer provided a loud and clear voice for advocates of peace during the 1930s. Since pacifism often went hand in hand with feminism, it is not surprising that peace became a well discussed issue. McNaughton was concerned at one point that she was concentrating too much on the issue of peace. In 1932 she sent out a blind questionnaire to her readers and received an overwhelming response to increase coverage. She pondered the response and wondered "after the magnificent response to the peace petition we wonder to what extent do our readers generally wish us to continue to help in 'pushing our statesmen from behind.'"  

Of course not all readers actively supported the peace movement. Once again, a lack of time and money was listed as an obstacle to a woman's active participation in the effort to disarm the world. Participation in the effort was wide and varied and in spite of the different approaches, peace brought women together. For those who were fervent activists and even for those who simply wrote to the pages expressing their desire for peace, the common goal of peace fostered a widespread identity. The "golden thread of peace", as W. Fowlie referred to it, linked women together. Ironically, the onset of World War Two had the same effect. In spite of their efforts for peace, farm women in

131 *WP*, 13 April 1933, 10.
132 *WP*, 14 April 1932, 10.
133 *WP*, 12 March 1936, 11.
Western Canada had to face another war in 1939. At the end of the decade, only a few comments were made on the pages about farm women's response to the hostilities. Some women did, however, mobilize to support the war effort by knitting and by performing other tasks.\(^{134}\)

The "Mainly For Women" pages of the *Western Producer* stand as a testament to the importance of community work in the lives of farm women during the Great Depression. Whether their commitment involved a trip to Saskatoon in June for Farm Women's Week or whether it meant heading down to the local polling station at election time, the pages show that women were certain of the impact their commitment would have on both the community of farm women to which they belonged, as well as to the larger farming community. While the pages reveal that the types of community work farm women participated in during the 1930s were wide and numerous, they also reveal that the reasons for seeking out that work were common. Through community work, farm women sought to change their world, to escape the monotony and isolation of farming life, and to seek out the friendship and support of like-minded individuals. Ironically, as the readers and contributors were discussing community work on the "Mainly For Women" pages, they were also creating and reinforcing the sense of community so many of them sought. For the same reasons that they turned to community work, farm women wrote to and read the *Western Producer* -- to shake the solitude and seclusion of being a farm woman in the Canadian West, to agitate for change in their communities amidst the dire economic times of the Depression, and to seek the comfort and empowerment of

\(^{134}\) *WP*, 28 December 1939, 9.
a common identity.
CHAPTER FOUR

"A Farmer's Wife is Not Only a Housekeeper": Challenging Productive Work Identities

A sixty-year-old farm woman wrote to the Mail Bag in 1938 that she was not simply a housekeeper; she was a dairymaid, a gardener, a poultry rancher, and a seamstress. She was "all these, besides poisoning gophers, and driving to town once a week, six miles with a horse and buggy, to do the shopping." Unarguably, farm women were multi-skilled when it came to performing jobs on the farm. Not only were they responsible for reproductive work, they also took on tasks that brought extra income to the farm itself. While the "Mainly For Women" pages speak minimally of this kind of work, they none the less reveal that farm women chose to labour in profit-earning jobs that were traditionally considered women's work. Because of depressed economic conditions, women's labour in the home and in other domestic-related work on the farm, such as poultry raising and milk production, took on greater significance. In performing these tasks, farm women came to have a stronger appreciation of the economic value of their work. Consequently, farm women turned to the "Mainly For Women" pages to acknowledge and legitimize the significance of their economic contribution to the farm. Through discussion and debate, they sought to define their identity beyond that of a "housekeeper."

Productive work, the work women performed for wages, profit, or exchange or the

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1The Western Producer [WP], 1 September 1938, 11.
raising of products for their own families, was the least discussed form of women's work on the "Mainly For Women" pages. Its obscurity on the pages was for several reasons. First, the pages were directed toward an audience of farm women who were married. Traditionally, these married women did not take up work independent of the home after marriage occurred. Secondly, because of the depressed economic times and because of patriarchal attitudes toward married women in the paid workforce, jobs that were available were given to men with families to feed before they were given to women with husbands or families who were able to support them. G.V.F. was upset that all relief planning was done for men and not women. She noted that "[w]omen and [c]hildren first" no longer applied:

We are told that we have taken the work away from men in teaching, office work, etc., but we do not hear any complaints against women scrubbing offices and taking in washing. The same applies to married women going back to the teaching profession. There are no protests against the scrubbing profession for married women. Even we farm women are classified in the census as housewives, of no particular occupation, when in such times as these we practically keep our families and this country 'eating' with the products of our industry -- butter, cream, eggs, poultry and vegetables.  

Finally, farm women rarely had the time to pursue jobs off the farm. What productive

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2 This particular definition is from Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners," unpublished M.A. thesis (History), University of Saskatchewan, 1983, 8. Productive work has been referred to by some historians as paid work. For example, Ruth Pierson defines paid work as waged and salaried work. Ruth Roach Pierson, "The History of Women and Paid Work," in Women's Paid and Unpaid Work, ed. Paula Bourne (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985), 17. This classification is too simplistic when examining the work of farm women. It must include the work women performed for exchange or the raising of products, as this was vital work to women on farms during the Great Depression.

3 WP, 11 February 1932, 10.
work they did was largely tied to the farm itself in that it either directly contributed to the maintenance of the farm operation or indirectly contributed to the farm through the care of the family. Since the productive work women did was strongly associated with the farm and since farming conditions were less than ideal during the 1930s, few women actually reaped the benefits of such work. Without gardens to harvest and cows to milk, little income or exchange was to be made.

In spite of the modest coverage women's productive work received on the pages throughout the decade, farm women recognized both its worth and its significance. As the Depression deepened, the extra income or products a woman could contribute to the family often made a great difference in a family's ability to sustain itself. The women that contributed letters and articles to the "Mainly For Women" pages consequently talked about the kinds of productive work that could be pursued and its value to the overall farm economy. Farm women used their letters and their columns to challenge the customary role of women as unpaid and hence unproductive members of the farm family and community and to seek recognition and fair value for their productive work.

The productive work that farm women performed during the Depression was for the most part traditional. It was often an extension of their reproductive work responsibilities but also incorporated work outside of the household. Women on farms, however, were expected to be involved in productive work because of the extreme economic conditions their families faced. One woman wrote to the Mail Bag that "[m]any of our farm women today are doing a man's work outside as well as looking after a home and children and all the jobs that go with it. Simply because hubby hasn't got
the money to hire anybody to do it." Women also turned to productive work to supplement their incomes with "pin money." Yet, with the Depression, pin money took on a whole new meaning. "Margo" pointed out to her readers that "[t]he very fact that we see so much in farm papers about side lines, and ways to make 'pin money' rather gives the show away, and the 'pin money' idea is a bit of sarcasm, as any few cents one can make are badly needed for ordinary food and clothes."

Whatever their motivations, productive work was an integral part of the daily lives of many farm women. A McNaughton editorial in August of 1938 which focussed on the hourly break-down of the average western farm woman's day emphasized the integration of productive work into a farm woman's work schedule. She documented a report prepared for the International Congress of Scientific Management on the hours and working conditions of the average farmer's wife in the British Isles. This report showed that farm women usually put in a seventy-eight-hour work week and that this time was divided between reproductive tasks such as cooking, cleaning and housework, and productive tasks such as gardening, poultry rearing, dairy work, stock tending, and preparing produce for sale.

The women who wrote about their productive work illustrated that that work was

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4WP, 3 July 1930, 14.

5WP, 26 June 1930, 14. "A Busy Mother" suggested to McNaughton in 1933 that a corner of the "Mainly for Women" pages be used as an exchange column as she thought this was a good way to make money. See WP, 12 January 1933, 10.

6WP, 11 August 1938, 9.
as varied as necessity required. From sewing fur-lined gloves\(^7\) to making cottage cheese,\(^8\) farm women attempted to make a profit with whatever was available to them. Most of the material on the pages focussed on educating women on how they could improve the skills and the knowledge required for maximum profit in different areas of productive work. For example, since chickens provided some extra income, several articles were published on the page about raising poultry. The April 17, 1930 edition of the \textit{Producer} carried an article entitled "Setting the Incubator Two Thousand Years Ago" which provided readers with an overview of the history of the incubation of chicks.\(^9\) The following week Clara M. Bickerton of Vancouver, B.C. submitted an article on the operation of a chicken house in British Columbia.\(^10\) On May 15 of that same year, Mrs. L.M. Purdy wrote an article on "Specializing In Poultry on a Saskatchewan Farm" where she shared information with her readers on pens, feed, sales and that year's hatch.\(^11\) Later in 1931, Laura Wright sent in letter on how to can chicken for home consumption and sale.\(^12\) This type of articles was important because it offered information to sharpen women's ability to perform this work as well as introduced other readers to different economic avenues to take some of the sting out of the Depression.

\(^7\textit{WP}, 25\ September\ 1930, 14.\)

\(^8\textit{WP}, 23\ October\ 1930, 19.\)

\(^9\textit{WP}, 17\ April\ 1930, 17.\)

\(^10\textit{WP}, 24\ April\ 1930, 14.\)

\(^11\textit{WP}, 15\ May\ 1930, 14.\)

\(^12\textit{WP}, 15\ January\ 1931, 14.\)
Chickens were obviously not the only source of income for farm women. The family garden also offered potential profit. Women were able to can vegetables and fruit grown in their own farm yards and sell them at markets or use the produce to feed their own families. Gardening was one of the most versatile forms of work farm women participated in. It was also a primary source of leisure for many farm women. The garden, however, usually mirrored the conditions on the farm. "The family garden has always been the stepchild of agriculture the last piece of cultivated ground to receive the farmer's attention." Consequently, like the farm, the garden was susceptible to the weather and economic conditions of the 1930s and took a back seat to the needs of the field. A successful garden was certainly a gamble on the prairie during the Depression. A lack of money also stood as an obstacle in the path toward a fruitful garden. No money meant no seeds; no seeds meant no garden.

Through the "Mainly For Women" pages, McNaughton tried to help the readers who were experiencing the worst of the Depression by establishing a seed exchange. For those who were already avid gardeners but could not afford seeds and for those who were seeking new ways of raising a little extra income, McNaughton's seed exchange was of tremendous value. Through the pages, she set up a garden exchange where farm women were able to swap goods with other readers for seeds or cuttings. For the most part the exchange was successful but it did have its problems. McNaughton had to mediate between Leona Dickman of Theodore, Saskatchewan and G.B. Smith of Portreeve, Saskatchewan over an unanswered request for cuttings. Smith claimed that she sent

\[13\] WP, 17 April 1930, 18.
Dickman a collection of "fancy work, transfer patterns, Denison Crepe Paper Books, several old coins, altogether estimated at about $2.00 worth of things."14 Her request for gooseberry, lilac cuttings, and a rose tree in exchange went unanswered. McNaughton wrote to Dickman several times emphasizing the value of the garden exchange and how she expected "people will be very careful in attending to all letters containing material or parcels."15 Dickman ignored McNaughton's diplomatic pleas for co-operation. In 1935, Agnes C. Bird alerted McNaughton to the problems she had with getting Dickman to follow through on her exchanges.16 McNaughton finally blacklisted Dickman from the pages when she tried to enter the exchange again in 1941 under the name Mrs. Gunnar Sjostrom. McNaughton bluntly warned that she could not "risk further trouble in this respect."17 The Dickman incident was an isolated one, and for many the exchange was a good thing. The gardens farm women grew put food on the table for their families and brought some additional income into the household.

One farm woman, Mrs. Fanny Curry, used the pages to tell how, instead of trying to do a bit of everything, she turned beekeeping into a "profitable hobby."18 With free information from the Rosthern Experimental Farm, the University of Saskatchewan, and the Open Shelf Library at Regina, Curry was able to turn a fascinating hobby into

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14 Saskatchewan Archives Board [SAB], McNaughton Papers, A1, D18, McNaughton to Dickman, October 11, 1934.
15 Ibid., November 22, 1934.
16 Ibid., February 15, 1935.
17 Ibid., McNaughton to Mrs. Gunnar Sjostrom, March 5, 1941.
18 WP, 24 April 1930, 19.
profitable work by selling the honey and using it to feed her own family. Another hobby, artwork, was also investigated by some women as a potential source for income. For example, "A Farmer's Wife" wrote to the page in 1930 looking for a market for her artwork. McNaughton used an editorial column in 1932, however, to draw attention to how difficult it could be for farm women to find a market for their homecrafts. She noted that farm women paid retail store prices for their materials, that they often had to pay the added price of postage, and that they had to seek markets in the cities to feature their work. She advised against women investing too much money in materials without being sure of the market. "Perhaps readers who have made successful terms with their own local storekeepers," she wrote in defence of her discouraging words, "would kindly spare a line to tell of their own experiences."

In addition to the letters about how to raise chickens and how to profit from beekeeping, some contributors participated in fascinating debates and discussions about the sexual division of labour and women's perceived roles in the traditional economy. It was these particular exchanges that illustrate how farm women were using the "Mainly For Women" pages to challenge the conventional conceptions of women's productive work roles on the farm and in the farming economy. The beginning of the decade witnessed an intense discussion on the pages about whether married women should be in the paid work force. Annie Hollis introduced the topic to her readers in February of 1930

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19 Ibid.
20 WP, 8 May 1930, 14.
21 WP, 24 November 1932, 10.
by asking "Should Married Women be Gainfully Employed?" Hollis reported that "out of a total female population of 3,209,998 ten years of age and over, recorded in the census of 1921, only 490,150 were reported as having a gainful occupation." She also noted that despite these low figures, society was up in arms over the number of married women working for pay. Her article attempted to rationalize why such attitudes towards women in the paid workforce existed. She wrote that "the majority of present day homes are being carried on with incomes notably below, what is declared by economic statistics to be fair living standards" and she argued that women were not a serious threat to unemployment as there were so few of them to pose such a potential danger. Hollis contemplated the idea that men were threatened by women working in their professions, and she quoted from a survey conducted by the Local Council of Women in Toronto to support her claim. The survey found married women worked for pay for a reason; they had to provide for their children, to take care of emergency outlay, and to live more comfortably. The survey also reported that more than one half of women did their housework after hours and that only 4% got help from their husbands. Most significantly, the report did not find any evidence supporting the claim that the employment of married women caused problems for her family, to other workers, or to the work itself:

The argument that the employment of married women outside the home tends to increase unemployment is beside the question. Industrial and economic conditions have forced women into the open labor markets. At present the wages of working men are generally insufficient to provide a decent standard of living for a family -- yet unmarried men are not regarded as selfish rivals of the married men, though many of them undoubtedly spend their earnings on expensive cars and luxurious living.

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22WP, 27 February 1930, 16, 23.
How must this problem be met? By curtailing the liberty of
married people? By legislating, or administering the public services of the
nation, so as to restrict the freedom of one class of citizens, and that the
class which is chiefly responsible for the welfare of all future citizens --
namely the married women of the nation? If the married women in our
towns and cities are not yet roused to an idea of the importance of this
problem and its bearing on the future home life of the nation, what do our
rural women think about it?

Several rural readers responded to Hollis' questions. "Aunt Betsy" supported
Hollis' argument. "I do not think that because a woman marries," she wrote, "she
becomes the property of the state and must do as the state requires of her -- that is give
up her career whatever it may be. She has a right to choose for herself."23 "Aunt Betsy"
continued that few married women actually preferred waged work over taking care of
their families yet they did so because their husbands were unable to work or did not make
a sufficient salary to maintain a decent standard of living. She wisely noted that "[t]he
married woman needs the money just as much and usually a lot more than the unmarried
girl who has only herself to keep and often has a home where she could live without
working for wages. Why should they, at least, not be on equal footing?" "Aunt Betsy"
also understood that rural women did not face the situation of married women working
in quite the same way as urban women. She wrote: "Most of us are busy -- too busy --
with housework but we find time to sell some produce and no one seems to object just
because we are married. We, farm men and women, advocate 'Equal Rights for All.' Let
us practice what we preach."24

23WP, 13 March 1930, 17.

24Ibid.
McNaughton carried some syndicated material about the role of married women in the paid workforce. A piece from Washington documented a study of a small group of Denver women conducted by Emily C. Brown of the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labour. Nine-tenths of the women questioned in that particular study stated that they worked because of economic necessity.25 Beside the article, McNaughton ran a photograph of Mrs. Leslie G. Bell, wife of the Member of Parliament for St. Antoine, who was denied the right to practice law because she was a woman. McNaughton ran another syndicated article in the following week's edition that recorded a vote among 7000 women members of the Civil Service Clerical Association in Canada as to whether women should remain in paid employment after marriage. The response was no. M.J. Brown, a Member of Parliament and secretary of the association, believed this response came both from women's concern about the high unemployment rate among men and from the anticipation with which they looked toward marriage.26

In 1931 the debate over married women in the workforce took a more specific turn; it began to focus particularly on women teachers. Letters explained both sides of the issue. A "Woman Teacher" argued in June of 1931 in favour of married women in the educational field. She argued that women should not be discriminated against because of their choice to marry.27 In July of that same year, however, an anonymous author argued that a woman with a healthy husband need not search for employment outside the

25Ibid.

26WP, 20 March 1930, 16.

27WP, 11 June 1931, 10.
home. If married women were to work, she asked, what would the single girl do? Mrs. G.R.’s letter to the Mail Bag argued that married women were in fact better teachers than unmarried women. "We have had men teachers mostly," she wrote, "and it seems to me that women would explain lessons more simply to children than the men do until each child has got a full grasp of the subject." M.B. agreed with Mrs. G.R.’s argument that what was needed was efficient teachers, regardless of their marital status, yet M.B. was also aware of why some were against married women participating in the work force. M.B. observed: "It is very plain why the 'traditionally dominant male' is opposed to equal rights for women. A profession frees a woman from economic dependence on him, and with it follows mental freedom from him. As a result, perhaps -- alack -- he finds that instead of quoting, 'Hubby thinks' he finds her saying, 'I think'."

Farm women who did actively pursue productive work that was more directly connected to their domestic work often wrote to the pages expressing discontent with the market system. Some women noted a large disparity between the labour and money invested in the products they made, the price they received for their goods, and the market value at which the product was sold to the public. "Cassie" told her readers that she sold her butter to a storekeeper for seven cents a pound. He resold it for fifteen cents. "All the way home," she wrote, "I thought of the barefaced robbery we women

\(^{28}\text{WP, 16 July 1931, 10.}\)

\(^{29}\text{WP, 6 August 1931, 10.}\)

\(^{30}\text{Ibid.}\)

\(^{31}\text{WP, 27 August 1931, 10.}\)
have to put up with when we sell our butter and eggs." Margaret M. Dickson argued that this was "easy money" for retailers. "Push a pound of butter six inches along the counter and take more for that than the butter maker got for feeding the cows, cleaning the barns, raising the feed, milking the cows, separating the milk, churning the butter and taking it to town." Poultry and turkey producers were also dissatisfied with their market returns. Mrs. M.E.D. was worried about the mothers on farms, including herself, with five cents to provide when I should have at least $1.00, and 16 hours a day hard labor in the bargain. Milking cows, caring for poultry and a large farm garden, and keeping house for five of us, sending three to school and trying to economize, patch and do without - yes, even a pair of shoes - and this in a land of plenty. What mockery, what crime behind all this and even yet in the city we read of ladies who are still out for a good time and spending money unnecessarily. Do these women ever stop to think of these injustices?

This unfair treatment spurred many farm women to support political parties like the Co-operative Commonwealth Confederation and to rethink the traditional roles of women in the economy. Sheer dissatisfaction with the capitalist market system led "Cassie" to vote for the C.C.F. What was envisioned by many farm women like "Cassie" was a new social order ushered in by the C.C.F., in which women would exhibit economic strength and be financially independent. The first step was to recognize the importance of women as producers and consumers. A summary of Frau Emmy

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32WP, 27 December 1934, 8.
33WP, 14 February 1935, 11.
34WP, 14 March 1935, 11; WP, 14 January 1937, 11.
35WP, 23 July 1931, 10.
36WP, 27 December 1934, 8.
Freundlich's review of economic conditions was published on the pages in October of 1930. In her analysis, which was originally delivered at the Congress of the International Women's Guild, she recognized that "[t]he woman with the basket is the symbol of our economic strength." Freundlich argued that, "[m]any millions of women, of housewives, are no longer willing to let themselves be exploited in order to ensure the perpetuation and development of a social system which is inimical to them, they realize that their market basket is the key to a new world." Lena Phelps, first prize essayist at Farm Women's Week, argued that women's first step was to "investigate and thoroughly understand economic systems":

As I have before mentioned many times, we are on the verge of a new economic system. This will mean established woman's place will be new conditions and they must be met with new methods and new ideas.... Under the present system, woman is literally the slave of man because he supports her. She is economically dependent upon him. In the new order of things she will break the links, throw off her chains of slavery, and earn a good living herself.

As a direct result of her economic independence marriage will no longer be an economic necessity. She will then be in a position to marry for love alone. Many a woman is forced by our present conditions to marry the first man who presents himself, because she may never have another chance. She marries for a home and untold domestic unhappiness is the direct result.... Another menace today is the fact that both man and woman are overworked. Women to a large extent, particularly farm women, too often become mere household drudges with no time for the things that refine and ennoble life. The new economic policy will remedy this by abolishing the dire poverty existing in the large masses of people. It will also shorten the hours of labor, thereby giving each and every woman time to pursue whatever her heart desires in the cultural side of life. Her individuality and originality will grow, for the doors of ambition and achievement will be thrown open wide. She will stand on her merits

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37WP, 16 October 1930, 20.

38Ibid.
"Sue Scapegrace" similarly envisioned a new social order where the housewife freely engaged in remunerative employment and where "marriage was an economic partnership." She had met several unhappily married women, and felt "safe in saying that money was the root of the evil in ninety percent of the cases." She made this conclusion based on the observation that because the man dictated his wife's personal expenditures, because he set the standard of living according to his ability to supply capital and his wife's ability to supply labour and because "[m]any men feel that having invested their money to support a wife, she receives from them a 'free meal ticket,' and their duties as husbands end there. Hence, he pigeon holes his engaging manners with the marriage certificate, and she is expected to 'settle down' in cow-like contentment." A woman's contentment was more likely to lie in her ability to earn her own living and to escape the overpowering dominance of a money wielding husband. "Now I don't think the average man means to be cruel to his wife," she wrote, "but often he is. Due to thoughtlessness, and never having borne a woman's burdens, many are like the young husband who, upon being told the new arrival was a 'her' instead of the 'him,' exclaimed, "Thank goodness! I never want a son of mine to go through what I have the last two hours."

39 WP, 18 June 1931, 15.
40 WP, 16 August 1934, 8.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
Sophia Dixon also imagined a very different farming economy where men and women shared a balance of economic responsibility in the marriage and on the farm. She recognized the "diverging viewpoints" of men and women on their "occupational functions" as being socially constructed. She wrote that "men have usually had to do the worrying about getting the dollars and cents, while women would worry out plans how to make these same dollars and cents buy food, clothing, shelter, medical services, recreation and educational facilities." She also noticed, however, that "the divergence in viewpoints is not as pronounced in the farm population as in the urban." Women's productive work roles on the farm are more necessary and accepted than those of women who participated in work outside of the home in an city environment. Dixon perceived the ability for men and women to work together apart from traditionally defined work roles, as a necessary step toward "more wholesome social conditions." She wrote:

Once a successful business man objected to a move being made to elect a woman to the town council. He said, 'we want men of good sound business sense on our council.' Perhaps a woman might want wholesome basis, to the neglect of a good financial investment....

To quote from Wm. Irvine, M.P., in his book "The Farmers in Politics":

'Legislation during the whole of women's enslavement, has been materialistic and commercial.' And again: 'What the world has lost by the exclusion of women from participation in industry, commerce and politics will never be known.'

Let us remember we have duties not only to our individual families but to the whole human family as well. There is more than one avenue through which to serve. 'Production for use instead of for profit' shall be our goal.43

These 'new social orders' were based on the recognition and valuation of women's

43WP, 23 July 1931, 14.
work both inside and outside of the home. This was the first step toward a more equal economic partnership with men. One of the most active farm women in the campaign for the acknowledgment of women's work in the home was Annie Hollis. The war waged on the pages by Hollis throughout the decade to have housework recognized as an official occupation in census forms included productive work. For farm women in particular, productive work and reproductive work were less divisible than they were for their urban counterparts. The reproductive work farm women participated in was central to the operation of the farm itself, and because it contributed to the production of the farm was considered productive work. For example, in 1936 "Enefgee" wrote to the pages asking if work in the garden, milking and raising poultry were considered to be included in the term housework. She "found out...that these were, on most farms, part of the routine work of the housewife, and were considered the mainstay in providing for the needs of the family." "Enefgee" was bothered, however, that some did not consider these activities work:

Perhaps you will be as surprised as I was when you learn there is no work connected with the keeping of poultry. In February, 1932, (drought time here) a few farmers and a traveller were having a talk in a grain elevator. Some of the farmers maintained they had the same right to charge for their products on the basis of the cost of production as the implement companies, etc. The traveller said he was out to make money, and had no desire to pay 8 cents for a loaf and 15 cents per dozen for eggs. All the farmer had to do was to go and gather the eggs anyway.footnote

Hollis' frustration with such narrow conceptions of the work women performed on the farm encouraged her to advocate the inclusion of housework as a category of work on the

footnoteWP, 1 October 1936, 11.
farm. She noted that the 1936 census form asked for information on the production of milk, cream, butter, cheese, eggs, chickens, bees, honey, beeswax, wool, fruit, vegetables, and even boarders and lodgers. These jobs were primarily performed by women. The census form, however, only asked for the number of farm workers who participated in this work exclusive of those who performed housework. According to Hollis, this simply reemphasized the fact "that the government census officials still regard the domestic work as having no monetary value." It further emphasized that women's participation in productive work was also not worthy of recognition.

The women who contributed to the "Mainly For Women" pages of the Western Producer during the 1930s saw productive work as a integral and necessary part of a farm woman's daily life. As with all aspects of her life, however, the farm woman was advised by her peers to balance her productive responsibilities with the other work loads in her life. One woman wrote that it was just as easy to get into a "narrow rut" doing productive work as it was with housework: "[t]he woman with wide interests will find satisfaction in whatsoever sphere her lot is cast I think because she is not bound by the strangling bonds of ambition to amass wealth, or gain possessions, or power, or popularity. Her chief task is that of striving to live up to the highest that is in her

45WP, 19 May 1938, 11.

46Ibid., 11. Hollis also realized the relationship between the lack of recognition of women's work and the plight of the woman who worked for pay was the status of the domestic worker. Hollis believed that the "unsatisfactory status [of the domestic worker] is vitally connected with the fact that the married, working housewife is regarded as not belonging to a 'gainful occupation.' WP, 24 March 1938, 11.
regardless of the way in which she earns her daily bread. 47

How a farm woman earned her daily bread was a secondary matter to the women who contributed to the pages. The pages certainly served as an educational tool to share information about how farm women were able to best profit from their productive work, yet the primary preoccupation of the contributors was to alter social attitudes toward women's work in general. The writers to the pages chose to step beyond the exchange of helpful hints to express their frustration and anger at the perspective of many who condemned women for defying traditional gender roles and refused to recognize the economic value of women's domestic work. Whether women chose to embark on independent careers apart from the farm or to launch productive ventures that were an extension of their domestic work, contributors to the pages were concerned with recognizing and appreciating the productive work women did. The paper ultimately served as a vehicle for farm women to assert their identities as contributing workers on the farm and in the broader economy and to redefine their roles as something more than mere housekeepers.

47WP, 12 March 1936, 11.
CONCLUSION

"Cast Off the Restricting Corset of Custom": The Depression Era Farm Woman and her Mouthpiece.

In 1931, "Square Deal" asked fellow "Mainly For Women" readers if they truly understood the "value of our paper." The letter read:

The value to us of this voice of the farmers is immeasurable for where would we be without this mouthpiece to help fight our battles. What other newspaper have we that is sufficiently dependable to give us a square deal so that our opinions and aims are not misrepresented at every turn....Another point, how could we get together for better co-operation without our Producer and how would we know what was going on in our different communities?1

They were apt comments. The Producer responsibly spoke for the farming community during the 1930s, a task to which no other rural newspaper during that decade can lay claim. The "Mainly For Women" section of that paper, moreover, served as a precious mouthpiece for women in the farming community. Not only did the pages give farm women throughout western Canada the opportunity to express themselves, they were also accountable for uniting women in the battle against the Depression. But because the pages brought women together and recorded their daily experiences and concerns, they also served as a mouthpiece for the construction of a subordinate ideology or counter discourse.2 The published letters, articles, and columns tell the story of how farm women

1The Western Producer [WP], 24 September 1931, 10.

2As noted in the introduction, Jeffery Taylor uses the term "subordinate ideology" to define the ideology that is created in reaction to dominant mainstream ideology. Subordinate ideologies are often practical ones that are constructed in response to a dominant ideology which is theoretical and inapplicable to the realities of daily life. Jeffery Taylor, Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Agricultural Knowledge, and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890-1925 (University of Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center,
perceived themselves as a group and how they spawned a collective identity.

The ongoing and varied discussions and debates about women's work that took place on the "Mainly For Women" pages reveal that common threads of a group identity existed. Within the context of the *Western Producer*, "farm woman" was most easily defined as an English-speaking woman who lived on a farm, worked on a farm, and was probably married to a farmer but this was not always so. Widows, farmer's daughters, or other women who kept house for farmers such as sisters were also farm women. An age limit also seemed to apply. McNaughton steered her pages toward women who were about twenty-five years and older. The "Young Co-operators" pages were for readers under twenty-five years of age.

The importance and necessity of their work roles also formed a consistent part of this definition of identity. As economic conditions on farms deteriorated, women's reproductive, productive, and community contributions became increasingly important to farm and family survival. Some farm women used the pages to recognize, legitimate, and appreciate their work. The pages were dominated by commentaries and criticisms of the nature and volume of the workload women performed, and they reflected how central work was to the understanding of who the women were.

Beyond this collective definition, identity was individual. Being a farm woman could simply mean being involved in domestic work, such as housekeeping or child-rearing, or it could include women who worked outside of the home. "Farm woman" could also include women who were involved in politics or women who belonged to rural
women's organizations. Or, it could refer to women who were active in all three areas of work, that is reproductive, productive, and community. The pages illustrated how farm women juggled concerns in both the community and in the family context. They were not, as earlier historians have suggested, preoccupied with solely the principles of maternal feminism. Instead, their identity reflected a variety of issues and concerns and was defined by each individual woman as narrowly or as broadly as she saw fit.

The philosophy behind the idea of "Divine Discontent," the perspective with which many of the readers of the "Mainly For Women" pages faced the Great Depression, is analogous to the way in which farm women expressed their identity on those same pages. With McNaughton's encouragement, readers learned to make the most of their resources in dire economic times but also chose not to be accepting of their situation. In this way, their discontent was divine. The heart of this ideology was also adopted in the manner in which women constructed their identity on the pages. In many ways farm women rooted their identity in traditional gender roles. Reproductive work formed the core of a farm woman's experience; productive work was largely traditional in nature; and community work was important to the family. But, through the "Mainly For Women" pages, farm women also challenged these work identities to recreate, reconstruct, and reshape those roles to reflect the reality of their everyday lives. "Judy O'Grady's" 1938 "Dissertation on the Gentle Art of Corsetry", which was published in the Mail Bag, also captured the importance of this philosophy in the creation of farm women's identity.³ "O'Grady" wrote that "the bustle and boned stays of Victorianism we have happily

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³WP, 3 November 1938, 11.
discarded but the Victorian mind is still unfortunately with us." She continued:

Anything which binds or encumbers us must be discarded, or we perish in the dust-laden ruins of our civilization. There are some things which we must salvage from the wreck. There are steel girders of democracy which we shall need for our new building, because they are tried and true. There are artistic gems from the legacy of the past which must not be lost, and the corner-stones of justice & freedom without which no building can stand & endure.

The true challenge for a farm woman, according to "O'Grady", was to "cast off the restricting corset of custom, and standing alone, [dare] to think & be herself a builder of new ideas."

The "Mainly For Women" pages are a rare find in historical sources. They are a precious resource for feminist scholars because they so candidly vocalize the thoughts and ideas of English-speaking western Canadian farm women during the Great Depression. They provide an exceptional record of the daily lives of these ordinary farm women and give an unprecedented account of how they perceived themselves as a group. Fortunately, for historians, farm women also recognized the value of the pages and collectively used that mouthpiece to its greatest extent. Thus, decades later, Depression era farm women can still be heard as loudly and as clearly as ever.

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^Saskatchewan Archives Board, McNaughton Papers, A1, D53, Nielsen to Mail Bag, 1938.
IN THE GARDEN

with MRS. HAITCH

NATURE

(Gray William Wordsworth)

To know an nature not as in the hour
Of stormy weather, when the winds do blow,
The sky is murder and the trees do groan
And thunder strokes in the o'ercharged sky;
And I have said that stormy weather does not
A prospect that disturbs me with
Of8raven thought; a sense
Of something forsook deeply known.
When in the sun the trees do stand
And threaten storms and the living
And the sky and, in the midst of
A silence and a sweet that soothes
All the sense of all things;
And a degree of things. Thence
A level of the mind and the
And emotions, and of all that we
From then come on of all the
Of things that shall be.

Youth is well pleased to
In nature, the language of the
The anchor of my present thoughts.
The guide, the guardian of my heart.
Of all my mental home.

Flowers For
The House

In choosing flowers for indoor decoration, I am interested in the same forms of arrangements as I am in the flowers themselves. This spring I have used some of the spring flowers, for example, in connecting the dining table for beautiful centerpiece. Strawberries and scented violets will bring your interest and ours as well. The flowers, for example, will be a perfect blend of color, some holding all the same flowers, others planting in the living room do not impair the beauty of the room, while others do impair the beauty of the room, while others do impair the beauty of the room.

The living room can be decorated with flowers as well. The combination of colors and the beauty of the flowers will add to the beauty of the room. If your wild flower beds have been well tended, they will make your room brighter and lighter.

THREE-MINUTE JOURNEYS

Budapest's Famous Playground

By Tompita Manning

Budapest, one of the gems of Europe, is a city full of history, beauty, and culture. The city is full of attractions, from the famous chain bridge to the ancient royal castle. One of the most popular attractions is the Szechenyi Thermal Bath, which offers a relaxing and therapeutic experience.

A LITTLE WORLD

Then there is a huge place or...
THE HOMEMAKERS

GLEANINGS FROM REPORTS ON AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

(BY E. R. DENT, Proprietor Conover Aplirates)

I have to tell you about a great little horticultural discovery in the "Country Journal," which I have been reading. It seems that scientists have discovered a new way of growing tomatoes. They have found that by planting the tomatoes in a special soil mixture, the plants grow much better and produce larger crops.

PLANT BREEDING

Every little while we see articles in the papers about plant breeding. It seems that scientists are working hard to improve the quality of our crops. They are trying to develop new varieties that are more resistant to disease and more productive. It's wonderful to think that we may soon have tomatoes that are even better than the ones we have now.

Adjourned

You, my friends, are the backbone of the country. You are the farmers, and you are the ones who make this world go round. Without you, we would have nothing.

But, dear friends, you're never alone. You have your families, and your friends, and your neighbors. And you have each other.

I love this land with all its grandeur. And I will always be grateful to you for the wonderful things you do.

Your health and your happiness are the most important things in the world.

The members of the Agriculture Club who were present at the meeting in our home last night, and the members of the Women's Club of Conover, held a carefully prepared program of entertainment last night. It was enjoyed by all present, and the members of the Agriculture Club are to be congratulated on their wonderful reception and the excellent arrangements made for the entertainment.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Flowers do not grow better in the city than in the country. But the city does have its advantages. In the city, there is a greater variety of flowers and a wider range of colors.

THEMEN GOLDEN WEDDING

Spanish Courts Busy With Divorce Cases

Since the new divorce law was passed in 1969, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of divorces. In 1969, there were 600,000 divorces in the country. In 1970, there were 1,200,000 divorces. It is estimated that there will be 2,000,000 divorces in the country in 1971.

The number of new divorce cases has increased so rapidly that the courts are having a hard time coping with the demand. In some areas, the courts are simply overwhelmed with cases.

The increase in the number of divorces is a result of the new divorce law. The law allows for a more lenient attitude toward divorce. It is not as difficult to obtain a divorce now as it was in the past.

In many cases, people who would have never divorced before now are seeking divorces. This is because of the new divorce law. It is easier to get a divorce now than it was in the past.

The increase in the number of divorces is causing a lot of problems for the courts. There are more cases than the courts can handle.

However, there is some good news. The courts are coming up with new ways to deal with the problem. There are new programs to help people deal with their problems.

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Expectant Mothers Need Constant Care

Campaign to Improve Practices for Safety of Mothers Under Laid by Physician

By Pearl G. Conwell, M.D., F.A.C.P.

On Mother's Day the Maternity Clinic in the hospital receives a number of the for the improvement of maternal and infant health. The day is marked by special attention to the health of expectant mothers and the newborn. At this time the clinic is open to all expectant mothers and infants, and a special effort is made to encourage them to come for care.

The clinic is open from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays. The infant care center is open from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on weekdays and from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Saturdays. The clinic is closed on Sundays.

Footwear

Feet Require Exercise and Proper Shoes

JELLY BAGS

To make a jelly bag, cut a circle from the bottom of a jelly bag, and this will form the base for the bag. Cut a piece of cloth and make a bag. The bag should be large enough to hold the jelly bag. The cloth should be thick and strong. It should be a good-sized bag.

A Dish For This Week

Whether you make a jelly bag or not, try making some jelly bags. They are easy to make and are very convenient to use. They are also good for storing food.

Easy Ways For Making Some Delicious Desserts

(From The Lenox Harvey)

Today we are going to present a few easy ways for making some delicious desserts. These recipes are simple and can be made with basic ingredients. They are perfect for a quick dessert or a special occasion.

SWEET FOR COMPANY

A delicious sweet for thatXMangeyour taste if right for your guests. The recipe is simple and requires no special equipment.

PATTERN V

If you want to add a special touch to your recipe, try using it with the jelly bag. It is a good idea to have a jelly bag on hand in case you need one. You can use a jelly bag to store food or to make a jelly bag.

THE BABY GROWS

Make Pudding Delightful Try a new food for the baby every day, but vary the amount of food he eats. If he is not hungry, give him more. If he is hungry, give him less. The baby will enjoy the new food and will not be bored.

BARLEY JELLY

Be sure to use the right kind of barley for the jelly. The barley should be young and fresh. The jelly should be made with barley.

RECIPE FOR JELLY

May I have a word of advice? If you want to make jelly, you should buy the right kind of jelly. The jelly should be made with jelly.

Homespun Yarn

A good, strong, thick, white skein of homespun yarn will make a beautiful gift for any lady. When you buy yarn, select the right kind of yarn. The yarn should be strong and durable.

High Praise for Modern Girl

New York Women are earning the little things they need to live. They are earning the little things they need to live. They are earning the little things they need to live.

BABY'S QUESTION BOX

It is not necessary to give the baby a lot of food. The baby should be fed according to his need. The baby should be fed according to his need. The baby should be fed according to his need.
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