

the genre of works such as Tilly and Scott's *Women, Work and Family* (1978) dealing with Britain and France, gathers the existing research and issues into a useful analysis within the Canadian context. Especially important is Chapter Five, "The Early Years of Women's Paid Employment: Confederation to the Second World War," which is an historical overview of women's heavy involvement in the early Canadian economy and in the industrialization of Canada as cheap labour, the link of work to marital status, continual sex segregation in the labour force and the predominance of domestic service and factory work for women. The movement of women into male-dominated fields of teaching and clerical work and the reasons for it are also included. In the final section of the book she demonstrates the interconnections of ideas and structures, particularly showing how education and the mass media, including pornography, are crucial vehicles of social control. This is followed by a well-selected 20 page bibliography.

One of our tasks must be clarification of the definition and nature of women's work and of the ways in which women's work and lives are distinct from those of men. Work has been defined according to male criteria and the workplace structured by patriarchal forces. In this context, our understanding of women's work has been severely obstructed. We need to be aware always of the distortions thereby produced in our concepts and methodologies. The linkages of women's work to economic and political structures and familial constraints must be understood.

Wilson takes an important step in that direction, through her discussion of the myths of women's work lives, for example (p. 98). It is utterly essential, as Wilson demonstrates, to understand how women's domestic work and family relations form the base for the societal definitions of her roles and identity and mold the structural parameters of her work situation. The separation yet interdependence of the public and

private sectors operate to define and limit the life activities of women, to prevent recognition of the real work women do, and to measure women's life possibilities by male standards.

Women, The Family and the Economy is a very welcome textbook, a useful reference tool and a provocative source of questions and directions for our research. It is a valuable contribution to those of us who teach and do research on women's work in historical context and who wish to build an historical sociology of women's work in Canada.

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Wheat and Women. Georgina Binnie-Clark. Introduction by Susan Jackel. *Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979. Pp.313.*

A Flannel Shirt and Liberty. British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914. Susan Jackel, ed. *Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982. Pp.229.*

In Western Canada Before the War. Impressions of Early Twentieth Century Prairie Communities. Elizabeth B. Mitchell. Introduction by Susan Jackel. *Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1981. Pp. 205.*

Susan Jackel has edited three volumes published before the First World War of writings by English "gentlewomen" that describe settlement of the Canadian prairie provinces. The books focus on women's experience, and generally are directed to English readers. Many of the writers, unmarried educated women of the middle and upper-middle classes, are capitalizing, as Jackel interestingly points out, upon the popularity of travel books. They describe Canada as a foreign land holding adventure and promise (a point of view that may startle those of us who live in or near these exotic regions). Certain themes recur. At the turn of the twentieth century in England

there were a million more women than men, and in Canada during the same years a shortage of women. Thus the solution to the English problem of “redundant” women (dreadful word) was persuading them to emigrate to Canada. Unmarried women might go as “home help” or as housekeepers to bachelor brothers, although educated English women often were ill prepared, it turned out, for the hard work of rural living. Nursing and teaching school also were possible, as well as jobs in shops and dressmaking establishments. Work was hard everywhere, and Canadian employers known to be impatient with ineptitude.

Elizabeth Mitchell *In Western Canada Before the War* spent nearly a year in Canada, from May 1913 until April 1914, visiting in North Battleford her cousin Lilius Mitchell, honorary deaconess in the diocese of Saskatchewan. Mitchell had completed first class honours in classical Mods and Greats at Oxford, had become active in the Town and Country Planning Association, and was especially interested in housing reform in Scotland. What she reports of her visit to the Canadian prairie, then, is highly coloured by her interests in town planning, for, at her most enthusiastic, she views burgeoning prairie towns as so many “new” towns.

Georgina Binnie-Clark’s *Wheat and Women* is a more personal account of her managing a wheat farm four miles from Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan, between 1905 and 1908. Georgina and her sister Hilaria had come to visit their brother Lal on his homestead, which they found a hopelessly incompetent enterprise. Hilaria, declaring farming “a waste of life,” moved to Winnipeg to work as a nurse, but Georgina determined to try her own hand, even though Canadian homestead laws which gave away land to men obliged women to buy land. Georgina’s book is a detailed account of day-to-day farming, much of it relentlessly, if entertainingly, factual, as her explanation for measuring the amount of grain in a granary: “The rule is to multiply length

by breadth by height by eight, and cut off the final figure” (p.43). She writes with humour and verve, quoting once from her diary: “In spite of failures and my many failings, especially a habit of occasionally doing my work in a rebellious sort of way—one may just as well do the inevitable amiably—I have made a step forward in my work and got on terms with the daily round. I am going strong—absolutely independent of people and circumstances” (p.213).

A Flannel Shirt and Liberty collects excerpts and shorter published writings from additional Englishwomen, as well as selections from Mitchell and Binnie-Clark. All three volumes include helpful scholarly commentaries by Susan Jackel that fill in what we need to know about the history of Canadian prairie settlement and about the lives of the writers she edits.

Immediacy was the primary attraction of these various writings at their first appearance. English people of all classes wanted to know what Canada was like, and people in Canada wanted to be known. Ella Constance Sykes, who had written travel books based on trips with her brother to Persia and India, went so far as to spend six months in Manitoba and Saskatchewan in the guise of a young woman hiring out for domestic services in order to write *A Home-Help in Canada*. Now seventy and more years later, our curiosity is piqued by other questions than aroused the first readers. We can hardly help reading the books differently. For instance, the manner in which most of these writers take for granted class separations now seems excessive, although none represented in Jackel’s selections is more emphatic than Marion Cran (from *A Woman in Canada*, 1910):

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. I know, I've washed too many of them in hospital days (*Flannel Shirt*, p. 129).

Other observations come to mind. Neither Georgina Binnie-Clark nor Elizabeth Mitchell married or had children, nor, apparently did most of the writers represented in the anthology. Most appear also to be self-supporting. As independent women they tend to think primarily about unmarried women and men. I am curious to know whether the plight of unmarried persons was as dire during prairie settlement as these writers suggest, and whether it was more severe than elsewhere. Lillian Schlissel's recent book about travel to Oregon asserts that western settlement in the United States was a family affair (with the single exception of the gold rush year 1849).

Even though Jackel's writers primarily describe unmarried women, both the writers and the single women they write about encounter women living with husbands and children, or widows. Furthermore, these writers have little to say about family life, about relationships between women and men, parents and children, and friendships among women, all subjects that are unmistakably central to private writings of ordinary women of this period. Disease, death, and sexuality are hardly touched. It is important to note then, that these works all were published, written for a public audience, and in that respect reveal much about how women viewed themselves in a public light, how they thought they were permitted to act, and write. About the actual lives of their subjects they may be less dependable.

Susan Jackel tells of doing considerable detective work to piece together biographies of the lives of some of her writers, particularly Binnie-Clark. Mitchell uses initials for names of towns,

and other writers similarly confound identification. Why? There is very little self-revelation in any of the writings. Georgina Binnie-Clark, for all the dialogue and lively sketches in *Wheat and Women* is very closed about her own inner life. Self-mockery and exhausting detail blot her own presence; the "many failings" she speaks of are only anecdotes. Elizabeth Mitchell makes astute and sympathetic observations ("For a man in the West marriage...means leaving a ghastly loneliness for companionship and help, and squalor for decent comfort,") but she shows us no such marriages in their particulars, and the towns she regrets for being laid out so irrevocably on grids, are curiously depopulated. These writers were ambitious for publication, yet employed travelogues gorged with facts to still their own expression.

The plight of "gentlewomen" is hard for us to imagine or be greatly sympathetic to—their removal from meaningful work, their excessive numbers, and their horror of the "lower orders" who did work. We speak of wanting better day care, equitable inheritance laws, equal opportunity and comparable pay. For us redundancy is all but gone, and except for the very poor among us, we live like gentlewomen with the additional possibility of meaningful work. The incongruities dramatized in these books give us fresh insights into a special group.

In the United States it is generally agreed that what lies on the map between the headwaters of the Mississippi in western Minnesota, and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in central Montana and Wyoming is what you drive through as fast as you can on the way to somewhere else. For all their austere beauty and fertility, I expect the same has been the fate of the prairie provinces of Canada, except in the minds of many who live there and, like Susan Jackel, increasingly are valuing the region's heritage and making it known to others. These are books by women who were half captivated by what they experienced there, but careful to keep their

distance. Who are we to blame them? Better to be glad they have made the distance a little less for us.

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A Woman With A Purpose. The Diaries of Elizabeth Smith 1872 - 1884. Edited with an introduction by Veronica Strong-Boag. *Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980. Pp. 298.*

Pictured in a 1917 issue of *Saturday Night* in an article on military training in the schools, is a middle-aged woman. Her expression is serious, her dress sensible, her views patriotic. This is Mrs. Adam Shortt, described in the caption as "A prominent Ottawa . . . who was a practising physician before her marriage . . . well known in philanthropic and civil movements." At the time of the newspaper story, twenty-four years had elapsed since Mrs. Shortt, at the age of thirty-four, had given up her medical career to devote her time to family responsibilities and to social reform work. Speaking on military training in schools, she used the opportunity to present her views on the three major problems of Canadian society: drunkenness, disease and feeble-mindedness. Patriotism, she claimed, aimed at the highest level of human efficiency, a goal which could not be reached as long as children's physical welfare was left "to parents, to nature and to chance." Their moral and mental development, she pointed out, was controlled by schools and churches; their physical welfare should be similarly monitored. Stopping "the supply of degenerates" at its source, possibly through sterilization, was, to Mrs. Shortt, an essential component of any plan to improve human efficiency.

Veronica Strong-Boag described Mrs. Shortt as uncompromising, embittered, disillusioned, her mood soured and her confidence shaken in the battle for social change and women's rights. The young woman who emerged from Elizabeth Smith's diaries was also determined and outspoken, convinced of the superiority of her Anglican deity, her middle class birthright and her liberal politics. Unlike Mrs. Shortt, however, Elizabeth was optimistic, fun-loving, flirtatious, passionate, a girl who bent and broke many of the rules which constrained Victorian womanhood. It is hard to believe that Elizabeth Smith and Mrs. Adam Shortt were the same person.

In her introduction to *A Woman With a Purpose*, Strong-Boag noted that the transformation which Elizabeth Smith experienced was not uncommon among feminists in the 1920s. Today, we recognize the same pattern - we call it burnout. Perhaps it is naive to expect youthful optimism and *joie de vivre* to survive into adult life, but one must agree with Strong-Boag that the disappearance of the vivacious and sensitive young woman of the diaries is a cause for regret.

Elizabeth Smith began writing her diaries in 1872, at the age of thirteen. In the ensuing years, she completed her training at normal school and spent some time teaching in rural Ontario. At the age of eighteen, the young teacher - "A Woman With a Purpose" - set out to gain admission to the medical school at Queen's University. Her last diary entry was made when she was twenty-five, at the start of her career in medicine.

Initially, Elizabeth's diaries served as a daily record of events, although even her notes as a thirteen-year-old were scattered with reflective asides. As she matured, the self-evaluative function of the diaries became more salient. The result, however, was not the tediously introspective soliloquy which one might expect from a young woman whose high religious and personal standards left little room for human failings - a young woman who agonized over her