

## ANYTHING IN SKIRTS STANDS A CHANCE: MARKETING THE CANADIAN NORTH-WEST TO BRITISH WOMEN, 1880-1914

Maureen Hupfer  
University of Alberta

### ABSTRACT

Urgent! Thousands of nice girls are wanted in the Canadian West! Despite the popular view that anything in skirts stood a chance, the Canadian government's marketing strategy to attract British female emigrants between 1880 and 1914 posed barriers of class, education and training. Furthermore, period documents suggest that this campaign's apparent success is more appropriately credited to British writers, voluntary emigration societies, and businesses with vested interests.

### INTRODUCTION

"England is glutted with female labour, Canada faints for want of it. It looks like the simplest problem in the world to solve" (Cran 1910, 190). As middle-class English writer Marion Dudley Cran remarked, this turn of the century marketing problem was one which appeared to have a simple solution. The social problem of the redundant or superfluous British woman received considerable attention from the British press throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, and few commentators failed to note the corresponding dearth of females in Canada. "In Britain one of the most urgent social difficulties is what to do with our surplus women — how to provide for them, how to find remunerative employment for them. In Canada one of the most urgent social difficulties is how to persuade women to come..." (Saxby 1890, 68).

Thus the social problem facing Britain and Canada came to be regarded as two sides of the same supply and demand coin. "Our little Island on the edge of Europe is overcrowded with people, chiefly women, and a vast Continent in North America is at its wits' ends for inhabitants, especially women. Now, why does not plus go over to minus and level things up a little, in order to make both countries more comfortable?" (Cran 1910, 247).

Despite the apparent simplicity of Cran's solution, in "reality" the situation was "bristling with difficulties" (1910, 190), not the least of which was the inherent mismatch between the class of women for which Britain required new homes and the types of women that the Canadian government wished to attract. This paper discusses Britain's desire to export females and Canada's need to import them, and explains the barriers that class, education and training posed for a seemingly straightforward exchange between Britain and her Canadian Dominion. The marketing strategies employed by the Canadian government and other organizations are reviewed and the British response to the promotion of the Canadian West is examined. Was Canada successful? Levels of female immigration, especially among middle-class women, did rise at a greater rate than did male immigration during the 1880-1914 time frame. However, Canada's apparent success in attracting British females is perhaps more appropriately credited to British writers, voluntary emigration societies, and businesses with vested interests, than to the strategies employed by the Canadian government.

### BRITAIN'S REDUNDANT WOMEN AND CANADA'S CRYING NEED

The surplus of women in Britain dated from the Napoleonic era, following years of war or threatened conflict as well as higher mortality rates among male children. However, it was emigration to the colonies that made the greatest contribution to the sex imbalance in Britain. Between 1850 and 1914, men accounted for three fifths of the 200,000 British who emigrated each year, and by 1911 there were 1.3 million more women than men in a population of 45 million (Jackel 1982, xiv-xv).

The true difficulty, however, resided not so much in the abundance of women in general but of middle-class women in particular. Females from the British working classes might reasonably expect to labour for much of their lives, and by 1901 approximately four million women were employed in occupations such as farming, domestic service, retailing, factory production, and the lower echelons of teaching, nursing, and clerical work (Jackel 1982, xv). None of these options was available to the English gentlewoman, who was expected to marry as well as she might, produce children, and create peace, happiness and virtue in the domestic sphere for which she was responsible (Poovey 1988). Unfortunately, there were far

too many women for the numbers of prospective husbands; hence these women came to be described as superfluous or redundant. Working as a governess or taking in fine sewing allowed the unmarried middle-class female to eke out little more than an impoverished albeit genteel existence, and the "plight of the single educated woman without means became one of the most widely debated social issues of nineteenth-century Britain" (Jackel 1982, xvi).

While Britain was overcrowded with women, Canada desperately needed females to work as domestics on homesteads and to marry. In some newly settled areas in the Canadian West, men outnumbered women by as much as twenty to one (Jackel 1982, xiv). As one Saskatchewan farmer wrote:

The bachelors are a great majority, and the women are not in the country. Any woman who ventures here will receive more than her share of attention, and, most likely, be promptly appropriated by some bachelor anxious for a happier state. The crying need of Western Canada is women; it is like that heathen cry which comes to the missionary — "Come over and help us." Though Canada is not altogether "heathen," it needs the missionary spirit of women to make it a crowning success, and no doubt many of the teeming multitude of British women would profit by this golden opportunity (Cran 1910, 114-115).

Cran herself remarked upon "thousands of acres of prairie lying desolate for want of people; the black loam, virgin to the plough...for want of labour. We see the farm homesteads and farmers' wives suffering from lack of servants to cook and mind the house, the farmers themselves frequently leading wretched lives for lack of women to wed" (1910, 248).

British writers who supported the emigration of middle-class women to Canada argued that such an exchange would benefit both countries and would further solidify Imperial bonds. The presence of the British gentlewoman in the Canadian West would elevate its moral tone and cultural life, and through the fulfilment of her ultimate destiny as wife and mother she would improve the Canadian race (Hammerton 1979, 129-130; Jackel 1982, xvii). According to Saxby, Britain could "confer no greater boon upon this fine young nation than by sending it thousands of our girls to soften and sweeten life in the Wild West" and reform the "restless, dissatisfied, reckless, and godless" state of its men (1890, 69). Certainly Canada needed many more of a "good type of girls...if the Dominion [were] to be, in accord with the best Anglo-Saxon ideals, a nation of homes" (Weaver 1914, 229). Cran reported that Englishwomen in Canada were "everywhere welcomed and valued. In the North-West, where wives are scarce, a work of Empire awaits the woman of breed and endurance who will settle on the prairie homesteads and rear their children in the best traditions of Britain" (1910, 14-15). It is clear that these three women strove to elevate female immigration from the level of a shipment of goods to one of Imperial duty.

#### THOUSANDS OF NICE GIRLS WANTED

The rhetoric of patriotic duty initiated by British writers may have constituted a high-minded response to the manner in which the Canadian West's call for women had been constructed in popular culture. Certainly the quest had captured the imagination of turn-of-the-century Canadians. One of the West's "most enduring myths" described congregations of farmers at prairie train stations, eagerly awaiting the latest "shipment" of prospective brides (Jackel 1982, xxiv). More proactive approaches were also initiated. C.T. Lewis, a private individual from Saskatchewan, proposed in 1889 that any single man who travelled from the North-West to find a wife should receive a rebate on his railway ticket if he were successful in bringing back a bride (Jackel 1982, 66-67). The Northholme Manufacturing Company in Toronto also popularized the hunt for women with a Canadian Souvenir Postal Card:

**URGENT!** Thousands of nice girls are wanted in THE CANADIAN WEST. *Over 20,000 Men are sighing for what they cannot get — WIVES! Shame! Don't hesitate — COME AT ONCE.* If you cannot come, send your sisters. *So great is the demand that anything in skirts stands a chance.* No reasonable offer refused They are all shy but willing. All Prizes! No Blanks. Hustle up now Girls and don't miss this chance. Some of you will never get another (Jackel 1982, Plate 1).

Despite its humorous intent, this postcard must have contributed to public awareness of the West's need for women. Certainly the "great advertising output of the Emigration Bureau and the Canadian Pacific Railway" (Cran 1910, 271) would have ensured that few turn-of-the-century British women could have been unaware of the opportunities available in the Canadian West.

## GOVERNMENT MARKETING STRATEGIES

### THE GOVERNMENT'S CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

By 1884, the Prairie line of the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed, and a deluge of publications designed to recruit settlers from the United States, continental Europe, and Britain were printed. One forty-nine page document was targeted specifically toward female readers and widely distributed in Great Britain. This pamphlet, *What Women Say of the Canadian North-West*, reported responses from some 320 women and a handful of men to a CPR questionnaire mailed to women in the North-West. Topics included general advice for settlers, such as information concerning supplies, prices, religion, and education, discussion of the climate, and employment prospects for women (Jackel 1982, 31). Certain respondents expressed the opinion that some women could find work as milliners or dressmakers in the cities or towns, but the demand for female help on the farms was overwhelming.

The advice of Mrs. Kate Lawrence was typical: "All I have to say is that there is plenty of homes and situations for all in this country, and no one need be afraid to come if they intend to work...." One male respondent, anxious to find a housekeeper, asserted that if there were "any young girls in your country who would like to start housekeeping, this is the place to come. There are lots of young men who want housekeepers. I would like to give over the job of washing the dishes myself." These sentiments were echoed by a host of other writers, many of whom also described favourable marriage prospects: "Good girls can get plenty of good places at good wages, then marry good young men with good farms." "This is a fine country for girls who want to work." "As the country is largely settled with bachelors, good girls do not require to be long at service as they can soon get homes of their own." "Good working girls are in great demand at all times." "There are lots of well-to-do bachelors who are wanting wives, and good, honest hardworking girls can soon find homes of their own." Others agreed that a woman in search of a husband was likely to find one, but lamented this fact. Mrs. Ownes advised girls "not to get *married* the minute their first month is finished," while Mrs. Gerow responded "Girls can find work at good wages, and so come along as many as can. The only trouble is they are sure to be picked up by our numerous bachelor neighbours." Mrs. Sutherland commented in a similar vein: "no one can hope to keep a girl more than a few months, and in many cases but a few weeks, when she is married and away" (Canadian Pacific Railway 1886, 40-57).

### THE MANITOBA PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The steady influx of Western homesteaders during the 1880s was accompanied by an upward trend in the number of homestead cancellations, and government officials came to believe that "the loneliness and discomfort of homestead life" for single men were largely responsible for such cancellations (Jackel 1982, 66). Accordingly, the Manitoba government added "Women" to the "capitalists", "prosperous heads of families", "farmers' sons" and "working men" that it normally targeted. The West desperately needed women to marry its bachelors, but they also needed female labourers to replace those who left their jobs to marry. Like many of the respondents cited in the CPR's pamphlet, Manitoba government officials believed that the marital prospects for women in the West were exceptionally bright, and in fact blamed the perpetual shortage of female farm help on the bustling marriage market. The "principal reason for the continuous demand is this: That young women scarcely get settled in a situation, when they leave it to take charge of a home of their own, in other words, *get married*" (Jackel 1982, 66).

### THE FEDERAL DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Rather than describing Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta as the Canadian North-West, the Department of the Interior publication *Canada West* promoted Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta as "Central Canada" (Department of the Interior 1908, 1). This nomenclature may have referred to the newly achieved provincial status of Alberta and Saskatchewan, formerly part of the Northwest Territories. It may have also constituted an attempt to counter popular reports of uncivilized living conditions and frigid climate. Winnipeg, for example, was described as the "Chicago of Canada" — a city of magnificent promise with electric railways and well-kept boulevards. The government informed readers that Central Saskatchewan had a "healthful and bracing" climate (1908, 9), while the "cold and stormy" winter weather experienced at times in Southern Alberta was offset by chinooks that raised the thermometer almost to the point of summer temperatures (1908, 13). Central Alberta was described in idyllic terms, with "water courses" that lent "boldness to a landscape of otherwise ideally pastoral charm" (1908, 16). The government appeared to believe that the less said about the climate in Northern Alberta, the better. The area was simply said to be "in a class by itself" (1908, 12).

*Canada West* was quite obviously targeted toward men; the settlers they expected to succeed were described as married men with no children (1908, 17). Men without the resources to commence homesteading immediately upon arrival in Canada were advised that they could find employment as labourers at the Commissioner of Immigration in Winnipeg. In addition, the government provided recommendations regarding appropriate strategies for men of varying levels of financial means. As a general rule, *Canada West* issues featured a small "teaser" inset on the colour-lithographed covers that referred to the "free 160 acres" of farmland available to homesteaders in the Canadian West, and further information concerning their acquisition was printed on the inside covers. Homesteads were available to males over 18, or the sole head of the family. A woman was permitted to take up a homestead if she had "minor children dependent upon her for support" (1908, inside cover). This stipulation was amplified in subsequent issues to read "a widow having minor children of her own dependent upon her for support is permitted to make homestead entry as the sole head of the family" (1911, inside cover). The government also added that only "farmers, farm labourers, railway construction men and female domestic servants" were "advised to come to Canada. All others should get definite assurance of employment" (1908, inside cover).

Between 1897 and 1911, approximately 651,000 Americans, 723,000 British, and 512,000 emigrants from other nations came to Canada. The immigration bureau at Ottawa estimated that in the Canadian West, 21% of the homesteads taken up were owned by British immigrants, 31% by continentals and 38% by Americans (Curtis 1911, 63). The task of promoting the free land and employment opportunities available in the Canadian West also fell to European and British shipping companies and American railway agents. For example, the Canadian government indirectly encouraged immigration through a system of bonuses paid to steamship booking companies in the UK, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland. The shipping companies then in turn promoted their fares to Canada with large colour lithographs which they affixed to Britain's poster hoardings. The companies received \$5 for each traveller over 18 and \$2.50 for those under 18, with the stipulation that only farmers and domestic servants of "perfect health and good character" were desired (Curtis 1911, 64).

In addition to their efforts overseas, the government also paid bonuses of \$3 for each man, \$2 per woman, and \$1 per child to agents of the immigration bureau in the United States. The American journalist William E. Curtis stated that during 1910, the Canadian government had paid bonuses of this form amounting to \$233,636 in the United States, \$85,660 in Great Britain, and \$10,000 in continental countries. In the 15 years prior to 1910, the government had paid out \$2,697,968 to attract American immigrants, and Curtis estimated that an equal if not larger sum was paid by the railway company's agents who were constantly "setting forth the allurements" of Canada. This figure did not include their budget for promotional literature (Curtis 1911, 64-65).

The federal government also enlisted the support of British journalists in their quest for women. For example, Marion Dudley Cran's volume *A Woman in Canada*, published in London and Toronto (1910), was the result of a six month tour of Canada at the expense of the government and the CPR. She reported that the Dominion was aware that England was "overcrowded with women" and that her "own prairie lands" were "crying for them by the thousands." At the government's request, Cran undertook:

to regard the country from the woman's standpoint as much as possible; to study the lives of the Englishwomen settled there; to form my own opinion as to their happiness, their usefulness, their success or failure as settlers and wives of settlers; to discover if possible in what ways they could make money for themselves without having to wait for menfolk to bring them or send for them (1910, 21-22).

Cran assured her readers that the government's sponsorship of her Canadian sojourn did not mean that she was "bound to speak well of it", and in fact had been advised by official sources that she should "Speak the truth, we can stand it" (1910, 17). The truth Cran found entailed hard work but virtually "endless" opportunities for women of the right kind (1910, 190), and she concluded that if she had to earn her living, she would go to Canada (1910, 283).

## BRITISH WOMEN RESPOND TO THE LURE OF THE WEST

### VOLUNTARY EMIGRATION SOCIETIES SEEK OPPORTUNITIES FOR BRITISH WOMEN

British emigration societies, such as the Women's Emigration Society (1880-84), the Colonial Emigration Society (1884-92), the United British Women's Emigration Association (1884-1919), and the British Women's Emigration Association (1884-1919), all responded to Canada's call for women. These voluntary organizations screened applicants for

suitability, raised money to assist with fares, and organized matrons to ensure that women reached their destinations. They also set up British training schools, such as the Leaton Colonial Training Home in Shropshire, that equipped women for labour in the Dominion. These associations grew to the extent that most British towns had a local branch and their hostels for female immigrants spread across Canada (Jackel 1982, xviii-xix).

Voluntary emigration societies also took on the task of publicizing the employment opportunities available in the West through contributions to the British popular press and their own periodical literature. Lewthwaite, whose writing was published in *Fortnightly Review* and the British Women's Emigration Association's *Imperial Colonist*, believed that one of the major impediments to emigration for gentlewomen was the "obvious difficulty of bringing both employer and employee into direct communication." She recommended that all agencies dealing with female employment should make known the openings in the Colonies, and above all, the "Colonies themselves must take the initiative and make far more widely known the organisations which already exist, and in every chief town of every Colony let there be well known Central Agencies, with their Correspondents in every quarter of the kingdom, to whom both employers and employed may apply..." (Lewthwaite 1901, 120).

### BECOMING A HOME-HELP IN CANADA

Canadian immigration policy actively solicited domestic servants to fill the overwhelming demand on the prairies for "home-help", but the specialized nature of British domestic service meant that even these women frequently lacked the skills necessary for life in the West. Georgina Binnie-Clark, a British emigrant herself, emphasized that domestic specialists from the old country needed to understand that what was wanted in Canada was general help and knowledge of "every detail of the daily round" (1910, 163). Sykes advised that no one should consider emigration to Canada without some "knowledge of cooking, washing, and so on, this being absolutely necessary in a country where only five per cent. of the women have servants" (1913, 224). Thus schools such as Leaton played an important role in ensuring that British females would arrive on Canadian soil with skills in plain cooking, bread making, laundry work, dressmaking, and butter-making (Lewthwaite 1901, 119). If a woman arrived in Canada with some means of support, the Guelph Agricultural College could teach her proper methods for washing clothes and dishes, sewing, dress-making, millinery, making butter and cheese, and rearing poultry (Sykes 1913, 300-301).

Skills in general domestic labour were particularly important for the gentlewoman, of whom British emigration officials observed: "The stock is all right, but the *training* is all wrong" (Sykes 1913, 303). Nevertheless, once the hurdle of training was past, the gentlewoman who intended to work as a home-help would find "never ending" demand (1913, 228) for this "one calling in which a girl can get immediate employment" (1913, 225). Other possibilities for employment included teaching, probationary nursing, stenography, dressmaking, hairdressing, millinery, or serving in a suitable environment such as the Hudson's Bay store tearooms or the Canadian Pacific Railway hotels (Sykes 1913, 229-238; Weaver 1914, 226-227).

Whether servants or settler's wives, the women of the West had to be hard-working and versatile. "The Canadian woman will drive a team of horses when her man is too busy to work the hayrake or binder, she will be baker, housemaid, cook, mother, seamstress, nurse to her neighbour five miles off when she is ill, she will run the dairy, sell the butter and eggs, and keep the farm accounts all in her own person" (Cran 1910, 265). These paragons were "spotlessly neat" "first-class cooks" who could "make the soap, cure the ham and bacon, bottle quantities of fruit for winter use, rear poultry, and on occasion can milk the cows, groom, harness and drive the horses, and are most handy with a hammer and nails" (Sykes 1913, 103).

In addition to information concerning the skills she would require to be assured of immediate employment in the West, the class-conscious British gentlewoman also required reassurance that the position of home-help would not entail a loss of social respectability. Such reassurance abounded in the reports of British women who had travelled or lived in Canada, and testified that immigrant women who worked on farms in the Canadian West were accepted as members of their employers' families, and remained single only by choice. Saxby informed readers that their domestic duties would not be "degrading"; if they would only "fling the prejudices of caste aside" they would find happy homes in the West (1890, 71). Binnie-Clark also urged her audience not to hesitate in taking up domestic service in Canada, "since there class distinctions are not, and rich and poor, gentle and simple, Canadian or immigrant, we are all of us working women" (1910, 163). Cran reiterated this theme, arguing that every "woman is a servant where labour is so scarce" and furthermore, the "wives of Canada seem to take it for granted that they shall be mistress and servant in one, and very excellently they do their work"

(1910, 59).

The organizers of the Colonial Intelligence League for Educated Women, who assisted English gentlewomen with emigration during the four years before the outbreak of World War I, were particularly concerned with the class implications of domestic service. At the request of the League, upper-class Englishwoman Ella C. Sykes undertook a six-month "undercover" mission as a home-help in the West in order to investigate suspicions that the title "home-help" was merely a euphemism for domestic drudgery (Jackel 1982, 187). Sykes advised the prospective immigrant to avoid home-help employment in Canadian towns, where she would be treated "merely as a servant" and "not in any way made one of the family" (1913, 226). She also cautioned readers that:

this occupation has not always been presented in its true light. The mere words "Golden West" teem with allurements, and there is a charm in the idea of helping with the pioneer work of a new country. Before I went to Canada I gathered from the literature treating of this subject, that I should probably have riding or driving in the afternoons and that there would be some social intercourse among the neighbours, many of whom would be of my own class. Nothing, or hardly anything, of this fell to my lot in the five situations that I filled during the summer, and maid-of-all-work as I was, I should have been too tired to have enjoyed such distractions had I had the chance of them (1913, 225).

Rather than be included in the "depressing" category of "superfluous woman", Sykes proposed that it was far better for a woman to endure some "discomfort and toil in the Dominion, where she is badly needed, and where, if of the right type, she will in all likelihood succeed beyond her anticipations" (1913, 304). She also believed that women wage-earners were respected rather than shunned in the West, and supported her contention with a reference to a "distinguished Canadian journalist" who remarked that in the Dominion "we consider that there is something wrong about a woman if she cannot earn her own livelihood" (1913, 242). Sykes agreed with Cran, stating "if I were obliged to earn my living...I should not hesitate for a moment between the wide, free life of Canada and my probable lot in over-crowded England!" (1913, ix).

#### BRITISH CRITIQUES OF DOMINION GOVERNMENT POLICY

Eager as they were to support female emigration to Canada, educated British women were also quick to critique the Dominion government for what they regarded as grave errors in immigration policy. Two important streams of protest ensued. The first was directed toward the government's active solicitation of domestic servants while the second concerned the inequality of male and female opportunity in the Canadian West.

#### BREEDING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN TRAINING

The same writers who assured English gentlewomen that their gentility and respectability would not be sacrificed by earning a living in Canada also used the rhetoric of class and breeding to argue against the government's preference for working-class female immigrants. If women employed in British domestic service lacked the general home-making skills required in Canada, then they were on an even footing in this respect with middle-class gentlewomen. Furthermore, these writers argued, the middle-class woman's breeding, upbringing and education made her by far the more desirable candidate for the task of nation-building. Saxby warned that populating the Canadian West with working class women would have dire consequences. The men in Canada "must, and will, marry if they get a chance, and since we do not encourage our educated, refined girls to go to those lands where men need helpmeets, of course the men take what they can get" (1890, 71).

Lewthwaite supported Saxby's claim and also seemed to believe that the Dominion was not "playing fair" by depriving Britain of her domestic servants while leaving her to cope with vast numbers of impoverished gentlewomen.

It has always seemed to me such a misdirected stream of philanthropy, which carries out of the Old Country a class of women for whom the demand at home infinitely exceeds the supply (I need hardly say I allude to domestic servants) and leaves to drift as best as they can, that vast army of gentlewomen, daughters of professional men, impoverished landed gentry and others, who by their birth, tradition, and upbringing are so ably qualified for Colonial life and surroundings. Few who have thought at all about the subject will deny that education and good breeding almost invariably mean increased power of endurance and of adaptability... (1901, 111).

Cran likewise bristled at the suggestion that the discomfort, inconvenience and doing without that would be experienced in

the Colonies could only be handled by the working class woman. She contended that the:

working-class woman does not bring the intelligence to bear on domestic emergencies which a cultured woman can, out of her ignorance how can she reduce disorder to comeliness, and make the prairie home a beautiful thing? It can be done. I have seen it. Then the next generation deserves some attention. If ignorant women of our lower orders go out and marry — as they will — farmers, who are often men of decent breeding, their children will go down, not up, in the scale of progress; a woman of refinement and culture, of endurance, of healthy reasoning courage, is infinitely better equipped for the work of home-making and race-making than the ignorant, often lazy, often slovenly lower-class woman (1910, 109).

## FARMS FOR WOMEN

The second stream of criticism, directed primarily toward the government's homestead policy, reflected an awareness of the same sort of gender inequality that pre-war British feminists combatted in their struggle for female emancipation. Emily Poynton Weaver believed that it could not "be said that at present the Dominion makes the same effort to attract women as men. For instance, the bonus given to booking agents is less on a woman than a man, and the only way in which a woman can acquire a free grant of Dominion crown lands is in the character of a widowed mother of a child, or children, under eighteen years of age." Weaver supposed that this "inequality of opportunity" was rooted in the "notion that a woman is not suited for doing homestead duties", but disputed this rationale. Her own experience as a British immigrant in Canada had shown her that women were entirely capable of managing homesteads, and in fact were frequently required to do so. According to Weaver, "the wife of a struggling newcomer is often left alone for weeks at a time on the homestead, while her husband 'hires himself out' to a farmer, or works on a new railway" (1914, 222).

Georgina Binnie-Clark was one of the most outspoken critics of the Canadian homestead policy which denied single women the right to apply for free land. Believing that this policy severely curtailed female opportunity in the West, Binnie-Clark argued strongly for its amendment on the grounds that competence rather than gender should determine the disbursement of Crown lands. In Binnie-Clark's eyes, it was highly unjust that "every woman who wants a 160-acre field in Canada — no matter how competent she may be to work it — must buy it at the current price per acre, which is no longer inconsiderable; but every man who wants a 160-acre field in Canada — no matter how incompetent he may be to work it — can have it for the asking" (1913, 179). She knew that it was quite possible for a woman to run a farm, as she had done so herself. Four years after her 1905 purchase of a 330 acre farm in Saskatchewan, Binnie-Clark turned a profit, and took up the cause of "land for single women" with Frank Oliver, the Minister of the Interior. Binnie-Clark was subsequently informed that homesteads for women other than widows and the heads of families contravened the law in Canada (1913, 175-177). Shortly thereafter, Binnie-Clark's success story was reported in the *Grain Grower's Guide*, and readers deluged Frank Oliver with enquiries about homestead policy. Oliver responded by tightening up rather than loosening restrictions regarding female applicants, and was unswayed even by petitions from his Edmonton home town. The regulations prohibiting single female homesteaders remained unchanged, and the next issue of *Canada West* clarified the closure of all loopholes (Jackel 1979, xxii-xxviii; Department of the Interior 1911, inside cover).

The Colonial Intelligence League also recognized the obstacle that this form of "prejudice against women working on the land" posed for interested women who desired agricultural experience in the Canadian climate. Accordingly, the League purchased farmland in British Columbia with the goal of providing women educated at British horticultural institutions practice in "small fruit, vegetable and flower-raising, poultry and bee-keeping, dairy work and so on before taking up land on their own account" (Sykes 1913, xv). Cran also supported small scale agricultural operations for women, noting that land within a few miles of the railway lines could be purchased for approximately ten dollars or two British pounds per acre.

Given health and industry, there is a fortune waiting for them in that marvellous prairie loam, just as surely as for the men who go out to grow wheat and run stock-farms. Above all there is a splendid opening for our women gardeners. Plenty of women now-a-days train in agriculture and horticulture, but the demand for their services is at best small in Great Britain, while it is urgent round the rapidly growing prairie towns (1910, 154).

She also saw safety in numbers, recommending that women "come out in twos or threes...settle within marketable driving distance of such cities as Saskatoon, Regina, Edmonton, Calgary, etc., and they will find awaiting them every facility for a life of independence and certain ultimate success in the grandest climate in the world" (1910, 155).



## CONCLUSION

Cran proposed that the absence of communal life to which British women were accustomed (1910, 265) and the hardship of childbirth on isolated prairie homesteads were important deterrents to female emigration (249). She also believed that the "mass of English bachelor women" were ill suited to life as settlers in Canada, but nevertheless was convinced that there must be "thousands" with "the courage and the health to...come into this wild beautiful West, giving their best of mind and body for the race and for the Empire" (1910, 266).

By the thousands they came. According to Jackel, "significantly more British women, single but usually of marriageable age and with a higher average level of education, enter[ed] the West than would have been the case had expected or 'normal' patterns of population movement prevailed" (1982, xxiii). The Colonial Intelligence League, for example, helped 269 educated women leave Britain during its four years of operation before the outbreak of World War I, while the British Women's Emigration Association was responsible for assisting 6706 females, 5768 of whom came to Canada. Among these were 1079 females identified as middle class (Hammerton 1979, 176). Numbers of females who left Britain rose from 57,248 in 1899 to 156,606 in 1911, while emigration of educated women (teachers, clerks, or professional women) increased at an even greater rate from 274 in 1899 to 3751 in 1911 (Jackel 1982, xxii-xxiii).

Given the upward trend in female emigration from Britain, one might assume that the Canadian government's promotional literature, such as *Canada West* publications and the Canadian Pacific Railway pamphlets, were effective in their persuasive task. However, examination of period documents suggests that it was through indirect attempts to influence the British public, such as Cran's tour, and bonuses to shipping companies and other transport agents, that the government experienced most of its success. Any woman who desired information regarding employment opportunities in Canada would have been more likely to find this advice in a British general interest periodical than between the covers of *Canada West*. Far more useful sources of information were the British voluntary emigration societies, their own periodicals such as the *Imperial Colonist*, and the Sykes volume concerning home-help opportunities. These societies also appeared to be more familiar than were Canadian immigration officials with the diverse range of skills required of women in the North-West, and understood that even the domestic servants targeted by government literature required further training to equip them for pioneer life. It would thus appear that the efforts of Britain's more fortunate educated women on behalf of their less comfortably positioned sisters played a pivotal role in promoting female emigration to Canada. In all likelihood, many of them would have agreed with Georgina Binnie-Clark who flatly stated, "in its programme of invitation to the English emigrant, the Canadian department of immigration has offered very little inducement to Englishwomen to emigrate to Canada" (1909, 170).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks Susan Jackel for her helpful comments in the preparation of this paper, and acknowledges the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

## REFERENCES

- Binnie-Clark, Georgina. 1909. "Conditions of Life for Women in Canada." In *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Ed. Susan Jackel 1982. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 170-177.
- 1910. "Are Educated Women Wanted in Canada." In *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Ed. Susan Jackel 1982. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 162-169.
- 1913. "Land and the Woman in Canada." In *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Ed. Susan Jackel 1982. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 178-186.
- 1914. *Wheat and Woman*. Reprint 1979. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press.



- Canadian Pacific Railway. 1886. "What Women Say of the Canadian North-West." In *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Ed. Susan Jackel 1982. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 32-65.
- Cran, Marion Dudley. 1910. *A Woman in Canada*. London: John Milne.
- Curtis, William E. 1911. *Letters on Canada*. Chicago: Record-Herald.
- Department of the Interior. 1908. *Canada West: The Last Best West*. Ottawa: Government of Canada Department of the Interior.
- 1911. *Canada West: The Last Best West*. Ottawa: Government of Canada Department of the Interior.
- Hammerton, A. James. 1979. *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Immigration 1830-1914*. London: Croom Helm.
- Jackel, Susan. 1979. "Introduction." In *Wheat and Woman*. Georgina Binnie-Clark 1914, reprint 1979. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, v-xxxvii.
- Jackel, Susan, ed. 1982. *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press.
- Lewthwaite, Elizabeth. 1901. "Women's Work in Western Canada." In *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Ed. Susan Jackel 1982. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 111-120.
- Poovey, Mary. 1988. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Saxby, Jessie M. 1890. "Women Wanted." In *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Ed. Susan Jackel 1982. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 68-74.
- Sykes, Ella Constance. 1913. *A Home-help in Canada*. 2nd edition. London: Smith, Elder.
- Weaver, Emily Poynton. 1914. "The Woman Canada Needs." In *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*. Ed. Susan Jackel 1982. Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 222-229.