

**‘I Must Record the Grit of My Little Wife Millie’:
Experience, Representation, and Rural Women in Early 20th Century
British Columbia**

by

Lorna Ivy Townsend

B.A., University of Northern British Columbia, 2003

Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment Of

The Requirements For The Degree Of

Master Of Arts

in

History

The University Of Northern British Columbia

June 2006

© Lorna Ivy Townsend, 2006



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file *Votre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-28403-2
Our file *Notre référence*
ISBN: 978-0-494-28403-2

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

APPROVAL

Name: Lorna Townsend

Degree: Master of Arts

Thesis Title: 'I Must Record the Grit of My Little Wife Millie': Experience, Representation, and Rural Women in Early 20th Century British Columbia

Examining Committee:

Chair: Dr. Chris Hawkins, Associate Professor
Natural Resources and Environmental Studies Program
Endowed Chair, Mixed Wood Ecology and Management
University of Northern British Columbia

Supervisor: Dr. Mary-Ellen Kelm
Associate Professor, History Department
Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Peoples of North America
Simon Fraser University

Committee Member: Dr. Theodore Binnema
Associate Professor, History Program
University of Northern British Columbia

Committee Member: Dr. Theresa Healy
Adjunct Professor, Gender Studies Program
University of Northern British Columbia

External Examiner: Dr. Blanca Schorcht
Assistant Professor, English Program
University of Northern British Columbia

Date Approved:

July 21, 2006

Abstract

This study examines the historical experiences and narrative representations of early 20th century women in north-central British Columbia. First, using empirical strategies, it determines the diversity of women's gender roles, their contributions to family survival, and their leadership functions in creating rural societies. Then, drawing on Helen Buss's multi-generational deconstructive model, it analyzes the local historical record, demonstrating how, although women's collective voices are over-represented, an androcentric narrative tradition predominates. Conversely, reading the sources from a consciously feminist position also reveals a number of subversive narrative strategies that allowed rural women to quietly exploit their accomplishments, without challenging the social power of men. Finally, the tensions and discontinuities between experiences and representations of rural women are shown to reflect issues of genre, persisting social tensions between rural men and women, and women's personal desires to both conform to and resist traditional expectations of femininity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract		ii
Table of Contents		iii
List of Tables and Figures		iv
Acknowledgement		v
Introduction		1
Chapter One	EXPERIENCE AND IDENTITY: Through Grandmother’s Eyes, the Journey Begins	24
Chapter Two	DISCOURSE AND IDENTITY: Mothering the Texts: The Conforming ‘Ground Noise’ of the Local Historical Record	55 56
Chapter Three	Sisterly (De)liberations: Beneath the Surface of Local Discourse	72
Chapter Four	One Daughter’s Reckoning: Realities, Ideologies and Rural Women	97
Bibliography		109

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure		Page
I.I	Map of North-Central British Columbia	23
Table		
1	British Columbia Population Census Data Div. 8 1921-1941	27
2	Adult Female Population by Racial Origin	28
3	Gender Ratios 1911 – 1941	28
4	Marital Status of Females – British Columbia	29
5	Marital Status of Females by Province 1911 – 1941	30

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people for making this thesis possible, including the History Department of the University of Northern British Columbia and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for granting me the scholarships that enabled me to conduct my research and complete this work. I also offer my sincerest appreciation and thanks to my advisor and mentor, Mary-Ellen Kelm, for her knowledge, support, criticism, and patience in allowing me the time and space to do it my way. I am equally grateful to Theresa Healy for her encouragement and insightful comments; and to Ted Binnema, for agreeing to be on my committee and immerse himself in feminist language. To the staff at the libraries, museums, and archives in Hazelton, Smithers, Telkwa, Houston, Burns Lake, Fraser Lake, Vanderhoof and Prince George, I also owe much thanks for the administrative assistance and research guidance. Last, but not least, I offer my deepest appreciation to my family, friends and especially, fellow graduate student Julie Andow, for their unwavering support.

I dedicate this thesis to three very special rural women in my life: my grandmother Ivy Middleton; my mother, Bessie Whitehead; and my sister, Sandy Stickney. By recovering the voices of other rural women, I am hopeful that their lives too will not be forgotten.

Introduction

In her life, character and spirit she combined the beauty of the lily and the fragrance of the rose....with a sweet simplicity of faith, inoffensive candour, unshakable confidence, fervent spirit and honest practice....Motherhood to her was life's most sacred privilege, its highest honor, its supreme obligation....Home was her pride and delight, her husband her ideal.

- "Mrs. Hankinson is Laid to Rest," *The Interior News*, 3 Dec. 1924

During my undergraduate studies, I had the privilege of interviewing my ninety-four year old grandmother. To provide a context for her life experiences, I examined early 20th century newspapers representing the Bulkley Valley. In doing so, I came across the above eulogy, which unsettled me. The images it presented did not conform to my knowledge and understanding of rural women, my perceptions being rooted in memories of my six foot, 180 lb. grandmother in her faded housedress, digging the garden, milking cows, mending fences, and driving tractors. Instead of sweet simplicity and inoffensive candor, I admired the rural women I knew for their independence, physical and emotional strength, pragmatism, and familial power. The conflict between my images of rural women and those of the historical documents like Mrs. Hankinson's obituary sparked my interest. I wanted to understand the relationship between the material realities of early 20th century rural women's lives and the ideological representation of them in local historical records. Because I represent the fourth generation of women in my family to live in north-central British Columbia, this study also represents a personal quest aimed at achieving a broader understanding of the female models I have drawn on throughout my own life for self-realization and development. Along the way, my perceptions of rural women (including my female ancestors) have been shaped and informed by

many factors, including the scholarship of provincial, national, and international feminist historians, and by feminist theories from a variety of fields including history, geography, psychology, and literature, all of which serve to locate this study within an interdisciplinary framework.

Geographically, this investigation concentrates on the Bulkley Valley, Lakes District, and Nechako Valley regions of British Columbia, that being the settled areas between and including the communities of Hazelton and Prince George. (See Figure 1) Temporally, it pertains primarily to the first four decades of the 20th century, which represents this area's concentrated period of early white settlement. By choosing these concise spatial and temporal parameters and utilizing local sources generated by and about early 20th century immigrants, this inquiry focuses on women of British and western European backgrounds because they are the dominant voices in the local historical record. Although these sources represent the ethnic majority of non-Native women living in this geographical area during the early 20th century, they clearly do not represent the substantial First Nations Carrier population inhabiting the area before, during and after this period.¹ The minimal presence of Carrier women in local discourse is telling in itself. It suggests that in spite of significant interactions between Natives and non-Natives, north-central British Columbia's communities came to be narrowly defined by 'whiteness.'² Thanks to the scholarly

¹ The Natives of north-central British Columbia are commonly known as Carrier peoples, a term which unites them linguistically.

² By 'whiteness,' I am referring to imperial discourse, in which Anglo-Saxons occupied positions of racial privilege. See Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

efforts of anthropologist Jo-Anne Fiske and others, studies of the region's Carrier women's early 20th century experiences are available elsewhere.³

One of the biggest problems feminist researchers encounter when studying women's pasts is the paucity of traditional archival sources pertaining to women. During the past three decades, scholars have attempted to overcome this difficulty by developing innovative and revisionist research techniques, new feminist theories, and expanded notions of acceptable historical evidence. British Columbia's historiography reflects these methodological developments, as late twentieth century scholars made significant strides towards placing the province's women into the historical record.⁴ However, their efforts thus far have emphasized urban women and the southwest corner of the province.⁵ This study, at its very basic academic level, is an initial attempt to fill this notable gap in the province's feminist historical record.

³ See for example, Jo-Anne Fiske, "And Then We Prayed Again': Carrier Women, Colonialism and Mission Schools," MA, University of British Columbia, 1981; Fiske, "Fishing is Women's Business: Changing Economic Roles of Carrier Women," in *Native Peoples, Native Lands: Canadian Indians, Inuit and Métis*, ed. Bruce Alden Cox (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1981), 186-98; Fiske, "Carrier Women and The Politics of Mothering," in *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, ed. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), 198-216; Bridget Moran, *Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John* (Vancouver: Tillicum Books, 1988); and Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend, eds. *In the Days of Our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006).

⁴ See for example, Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess, eds. *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980); Susan Jackel, ed. *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1982); Barbara Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds. *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria: Camosun College, 1984); Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds. *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992); Kathryn Bridge, *By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer: Women of the Frontier* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1998); and Cathy Converse, *Mainstays: Women Who Shaped BC* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 1998).

⁵ For evidence of the rural gap, see Theresa Healy, "Finding Women in British Columbia: A Select Bibliography," in *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, 431-449. Healy's 1992 bibliography draws attention to the absence of rural women in the published record and how at that time, just one of the 300 sources available featured women of north-central British Columbia.

A critique of British Columbia's scholarship highlights not only its urban and limited geographical focus, but also how historians of the past often chose to uncover women's lives by using the "add and stir" approach, which means they recorded women's experiences, but offered no in-depth analysis of what those experiences meant.⁶ This does not negate the importance of their work, however, for as this study also demonstrates, reclaiming women's experiences is often a necessary first step in feminist historiography. Nonetheless, today's scholars suggest that women's experiences are more than just portraits.⁷ As Joan Scott explained, since "meaning preceded experience," women's experiences must serve not as the "origin of our explanation," but as the subject of it.⁸

By stressing the need to explain, and not just name women's experiences, Scott emphasized the relevance of historical context, culture and change in determining social identities. Significant to these discussions was her assertion that gender, race, ethnicity and class are culturally constructed features of human identity, and that as such, they are also fluid, interconnected categories of social difference that represent relationships of power.⁹ For example, as British emigrants, the female subjects discussed here held privileged positions relative to race, ethnicity and class, but as women were subordinated by gender. This shift in feminist thinking away from universalized notions of female oppression represented

⁶ For examples, see Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag, "Taking Gender into Account in British Columbia: More than Just Women's Studies," in *BC Studies* 105/106 (Spring/Summer 1995), 14.

⁷ Joy Parr, "Gender History and Historical Practice," in *Gender and History in Canada*, eds. Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996), 15.

⁸ Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," in *Critical Inquiry* 17:4 (Summer 1991), 797.

⁹ Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 152,167.

a “sobering corrective to the essentialist tendencies of feminist politics.”¹⁰ It reinforced the connections between theory and history, as historians began to search for social differences to discern hierarchies of power and a diversity of truths about women’s lives. The acceptance of identity as a multi-faceted social construct, along with the expansion of acceptable historical sources, such as oral methodologies, also amplified the importance of the historical discourse itself. As a result, interdisciplinary discussions, including psychoanalysis and post-structural theoretical debates pertaining to issues of voice, language, representation, subjectivity, and objectivity are becoming common in all social science research. By focusing on the diversities and differences of rural women’s experiences and analyzing the discourses embedded in the sources themselves, this inquiry meets the expectations of contemporary feminist scholarship.

Rural Women in Historical Context

Adele Perry’s work, entitled *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*, serves as an excellent model of feminist history in this province.¹¹ The author combines an analysis of gender, class, race, sexuality and imperialism with post-structural theories of language and discourse to suggest that British Columbia’s uniqueness to the rest of Canada can be found in its “edge of empire” colonial relationship with Britain. She argues that the demographic imbalance between Natives and Europeans, and between European men and women, allowed colonial residents to challenge imperial norms, by creating a male

¹⁰ Ibid. “Intro.,”5.

¹¹ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). Although this study peripherally includes Barkerville, its primary geographical focus is Vancouver Island and the southwest corner of the province.

homo-social culture and by encouraging mixed-race relationships. Further, although reformers sought the emigration of British women as a solution to such “social problems”, their efforts were hindered because of geography, isolation, Native resistance, and the female emigrants themselves, who were unwilling to act as “civilizers” to colonial society. According to Perry, these factors represented a unique transitional time which ended with British Columbia’s entry into Confederation in 1871. However, I believe her thesis can be extended into the 20th century, for the same geographical and demographic factors led to similar social practices and opportunities for women to deviate from conventional gender norms during the early settlement period in north-central British Columbia.

R.W. Sandwell’s 1997 edited collection, *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, also provides a context for understanding British Columbia’s rural history. In fact, as Sandwell points out, this anthology represents the only major scholarly effort aimed at filling the geographical gap in the provincial historical record that has “hindered the emergence of a broadly shared rural consciousness” and neglected the historical importance of agriculture.¹² These omissions are no small matter because there are more than a thousand rural communities in British Columbia and because agriculture rivaled forestry as the economic mainstay of the province well into the 1920s.¹³ Sandwell’s work moves definitions of “rural” beyond low population density and defines the “most coherent characteristics” of early 20th century rural British Columbia as:

flexibility and variability; occupational plurality; [skewed] gender [ratios];

¹² Martin Robin, as cited in R.W. Sandwell, ed. *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 3.

¹³ Sandwell, 7.

seasonal geographic mobility; intermittent participation in the waged labour market or in the marketing of produce; partial reliance on subsistence hunting and gathering activities; and land-based, family-centred social formations.¹⁴

These attributes of rural are broader than that found in the abundant scholarship on the prairie provinces, which associates rural almost exclusively with an agrarian, subsistence lifestyle, and accordingly, identifies women within “unpaid, subsistence and reproductive labour” inside the home and “income-generating” farm labour outside the home.¹⁵ This thesis will advance the study of rural women by testing Sandwell’s paradigm of rural and moving beyond the existing prairie literature.

Looking outside the province to North American rural studies more generally, we find that feminist scholars have assimilated British scholarship, much as mainstream women’s history has, by drawing on “separate spheres,” an analytical model grounded in middle-class life, to argue that rural life either contributed to women’s oppression or offered them autonomy.¹⁶ “Separate spheres” refers to the apparent narrowing of acceptable gender roles which took place in late 18th and early 19th century Britain, when women became associated with the private domestic sphere of home and men with public economic, political and social spheres. These restricting gender ideologies paralleled rapid social changes occurring in Britain, due to urbanization, industrial capitalism and evangelical religious movements. The term

¹⁴ Ibid. 11.

¹⁵ Sheila McManus, “Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women,” in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women’s History*, eds. Catherine A Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 130.

¹⁶ For examples of this rural scholarship, see Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984); and Linda Rasmussen et al, *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1976); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979); Glenda Riley, *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981); Sandra Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984); and Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in 19th Century New York* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

“middle-class” characterizes the third level of social hierarchy created by capitalism, in which business administrators and managers were defined as separate from labouring sectors and upper-class capitalists and gentry. Middle-class attributes of femininity came to include purity, passivity, morality, submissiveness, and dependence, while masculinity represented patriarchal dominance, self-sacrifice, independence and hard work.¹⁷

As British scholarship also points out, many women resisted these emerging middle-class ideologies. In fact, it was the tensions that arose from them that inspired the feminist movement in late 19th and early 20th century Britain.¹⁸ E.J. Hobsbawm referred to this period as the “age of empire” for women in Britain, because during these years women made significant strides towards improving their educational and professional status.¹⁹ However, a growing demographic imbalance ensured that many women would never fulfill their middle class obligations to marry and raise children. Between 1891 and 1911 alone, the British census recorded a rise in the number of surplus women (over men) from 600,000 to 1.25 million.²⁰ Meanwhile, men outnumbered women in British Columbia in the same period by two to one. Emigration to the colonies, including British Columbia, was a practical solution proposed by both British and Canadian governments to alleviate the demographic imbalances in both countries. These historical events link British feminist scholarship to North American studies, providing a basis for understanding

¹⁷ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 98. See also esp. Ch. 3.

¹⁸ See for example, Deirdre Beddoe, *Discovering Women's History: A Practical Guide to Researching the Lives of Women Since 1800* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc., 1998); and Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

¹⁹ E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 191.

²⁰ D. Crow, *The Edwardian Woman* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1978), 218.

the cultural tensions and ideologies emigrant men and women brought with them and the shifts in gender identities that resulted from their early settlement experiences.

By drawing on the separate spheres frameworks to argue for women's oppression or autonomy, rural feminist scholars have also perpetuated deeply rooted stereotypes of rural women as 'reluctant emigrants' or 'cheerful helpmates.'²¹ The term 'reluctant emigrant' suggests that women came to Canada unwillingly and had great difficulty adjusting to rural life, while 'cheerful helpmate' implies that they adjusted, by assuming roles that "enabled men to succeed" and by handling "crises with competence and without complaint."²² In Canada, these ideologies date back to the 19th century texts of Susanna Moodie, Catherine Parr Traill, Anna Jamieson and other early writers, whose imperialistic representations were directed to "back home" audiences.²³ However, like mainstream historians, rural scholars of recent years have begun to question these essentialist frameworks, by suggesting that they ignore the diversities of women's experiences and the differences between them.²⁴

²¹ See for example, Catherine Philip, "The Fair, Frail Flowers of Western Womanhood," in *Frontier Calgary*, eds. A.W. Rasporich and H. Klassen (Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West, 1976), 114-124.; and Sara Brooks Sundberg, "Farm Women on the Canadian Prairie Frontier: The Helpmate Image," in *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States*, eds. Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1983), 71-90.

²² Beverly J. Stoeltje, "A Helpmate for Man Indeed": The Image of the Frontier Woman," in *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (Spring 1975), 32. See also Jacqueline Bliss, "Seamless Lives: Pioneer Women of Saskatoon, 1883-1903," in *Saskatchewan History* 43:3 (1991), 84-100; and Janet Floyd, *Writing the Pioneer Woman* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), esp. Ch.1.

²³ See for example, Helen Buss, *Mapping Ourselves: Canadian Women's Autobiography* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Lorraine McMullen, ed. *Re(Dis)Covering our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990); and Elizabeth Thompson, *The Pioneer Woman: A Canadian Character Type* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991).

²⁴ For criticism of the separate spheres model, see Dorothy O'Helly and Susan M. Reverby, eds. *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History: Essays from the Seventh Berkshire Conference on the History of Women* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); and Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," in *The Journal of American History* 75:1 (June 1988), 9-39.

Nonetheless, while recognizing the importance of diversity and difference, it seems to me that inequalities in gender relationships and the division of labour deriving from separate spheres ideologies persist as long as women continue to be associated primarily with the domestic sphere of raising children, food preparation, house-cleaning, and health care.²⁵ Furthermore, as this study shows, women themselves continue to draw on the language of domesticity to define themselves, in spite of their apparent non-traditional experiences. We must also acknowledge that women's voices reflect dominant white, androcentric worldviews. As Sarah Carter so aptly observed, "women are not always free to project their own images or identities, nor are they free to author their own texts fully."²⁶ Therefore, scholarly inquiries such as this, which draw attention to the contradictions and tensions between women's experiences and their discursive representations, are crucial to the emancipation of women's voices.

Kathryn McPherson described new scholarly trends that have shifted the emphasis towards diversity and difference in investigations of rural women's experiences and how these changes, including oral methodologies and the linguistic turn towards the discourse itself, are beginning to alter cultural ideologies of rural women..²⁷ For example, recent investigations by Emma Curtin and Aileen Moffatt represent scholarly attempts to revise the meta-narrative of rural women's early

²⁵ Leonore Davidoff, "Gender and the 'Great Divide': Public and Private in British Gender History," in *Journal of Women's History* 15:1 (2003), 12,16.

²⁶ Sarah A. Carter, *Capturing Women, The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), xv.

²⁷ Kathryn McPherson, "Was the 'Frontier' Good for Women? Historical Approaches to Women and Agricultural Settlement in the Prairie West, 1870-1925," in *Atlantis* 25:1 (Fall/Winter 2000), 75-86.

settlement experiences.²⁸ Curtin's study synthesizes British ideologies of womanhood, imperial propaganda, the role of emigration societies, and oral methodologies to suggest that the early 20th century experiences of "gentlewomen" in Alberta "reveal a wide middle ground between [the] two stereotypical poles" of "simpering, reluctant emigrants" and "independent superhuman women on an imperial civilizing mission."²⁹ Moffatt's study, also based on oral methods, similarly argues that women in early 20th century Saskatchewan combined British ideologies with the realities of their early settlement experiences to construct identities that were "distinctly rural and western Canadian" and "uniquely experienced in rural Saskatchewan."³⁰ Like most rural studies, these authors' notions of the 'Canadian West' exclude British Columbia.³¹ Although this omission helps to explain the rural gap in the province's historical record, my research suggests that British Columbia's rural women do have a place within this scholarship, for the "unique" experiences of emigrant women on the prairies are remarkably similar to that of many women in north-central British Columbia. On the other hand, the lives of women defined less by agrarian subsistence than by occupational plurality also deserve to be recognized as "edge of the empire" and "uniquely experienced" in rural British Columbia.

While recent historical studies provide an important basis for understanding north-central British Columbia's women, they are, for the most part, based on self-

²⁸ Emma Jane Curtin, "Daughters of Empire: British Gentlewomen in Alberta, 1880-1914," (M.A., University of Calgary, 1990); and Aileen Moffatt, "Experiencing Identity: British-Canadian Women in Rural Saskatchewan, 1880-1950," (PhD., University of Manitoba, 1996). See also Sheila McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women, 1905-1929."

²⁹ Emma Jane Curtin, Intro.

³⁰ Aileen Moffatt, 11.

³¹ For other examples of rural feminist scholarship that does not consider British Columbia part of the 'western frontier,' see R.G. Moyles and Doug Owsram, *Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada, 1880-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Susan Jackel, ed. *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*; and Eliane Silverman, *The Last Best West*.

generated oral methodologies and explorations of experience, but not the discourse itself.³² By reaching outside the discipline, I found two literary analyses of prairie women's narratives, by S. Leigh Matthews and Lillian Tuttosi, which provided a context for understanding the sub-conscious and subversive narrative voices of rural women of north-central B.C. For example, in her exploration of early 20th century prairie women's published memoirs, Matthews proposes that the texts are best read as folklore or genres "on the margins" that allow women to participate from within and beyond mainstream cultural systems.³³ Similarly, Tuttosi's deconstructive reading of Saskatchewan women's life-narratives suggests that women consciously and unconsciously create a "palimpsest" or underpainting in their texts, which protects them from the "public gaze."³⁴ My inquiry also attempts to add to this work, by combining the historical and the literary and including not only oral voices, but all of the narrative forms found in the local historical record.

Rural Women and Theoretical Perspectives

a) Feminist Materialism

In order to establish a theoretical framework for this study, I have taken as a starting position, the terms "experience" and "identity," which are the focal points of my inquiry. Experience, according to Ruth Roach Pierson, can be defined as that which is "constituted in part by positions occupied and tasks performed, *and* also by

³² For similar studies, see Charlotte Van de Vorst, *Making Ends Meet: Farm Women's Work in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002); Monda Halpern, *And On That Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001); and Sheila McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women, 1905-1929."

³³ S. Leigh Matthews, "Bound to Improve': Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs and Intersections of Culture, History and Identity," (PhD., University of Calgary, 2001).

³⁴ Lillian Christine Tuttosi, "Documented Displacement: The Archival Texts of the Women of Sterner Stuff," (M.A., University of Regina, 2001).

the discourses dominating and shaping the social/historical context.”³⁵ Similarly, feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis defines identity as the locus of external and internal social positions determined by historical process, i.e. gender, race, ethnicity, class, geography etc, which humans “come to assume subjectively and discursively in the form of political consciousness.”³⁶ Ultimately, these definitions stress how our identities are determined not only materially by our lived experiences, but by the language and culture that surrounds us as well. As such, an appropriate theoretical position for this study must speak to the significance of the material, the discursive, and the subjective in creating experiences, thereby allowing room for diversity, difference, agency, and the capacity for change.³⁷ A feminist materialist perspective is most compatible to these objectives. Unlike Marxist theories or conventional historical materialism, which focuses on material realities only, a feminist materialism perspective proposes a reality that represents both materiality and thought.³⁸ By ‘thought,’ I am suggesting a shared feminist consciousness, whereby one seeks to know reality, not as individual or subjective ideas, but as a collective ‘woman.’ For example, by applying feminist insights to the material and discursive levels of north-central British Columbia’s local historical record, I am attempting to establish a new understanding of rural women’s political realm. As de Lauretis stated, a feminist awareness of women’s oppression (as suggested here by the repressed voices of

³⁵ Ruth Roach Pierson, “Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women’s History,” in *Writing Women’s History: International Perspectives*, eds., Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Rendall. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 82. (emphasis added)

³⁶ Teresa de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness,” in *Feminist Studies* 16:1 (Spring 1990), 137.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 122.

rural women in the local historical record) redefines the oppression itself.³⁹ It speaks to women's capacity for resistance, agency and change, and thus, to the very basis of contemporary feminism. From a feminist perspective then, the discursive component of this inquiry serves two purposes: first, it reveals the gender politics embedded in the discourse; and second, in doing so it changes the meaning of the texts themselves.⁴⁰

b) Post-Structural Perspectives

As suggested earlier, women's absence in traditional archival records has forced feminist scholars to redefine the meaning of historical evidence, by including local histories, oral histories, memoirs, letters, diaries, reminiscences, and autobiographies in their research agendas. For example, it is only from within these sources that the voices of early 20th century rural women of north-central British Columbia can be found. Including them in our studies has also created the need for theoretical and self-critical approaches that allow us to prove the academic validity of our data and our rights to speak of and for other women.

Post structural theories, including linguistic and deconstructionist perspectives, are particularly relevant to inquiries like this that use non-contemporary materials, because they emphasize the importance of language, narrative form, context, and ethical issues related to the sources. More specifically, they draw attention to notions of subjectivity and objectivity and the way that language and discourse becomes embedded in our consciousness and shapes our

³⁹ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 141.

identities, including gender.⁴¹ Equally important is the post-structural understanding that discourse can construct reality through acts of human agency. By writing themselves into the historical record, rural women of north-central British Columbia are exercising agency and constructing discursive realities, by acknowledging that “men are not the centre of the world, but men *and* women are.”⁴² On the other hand, these women’s narratives are informed by dominant androcentric language and cultural traditions that encourage the misrepresentation of their gender identities. For example, in spite of their primary roles on family farms, rural women do not describe themselves as “farmers,” because the word connotes a male image. Instead, they describe themselves as “helpers” to male farmers. While on the surface, this language confirms and reinforces their subservient roles, it can also be read as a subversive feminist narrative strategy used by women to emphasize the diversity of their experiences and thereby subtly resist the androcentric language from which they speak.

Psychoanalytical and Foucauldian perspectives on memory, truth and power are also useful for interpreting oral and written narratives that are produced long after the experiences represented in them. For example, memory theory posits that the mediation of human experiences takes place soon after events and dictates how those experiences are remembered and recalled later.⁴³ In turn, as Jan Vansina explained, oral histories and personal narratives represent the totalizing power of

⁴¹ Joan Sangster, “Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History,” in *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women’s History*, 4th ed. Eds. Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason and Adele Perry (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 222.

⁴² Gerder Lerner, as cited in Geraldine Moane, *Gender and Colonialism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 130. (emphasis added)

⁴³ Paul Thompson, “Believe It or Not: Rethinking the Historical Interpretation of Memory,” in *Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience*, eds. Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994), 3.

human memory in action. They are not random thoughts but “part of an organized whole of memories that tend to project a consistent image of the narrator, and in many cases, a justification of his or her life.”⁴⁴ This is not to suggest, however, that these sources are devoid of myth or reflect only ‘truths.’ As Paul Thompson stated, “reality is less tidy than myth,” and the key is to consider both possibilities, while also recognizing that the act of forgetting often reflects boundaries between public and private and between collective and individual identities.⁴⁵ This explains why rural women do not include the oppressive, darker side of their experiences in their narratives, for they are private and thus, contrary to what is acceptable in public. As such, these memories are excluded from the community’s collective discourse. Nonetheless, although it is necessary to identify the silences, myths, and contradictions we find within non-contemporary sources, the ultimate objective must be to use material evidence *and* personal memory to interpret change over time.⁴⁶ As such, an appropriate research agenda for this inquiry is one which combines these post-structural insights with a well-grounded feminist materialist perspective.

Methodologies

The absence of rural women from British Columbia’s traditional historical record creates a challenge for feminist researchers like me who want to move beyond just naming women’s experiences. Adopting theoretical and methodological approaches that include both heuristic and hermeneutic principles of inquiry is one way of addressing the rural gap, while also conforming to scholarly expectations

⁴⁴ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985), 8.

⁴⁵ Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, eds. “Introduction,” in *The Myths We Live By* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 13.

⁴⁶ Paul Thompson, “Believe It or Not,” 11. By ‘non-contemporary’ I am referring to those sources which appear primary but for the time delay in writing them.

which require focusing on the diversities and differences of rural women's experiences, the nuances of language, and the subjective role of the researcher. By 'heuristic', I am referring to traditional empirical epistemologies that accept the authority of experience as evidence and focus on "trying to comprehend or understand meanings of human experience as it is lived."⁴⁷ This approach is as important as discourse analysis because, as Sangster pointed out, by abandoning the concept of experience for an unknowable or elusive past, we risk returning to a history that denies power and suppresses women's voices.⁴⁸

By 'hermeneutic,' I am referring to the discursive component of this inquiry and the "interpretative process that seeks to bring understanding and disclosure of phenomena through language" or, in other words, studies women's voices "with a view towards...find[ing] intended or expressed meanings."⁴⁹ This approach is also fitting for studies that draw heavily on non-conventional sources, because each genre offers different 'truths' and requires unique narrative strategies for both writing and reading them. Most significantly, I find Helen Buss's metaphorical multi-generational deconstructive model, which she refers to as a "(m)othering of the texts," appropriate for this investigation.⁵⁰ The metaphor implies a three-part relationship, in which the reader becomes 'mother', 'sister' and 'daughter' to the texts. I propose the addition of a fourth 'grandmother' reading position, which can be applied to the experiential analysis of rural women. Ultimately, these symbolic

⁴⁷ Susann M. Laverty, "Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations," in *International Journal of Quantitative Methods* 2:3 (September 2003), 3. Retrieved April 22, 2005 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissue/2_3final/html/laverty.html.

⁴⁸ Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories," 231.

⁴⁹ Susann M. Laverty, 9.

⁵⁰ Helen Buss, *Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography in English* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 26.

reading positions imply incrementally increasing the depth, complexity, and biases in one's critical reading of the texts, which changes the interpretation of them, thereby emphasizing the many analytical possibilities for understanding rural women and the role of gender in cultural production. Because I am a fourth generational rural woman of this region, this method is also a suitable metaphor for my own subjective relationship to this inquiry.⁵¹ Reading and analyzing the sources from these four different interpretative positions draws attention to my own subjectivities, the subjectivities within the discourse, and the underlying narrative strategies that rural women have adopted to mediate genre limitations and overcome dominant cultural ideologies. On every interpretative level Buss recommends a "phenomenological" reading of the sources, which means reading "not from above," but from "within." This is achieved by "enter[ing] into the same spirit of discovery as the writer did while writing," which allows the reader to "grasp the object wholly and know that [he or she] grasp[s] it wholly"⁵² This overall gendered empathy, combined with Buss's suggested multi-generational distancing, informs and creates diversity in the interpretation of these sources.

Finally, while these post-structural techniques are useful for analyzing the discourses embedded in local histories, I am also guided by Pierson's cautionary advice to exercise "epistemic humility," and thus to remember that rural women in north-central British Columbia were not passive objects. As authors and subjects they must be respected as individuals who have actively chosen to represent particular experiences and identities. As a feminist researcher, gender is of primary

⁵¹ In other words, it parallels my own identity and its links to the women represented in these texts.

⁵² Helen Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 161.

importance to me, but it is not the force of identity that all rural women emphasize in the construction of their lives.⁵³ To this end, an appropriate feminist research agenda must also include strategies of reflexivity.

Self-Reflexivity

A hermeneutical approach, as Susann Laverty explained, speaks not only to the interpretative analysis of our sources, but also to the need for a self-reflective understanding of the “dialectical” relationship between the researcher and the interpretation.⁵⁴ In other words, this implied recognition of the relationship between the story and the teller suggests that when all is said and done, we, as researchers, “merely represent, rather than mirror reality.”⁵⁵ As such, self-critical reflexivity necessarily allows us to bring issues of subjectivity to the surface of our inquiries. By reflexivity, I am referring to how “a person seeking to understand something has a bond with the subject matter that comes into language through the traditional text and has, or acquires, a connection with the tradition from which it speaks.”⁵⁶ For example, I am very aware of my own privileged biographical, social and historical location within this research and how my ideological perceptions of early 20th century rural women’s identities inform my work. Rosemarie Anderson offers an appropriate model for reconciling the objective and subjective in inquiries such as this, for she proposes ‘caring’ in a “disciplined, intentional way”:

...a compassionate knowing brings a softness to the way we ask our questions, set our hypotheses, devise our instruments, conduct our

⁵³ Laura Pulido, “Community, Place and Identity,” in *Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation*, eds. John Paul Jones III, Heidi J. Nash and Susan M. Roberts (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 12.

⁵⁴ Susann M. Laverty, 10.

⁵⁵ Jones, Nash and Roberts, eds., “Introduction,” in *Thresholds in Feminist Geography*, xxii.

⁵⁶ Susann M. Laverty, 10.

investigations, analyze our data, construct our theories, and speak to our readers or audience....Cross-verified in both the mechanics of conventional objective science *and* in the more unconventional intuitive sense of the researcher, both objective and subjective knowing can contribute jointly to our understanding.⁵⁷

In summary, by drawing on these methodological and theoretical perspectives in order to focus on the complexities of rural women's lives and analyze the sources from multiple interpretative levels, and by reflecting on my own biases, assumptions, and proximity to my subjects, and by paying attention to the "dialectic" between my understanding of the research process, my interpretive framework, and my sources, I believe I can offer some valuable scholarly insights into understanding the experiences and identities of early 20th century rural women in north-central British Columbia.⁵⁸

Several themes represent key findings of this study. Most importantly, by emphasizing the diversities and differences of women's experiences and social identities, this work implicitly rejects the existence of a monolithic 'rural woman' in early 20th century north-central British Columbia. Overall, it makes clear that there are many contradictions and tensions between the realities and ideologies of rural women within the local historical record. An analysis of the material level of women's experiences indicates that low population densities, geographical isolation from urban influences, skewed sex ratios, and an undeveloped material environment influenced a reconfiguration of gender roles, whereby conventional notions of women and femininity shifted to reflect the diversities of women's economic activities, their inter-personal relationships, and their leadership roles within rural

⁵⁷ Rosemarie Anderson, "Intuitive Inquiry: Interpreting Objective and Subjective Data," in *ReVision: Journal of Consciousness and Transformation* 22:4 (2000), 32.

⁵⁸ Susann M. Lavery, 21.

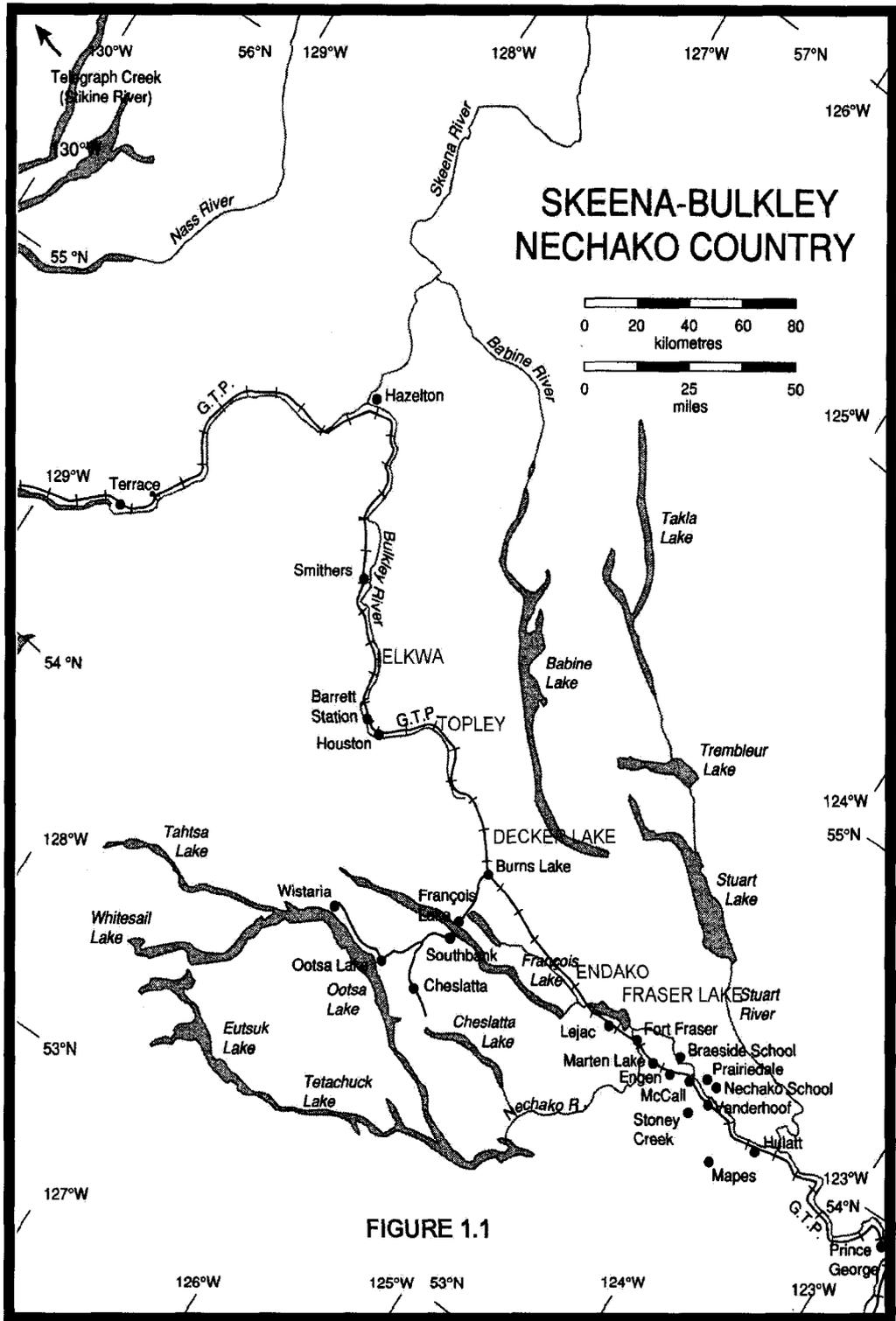
societies. However, an analysis of the discourse itself shows that these shifts in rural women's identities have not been ideologically translated into the local historical record. Instead of reflecting the realities of rural women's lives, local sources emphasize a dominant pioneer cultural script, in which women are primarily defined within traditional roles of domesticity and separate spheres, which, in turn, creates paradigms of male dominance and female subordination. On the other hand, reading the sources from a consciously feminist deconstructive position also reveals a narrative resistance to these restricting ideologies of rural women. Finally, in attempting to reconcile or situate these complexities within the discourse, I argue that they reflect limitations of local genres and persisting social tensions, in power relationships between rural women and men, and in rural women's personal desires to both resist and accept cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity.

The following chapter, which focuses on the material realities of rural women's experiences, represents the beginning of the metaphorical multi-generational method I have chosen for this study. From the interpretative reading position of a grandmother, it uses gender and geography as its first analytical focus to discuss issues related to rural women's emigration circumstances, demographics, conditions of settlement and initial adjustments to a new environment. Rural women's economic activities are also examined, focusing on the connections between gender and rural women's paid and unpaid work. In the final section of the chapter, issues of gender and social identities in rural communities are explored, including women's roles in reform and building rural societies. Collectively, this analysis of women's experiences suggests that early 20th century north-central

British Columbia offered opportunities for many newly emigrated women to transcend traditional social boundaries and make measurable gains in their agency, independence and autonomy.

Chapters Two and Three focus on the discourse itself, with an aim towards understanding the connections between the lived experiences of rural women and the ideological construction of them in the local historical record. Building on the previous chapter's multi-generational analytical concepts, the sources are analyzed from the metaphorical interpretative positions of a mother (Chapter Two) and a sister (Chapter Three), emphasizing the narrative layers of the texts and the strategies rural women have adopted to both accept and reject cultural norms of 'woman' and femininity. Most importantly, these two chapters demonstrate rural women's refusal to accept oppressive identities, by illuminating instead their active resistance to the power hierarchies that previously denied them a history.

The final chapter of this inquiry, written from the interpretative position of a visionary daughter, attempts to situate the tensions between realities and ideologies of rural women's early 20th century experiences. It argues that the differences between them reflect problems related to the function and purpose of local genres and rural women's conflicting personal desires, in which they are torn between wanting to represent collective, conforming images of self and to individually resist the ideologies that narrowly define them.



(Source: John Calam, ed. *Alex Lord's British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-36*, p.44)

Chapter One

Experience and Identity

Through Grandmother's Eyes, the Journey Begins

There is no sweeter meat than that which clings to our bones.
- Walt Whitman

In accordance with the metaphorical multi-generational methodology outlined in the introduction, this analysis begins from the position of a grandmother. She is in the final stage of her life, where she must reconcile her life experiences, find them meaningful, and renew her sense of identity, as connected to the people she has known, the places she has been, and things she has done.⁵⁹ To aid her reminiscing, the reading grandmother turns to journals, diaries, newspapers, letters, local and oral histories, autobiographies, and unpublished memoirs, which tell the story of her past and that of those around her.

As this grandmother undoubtedly determines, north-central British Columbia's local historical records are invaluable for the insights they offer into understanding the unique geographical features of the area, the demographic patterns of settlement, women's economic experiences, their contributions to rural communities, and their inter-personal relationships with others. By focusing on these themes and local sources, this analysis of rural women's experiences suggests that the first four decades of the 20th century in north-central British Columbia represented a unique time period, when geographical and demographical factors provided the opportunity for social change and the blurring of gender boundaries which had previously

⁵⁹ Harriet Wrye and Jacqueline Churilla, "Looking Inward, Looking Backward: Reminiscence and the Life Review," in *Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader*, eds. Susan H. Armitage et al (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2002), 147.

separated men and women. Instead of affirming stereotypes that suggest rural women were “reluctant emigrants” or “cheerful helpmates,” it reveals their assertiveness and independence, as employed in their emigration circumstances, the diversities of their gender roles, and their significant contributions to family survival and community development.

Gender and Geography

In 1917, thirty three year old Oakla Dotson married John Collier and gave up an urban lifestyle and a successful career as an opera singer and soloist in New York, to become a pioneer homesteader on a large, remote ranch in the Ootsa Lake area. Soon after arriving, she gave birth, but six weeks later, while returning from a trip to Burns Lake for supplies, the buggy she was traveling in overturned, killing her infant child. Soon after, Oakla’s marriage died, as well. She stayed in the region and overcame her personal tragedies by immersing herself in politics and local economic activities, including mineral explorations in the area. While pursuing this particular interest, Oakla discovered several oil formations and a new mineral called “Collinsite,” which attracted much publicity in the United States and elsewhere, and ultimately led to further economic development and settlement in this part of the province. These activities also led Oakla to her second husband, Mr. Emmons, the president of a large oil company in Montana. In 1925, she left north-central British Columbia to make her home with him. Soon after, she gave birth to another child, but, as fate would have it, when this baby was six weeks old, tragedy struck again, and this time, Oakla perished.⁶⁰

Oakla Emmons’s experiences exemplify the tragic realities of early 20th century rural life, but just as importantly they draw attention to the links between geography and gender and how shifting one sometimes meant shifting the other. In other words, focusing on the interplay of geography and gender emphasizes how rural women’s early 20th century experiences were unique to a specific time and place, and influenced not only by gender, race, ethnicity and class, but also by

⁶⁰ “Mrs. Emmons Did Much Toward Developing the Mining Properties in This Section of the Central Plateau of British Columbia,” *The Observer*, 2 June 1927; and May Mills, *The Mills Story*, unpub. n.d., Lakes District Museum, Burns Lake.

geography and demographics, which both diminished and increased their social powers.

a) Demographic Patterns of Early Settlement

Until the early 20th century, European settlement in north-central British Columbia was minimal and centred on fur trading post interests, augmented by a handful of prospectors, trappers and survey workers who lived sporadically throughout the region. Emigration to the area began in earnest around 1906, as a result of boosterism and land speculation associated with the building of the Grand Trunk Pacific railroad, which connected Eastern Canada to Prince Rupert.⁶¹ By 1941, the census recorded 11,000 Europeans and 2,600 Natives living in the region. Some of the newcomers lived in Prince George, which emerged as the railroad's divisional centre and the regional capital, with 2,000 residents, while others made their home in Vanderhoof, Burns Lake, Smithers and Hazelton, the only other towns in the region with populations exceeding two hundred. Still others settled in the tiny hamlets of Fort Fraser, Fraser Lake, Endako, Decker Lake, Topley, Houston, and Telkwa, which sprung up during railroad construction. Ultimately, however, as census records indicate, the majority of emigrants lived on acreages, in farming clusters scattered throughout the region. (Table 1)

In addition to the building of the railroad, several important trends characterize this area's settlement period, some of which are similar to the rest of the province, but unique when compared to the rest of Canada.

⁶¹ Boosterism refers to the "exaggerated proclamation of the worth of a place." Paul Koroscil, *British Columbia: Settlement History* (Burnaby: Simon Fraser University Press, 2000), 30. Railroad construction between Prince Rupert and Prince George took place between 1910 and 1914, however, the federal government's announcement of its impending construction attracted speculators and settlers before then.

British Columbia Population Data 1921 – 1941			
For Census Division 8			
	1921	1931	1941
Subdivision A – Nechako-Fraser	3249	5188	5253
Unorganized Parts	1066	2627	3089
Indian Reserves	130	82	137
Prince George	2053	2479	2027
Subdivision E – Skeena-Bulkley	3982	5081	4862
Unorganized Parts	2744	2602	2254
Indian Reserves	1238	1480	1849
Smithers	----	999	759
Subdivision F – Nechako,Upper	3379	3083	3546
Unorganized Parts	2854	1920	2351
Indian Reserves	525	656	627
Burns Lake	----	202	218
Vanderhoof	----	305	350
TOTALS	10610	13352	13661

Source: Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. 1, Table 1

Table 1

First, like the rest of the province, north-central British Columbia attracted a higher percentage of British emigrants than other parts of Canada. (Table 2) By 1941, 75% of the province's female population was of British origin, as compared to a national average of 53%. As Jean Barman pointed out, the higher rates of British emigrants in British Columbia can be linked to the province's colonial past or its "overt British ethos," which guaranteed newcomers a good measure of cultural continuity.⁶² In addition, provincial officials primarily targeted British citizens in their immigration programs, particularly the middle-class, by offering them special incentives to come here.⁶³ Immigration efforts in the prairie provinces, on the other

⁶² Jean Barman, "The West Beyond the West: The Demography of Settlement in British Columbia," in *Journal of Canadian Studies* 25:3 (Fall 1990), 11. See also Barman, *The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 139-141.

⁶³ One of the government's emigration schemes was the Soldier Settlement Board, which specifically focused on the Bulkley and Nechako Valleys as its primary settlement areas. For details, see Paul Koroscil, "Soldiers, Settlement and Development in British Columbia, 1915-1930," in *BC Studies* 54 (Summer 1982), 63-87.

hand, targeted the farming classes in central Europe.⁶⁴ As a consequence, the majority of emigrant women living in north-central British Columbia during the early 20th century appear to have urban British backgrounds. Although it is difficult to determine their class identities, their administrative skills and business acumen suggests they were well educated.⁶⁵

ADULT FEMALE POPULATION BY RACIAL ORIGIN			
1941			
	Total Females	British Origin	%
Canada	4,026,867	2,148,729	53.0
Alberta	256,857	138,258	53.8
Saskatchewan	286,579	136,708	47.7
BC	296,364	223,060	75.3

Source: Census of Canada, 1941, Vol.4, Table 3

Table 2

Second, the skewed gender ratios that characterizes the province's past is also reflected in the demographic profile of the north. (Table 3) For example, although male-female ratios were nearly equal in Canada by 1921, they were still 127:100 in British Columbia, and 171:100 in the north-central region of the province.

GENDER RATIOS 1911 – 1941				
# of Males to 100 Females (all ages)				
	1911	1921	1931	1941
Canada	118	109	107	106
Alberta	149	123	121	115
Saskatchewan	145	120	119	114
BC	179	127	125	114
BC – Div.8	n/a	171	156	142

Source: Census of Canada, 1941 Vol. 2 ,Table 19; and Census of Canada, 1921 Vol.2 Table 2

Table 3

⁶⁴ Paul Koroscil, *British Columbia: Settlement History* (Burnaby: SFU Press, 2000), 64.

⁶⁵ Provincial historians disagree on matters of class among British emigrants. For example, Cole Harris has stated that the majority were middle-class, while Jean Barman has also suggested they were of modest means. See Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 223; and Jean Barman, "The West Beyond the West: The Demography of Settlement," 10.

Even at the end of the study period, the gender imbalance in the north remained significant, with just 34% of the population being female.

Third, and perhaps most surprising, given their scarcity, marital rates of females in north-central British Columbia were lower than provincial averages. (Table 4 & 5) Conversely, many scholars have emphasized how the proportion of adult women in British Columbia who were married was always higher than the Canadian average. As such, the scholarly argument has been that skewed sex ratios restricted women's opportunities for independence and placed added pressure on them to marry.⁶⁶

Marital Status of Females – British Columbia					
As Percentage of Total Females					
	Total	Single	Married	Widowed	Div./Sep
1931					
BC	309,044	48.2	45.2	6.4	.2
Div. 8	8,410	51.6	44.0	4.1	.3
1941					
BC	382,830	43.1	47.6	7.6	1.7
Div.8	10,436	49.3	44.4	4.7	1.6

Source: Census of Canada, 1941, Vol.2, Table 26

Table 4

However, this notion becomes less valid when we consider that for most of the study period, Alberta and Saskatchewan's sex ratios were less disparate than B.C.'s, yet marital rates were higher and further, that in all years between 1891 and 1941, British Columbia recorded significantly higher rates of widowed and divorced women than these two provinces and indeed, the rest of Canada, as well.

⁶⁶ See for example, Adele Perry, "Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men: Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia," in *BC Studies* 105-106 (Spring/Summer 1995), 28; and Melanie Buddle, "Women, Family and Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901-1971," (Ph.D. University of Victoria, 2003), 46.

**Marital Status of Adult Females 1911 - 1941
Number and Percentage Distribution**

	<u>Year</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Single</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Widowed</u>	<u>Divorced</u>
BC –	1911	95,984	28.3%	64.9%	6.6%	.2%
	1921	156,942	25.5	66.0	8.2	.3
	1931	224,486	28.7	62.2	8.8	.3
	1941	296,364	26.5	63.0	9.9	.6
Alberta	1911	91,567	26.3	68.7	4.9	.1
	1921	159,137	24.5	69.3	6.0	.2
	1931	213,257	29.0	64.6	6.2	.2
	1941	256,857	28.5	64.2	7.0	.3
Sask.	1911	118,476	25.5	69.7	4.7	.1
	1921	195,659	24.8	69.7	5.4	.1
	1931	260,806	31.0	63.2	5.7	.1
	1941	286,579	31.3	62.0	6.6	.1
Canada	1911	2,210,276	34.8	56.9	8.2	.1
	1921	2,760,425	32.1	59.2	8.6	.1
	1931	3,379,483	34.0	57.4	8.5	.1
	1941	4,026,876	33.0	58.0	8.8	.2

Source: Census of Canada, 1941, Vol.1, Table 20

Table 5

Ultimately, these statistics contradict notions of marriage as the driving force behind female emigration to British Columbia. Alternatively, as immigration propaganda and local sources suggest, women also immigrated to north-central regions of the province to pursue land ownership and financial independence. As one 1909 British newspaper asserted, “No girl should seek the new land with marriage shining ahead as the chief star. Let her work and career be foremost in her thought.”⁶⁷ Surprisingly enough, north-central British Columbia offered several advantages for women who hoped to increase their independence.

⁶⁷ February 1909, *Imperial Colonist*, as cited in Emma Jane Curtin, “Daughters of Empire, 57.

b) Rural Women and Land Ownership

British Columbia was one of the first provinces in Canada to extend property rights to married women, and the only province to offer homestead land to single women through its pre-emption program.⁶⁸ Elsewhere in Canada, provincial laws and the Dominion Lands Act restricted land ownership, including pre-emptions, to household heads, and thus, only men and widowed or divorced women were eligible.⁶⁹ As a result of British Columbia's land policies, the province has a unique history of female land ownership.⁷⁰

Georgina Roberts, Elizabeth McGregor, Bernice Martin, and Mrs. H.C. Jones were among those women who took advantage of the province's land policies and speculation opportunities during the region's railroad construction period. Roberts and McGregor both purchased huge tracts of land in the Fort George area prior to 1909 and although it appears that neither of them settled in the area, they both recorded huge profits when selling their lands.⁷¹ Bernice Martin, the young wife of a Grand Trunk Pacific railroad contractor, demonstrated similar financial astuteness, when in 1912, she wrote to her father in Wisconsin from her little tent in Decker Lake, pleading for yet another loan, so she could add to the profits she had earlier

⁶⁸ Ontario and British Columbia passed similar Married Women's Property laws in 1874 and 1887 respectively, thereby allowing married women to own and dispose of land without their husband's involvement. See Peter Baskerville, "She Has Already Hinted at 'Board': Enterprising Urban Women in British Columbia 1863-1896," in *Histoire Sociale-Social History* 26:52 (November 1993), 208, 209; and Constance Backhouse, "Married Women's Property Laws in 19th Century Canada," in *Law & History Review* 6:2 (1988), 211-57.

⁶⁹ See for example, Kirk N. Lambrecht, *The Administration of Dominion Lands 1870-1930* (Regina: Canada Plains Research Centre, 1991), 106-7.

⁷⁰ See Peter Baskerville, "Women and Investment in Late 19th Century Urban Canada: Victoria and Hamilton, 1880-1901," in *The Canadian Historical Review* 80:2 (June 1999), 191-218. In a comparative study of land ownership in Hamilton, Ontario and Victoria, British Columbia, Baskerville found that in spite of similar land policies, the rates of female land ownership were much higher in Victoria, and that in fact, owning land and borrowing money did not appear to be influenced by gender, at all.

⁷¹ Anna Bumby, "The Sales Campaign of George J. Hammond and the Natural Resources Security Company," in *Local History Seminar Research Essays, Spring 1981* (Prince George: College of New Caledonia, 1981), 4-5.

amassed by speculating in land in Prince Rupert. This time, Martin hoped to invest in the newly announced “government-approved GTP townsite of Fort George,” by participating in the \$100,000 pool being organized by railroad employees.⁷² Martin’s letters clearly indicate that she was making financial decisions independent of her husband. Around the same time and just a little further down the railroad line, near Hazelton, Mrs. H.C. Jones also asserted her economic independence and business acumen, by purchasing sixteen sections of coal lands adjacent to Driftwood Creek.⁷³ While local records indicate that many of the region’s female land-owners, like Jones, were married, these notions may in fact be misleading, because as provincial studies show, although married women represented the majority of female landowners, in reality many were financially independent and living apart from their husbands.⁷⁴ For example, although Olive Fredrickson was legally married in 1928 when she purchased land in the Nechako Valley, she had been living independent of her husband for several years.⁷⁵

Turning from land speculation to homesteading reveals further diversity in the marital status of female land-owners in the region. Records indicate that married women often pre-empted land in order to increase their husband’s holdings or to tie up nearby land parcels until the family decided which area was the most suitable for homesteading. For example, shortly after the family’s arrival in the Francois Lake

⁷² *Letters of Bernice Medberry Martin 1912-1914*, Bulkley Valley Museum, Smithers.

⁷³ *Omineca Herald*, 3 May 1912. A section of land equals 640 acres.

⁷⁴ See Baskerville, “Women and Investment,” 191-218. Baskerville found that although 67% of female landowners in Victoria at the turn of the century were married, 40% of these women lived apart from their husbands. See also Buddle, “Women, Family and Entrepreneurship,” 270. Buddle similarly found that more than half of the province’s self-employed married women did not live with or depend financially on their husbands. For homestead land records representing the region, see *Land Settlement Board, 1916-1967*, BC Archives, GR 0929, Boxes 60-72; and *Crown Land Pre-Emption Records*, GR 0112, Vol. 9-26, 56-59, 119-128, 216-219.

⁷⁵ Olive A. Fredrickson, *The Silence of the North* (Toronto: PaperJacks Ltd., 1980).

area in 1910, Mr. Jeffrey registered seven pre-emptions, one each for himself, his wife and their five children.⁷⁶ Single women, like Florrie Evans, also took advantage of the fact that in British Columbia a “girl need only be over eighteen and self-supporting to pre-empt a quarter of land.”⁷⁷ Evans recalled the advice given to single women emigrating to the province:

The Canadian Department of the Interior did caution emigrating women from Britain to earn their own living for a while before taking a husband. They cautioned the young woman to remember that in many cases where a farmer on a homestead wanted a wife it meant she was to have all the drudgery and worry of a farm...and get no wages for her effort.⁷⁸

After registering her pre-emption in the Nechako Valley in 1912, Evans assumed primary responsibility for clearing her land and fulfilling the necessary requirements for full ownership. That she took pride in these accomplishments is evidenced by her memoirs, written sixty years later, where she continued to refer to the family homestead as “her” land.⁷⁹ Although Evans did marry a year after arriving in the region, other single women heeded the advice of the government and chose to maintain their independence. Cassie MacMillan, who immigrated to the Bulkley Valley in 1905 and shortly thereafter registered one of the area’s first pre-emptions, was one of them. Miss Cain, who staked her claim at Ootsa Lake, was another. Both women remained single and full-time farmers for the rest of their lives.⁸⁰

Farming was not easy for a man or woman on their own, however, and although

⁷⁶ Wiggs O’Neill, “A Lifetime in British Columbia and Early Days,” unpub. n.d., 137, Bulkley Valley Museum, Smithers.

⁷⁷ Lyn Hancock, ed. *Vanderhoof: The Town That Wouldn’t Wait* (Vanderhoof: The Nechako Valley Historical Society, 1979), 31.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷⁹ “Florrie Evans Memoirs,” *Nechako Valley Historical Society Collection*, Nechako Valley Museum, Vanderhoof.

⁸⁰ *Pioneer Women* (Smithers: Bulkley Tweedsmuir Women’s Institute Convention, 1967), 77; Jean Clark Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost: A People’s History of the Ootsa Lake Region 1905-1955* (Likely: Quesnel Lake Publishing, 1994), 16.

MacMillan and Cain had youth on their sides, the majority of single female farmers did not. According to the 1931 census, 71% of British Columbia's independent female homesteaders were older widowed women, some of whom were running family farms previously owned by their husbands, and others who purchased or pre-empted land after their husbands had died.⁸¹ Mrs. Watson, for example, was widowed and seventy years old when she purchased six hundred acres in the Francois Lake area in the 1930s.⁸² Similarly, Margaret Christian, was a middle-aged widow when she purchased six hundred acres of farm land near Endako in 1920.⁸³ In summary, the local historical record suggests that many women, of all ages and marital status, were attracted to north-central British Columbia because it offered land ownership possibilities. While others came primarily to work or to pursue strategic or traditional marital opportunities, it appears that most female emigrants expected to assume new roles and responsibilities that would shift their identities as women.

Gender and Economic Identity

Edna and Tom Tyner arrived in Fort George with their four small children during the summer of 1913 and within days, Edna had turned their little tent cabin into a comfortable home, canned hundreds of jars of wild berries, and established a ready market for her homemade bread and ironing skills. During the following seven years, Edna gave birth to three more children and the family moved seven times. For several years they lived in town, while Tom worked away from home, either harvesting on the prairies, trapping, or on his pre-emption at Shelley. Eventually Edna gave up waiting for her own homestead, and borrowed money from her parents in Ontario to rent a farm on the Nechako River, and later, one at Mud River. Tom continued to be absent much of the time and family survival remained Edna's

⁸¹ Melanie Buddle, "Women, Family and Entrepreneurship," 300-01. Buddle reported that in 1931, 71% of the female farmers in the province were widows, while 14% were single females and 14.6% were married. However, as she also noted, the married female farmers were in all likelihood not living with their husbands, as census takers were instructed to record all farmers' wives as unemployed.

⁸² Pat Turkki, *Burns Lake and District: A History Formal and Informal* (Burns Lake: Burns Lake Historical Society, 1973), 247.

⁸³ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys* (Fraser Lake: Fraser Lake and District Historical Society, 1986), 160.

*responsibility. She learned to further exploit her domestic skills by cooking, knitting and sewing for bachelors, doing housework for pay, taking in foster children, and selling bread, water, wood, milk, potatoes, flowers, and soap. Edna outshone her husband with her financial astuteness and farm management skills, which included digging her own well and building her own fireplace.*⁸⁴

North-central British Columbia offered a diversity of experiences for women like Edna during the early settlement period that extended far beyond traditional domestic roles. Nowhere are these diversities more apparent than in women's economic activities. Indeed, rural women's participation in all levels of local economies is remarkable and further exemplifies the role of geography and demographics in the construction of rural women's identities.

As Edna Tyner's experiences suggest, there were no firmly drawn lines between rural farming and small town life in early 20th century north-central British Columbia, except perhaps enhanced mobility and economic opportunities. For women living in town, life bore a remarkable similarity to women on farms, except the pigs, cows and chickens were fewer in number and in the back yard instead of the back forty, and home, especially during the early years of settlement, was a tent, rather than a log cabin. Regardless of where they lived, the domestic roles of the majority of rural women in the region included hauling water from the nearby river, chopping and gathering wood for heating and cooking, scrubbing clothes on a wash board, cultivating large vegetable gardens, milking cows, feeding pigs and chickens, as well as the more traditional responsibilities of household management. On farming acreages, women's roles were even more demanding, as they oversaw much larger egg, butter and milk productions, which they sold to nearby markets, thereby providing a significant portion of the family's cash income. For example, in

⁸⁴ *Edna A.W. Tyner Diary, 1912-1922*, Fraser-Fort George Museum, Prince George.

addition to all her many domestic responsibilities, Carolina Dahlgren, of Fraser Lake, contributed more to the family economy with her five hundred chickens than her husband did cutting ties full-time for the railroad.⁸⁵

For the majority of newly emigrated women to this region, the necessary adjustments to their gender identities were significant. In addition to animal husbandry skills, these women recall having men teach them carpentry skills, so that they could work alongside them in building their homes and barns. They also learned to ride horses, butcher farm animals, fall trees, clear land, and plow, plant, rake and haul hay. Florrie Evans recalled with pride how she cleared her own land, using nothing more than a pick-axe, a rake, and a shovel.⁸⁶ Some women also learned to mend fences, while others, like Helen Campbell, were taught to shoot guns, so they could supplement the family larder and protect themselves from bears, cougars and other wild animals.⁸⁷ Many women were also relied upon to serve as country doctors and midwives. Dorothy Forde delivered most of the babies in the Francois Lake area during the early settlement period, and she “kept a good stock of medicine” for other medical emergencies.⁸⁸ While Forde had no previous training, Terry Hoops was a registered nurse, which meant that she took on “all the doctoring” in the Telkwa area for many years.⁸⁹ Lydia Saunders, a teacher by profession, also traveled throughout the Lakes District on horseback, delivering babies.⁹⁰ For one Francois Lake family, fixing the engine of the old Model T Ford was another role

⁸⁵ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 266.

⁸⁶ “Florrie Evans Memoirs,” *Nechako Valley Historical Society Collection*.

⁸⁷ *Pioneers: A Two Mile School Project*, 20-37.

⁸⁸ *Pioneer Women*, 27.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁰ Jean Reynolds Interview, *Lakes District Historical Society Collection*, Lakes District Museum, Burns Lake.

assumed by a woman. According to her grand-daughter, Mrs. Guss enjoyed “hoist[ing] the motor out of the car and set[ting] it up in the work shed.”⁹¹ Although mechanical skills were not part of every rural women’s repertoire, the majority assumed the other roles described, and often, with very little assistance from men.

In addition to outside farming chores, household and childcare responsibilities, many rural women further contributed to household economies by pursuing financial opportunities in the public sphere. For example, while Dorothy Forde’s husband worked full-time as a fire warden, justice of the peace and a freighter, she was left to manage their isolated farm in the Francois Lake area alone, and in addition to making and shipping 100 pounds of butter a week to Smithers, she started a library, served as the area’s midwife and country doctor, and ran the local post-office.⁹² Florrie Evans also found seasonal work off the farm, as a cook in one of the many tie-hacking camps scattered throughout the region, while Jean Paulson and Lucy Dewulf chose to work alongside men as tie-hackers themselves.⁹³ Mrs. Henkel, on the other hand, independently owned and operated two guiding and hunting lodges near Francois Lake, while her husband worked as a ferryman and a rancher.⁹⁴ Margaret Christian’s entrepreneurial skills were equally notable. In addition to purchasing six hundred acres of farm land near Endako in 1920, she owned a general store in Endako [and] bought and sold furs for the Hudson’s Bay Company and managed the local post office.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Guss Family Interview, *Lakes District Historical Society Collection*.

⁹² *Pioneer Women*, 26-7.

⁹³ “Florrie Evans Memoirs,” *Nechako Valley Historical Society Collection*; “Telling Their Stories,” *Omineca Express*, 22 October 1997, B-15; Jean Paulson Interview, *Lakes District Historical Society Collection*; and Lucy Dewulf Interview, *Nechako Valley Historical Society Collection*.

⁹⁴ “Francois Lake Lodge Doubles Accommodation for Guests” *The Observer*, 19 April 1928.

⁹⁵ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 160.

Women living within rural towns also found opportunities to expand their domestic roles and increase their financial independence by owning rooming-houses or ladies dress shops, working alongside their husbands in family-owned enterprises, or operating them on their own, while their male partners worked elsewhere. For example, Barney Mulvaney's wife managed their hotel in Burns Lake for many years, while he ran a full-time pack train outfit back and forth to Hazelton. Single women, on the other hand, dominated the teaching, health and service-related professions. Between 1915 and 1930 alone, there were more than six hundred teachers employed in north-central British Columbia, of which 83.5% were female, and 92.5% were single.⁹⁶ Turn-over rates, at just over a year, were extremely high, primarily because the women were young and expected to endure extremely difficult teaching and living conditions. Most boarded with local families, which meant they had little or no privacy, often sharing a bed with one of their pupils.⁹⁷ The teacher's duties also extended far beyond educating children, and included organizing most of the community's social events.

Mary Williams, one of the region's early teachers, kept a diary during the three years she taught at Mud River, near Prince George, in which she detailed her frustrations at having to sleep with the Miller child, endure the sexual harassment

⁹⁶ Paul Stortz and J. Donald Wilson, "Education on the Frontier: Schools, Teachers and Community Influence in North-Central British Columbia," in *Histoire Sociale* 26:52 (November 1993), 265-290. These statistics represent the area between Terrace and Vanderhoof. The number of teachers in the study region would have been even higher, as the area between and including Prince George and Vanderhoof was more heavily populated than that between Hazelton and Terrace. See also Jack Mould, *Stump Farms and Broadaxes* (Saanichton: Hancock House, 1976), 111. As Mould reports, within a 100 mile radius of Smithers alone, there were 28 schools.

⁹⁷ In Burns Lake, one female teacher shared a bed with the mother of the house. See Pat Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 167.

and constant attention of men, and act as a model of adult feminine morality. In one entry, the eighteen-year old wrote:

I wish I could go home where I would not always have to be on the lookout to not do something a school teacher oughtn't to do....I just want to go home and be a kid for awhile...I am so sick of being a grown up young lady.⁹⁸

Mildred McQuillan, who taught at Orange Valley near Fraser Lake during the same period, recorded similar complaints. Her diary also exposes tensions within rural communities during this period, as neighbours squabbled over the school's location and who would have the privilege of boarding the teacher.⁹⁹ The teacher's rent money was clearly a welcome supplement to rural family incomes and McQuillan was outraged by the amount she was expected to pay her host family.

Hospitals in Prince George, Smithers, Telkwa, Burns Lake, Francois Lake and Hazelton also employed many single women as nurses, hospital superintendents, support staff, and, in one case at least, even as doctors. Dr. Maysil Williams was not only young, single, and female, but the first physician to serve the Francois Lake hospital, which operated between 1919 and 1928.¹⁰⁰ For the first three decades of the 20th century, the Hazelton hospital also functioned as a provincial training school for nurses, during which time it employed and trained more than one hundred and fifty young women.¹⁰¹

Finally, although most single women in the region worked for wages, some deviated from employment norms, by becoming self-employed, as prostitutes.

Prostitution may not have been a respectable occupation, but it was clearly

⁹⁸ *Mary Carolina Greenwood (nee Williams) Diaries, 1922-1925*, BC Archives, MS 0261.

⁹⁹ *Mildred McQuillan Diary 1927*, BC Archives, MS 1252.

¹⁰⁰ "Canadian Girl Doctor Does Fine Work," *Interior News*, 21 February 1923.

¹⁰¹ Jessie Gould Interview, *Pioneers: A Two-Mile School Project*.

lucrative.¹⁰² Census takers seemed reluctant to record these women's economic activities; however, informal sources do confirm their presence throughout the region and their prominence as a social and economic concern, particularly in Hazelton and Prince George. In both towns, activities related to prostitution incited moral officials to have local laws created, which forced the women to relocate outside of town limits.¹⁰³ In Hazelton, these actions ultimately created a new town:

Since their trade was largely with the construction men who craved companionship, [the prostitutes] managed to part a lot of them from a payroll that had previously been spent in Hazelton. As a result, Three Mile flourished. I understand that it is now known by the more dignified name of New Hazelton.¹⁰⁴

Lucrative as it was, prostitution seemed to be a temporary economic strategy, in which geographical isolation and disparate gender ratios offered unique opportunities for women to exploit their femininity. For example, Blanche, a Hazelton prostitute, "had a little daughter in Seattle who thought her mother was a dressmaker," and as the woman explained, "another couple of hundred in the bank and that's what I'll be and I hope she never knows the difference."¹⁰⁵ Much like the region's school teachers, the prostitutes often ended their careers by marrying and "raising families of good citizens."¹⁰⁶ In summary, north-central British Columbia's local historical records provides many examples of rural women, both married and

¹⁰² See for example, Rochelle Pittenger, "The 'Necessary Evil': Opposition to Prostitution in Early Prince George," in *Prince George in Context: Students from History 407, Local History and Methodology, 1997-1999*, ed. David Peterson del Mar (Prince George: UNBC Print Services, 1999), 2-14; Eva MacLean, *The Far Land*, 39-44, 70; and Tanja Gattrell, "Booze, Belles and Bistros: Carmen Elliott, A Woman Entrepreneur of the North," in *Work in Progress: A Collection of Local History Essays*, ed. Theresa Healy (Prince George: UNBC Print Services, 1996), 6-16. Elliott ran a successful brothel house in the Prince George area for forty years. She also owned a restaurant and was part-owner of a local sawmill.

¹⁰³ "Women Were Made Dupes Of," *Fort George Herald*, 16 August 1913; and Blaine Boyd, "The Coming of the Steel," in *Pioneer Days in British Columbia*, Vol. II, ed. Art Downs (Surrey: Heritage House Publishing, 1975), 99.

¹⁰⁴ Blaine Boyd, "The Coming of the Steel."

¹⁰⁵ Eva MacLean, *The Far Land*, 44.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

single, on farms and in small towns, who combined farming and domestic-related economic activities with work in the public sphere.

The contributions that rural women in this region made to household economies reflect provincial trends, whereby, unlike the prairies, farming was never more than marginal. Cole Harris maintained, for example, that by 1940, full-time employment off the farm was the norm for all rural males in British Columbia, which meant that women and children were often left to run family farms on their own.¹⁰⁷ However, in the north-central region it seems that women's paid labour contributions were also required. Their occupational pluralities also contradict Melanie Buddle's assertion that "farming was virtually the only entrepreneurial occupation available [to women] in rural areas."¹⁰⁸ However, in Buddle's defense, many of rural women's economic activities, including the income they generated from the farm, do not appear in census records, upon which her study was based. As Buddle herself noted, married women were assumed to be unemployed; therefore, unless they independently owned businesses or farms, all of their work went unrecorded. Further, even when their husbands lived and worked full-time elsewhere, census takers were directed to consider the men as the head of the household.¹⁰⁹ As such, formal statistics not only negate women's economic, administrative, educational and health-related contributions to rural societies, but they also misrepresent the actual number of female farmers there were in rural areas. Nonetheless, even with the gendered omissions in census data, statistics indicate that women's participation in

¹⁰⁷ Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 227.

¹⁰⁸ Melanie Buddle, "The Business of Women: Female Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901-1941," in *Journal of the West* 43:2 (2004), 50, 51.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

the labour force in this region and elsewhere in the province is yet another unique feature of British Columbia's history.¹¹⁰

By drawing on the 1911 census data, I offer, as a final case in point, an analysis of the demographic and economic activities of the emigrant female population of Hazelton, which, at that time, was north-central British Columbia's most established non-Native community. According to census details, eighty-eight women and 462 men lived in Hazelton during 1911, while an additional 450, predominantly male, lived in nearby railroad construction camps.¹¹¹ While fifty-one of the town's women reported being married, six were clearly financially independent and living on their own. Therefore, I have considered them as single, which makes the ratio of married and single women to be approximately equal.¹¹² In terms of employment, all but two of the single females recorded occupations.¹¹³ Among the married women, only seven reported being employed; however, because an additional nine were wives of retail and hotel owners, I have considered them to be engaged in these economic activities, as well.¹¹⁴ Thus, the adjusted female employment rates are 95% for single women and 35% for married women.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ See for example, Melanie Buddle, "The Business of Women," 44-53. Buddle's quantitative study of female employment indicates that, in spite of skewed gender roles, provincial rates of female employment between 1901 and 1941, particularly for married women, were much higher than elsewhere in Canada.

¹¹¹ *Census of Canada, 1911*. Enumeration data for Comox-Atlin Electoral District 8, North Bulkley Valley, Enumeration Districts 9 and 36. The Getanmaax Reserve, adjacent to Hazelton is not included in this data.

¹¹² As a point of interest, just 21 of Hazelton's married women recorded children living with them.

¹¹³ While one of the unemployed single females was the 17 year old daughter of the local physician, the other was the 22 year old sister of a male household head. In all likelihood, she was occupied as his housekeeper.

¹¹⁴ Evidence from other sources suggests that these women would have worked alongside their husbands, as was the norm. See, for example, Buddle, "The Business of Women,"; and Sylvia Van Kirk, "A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush, 1862-1875," in *British Columbia Reconsidered*, ed. Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), 22.

¹¹⁵ These rates are significantly higher than provincial norms, which were 65% for single women and 18% for married women, and higher than national norms, which were 80% and 8%, respectively. See Melanie Buddle, "The Business of Women," 46.

The single women were predominately wage-earners, engaged as nurses, teachers, stenographers, domestics, hospital matron, house-keepers, and waitresses. There were also five who were self-employed, three as dress-makers, and one each as a rooming-house owner and a hotel-keeper.¹¹⁶ Finally, the census taker recorded occupations for an additional eight single women, which were subsequently crossed out. This apparent act of censorship on the recorder's part, when combined with local evidence that confirms the presence of prostitutes in Hazelton during this period, suggests that these eight women were likely prostitutes.¹¹⁷ The married women all held entrepreneurial positions, as hotel-keepers, restaurant owners, ladies wear store owners, and dress-makers.

To summarize, this statistical data follows provincial trends related to single and married women's economic activities, whereby single women primarily worked for wages and married women engaged in entrepreneurial activities.¹¹⁸ It also confirms the region's extremely disparate gender ratios, higher rates of single women as compared to provincial norms, and higher rates of female employment, as compared to both provincial and national norms. It also draws attention to the limitations of census records, for although it includes the entrepreneurial activities of independent women, it ignores the economic activities of those working in family-owned businesses.

As the preceding evidence suggests, geographical isolation and demographic imbalances in early 20th century north-central British Columbia challenged

¹¹⁶ The latter two women, aged thirty-five and forty-one, were the oldest single women in the community, which might explain their deviation from employment norms.

¹¹⁷ See for example, Eva MacLean, *The Far Land* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 1993), 39-44; and Blaine Boyd, "The Coming of the Steel," 99.

¹¹⁸ See Melanie Buddle, "The Business of Women."

patriarchal traditions by providing rural women with unprecedented opportunities to increase their independence, autonomy, freedom and choice, through land ownership and participation in local economies. An examination of rural women's social identities further supports the links between gender, geography, and demography in determining diversity and difference in women's social status and power.

Gender and Social Identity

Rural Women's Relationships with Men

*Sandy Jenkins produced a cigar box full of ladies pictures, some just busts and some full length. He said to me, 'Will ye no give me a hand to pick mesel out a female?' He had been writing to some matrimonial club for a wife. 'Well, Sandy,' I said, 'we will look over the full length ones. If you want a mate for your farm, you want to see all of her and not just get a pretty face. You want a good husky woman who can do some work. I picked out a big husky one with good big feet. 'Now Sandy,' I said, 'this one would be my idea of what you want.' He looked the amazon over and said, 'I ken ye are about right. I'll write the lassie.'*¹¹⁹ – Wiggs O'Neill

Like many other areas in western Canada, north-central British Columbia's local historical records indicate that many females immigrated to the region as mail-order or war brides.¹²⁰ Considering the many responsibilities assumed by women on early 20th century farms, it is not surprising that male homesteaders like Sandy Jenkins went to such great lengths to find wives. Clearly, women were needed not only for companionship and reproduction, but for successful farming, as well. Extremely disparate gender roles, combined with geographical remoteness, forced men to resort to non-traditional methods of finding a wife. For example, many found

¹¹⁹ Wiggs O'Neill, "A Lifetime in British Columbia and Early Days," 132.

¹²⁰ While several women elsewhere in the region reported coming as 'mail-order' brides, they appeared to represent the majority of marriages in the farming settlement areas of Ootsa Lake and Francois Lake. See for example, Jean Clark Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*; and John Glen, Sr., *Where the Rivers Meet: The Story of the Settlement of the Bulkley Valley* (Duncan: New Rapier Press Ltd., 1977); and Wiggs O'Neill, "A Lifetime in British Columbia and Early Days."

their marital partners by advertising in local newspapers or national agricultural publications. However, as the experiences of Tommy McKinley, a middle-aged homesteader in the Ootsa Lake area attest, this was not an approach without risk. As custom dictated, McKinley sent his prospective mail-order bride money so she could travel from Kansas to marry him. Everything proceeded according to plan until she arrived at the Francois Lake ferry landing a day earlier than expected and was forced to seek accommodation with a nearby bachelor. By the time McKinley showed up the following day, she had committed to marrying her new host.¹²¹ While both of these men's marital strategies seem rather desperate, rural women's reasons for marrying were often more pragmatic than romantic, as well.

Mildred Cassidy's courtship was very brief. As she recalled, her husband proposed the day they met, not because he was smitten with her, but because "he was desperate for a housekeeper." For her part, she responded by asking if he drank and whether he was a Catholic or a Protestant. When he confirmed that he was a Protestant, and although he liked to drink, he would never do so "at the expense of children," she "let that ride" and married him.¹²² In a similar vein, Margaret Gardner received three proposals for marriage soon after her arrival in the Francois Lake area, two of which took place on the same day. She accepted the offer which met her criteria for marriage, which meant he owned a home and had a thousand dollars in the bank.¹²³ While Cassidy and Gardner's courtships were

¹²¹ Ibid., 131. McKinley's subsequent attempts to procure a wife were similarly unsuccessful. A few years later, my great-grandmother, Annie Middleton, emigrated from England as his mail-order bride and although they did marry, the marriage ended within a year.

¹²² Mildred Cassidy Interview, *Lakes District Historical Society Collection*.

¹²³ Margaret Gardner, *Wooden Sidewalks: From the Metropolitan City of Zurich to the British Columbia Hinterland* (Prince George: Repository Press, 1983), 26, 27.

almost non-existent, this was not the case for all rural women. Nan Capewell remained single for several years after emigrating from Britain to the Bulkley Valley, during which time she worked in the Aldermere Hotel, near Telkwa. After a traditional courtship, she based her decision to marry Joe Bourgon not on love, but on her advancing age (she was thirty-four), her desire to farm, and his promise of a new house.¹²⁴ These and other examples support Eliane Silverman's argument that early 20th century frontier marriages were an economic arrangement, "designed for survival, for productivity, and for reproduction," and not necessarily, for romantic fulfillment.¹²⁵ As such, women had to be pragmatic in their marital choices.

Rural women's relationships with men outside of marriage also reflect a remarkable amount of autonomy. For example, Mary Williams was just eighteen years old when she began her teaching career in the Mud River area, yet her diary indicates a great deal of assertiveness in her relationships with men. In addition to recording her intense frustration with the constant attention of nearby bachelors, Williams makes references to initiating and maintaining letter-writing relationships with at least six males she had 'met' via the "Primrose Page" of an agricultural publication. In her face-to-face relationships with older men in the region, she also defied the subordinate roles expected of her youth and gender, for as her diary indicates, she expended a great deal of time and energy engaged in political, religious, and ethnic debates with the married men living around her.¹²⁶ The social experiences of this young woman certainly contradict the historiographical

¹²⁴ Nan Bourgon, *Rubber Boots for Dancing*, 49.

¹²⁵ Eliane Leslau Silverman, "Women's Perceptions of Marriage on the Alberta Frontier," in *Building Beyond the Homestead*, ed. David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1988), 58.

¹²⁶ *Mary Greenwood (Williams) Diary*, BC Archives.

suggestion that Canadian women, during the late 19th and early 20th century, “were taught by men and other women to be docile, submissive wives, mothers and hostesses.”¹²⁷

Emotional and social ties between women and men outside of marriage are also implied by the local historical record’s many examples of friendships between married women and bachelors and by the incredible lengths that men and women went to in order to have social contact with one another. Newspapers recorded each and every social event and movement of men and women in and out of the region. The mobility of women, as well as the frequency of large gatherings and dances, even in the most isolated farming areas, is surprising. For example, in spite of the many responsibilities related to running a large farm on his own, Jock McMillan, a Vanderhoof bachelor, found time to socialize with more than two hundred individuals in a one year period, many of whom were married women he escorted to dances, picnics, meetings and to visits with other married women. He also retrieved doctors for his female neighbours, showed great concern for them in child-birth, and carefully recorded the arrival and growth of their children.¹²⁸ Clearly, in this region it was socially acceptable for bachelors to develop strong emotional bonds with other men and with married women. For one single man, it was even okay to invite unescorted married women to stay in his home. During the early decades of the early 20th century, Charley Barrett, a wealthy homesteader in the Houston area, treated many married women to week long vacations at his “Home

¹²⁷ Terry L. Chapman, “Women, Sex and Marriage in Western Canada, 1890-1920,” in *Alberta History* 33:4 (1985), 2.

¹²⁸ *John Henry (Jock) McMillan Journal, 1919-20, 1924-30*, Provincial Archives of British Columbia, MS 1906 and MS 1297.

Ranch,” where he engaged them in shooting, riding horses, dancing and playing bridge.¹²⁹ Admittedly, these social opportunities were not available to all rural women, but they do suggest that gender imbalances did not severely restrict women’s social experiences or sustain inequalities in their power relationships with men.

Having said that, relationships between rural men and women were not always autonomous or based on mutual support. For example, skewed demographic ratios and active participation in household economies did not guarantee women equality within their marriages. Ivy Middleton spent most of her ninety-seven years in the Bulkley Valley, where she raised nine children and assumed primary responsibility for all chores related to owning a farm, while her husband enjoyed a thirty-year career with the local railroad company. In spite of her many contributions to family survival, Ivy’s marriage was defined by patriarchal dominance, for she had little say in financial or other important decision-making matters and was frequently made to feel inferior to her husband.¹³⁰ Her neighbour and friend, Nan Bourgon, endured a similarly oppressive relationship with her husband.¹³¹ For women like Ivy and Nan, relationships with other women and volunteer work in the community often offered alternative ways of achieving social autonomy.

Rural Women and Social Activism

In Fort Fraser, twelve women began meeting in January of 1921, under the name of “Our Club,” and the motto, “for the common good.” Their first objective was to build a suitable town hall. Mrs. Tannock calculated the costs at approximately six

¹²⁹ *Bernice Martin Letters*, Bulkley Valley Museum, Smithers.

¹³⁰ Ivy Middleton, Interview with author (grand-daughter), 28 November, 1998, Terrace, B.C.

¹³¹ Nan Bourgon, *Rubber Boots for Dancing*, 56-59.

*thousand dollars and Mrs. Slavin donated a town lot. The women then began organizing fund-raising events and canvassing the town for donations of labour, money and materials, and eight months later, they held the official opening of their hall. Six months after that, they were debt free. For the following sixty-six years, these twelve women and their successors owned and maintained this hall, which was the lifeblood and centre of all community events in Fort Fraser. In 1987, the building was torn down and replaced, this time under the direction of a new municipal committee.*¹³²

For the women of Fort Fraser and indeed, for the majority of immigrant women living in north-central British Columbia during the early 20th century, life represented a return to the agrarian lifestyles of their grandmothers and great-grandmothers, with respect to their undeveloped material surroundings and their economic activities, which focused primarily on subsistence and survival. Undoubtedly, these women longed for the household conveniences, health care, education, and other social institutions and activities they had previously known, and local historical records suggest that they did not wait for men to attain them.

All of the region's early newspapers give credit to the efforts of the Ladies Aid, Hospital Boards, Red Cross, Women's Church Auxiliaries, Women's Institute, and similar female-only groups, for their substantial fund-raising efforts, leadership, organization and control of community social events. Among these groups the Women's Institute stands out for raising the profile of rural women, not only in this region, but throughout Canada.¹³³ Under the umbrella of the WI, the women of north-central British Columbia lobbied on behalf of all women and supported the

¹³² Lenore Rudland, *Fort Fraser*, 208-229.

¹³³ British Columbia Women's Institute, *Modern Pioneers: 1909-1959* (Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1959). (also known by the acronym WI) The WI was initiated in 1897, by Adelaide Hoodless, a rural Ontario woman, who was incited to action after her baby died from drinking contaminated milk. By 1916, it had become an international movement and the second largest organization in Canada, with nine hundred branches and more than thirty thousand members across the nation. By 1921, nearly half of the families in British Columbia were represented in the organization. Its scope was broad and included domestic, health, culture, education, social and political concerns.

causes of their urban counterparts, but more importantly, they directed incredible amounts of time and energy towards improving rural living conditions and acquiring cultural, social, health and educational amenities and services. The efforts and the results of their labours cannot be understated. These women raised most, if not all, of the monies needed to build and maintain community halls and acquire doctors, nurses, and dentists. They organized dances, picnics, barbecues, concerts, fall fairs, and community sports events and petitioned for schools, and then when they got them, they outfitted them with kitchens, sports equipment, pianos, and books. They fought for mail service, roads, electricity and water, set up bursaries for rural children to attend university, and sponsored Girl Guide and Boy Scout groups, teen and drama clubs, and special classes in their schools. They planted flowers and trees, fenced and did all of the maintenance in their local cemeteries and, most important to this study, they wrote local histories. They also sent sick children to cities for medical care, supported needy families and gathered food, bandages and other supplies for soldiers at war.¹³⁴ In several communities, women were gathering for these purposes before they had even heard of the Women's Institute.

The founding members of the Round Lake Women's Club, formed in 1920, clearly included some "feminists under the skin," for its mandate was not only to advance the "social and educational condition of the community," but also to improve

¹³⁴ British Columbia Women's Institute, *Modern Pioneers*, 89-94. See also *Telkwa Women's Institute Records*, BC Archives, MS 0150; *Houston Women's Institute Records*, MS 0526; *Quick Women's Institute Records*, MS 1421 and MS 1342; *Southside Women's Institute Records*, MS 1639; *Fraser Lake Women's Institute Records*, MS 1504; and Elnora C. Smith, ed. *Marks on the Forest Floor*, 49-54; Lenore Rudland, *Fort Fraser*, 207-228; *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 132-140; Carol J. Dennison, "Women's Institutes in British Columbia: Housewives 'For Home and Country'" (M.A., University of Victoria, 1983); and Alexandra Zacharias, "British Columbia Women's Institute in the Early Years: Times to Remember," in *In Her Own Right: Selected Essays on Women's History in British Columbia*, eds. Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess (Victoria: Camosun College, 1980), 55-78.

their “knowledge of women’s legal standing, parliamentary law” and to elevate themselves “to a better knowledge of what [was] going on in the woman’s world everywhere.”¹³⁵ Nonetheless, much like the women of Fort Fraser, their first major project was a community hall and within a year, they too celebrated their hall’s opening. As founding member Nan Bourgon asserted, “that hall was our biggest blessing.”¹³⁶ While political and social issues brought these women together, it was health care needs that inspired the women of Houston towards activism. A local resident confirms their success by stating, “only after the Houston Women’s Institute was formed was any real progress made in getting medical services for the community.”¹³⁷ All local histories give accolades to the Women’s Institute for their efforts and contributions towards community development, and therefore, by assumption, to the social power and influence of rural women. As one Fraser Lake pioneer wrote, “the Women’s Institute was really the backbone of Fraser Lake.”¹³⁸

While acknowledging the power and influence of the WI in British Columbia and the role it played in improving rural life, Carol Dennison suggested that men accepted their wives participation in this group because its mandate was based on domestic ideology. In other words, the community and nation were viewed by society as an extension of home, and women’s roles in both were the same.¹³⁹

However, as the saying goes, “the personal is political,” and rural women in north-

¹³⁵ Nan Bourgon, *Rubber Boots for Dancing*, 82. The term “feminist under the skin” comes from Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers Ltd., 1980), 1. Blair maintains that many Canadian women’s organizations during the early 20th century included feminist mindsets.

¹³⁶ Nan Bourgon, *Rubber Boots*, 82. Round Lake is a farming settlement, in the Bulkley Valley. More than 80 years later, this hall continues to serve as the centre for community events.

¹³⁷ Elnora C. Smith, ed. *Marks on the Forest Floor*, 49.

¹³⁸ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 281.

¹³⁹ Carol Joy Dennison, “The Women’s Institute in British Columbia,” 7.

central British Columbia, like their counterparts elsewhere, clearly manipulated traditional ideologies of domesticity and separate spheres in order to achieve more far-reaching social change without creating gender conflict. Presumably, the backgrounds of these women also influenced their community involvement and activism. As Susan Jackel suggested, women with British middle-class backgrounds would have been very “conscious of the interdependence of education, economic independence and social mobility,” and of the power of female solidarity and activism.¹⁴⁰ By organizing and participating in women’s groups like the WI, these women were able to instill a culture of female solidarity and activism in other rural women.

The minutes and records of regional branches of the Women’s Institute confirm that when women gathered they used their collective power to their political advantage. They not only discussed politics, but sent hundreds of petitions and resolutions to their organization’s national leaders, to school boards, and to governments. Historians elsewhere have noted this relationship between women’s groups (including the Women’s Institute) and the provincial government, particularly after the Liberals came to power in 1916, when important legislative changes resulted from women’s petitions for suffrage, prohibition, university courses, dower rights, and guardianship and maintenance laws.¹⁴¹ As Chris Clarkson stated, social reform in British Columbia was “essentially a feminist enterprise.”¹⁴² That the actions of women in north-central British Columbia made a difference is also

¹⁴⁰ Susan Jackel, ed. *Flannel Shirt and Liberty*, xxiv.

¹⁴¹ Christopher Clarkson, “Remoralizing Families? Family Regulation and State Formation in British Columbia, 1862-1940 (Ph.D. University of Ottawa, 2002), 350.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 286.

suggested by Michael Cramer, who studied women's suffrage campaigns in the province and determined that, in spite of the efforts of Helen MacGill and urban women, "rural ridings were more favorable to the [suffrage] question" and it was from the rural vote that the cause was won.¹⁴³ Clearly, the Women's Institute and other female-only groups provided a venue for many women in this region to pursue philanthropic and charitable activities and put their organizational, fund-raising and political skills to use. In turn, these women were able to increase their independence and autonomy by assuming prominent roles in a variety of rural community-building activities.

In summary, the local historical record suggests that the early 20th century represented a unique moment for newly emigrated women when geography, demographics and gender came together to provide them with unprecedented opportunities to redefine themselves as women. Like the women on the prairies, a return to agrarian semi-subsistence lifestyles required a reconfiguration of gender roles, in which conventional notions of femininity shifted to reflect the diversities of their rural experiences. Social change also resulted from their experiences as land-owners, entrepreneurs, wage-earners, and social, economic and political players in the creation of rural societies, all of which similarly helped to shift gender ideologies and increase women's social power and influence.

In the next two chapters, the connections between rural women's lived experiences and the narrative representation of them within local historical records are explored. Focusing on the discourse itself and on issues of genre, voice,

¹⁴³ Michael H. Cramer, "Public and Political: Documents of the Woman's Suffrage Campaign in British Columbia, 1871-1917: The View from Victoria," in *British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women*, ed. Crease et al (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992), 67.

language and power, these chapters emphasize the discordant relationship between the realities and ideologies of rural women.

Chapter Two

Discourse and Identity

Some women wept at the continual hard work. Others found loneliness much more difficult to bear. A great majority of the women, however, cheered and helped their men and in so doing, raised their own morale.

- Vanderhoof, *The Town that Wouldn't Wait*.

In the previous chapter, the early 20th century experiences of rural women in north-central British Columbia emerged from the local historical record, revealing the material level of their lives and the roles that gender, geography and demographics played in producing diversity and difference in women's spatially constructed identities.¹⁴⁴ Equally important to the construction of identity, however, is the ideological representation of women within these sources because, as Joan Scott and many others have argued, gender and identity are not only materially or spatially constructed, but socially constructed, as well. Accordingly, these next two chapters focus on the sources themselves, in order to determine the connections between the material and discursive levels of rural women's early 20th century identities. In doing so, they also draw attention to the power of language and the many ways that it can alter and influence our understanding of rural women, without changing the material realities of their experiences. For example, reading the texts from one interpretative position suggests rural women's complicity with the androcentric narrative tradition, while reading them from another exposes strategies of resistance against this cultural script. Further, this complicity and resistance can occur in texts simultaneously. Most importantly, by focusing on the discourse, these two chapters emphasize the politics of self representation or how narrators of local sources have

¹⁴⁴ By spatially, I am referring to the roles of geography and the physical environment in the construction of identities.

oppressed and empowered rural women according to their subjective needs, and how we, as authors and readers, have the power to do the same.

In accordance with the multi-generational methodologies outlined earlier, this chapter begins with an analysis of local sources based on the reading position of a “mother.” This interpretative perspective is of one who is responsible, nurturing and capable of a “consciousness that understands it is in intercourse with a subject that is not absent, but not yet formed.”¹⁴⁵ In other words, instead of paying attention to the details of experience, the reader “listens to the ground noise of settler society” to get a sense of the dominant images of rural women created by the local historical record.¹⁴⁶ This deconstructive reading is also one which pragmatically focuses on genre, voice, context, language and gender, or like a mother, is concerned first, with who is speaking, to whom they are speaking, and for what purpose.

**Mothering the Texts: The Conforming ‘Ground Noise’ of the Local
Historical Record**

The function of any written text is to reproduce ideology.

- Mary Poovey

a) Genre and Voice

To begin, the motherly reader determines that, regardless of who writes, local histories tend to merge with the dominant discourse. The gender of the author appears to be less important than the gender of the discourse, for even women produce androcentric narratives that hide their importance on the rural landscape. Having said that, it is significant that all but two of the nearly twenty collective or ‘official’ community histories representing north-central British Columbia were written

¹⁴⁵ Helen Buss, *Mapping Ourselves: Canadian Women’s Autobiography in English* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 1993), 26.

¹⁴⁶ Helen Buss, “Listening to the Ground Noise of Canadian Women Settlers’ Memoirs: A Maternal Intercourse of Discourses,” in *Essays on Canadian Writing* 60 (Winter 1996), 199-214.

by a female author or editor or by a committee comprised primarily of women.¹⁴⁷ In addition, rural women's voices represent the majority in local oral history and family memoir collections. These statistics suggest that rural women of this region wanted to be included in the historical record, that they were not willing to wait for scholars to put them there, *and* that they have demonstrated assertiveness and agency by dominating these particular genres. Further, as Gerder Lerner noted, the act of writing themselves into the historical record, in itself, implies emancipation, liberation, and psychological or social change, because in doing so these women are proclaiming that "men are not the centre of the world, but men and women are."¹⁴⁸

On the other hand, although rural women dominate as authors and narrators of collective local histories, oral histories and unpublished memoirs, they are notably under-represented as independent authors of published autobiographical texts. While more than twenty autobiographical works represent the early settlement experiences of people in this region, just six are written by women.¹⁴⁹ These statistics suggest that rural women are, by and large, limited to the collective voice of woman, which as Judy Long suggested, results in generalizations and essentializing images of women.¹⁵⁰ Even though oral histories and unpublished memoirs offer first-person female voices, they do not tend to be venues for private expression.

¹⁴⁷ See the bibliography at the end of this work.

¹⁴⁸ Gerder Lerner, as cited in Geraldine Moane, *Gender and Colonialism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 130.

¹⁴⁹ See the attached bibliography. Within the category of autobiography are several texts that could be considered local histories, but because they have single authors and are written from the speaking position of 'I,' I have considered them as autobiographical. Further, only four of the six female-written autobiographical texts are analyzed here in detail. Jessie Sugden's narrative is brief and specific only to her childhood, while that of Margaret Gardner only minimally focuses on her experiences in north-central British Columbia.

¹⁵⁰ Judy Long, *Telling Women's Lives: Subject/Narrator/Reader/Text* (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 7.

They are public or, at least, semi-public texts in the sense that rural women, as their narrators, knew that their stories would serve as the foundation for 'official' local histories and therefore, that they must conform to the expected cultural script. The paradox is that somehow producing a public text suppresses female voices and the private world of women, yet writing a public text is, assumably, a transgressive act in itself. This distinction between public and private in the production of local history and how it is okay for women to document the public history of their communities but not their private lives is suggested, for example, by an oral interview featuring Mrs. Van Dyke. While Van Dyke, who emigrated from London to Prince George in 1919 as a mail-order bride, was forthcoming with many of her life experiences, she refused to answer when asked what difficulties she had adjusting to her marriage.¹⁵¹ Like other rural women, she understood that it was not her private experiences as an individual or a woman, but her status as an emigrant that allowed her a narrative voice.¹⁵² These factors draw further attention to the links between genre, voice, and the ideological representation of rural women and how they represent dynamics of power, access and legitimacy.¹⁵³

In addition to the aforementioned concerns, several other interpretative challenges influence the scholarly analysis of local records. First, there is the issue of memory. Even local histories, because they draw heavily on oral interviews and submitted family memoirs, have problems related to memory. Human memory can

¹⁵¹ Mrs. Van Dyke Interview, *Carbutt Collection*, Prince George Library.

¹⁵² Janet Floyd, *Writing the Pioneer Woman* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 15.

¹⁵³ Judy Long, *Telling Women's Lives*, 7.

be fallible, ego-distorting, and contradictory.¹⁵⁴ For example, within their narratives many rural women explicitly state that married women in the region never worked outside of the home, yet they contradict themselves by offering examples of such labour. As individuals grow and change, so do their memories and cultural beliefs, which increases the potential for constructing mythical pasts. Nonetheless, local sources represent much more than random memories. In their totality, for example, they offer a memory-based quantitative approach aimed at understanding historical change.¹⁵⁵ In their consistencies and through verification with other records, each non-contemporary voice gains validity and contributes to a broader social context. As Luisa Passerini suggested, “all autobiographical memory is true; it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, for which purpose.”¹⁵⁶ Evidence also suggests that rural women and men, as narrators and authors, have not taken their roles as historians lightly. All local histories utilized in this study include references to primary materials, such as journals, diaries, newspapers, village records, school board minutes, church registers, Hudson’s Bay Company records, and provincial and national archival records.

There is also the issue of subjectivity. Most of the narrative voices found within local discourse share a “unique rhetorical stance” with their texts, because they represent the subjects themselves, who are serving tripartite roles as the eye

¹⁵⁴ Louis Starr, “Oral History,” in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd ed. eds. David K. Dunaway and Willa Baum (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1996), 40.

¹⁵⁵ By quantitative, I am referring to the diversities, differences, continuities and patterns of rural women’s lives that are revealed by examining many local sources, i.e. oral interviews, local histories, memoirs, etc., as opposed to a qualitative case study of one or a small group of women.

¹⁵⁶ Luisa Passerini, “Women’s Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences, and Emotions,” in *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, ed. Personal Narratives Group (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 197.

witness, the participant and the historian.¹⁵⁷ For instance, Lenore Rudland, author of *Fort Fraser (Where the Hell's that?)*, was born in Fort Fraser during the early settlement period, thus her 'official' local history offers personal insights and a subjective bias not common to traditional historiography. Oral history collections add a further layer of subjectivity to local discourse, because they include the knowledge, biases and agenda of interviewers, who hold similar positions of power in which they can manipulate the stories of rural women. The conflicting agendas of interviewer and subject are evident, for example, in an interview featuring Prince George pioneer Margaret Morgan. While Morgan clearly attempted to focus on the diversities of her experiences as a single woman, her interviewer kept interrupting her and shifting the focus away from Morgan towards her husband and the community.¹⁵⁸ This subjective influencing power of the interviewer (and the androcentric focus) is found in most oral histories, as is the emphasis on community identity over that of the individuals themselves.

The local historical record also reflects the experiences, thoughts and perceptions of individuals who are in the final stages of their life. As such, the narrators of these texts often view them as venues for conducting life reviews and for leaving a material record of their existence. According to psychoanalytical theorist Eric Erikson, the coping, surviving self depends upon a positive construction of identity.¹⁵⁹ This also helps to explain why local discourse rarely includes the

¹⁵⁷ Marcus Billson, as cited in Helen M. Buss, *Repossessing the World': Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2002), 32. Indeed, this complicated subject position of the authors replicates and validates my own narrative position.

¹⁵⁸ Margaret Morgan Interview, *Prince George Oral History Group*. Available online: <http://www2.pgohg.org>.

¹⁵⁹ Harriet Wrye and Jacqueline Churilla, "Looking Inward, Looking Backward: Reminiscence and the Life Review," 147.

oppressive, controversial, or adversarial aspects of human experience. Further, this “sword of censorship,” as Sheldon Stromquist noted, can be connected to the intended audience of these works:

...judgement is immediate. [They are] not judged by standards of scholarship, but whether [they] conform to the unconsciously transmitted and fragmented legacy that they know or imagine as the community’s history, and by whether their relatives are favorably mentioned.¹⁶⁰

It is because of this subjectivity that local histories, which are fundamentally constructed from oral histories and family memoirs, are considered in this inquiry as primary sources.

In addition to sharing interpretative issues related to memory and subjectivity, local genres also share a common purpose and meaning, in which, as Stromquist suggested, they primarily function to affirm connection and belonging to a place, a community identity, and a dominant pioneer cultural script. As models of regional imperialism, they also offer nostalgic, androcentric ideologies of rural society that replicate the middle-class values of Anglo-European society. Elizabeth Furniss referred to this primary function of local discourse as the “frontier cultural complex,” suggesting that it perpetuates myths and stereotypes similar to Richard Slotkin’s frontier thesis.¹⁶¹ The myth begins with the European emigrant (predominately male) making the long hard journey into the free, remote, but wild and dangerous wilderness of North America. This continental move forces the emigrant to regress to culturally, morally and materially primitive living conditions. Then, after many

¹⁶⁰ Shelton Stromquist, “A Sense of Place: A Historian Advocates Conceptual Approaches to Community History,” *The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice*, Carol Kammen, ed. (Walnut Creek, California: Alta Mira Press, 1996), 183.

¹⁶¹ Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 16. For Slotkin’s frontier thesis, see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973).

courageous, heroic (predominately male) struggles with nature and “unknown and hostile Indians,” he conquers nature, and through acts of benevolence, the Natives, as well. As Furniss notes, this dominant pioneer script “renders invisible the complexity of historical interactions” and, more importantly, it ignores the diversity and differences within and between social groups, including gender.¹⁶²

While it is necessary to identify and be critically vigilant of the interpretative challenges related to the local historical record, it is also important to recognize its positive attributes. As Buss asserted, “it is precisely because of their subjectivity, their rootedness in time, place and personal experiences, and their perspective ridden character that we value” these sources.¹⁶³ In other words, it is here, “at the level of the locality that the lives of ordinary British Columbians emerge most vividly from the obscurity of the past.”¹⁶⁴ It is also within these texts that we can find rural women’s voices, and in their everyday experiences, perceive how their lives and identities are being constructed. Most importantly, it is here that rural women modify the traditional script by capitalizing on their identities as emigrants in order to secure their place in the historical record. Writing themselves in represents an important historiographical shift, because these women, by bringing “female gendering to bear” on the previous male-centred scripts, alter the pioneer story.¹⁶⁵

b) Context: Themes, Language and Gender

The gendered stereotypes that predominate in this region’s local histories are grounded in notions of rural identity as defined by isolation, subsistence, gender

¹⁶² Elizabeth Furniss, 18.

¹⁶³ Helen Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 28.

¹⁶⁴ Linda L. Hale and Jean Barman, *British Columbia: Local Histories: A Bibliography* (Victoria: BC Heritage Trust, 1991), Intro.

¹⁶⁵ Helen Buss, *Repossessing the World*, 3.

imbalance and a resource-based economy. For example, *Vanderhoof, the Town that Couldn't Wait*, is dedicated to the “pioneer, whose courage and determination settled this country,” while *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, the official local history of Fraser Lake, honors the “rugged men and women of past and present, whose courage, ingenuity and steadfastness began the settlement of this area.”¹⁶⁶ In this latter work, an added tribute recognizes “the pioneer women who braved the elements and hardships of the early years.”¹⁶⁷ In *Heritage Lost: A People's History of the Ootsa Lake Region*, the bachelors are singled out for special recognition.¹⁶⁸ These ideological virtues of rural men and women persist throughout these local texts; however, in addition to courage, determination, ingenuity, etc, they exploit far more restrictive and gender-specific language to describe rural women.

First and foremost, pioneer women's identities remain ideologically rooted within traditional spheres of domesticity, home and family. Even when the breadth and scope of their experiences clearly suggests an expansion of gender roles, they are narratively presented as routine, domestic chores. By implication, rural men become the true pioneer heroes. Further, these perceptions have no gender for they are perpetuated by both male and female narrative voices. However, having said that, there is a difference in that women tend to understate and misrepresent their experiences, while men often omit them altogether or make women so peripheral so as to assume they contributed little to rural life.¹⁶⁹ As Judy Long

¹⁶⁶ Lyn Hancock, ed., *Vanderhoof, The Town that Wouldn't Wait*, 2.; *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, iii.

¹⁶⁷ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, ix.

¹⁶⁸ Jean Clark Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, Forward.

¹⁶⁹ For example, one of north-central British Columbia's most popular contemporary authors of local history, has published several works featuring his pioneer experiences, and by and large, they do not mention women. See Jack Boudreau, *Crazy Man's Creek* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 1998); *Grizzly Bear Mountain* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 2000); and *Mountains, Campfires & Memories* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 2002).

explained, these omissions are not necessarily intentional, but a reflection of gendered voice preference. When men write, they generally use the first person 'I' voice and focus on their own experiences or those of their male counterparts, while women include men because they favor the collective, third person 'we' or 'they' narrative positions.¹⁷⁰

This gendered voice difference is exemplified in the section of local histories reserved for family memoirs. For example, George Kirkland, of Fraser Lake, does not acknowledge his wife at all in his memoirs, although the accompanying photo does.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Lloyd Ray's memoirs, appearing in the same work, provide no hint of his wife Birdie's existence, or their fifty plus years of marriage. Ivan Ray, on the other hand, pays tribute to his wife, Ruby, and their fifty-six years of marriage, but only by stating, "they don't make women like her anymore....We wore out ten saddle horses together."¹⁷² Finally, the memoirs of Alvin Mooney, a revered pioneer doctor of Vanderhoof, reveal similar patriarchal ideologies, for he requested that his wife be remembered, as "Janey, whose special qualities have supported him so well through the years."¹⁷³

The notion that early 20th century rural women were confined to domestic spheres is similarly promoted by the pioneer women themselves. For example, in her reminiscences of life in early 20th century Prince George, Jessie Sugden maintained that "a woman's place was in the home, few women worked, nice girls

¹⁷⁰ Judy Long, *Telling Women's Lives*, 7-26.

¹⁷¹ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 283.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 300.

¹⁷³ Lyn Hancock, ed. *Vanderhoof*, 109.

said no, and to be married after age twenty-five was a disgrace.”¹⁷⁴ By comparing Sugden’s ideological representations to the lived experiences of women like Nellie Law, who never married, but worked forty years as a hotel clerk in Prince George, or Miss Cain and Cassie MacMillan, lifelong independent female farmers, or Mrs. Henkel, the owner/operator of two hunting lodges, we can assume that there were many non-conforming “disgraceful” females living in this region of the province during the early settlement period.

Secondly, as the following passages suggest, local sources not only define rural women within traditional notions of domesticity, but they also characterize them as uncomplaining. The image of rural women “putting up and shutting up,” or “making do, and getting by,” denotes another deeply rooted feminine virtue, of passivity.

It was a hard life for the pioneer housewife but Julia Larsen never complained...not even when the water was frozen in the pails on winter mornings.¹⁷⁵

...the twins were born one afternoon when she was alone....True to her industrious nature, the next day Mrs. Dungate was up on the roof, putting on shingles.¹⁷⁶

...women’s lot was to do and endure, to be battered and cheated by life and never complain, [and] to fight bad luck and poverty with hard work and consideration for others.¹⁷⁷

Even when Mrs. Silverthorne’s work here was finished, and death came peacefully one night as she slept, the next morning was found on the side-board her usual supply of fresh baked, delicious bread. She had stayed up late the night before to bake it, symbolizing that true pioneer spirit—that whatever may come, every day jobs must be done!¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Jessie Bond Sugden, *In the Shadow of the Cutbanks: A Story of Growing Up in Prince George* (Prince George: Jessie Sugden, 1985), 34.

¹⁷⁵ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 195.

¹⁷⁶ *Marks of a Century*, 50.

¹⁷⁷ Earl L.S. Baity, *I Remember Chilako* (Prince George: Prince George Printers Ltd., 1978), 140.

Based on these narrative voices, it seems that to be a true pioneer, a woman had to sacrifice her life for the welfare of her husband and children.

Thirdly, and perhaps because many of their experiences fit rather uneasily into domestic language, rural women are praised for being help-mates to men. Help-mate, in rural discourse, as previously explained, refers to women's "ability to fulfill duties which enabled men to succeed and to handle crises with competence and without complaint."¹⁷⁹ The term also implies that women's assistance to men was occasional or peripheral, and therefore, that it did not represent "a permanent confusion of spheres."¹⁸⁰ This helpmate label is applied freely to north-central British Columbia's women, and is, once again, reflected in both male and female narrative voices. For example, Lenore Rudland, in *Fort Fraser (Where the Hell's That?)*, insists that "much credit must be given [the] women because they stood behind their men and worked hard to provide homes for their children and helped to build a good community."¹⁸¹ In a similar vein, an authorial voice sums up Vanderhoof's early 20th century rural women:

Some women wept at the continual hard work. Others found loneliness much more difficult to bear. A great majority of the women, however, cheered and helped their men and in so doing, raised their own morale. Even in the building of homes, there were many ways women could be of help. Because of the long winters, a comfortable dwelling was of more importance to the wife than the homesteader himself.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Elnora Smith, ed. *Marks on the Forest Floor*, 60.

¹⁷⁹ Beverly Stoeltje, "'A Helpmate for Man Indeed': The Image of the Frontier Woman," 32.

¹⁸⁰ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: 'Civilizing' the West? 1840-1880* rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 31.

¹⁸¹ Lenore Rudland, *Fort Fraser*, 57.

¹⁸² Lyn Hancock, ed., *Vanderhoof*, 43.

In one short passage, this narrator perpetuates the three most dominant cultural images of rural women in North American discourse, thereby drawing attention to the role that language plays in the construction of identity and how it is used to subvert gender power. The pioneer women of Vanderhoof are to be remembered as “simpering, reluctant emigrants” who wept in response to their plight; as “over-worked drudges” who “put up and shut up”; and finally, as “cheerful helpmates,” who happily served as adjuncts to men. Above all, they are to be remembered as wives, not as homesteaders. This paragraph also suggests that rural life offered women just two choices – to weep or to stand behind their men. Ultimately, local discourse constructs and sustains ideologies of rural women as dependent, subordinate, adjuncts to men. These androcentric worldviews are so entrenched in pioneering language that the women themselves seemed to take for granted that settlers, pioneers, homesteaders, farmers, and ranchers were roles that could only be applied to the male gender. Consequently, they understate their contributions to rural life because they lack the words to more appropriately describe themselves. They are “womenfolk” or “farmer’s wives,” who just happened to milk cows, clear land, build houses, haul hay and shoot guns.

Patricia Turkki, female author of Burns Lake’s official community history, wrote about the area’s “many pioneers...and often their wives,” and suggested that the model of an early 20th century rural woman was, “Mrs. P. J. Carroll, a girl endowed with grace and charm,... intelligent and capable, [who] also had the qualities necessary to share the versatile life of a man who was pioneer, prospector,

traveler and trapper.”¹⁸³ Following tradition, Turkki identified Carroll by her husband’s name. In reality, she was Beatrice Carroll, pioneer of Ootsa Lake, and prospector, trapper, and traveler in her own right. Carroll also raised sled dogs, and among her (and her husband’s) many diverse and interesting experiences was a 6,000 mile, eighteen month-long dog sled trek across North America to New York and back in the early 1930s.¹⁸⁴ Because she is a rural woman, however, she is praised in the local historical record not for her individual experiences or accomplishments, but for being endowed with the qualities necessary to live with a man who, as the narrative implies, was the true pioneer, prospector, trapper and traveler.

The relationship between gender identity and the rural landscape is another feature of local discourse, in which agrarian language ideologically associates males with the control of land, and females with nature. For example, rural men have plowed, tamed, and conquered the virgin, barren and fertile lands of north-central British Columbia and by symbolic association, women, as well.¹⁸⁵ The connection between individual women and nature is also found in this male-written description of “Old Lady Hinton,” a woman “well into her sixties...[and] of heavy build and somewhat lame,” who traveled by horse and wagon from Hazelton to Ootsa Lake near the turn of the century. According to the narrator, the “trip in must have been a

¹⁸³ Pat Turkki, *Burns Lake*, 7, 175.

¹⁸⁴ Robert F. Harrington, “The Bannock Trail,” in *BC Outdoors*, February 1977; and Jean Clark Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost*, 22. Beatrice’s journal of this dog sled journey filled fourteen volumes. The couple financed their trip as they went, by selling booklets of Mr. Carroll’s poetry and picture postcards of themselves with their dog team. For further evidence of Beatrice’s experiences as a prospector, see Ida Mackie, “How B.C.’s Residents Earn a Living - Prospector,” in *The Northwest Digest* 13:2 (Mar-Apr. 1957), 8, 37-39.

¹⁸⁵ For scholarship that further explores these binaries in geographical thinking, see, Jo Little, *Gender and Rural Geography: Identity, Sexuality and Power in the Countryside* (Harlow, Eng: Pearson Education Ltd., 2002); and Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

trial,” but she “took it like a thoroughbred, as she did too, the often far from easy life afterwards.”¹⁸⁶ Metaphorically speaking, the author is asking that Mrs. Hinton be forever remembered as a heavily built, somewhat lame thoroughbred horse.

As the previous example suggests, even when rural men attempt to give special recognition to the roles women played in early settlement, they are hindered by unconscious narrative strategies and ideologies that guide their discourse. For example, benevolence, reluctance, and refusal seemed to control the voice of Ootsa Lake pioneer, Arthur Shelford, when he wrote, “*I feel I must* pay tribute to those first pioneer women who braved the long, hard trails into the country, and then settled in to make the best homes they could for their husbands and children.”¹⁸⁷ By including the words, “I feel I must,” the author implies that he felt obligated to include women in his narrative, but would rather not have. He further intimates that the “trip in” was the hardest part of rural life for women, that women’s roles were strictly domestic, and that pioneer women primarily existed to serve men and children. In subsequent passages, he describes his political duties as regional representative of the Farmer’s Institute and uses similar narrative strategies to explain his wife’s contributions to his success.

I must record the grit of my little wife Millie, for she stayed alone during those *two six-week* campaigns and looked after all the work that has to be done on any farm. Not all women could stand such isolation, *even though* she was only a mile from Jack and his family.¹⁸⁸

Again, through language, the author implies that it is obligation and not desire that motivates the narrative recognition of his wife. He also subtly suggests that he

¹⁸⁶ Arthur and Cyril Shelford, *We Pioneered* (Victoria: Orca Book Publishers Ltd., 1988), 149.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 119. (emphasis added)

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 183. (emphasis added)

did not shirk his responsibilities often and when he did, it was loneliness and not labour that taxed his wife the most. However, Shelford acknowledges the diversity of his wife's gender roles in a slightly less diminishing and condescending manner:

The life of a wife on a pioneer farm is always a busy one for besides the ordinary routine work around the home, three days a week can be written off for washing, churning, and bread making. The chickens take a lot of attention, as does the lone pig kept for home consumption. In addition to all this work, Millie has done most of the work in the garden, helped often with the milking...and she has always given a lot of help in the hay-field and in the harvesting. She has also helped to harvest potatoes and turnips and in many other tasks...but it has often not been easy for her.¹⁸⁹

Undoubtedly, he was correct to suggest that it was often not easy for her. However, like many other men, he clearly misrepresented his wife by over-using the word "help" and perpetuating the notion that women were not farmers, but instead farmers wives.

In summary, a motherly, pragmatic, reading of the genres that comprise the local historical record produces a dominant image of 'rural woman' as hard-working, passive, and subordinate. While these ideologies conform to and sustain the static, androcentric pioneer cultural script, they also reflect a shift represented elsewhere in rural discourse, in which feminine characteristics of strength and stoicism have replaced weakness and frailty, or the pre-emigrant ideological attributes of most rural women. Just as importantly, a motherly reading of these texts emphasizes the links between genre, voice, language, and gender in the narrative construction of rural women, and how these factors operate in tandem to subvert power by downplaying the significance of women's experiences. On the other hand, as the following chapter suggests, by reading the sources from a more consciously-focused feminist

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 210, 211.

deconstructive position, another layer of interpretation, characterized by a subtle female resistance to the politically correct surface narrative, can be found.

Chapter Three

Discourse and Identity

Sisterly (De)liberations: Beneath the Surface of Local Discourse

We frame our construction of identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the identities our significant others want to recognize in us.

- Charles Taylor, *Malaise of Modernity*

The interpretation of rural women's identities offered in the following pages is based on a feminist deconstructive reading position, wherein the reader, like a sister, seeks to find a "common cause" with the texts.¹⁹⁰ By sisterly, I am suggesting that the reader becomes one with the texts, enters into them, transcending time and place in order to recognize in rural women's voices the realities of her own life.¹⁹¹ In my case, this subjective reading position is further amplified by my own personal relationship to the sources. However, instead of suggesting that my proximity to the subject undermines my reading position, I propose that it enhances it. As a rural woman living in this geographical area and as a contemporary female academic, I bring life experiences, skills, biases, and an agenda to the discourse that allow me a deeper level of understanding and an ability to more fully recognize the "parallels between my own subjectivity" and the subjects expressed within these texts.¹⁹² As Helen Buss suggested, "as sister [to the texts], I take in the details of [rural women's] experience as a woman like me...[and] realize the possible implications of her experience that my experiences can allow me."¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Helen Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 26.

¹⁹¹ Helen M. Buss, "Canadian Women's Autobiography: Some Critical Directions," in *A M A Z I N G Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing*, ed. Shirley Newman and Smaro Kamboueli (Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1986), 161.

¹⁹² Helen Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 26.

¹⁹³ Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 194.

The decoding strategies of this interpretative reading position require more than a disciplined, sisterly, empathetic sensitivity. In order to dig beneath the surface layer of local discourse, it is also necessary to draw on historical and theoretical knowledge not readily understood by the authors and narrators of these sources. For example, it is a basic understanding of linguistic strategies that enables me to recognize the “small breaks in the code” that create resistance, contradiction, and tension in the narrative representation of women.¹⁹⁴ By combining these discursive ruptures with my gendered sensitivities, I am then able to piece together “the undercurrent of forbidden discourse, a discourse of rebellious accusation, which [lies] hidden below the surface narrative of obedient conformity” in local sources.¹⁹⁵ In essence, this sisterly deconstructive reading position produces an interpretation of rural women that suggests, as authors, editors, and narrators, they have empowered themselves by drawing on unique feminist strategies to subversively challenge the traditional meta-narrative. Further, although this resistance appears in women’s collective and individual narrative voices, it is most discernable in their published autobiographies. However, regardless of genre, these women’s narrative strategies follow a pattern. They are subtle, seemingly unconscious, and most often, appear in the form of juxtaposition, a misrepresentation of normative language, autonomy, displacement, and contradiction.

Juxtaposition

Juxtaposition, as a narrative strategy, refers to the ambiguous, ironic,

¹⁹⁴ Helen Buss, “Settling the Score with Myths of Settlement: Two Women Who Roughed It and Wrote It,” in *Great Dames*, eds. Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dickin (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 168.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

disconnected arrangement of ideas, voices, phrases, or paragraphs that defy grammatical logic, but are subtle, easily missed or interpreted as accidental.¹⁹⁶

Rural women utilize this paratactic narrative tool, as do men, by taking up most of their allotted “family memoir” narrative space within local histories to describe their own experiences, thereby ignoring their spouses. This strategy is also used by female editors, who more consciously seek ways to give primacy of place to women. For example, one might expect the family memoir, entitled, “Mr. and Mrs. Charles Barrett,” appearing in Houston’s local history, to emphasize Mr. Barrett, not only because of his gender, but also because of his previous prominence as a wealthy bachelor and because he was the first British emigrant to settle in the Bulkley Valley.¹⁹⁷ Instead, the editor, Elnora Smith, focuses entirely on Mrs. Barrett’s accomplishments, thereby suggesting that she was the most prominent of the pair.

Mrs. Barrett nursed numerous ill people back to health, and supplied countless meals to weary travelers. Hours of tilling and weeding produced most prolific vegetable gardens....timothy hay became the main crop, andMrs. Barrett spent hours handpicking seed...which took prizes all across Canada. Cattle were raised on the ranch by the hundreds. Sheep, pigs and chickens took up a good portion of time with their care. Mrs. Barrett became an expert horsewoman, and took her place with the ranch hands when round-up time came around....[and] handled the post office for the Barrett District, with mail carried from the CNR station 2 ½ miles away.¹⁹⁸

Just as intriguing, is the biography of Mrs. Slavin, which follows in the same work. Entitled, “Mrs. Slavin,” it too focuses entirely on this woman’s life experiences, thereby giving the impression that she was widowed or divorced. Her husband’s

¹⁹⁶ Joan Newlon Radner and Susan S. Lanser, “Strategies of Coding in Women’s Cultures,” in *Feminist Messages: Coding in Women’s Folk Culture*, ed. Joan Newlon Radner (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 13, 14.

¹⁹⁷ During the early 20th century, Barrett owned a 300 horse pack train and the largest, most successful ranch in north-central British Columbia, twenty years of which he was a bachelor. Elnora Smith, ed., *Marks on the Forest Floor*, 70,71.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. The same story appears in Grace Hols, ed., *Marks of a Century: A Story of Houston, B.C. 1900-2000* (Houston: District of Houston, 1999), 46.

existence is made known only by the statements, “Mrs. Slavin moved to Houston where she and her husband operated the Hotel,” and, “from Houston the Slavins moved to Fort Fraser and later to Telkwa, still following the hotel business.”¹⁹⁹ Again, it appears that the editor consciously chose to portray Mrs. Slavin as more prominent and noteworthy than her husband. The same pioneer couple is featured in Fraser Lake’s local history, where, in an equally odd manner, the narrator states, “Mr. Slavin came down from Houston [in 1920] to look at the Titemore Hotel which he bought. Mrs. Slavin was very active in the formation of...Our Club Women’s Institute. She...donated the land for the [Fort Fraser] community hall.”²⁰⁰ In both cases, juxtaposition, as a narrative strategy, subtly emphasizes the agency and independence of Mrs. Slavin.

Juxtaposition is also used to challenge traditional ideologies of rural women in the economic section of several local histories. In *Marks on the Forest Floor*, just two narrative voices describe Houston’s forest industry history; one is that of Vivian Pederson, a female logging camp cook; the other is that of Harry Hagman, the community’s corporate icon.²⁰¹ In *Marks of a Century*, three female voices highlight the forestry section, including Pederson’s; that of Molly Luszez, the wife of a logger; and that of Dana Giesbrecht, the grand-daughter of a logging contractor. From a feminist perspective, these female voices have been strategically placed alongside male ones to subtly exploit the notion that men *and* women played integral roles in the local economy.²⁰² In a similar vein, Lyn Hancock, the editor of Vanderhoof’s

¹⁹⁹ *Marks on the Forest Floor*, 73.

²⁰⁰ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 288.

²⁰¹ *Marks on the Forest Floor*, 100-108.

²⁰² *Marks of a Century*, 121-129.

local history, utilizes just one narrative voice to detail the importance of telegraphy to that community's past. As a male-dominated occupation, one might expect that voice to be male, but instead, it is that of Genevieve Blench Barteaux, the only female telegraph operator employed by the Canadian National Railway between 1924 and 1942.²⁰³ The accompanying photo of Barteaux, depicted in her role as a telegraph operator, also represents juxtaposition as a strategy for disrupting traditional gender ideologies. The photos of Mrs. Jim, one of Houston's tie-hackers, portrayed lifting huge ties onto the train, and those of Edna Westgarde, and Betty Dungate, wearing hunting gear and holding guns are also meant to create new paradigms of rural women.²⁰⁴

Misrepresentation of Normative Language

Many rural women, including Genevieve Barteaux, utilize the language of domesticity, family and home in their narratives in order to justify their assertiveness, independence, and contributions to family survival. For example, Barteaux prefaced the details of her non-traditional career, with the statement, "In 1924, I realized I had to support myself and two children, [so] I hired out as a telegraph operator on the CNR."²⁰⁵ Then, after justifying her transgression of traditional domestic boundaries, she more confidently asserted, "I worked at every station from Chilliwack to Prince Rupert to Jasper....I also worked on work trains, ditches and steam shovels and I was three years on a bridge and building gang up in the

²⁰³ *Vanderhoof, the Town that Wouldn't Wait*, 20, 21.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 20; *Marks on the Forest Floor*, 14; and *Marks of a Century*, 5,147,250.

²⁰⁵ Genevieve Barteaux Interview, by Lil MacIntosh, August 19, 1973. *Nechako Valley Historical Society Collection*.

Smithers division.”²⁰⁶ The notion that this woman’s experiences are strategically intended to serve as a model of resistance is made more explicit by her female interviewer, who responded to Barteaux’s reminiscences, by adding, “In these days of women’s lib...this is an example of someone who took it in their own hands many years ago and entered the man’s world of occupation.”²⁰⁷

Rose Wright is another rural woman who utilizes normative language as a feminist narrative strategy to manipulate, shift, and redefine traditional ideologies of domesticity without openly rejecting them. However, unlike Barteaux, Wright does not exploit her resistance in the name of necessity. She was twenty-five years old when she emigrated from Britain in 1912, and in her family memoirs, she asserts, “Why I actually was coming to Canada, Mother didn’t understand at all. She said I had read too many books.” With implied independence, she then details her journey, which she shared “with twenty five other girls—a mixed lot of working class girls between nineteen and thirty one years old.”²⁰⁸ By 1914, Wright found herself married and living in Prince George in a tent. Soon after, she and her husband, Fred, pre-empted land west of Prince George, near Cluculz Lake, and became homesteaders. When describing her life on the farm, Wright manipulates the help-mate image to demonstrate the diversity of her gender roles.

It was a life of hard work and I learned to help in many ways. I learned to harness horses and drive them, to hold the handles of the plow while Fred drove, to pick up sticks for the land clearing piles, to help put up hay, to milk cows, to raise sheep and shear them in the spring, ...to plant and care for a big garden, to make butter and cheese, and to preserve meat and vegetables for winter. I also learned to card the raw wool and make socks, sweaters,

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Rose E. Wright, *From Southern England to Sob Lake: The Wright Story* (Vanderhoof: The Wright Family, 1980), 2.

mitts, caps, quilts and little felt boots for the boys.²⁰⁹

Clearly, this woman understood the significance of her roles on the pioneer farm.

She uses normative language (“I learned to help”) to affirm her ideological conformity, which then allowed her to resist it, by providing a more detailed representation of her identity. In succeeding paragraphs, she challenges the helper notion, by recalling how she wrote to the Department of Agriculture in Ottawa for advice about summer frosts, soil erosion, grain crops, vegetables, and making cheese, adding that, “A month later, I got a reply [and] all the literature I wanted.”²¹⁰

Wright also points out how for the following thirty years, she made thirty pounds of cheese a week and overcame marital pressures in order to profit from it:

Fred would not let me sell [cheese] for money so I traded it for things I needed, such as baby lambs, little pigs, potatoes, apples, a second hand sewing machine and harnesses for the horses. I traded brown bread, cheese, and butter for hired help in the hay field, for second hand clothes for the boys and many other things. The Indians were really good. They would fish on Cluculz Lake close by or pick a pail of blueberries and bring them to me. I gave them sugar, soap, and cheese in return, so we were all satisfied.²¹¹

Autonomy as a Narrative Strategy

While some women manipulate ideologies of domesticity and separate spheres in their narrative representations of rural life, others reject them and instead use autonomy as a narrative tool to emphasize the diversity of their experiences. The strategy of autonomy, or the notion of a pioneering partnership, is implied by a narrative emphasis of the word “we,” which subtly lets the reader know that men and women were homesteaders; that they contributed equally to family survival; and that

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 26.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid., 27.

gender roles were very fluid. In fact, autonomy seems to be rural women's preferred strategy of resistance, perhaps because it allows them, as individuals, to assert the diversity of their gender roles without the self-centred 'I' narrative position. Instead, they confront the pioneer myth with such statements as, "We started a ranch," "we hauled hay," "we fell trees," or "we built the house." When placed alongside men's narratives, which tend to be ego-centred, these third person voices exemplify the difference in men and women's ideological representation of rural women.²¹² For example, in the following female-written excerpt, autonomy is used to carefully paint a new paradigm of rural women.

The Grundys' obtained two hundred and forty acres of land four miles west of Endako....The couple had two cows and a team of horses. They grew a garden and worked long, hard hours on the land. In the winter months, railway ties were made by hand with a broad-axe. Ted and Lillian would saw the trees down with a crosscut saw – she at one end of the saw and he at the other.²¹³

Like the domestic language used by Barteaux and Wright, autonomy also serves as a set-up tool for more assertive representations of female identity.

*My husband Howard and I cleared land, grew hay, herded cattle and kept poultry, pigs and horses. I never drove a binder but I did most chores connected with a farm....[and] in 1919, I took over the running of the Stellako Post Office, [a position] I held...until 1934.*²¹⁴

As a resistance strategy, autonomy seems to come naturally to these women, perhaps because, as historians elsewhere have noted, it was during the early settlement period that women learned to manipulate ideologies of mutuality, not only in their narratives, but also to empower their everyday lives. As Nancy Osterud

²¹² See for example, *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, esp. Chapter 9, where the gender voice difference is quite apparent.

²¹³ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 186.

²¹⁴ *Vanderhoof, the Town that Wouldn't Wait*, 160.

explains, pioneer women responded to their gender inequality by “voluntarily participat[ing] in the most labour-intensive and highly valued work” on the farm, thereby nurturing “an ethic of mutuality in work and decision-making” in their marriages.²¹⁵

Displacement

Displacement is another narrative tool rural women use to confront conventional ideologies of ‘woman’ and femininity in their texts. By displacement, I am referring to the way that, as narrators, authors and editors, they let others do their resisting. As Buss suggested, “another level of implication becomes available when talking of others,” because it offers a less restricted subject position that allows a female narrator to overtly challenge dominant cultural scripts, while also presenting self as conforming.²¹⁶ In the Bulkley Valley area, the icon of female resistance is Popcorn Kate, the road-house owner who wore a cassock, a belt, and a whiskey bottle hanging from her waist and offered food, drink and “anything else” a man might want.²¹⁷ In the Vanderhoof area, it is Mary Stewart, the “homemade character who stands out with the most colorful of the pioneers,” simply because she chose to wear men’s jeans and a wool jacket and chew snuff, before and after she married.²¹⁸ It is also Amy Sharpe, the young “gold-medal” winning school teacher from the University of New Brunswick, who married a bachelor farmer in the Mapes

²¹⁵ Nancy Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in 19th Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 2, 275.

²¹⁶ Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 51.

²¹⁷ Eva MacLean, *The Far Land* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 1993), 156; and *Bulkley Valley Stories Collected from Old Timers Who Remember* (Smithers: Heritage Club, c1974), 14, 89.

²¹⁸ *Vanderhoof, the Town that Wouldn’t Wait*, 58.

area in 1914, and eighteen years and eight children later, shot herself.²¹⁹ Sharpe is a resistance character because she is used by others to portray the negative side of rural life. She is also a resistance character for, unlike most rural women, she controlled her demise. Dying quietly in the night, leaving freshly baked bread on the counter for the family, would, seemingly, have been a more appropriate way to epitomize “the true pioneer spirit.”

Generational distancing is also a form of displacement offering a less restricted subject position, and therefore, a level of honesty not readily found in representations of self. Male voices, for example, are far more likely to acknowledge women’s contributions to rural society in the name of their mother, than they are to give similar credit to their wives. John Corless, who immigrated to the Prince George area with his parents in 1914, is one of the males who challenge the myth of the pioneer male hero in the name of his mother.

I think possibly that in the story of pioneering, the woman should get the credit. Looking back on it, and talking to my mother up until she died at age eighty-four, I really feel that the women were the true pioneers. It was easy for the father to say he was going out to get some meat and go out hunting and disappear for awhile; but she had to stay and look after the children and cope with the stove and the leaky old building and the cold and the misery, packing in the water and the washing and the wood.²²⁰

Rural women also use generational distancing to resist patriarchal convention, by juxtaposing images of emotionally weak, irresponsible fathers and strong, responsible mothers. This strategy of resistance is more commonly found in oral histories than in written narratives, because the spontaneity of the oral voice

²¹⁹ Frances Almond Interview; and Ivy Stampflee Interview, *Nechako Valley Historical Society Collection*; and *Letters from Rachel Nott to Elizabeth Dowson, 1939-1940*, Lakes District Museum, Burns Lake.

²²⁰ John Corless Interview, *Pioneer Tapes*, Vol.I, Prince George Public Library. See also Earl Baity, *I Remember Chilako*.

increases the risk of unconscious slips in the expected script. The notion of the emotionally stronger woman is suggested, for example, in the oral voice of Burns Lake pioneer, Queenie Rowland, who stated, “Mother took to her new life, but Father never did. He missed the city.”²²¹ Similar images, albeit less subtle, are reflected in the generational distancing methods of Isabel Ford:

He could have worked for the railroad, but didn't like working for anybody else....[instead he purchased a threshing machine and] lost everything really because he was poor at business. My mother was better at keeping track of money....Dad wasn't really a farmer....[but] my mother was really good at managing the farm....Dad was away from home a great deal and probably didn't listen to us when he was home.²²²

While Ford's challenge to dominant ideologies is fairly explicit, rural women's resistance is generally done less consciously.

Contradiction

Contradiction can also be seen as an unconscious coding strategy in rural women's narratives, and nowhere is it more apparent than in discussions of female employment. Rural women of north-central British Columbia clearly accepted the notion that females did not work for wages during the early 20th century, yet they constantly contradict themselves in their narratives by stating such, and then offering examples of women who were employed.

Did you work after your marriage?...Good gracious, no! There weren't jobs and women, I don't recall any women working, unless it was in their husband's building or something like that.²²³

Marriage meant the end of my job....After I married, I took over as accountant for our family business.²²⁴

²²¹ Queenie Rowland Interview. *Lakes District Historical Society Collection*.

²²² Isabel Tyner Ford Interview, Fraser-Fort George Regional Museum.

²²³ Ruby Hoskins Interview. *Bulkley Valley Historical and Museum Society Oral History Collection*, Bulkley Valley Museum, Smithers.

²²⁴ Winnifred Goodacre, *Pioneer Women of the Bulkley Valley*, unpub. man., Bulkley Valley Museum, 6.

Were there many jobs for girls in Prince George?...Not too many, although there were banks...when I came in 1911...[but] mostly they had men working in banks. They didn't have girls....I worked in the Royal Bank, oh, and my sister and I also worked in the lawyer's offices, and as public stenographers, and as telephone operators.²²⁵

Were there many jobs for girls in Prince George?... only menial ...demeaningand humble jobs...I clerked in a store...and a large number of girls found work in cafes, stores, hotels, the post office, banks and private offices [and] others became teachers or nurses."²²⁶

Although contradiction, as a strategy of resistance is fairly easy to discern, women's challenges to social convention are often so subtle that they are implied by one small word or phrase, occurring within an otherwise conforming script. For example, the words "must" and "had to" can be read as metaphorical italics in the narrative of Florence Ray, a Fraser Lake pioneer, who wrote, "I knew I *had to* stay here....My mother always said a wife *must* go where the husband makes a living and be satisfied. So I was."²²⁷ In the nuances of language, however, Ray suggests otherwise. As with many female voices, her ideological intentions are being misled by her unconscious representation of reality. Resistance is also suggested by the word "either," attached to the following description of the "two-man whipsaw," an apparatus used for building pioneer homes. According to the female narrator, "[t]he two-man designation isn't accurate *either*, as many wives or daughter took their regular turns on the end of the whipsaw."²²⁸ The implication is that there are many other inaccurate gendered representations of rural life in the local historical record.

²²⁵ Mabel Peterson Interview, Fraser-Fort George Regional Museum.

²²⁶ Jessie Bond Sugden, *In the Shadow of the Cutbanks*, 23, 34.

²²⁷ *Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys*, 297. (emphasis added)

²²⁸ *Vanderhoof, the Town that Wouldn't Wait*, 46. (emphasis added)

Finally, some rural women do not draw on subversive narrative strategies when rejecting pioneer stereotypes, but instead, assert themselves by doing so more openly.

Between you and me, it wasn't the men that went through a lot of hardships – it was the women of the district who were the real pioneers.²²⁹

One thing I have noticed is that men are always hollering about opening up new country. But if it weren't for us women, a country would never be settled.²³⁰

It is interesting to note that this last female voice confronts the pioneer male as hero myth, but has no similar quarrel with the Eurocentric “empty wilderness” ideology.

In summary, a sisterly or feminist deconstructive reading of local discourse suggests that rural women, as authors, narrators and editors, both consciously and unconsciously adopt narrative strategies that allow them to challenge cultural stereotypes that misrepresent their identities. At the same time, they also, both intentionally and unintentionally, affirm the dominant script that distorts, constrains and essentializes their identities as rural women. They do so, according to Buss, because they “operate from within assumed limits of the genre.”²³¹ In other words, rural women recognize, albeit often unconsciously, that the local historical record requires a collective, voice that conforms to traditional pioneer ideologies and affirms their attachment to place. The contradictions and tensions found within local texts, then, are not surprising, given that “consistent misrepresentation is difficult.”²³² As Carolyn Heilbrun pointed out, “women write their lives on a level far below consciousness,” and it is because their sub-conscious governs much of their

²²⁹ Clara Stangebye Interview, *Nechako Valley Historical Society Collection*.

²³⁰ “Grandma Wakefield – Bulkley Valley Pioneer,” in *Northwest Digest* 14:3 (June 1958), 35.

²³¹ Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 19.

²³² *Ibid.*, 20.

discourse that we, as readers, by adopting a sisterly deconstructive stance, are able to discern their unintentional glimpses into reality.²³³

Autobiographies as Resistance Texts

Autobiographical acts of survival are about restoration, reformation and reinvention...[by] making the old alive in the new, we can perform acts of repossessing the self and the world..

- Helen Buss, *Memoir with an Attitude*

Turning to the region's four published autobiographies of rural women, we are, once again, reminded of how "different accounts relay different truths."²³⁴

While the collective voices of women in the local historical record are remarkable for the narrative resistance they offer, these four female-written autobiographies can clearly be read as counter-narratives or models of protest against the dominant cultural script, afforded by a less restricted first person narrative voice. In the narrative construction of their identities, Olive Fredrickson, Eva MacLean, Nan Bourgon, and Mary John, further exemplify the links between genre, voice, power, and knowledge.

Autobiography, as a genre claimed traditionally by males, has roots that extend from St. Augustine to north-central British Columbia's present day historical record. One has to wonder, then, what is it that allows Frederickson, MacLean, Bourgon and John to transgress these deeply rooted social and literary boundaries? The expected common thread of a British middle-class heritage can not be used to explain these women's asserted rights to this genre, as Bourgon is the only British emigrant among the four authors, and she claims a working-class background, as

²³³ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 14, 23, 120.

²³⁴ Judy Long, *Telling Women's Lives*, 2.

does Fredrickson, who was born to poverty in Wisconsin. MacLean, on the other hand, originates from eastern Canada, and, as a Protestant minister's wife, she can claim a middle-class identity. Mary John cannot so claim; but, as a Carrier Native, she does have the deepest historical roots in the region. What three of these female authors do share is a primary identity as widows. As widows, Fredrickson, MacLean and Bourgon represent narrative positions that allowed them to be honest in their reflections. They could more assertively exploit their experiences and challenge patriarchal conventions, for example, because they were not writing from within the same "system of dependencies" as married women who need to worry about protecting living male egos.²³⁵ However, Mary John was not a widow. Therefore, her participating rights to the genre of autobiography are not implied by her marital status. Her privileged narrative voice is more complex because, as a Native woman, her work can be deemed Native protest writing or even salvage ethnography. John's work is also a collaborative effort, in which her biographer Bridget Moran's divorced status can also be used to partially explain this privileged narrative position that transcends the confines of the male ego.

In spite of the diverse narrative positions from which the four women speak, their texts, as part of the local historical record, serve a similar function and purpose as the other genres. Like all rural women, the four authors seemed to understand that their status as early 20th century pioneers afforded them a narrative voice and that therefore, on some level, they needed to conform to the pioneer cultural script.

²³⁵ Helen M. Buss, "Constructing Female Subjects in the Archive: A Reading of Three Versions of One Woman's Subjectivity," in *Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents*, eds. Helen Buss and Marlene Kadar (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001), 34.

On the other hand, the individual, first person voice of formal autobiography also offered the literary space to more overtly express the differences and diversities of their experiences. Accordingly, the four works serve dual purposes, in that they represent “an attempt to express belonging to the cultural heroization of the settler,” and they serve as “an act of ritual redress” against “the narratives which homogenize and deny experiential differences.”²³⁶ By continuing to adopt a feminist deconstructive, empathetic, sisterly reading stance, these autobiographies can be interpreted as resistance texts, with unique motives and strategies for confronting the pioneer cultural script.

Silence of the North

Olive Fredrickson offers a complete overview of her life in her autobiography, *Silence of the North*. However, the central focus of her work is the thirteen years she spent as a young widow with three children, homesteading on the Stuart River, near Vanderhoof.²³⁷ As such, hers is an autobiography of survival without a man. Fredrickson draws on many feminist strategies to construct her identity of difference, including the employment of a male editor, Ben East, the New York journalist who subversively functions as validation of her participation in the male-only club of autobiography. Fredrickson’s primary motive for writing, however, is not to destroy the club, but to confront the male heroic struggle against the wilderness pioneer plot, by exploiting the same images in the name of woman. She does this

²³⁶ S. Leigh Matthews, “‘Bound to Improve’: Canadian Women’s Prairie Memoirs and Intersections of Culture, History and Identity,” iii.

²³⁷ Olive A. Fredrickson with Ben East, *The Silence of the North* (Toronto: Paperjacks Ltd., 1980). (1972). This autobiography has been made into a movie, known by the same title, with Ellen Burstyn portraying the character of Fredrickson.

well by recounting her own hunting, trapping, farming, employment, and survival skills, which, in turn, challenge traditional gender norms.

Like other rural women, Fredrickson utilizes normative language of domesticity, family and home as a feminist strategy to justify her agency and independence, by suggesting they were born of necessity. Acceptable resistance is implied, for example, when upon learning of her husband's death, she writes, "How was she ever going to manage three children on her own?"²³⁸ By unconsciously slipping into the third person, collective voice here, Fredrickson draws attention to the contradictions between realities and ideologies, in the expression of her grief. In other words, her collective voice implies that her husband's death was a turning point in her life, while her first-person voice had previously demonstrated that she was very capable of living without a man long before his death. In previous passages, for example, she recalls how she and her husband separated several years prior to her arrival in Vanderhoof, during which time she ably supported herself and her young children. She also indicates that she pursued the opportunity to farm in Vanderhoof without her husband's knowledge and, on her own, saved enough money to move from Washington and purchase 160 acres of land after arriving. Fredrickson also offers no indication that her husband knew of her whereabouts or indeed, that he planned to join her. These and many other narrative strategies allow her to demonstrate freedom, agency, independence and choice in the diversities of her experiences. She manipulates normative language and switches again into the mythologizing, collective voice of woman when she asserts that "the young

²³⁸ Ibid., 105.

homestead widow prov[ed] to herself that she could take care of her family and make the grade.”²³⁹

The Far Land

Eva MacLean’s autobiography, *The Far Land*, does not provide an overview of her entire life. Instead, MacLean represents her identity by focusing on a five year period of her life, 1911 to 1915, when she and her Presbyterian minister husband resided in Hazelton.²⁴⁰ Thus, her overall narrative strategy is one of displacement, in which she consciously commits the rest of her life to silence.²⁴¹ Unlike Fredrickson, MacLean does not collaborate with a male author to justify her soiree into the ego-centred genre of autobiography. Instead, Ken Coates, a prominent male historian of northern British Columbia, provides the forward to her work, and thus, serves a similar function of validity. Coates uses the words “unpretentious” and “modest” to describe MacLean and suggests that her story “is a modest one, told with a gentleness of spirit and sprightly humor,” which effectively assures the reader that she and her text conform to traditional ideologies of femininity.²⁴² Coates also proposes that MacLean’s primary narrative challenge is “to the standard version of Canada’s ‘peaceable’ frontier,” thereby referring, not to the focus of her work, but to the peripheral segment near the end of her text, where she contradicts realities expressed earlier, by offering stereotypical images of the wild west through tales of

²³⁹ Olive Fredrickson, *The Silence of the North*, 113.

²⁴⁰ Eva MacLean, *The Far Land* (Prince George: Caitlin Press, 1993).

²⁴¹ Lillian Christine Tuttosi, “Documented Displacement: The Archival Texts of the Women of Sterner Stuff,” 67.

²⁴² Eva MacLean, *The Far Land*, v,vi.

her gun-toting minister husband saving the town of Hazelton during a bank robbery and shoot out in 1914.²⁴³

More accurately, MacLean's primary motive for writing is to refuse the traditional identity of a minister's wife as devout, domestic, subservient, and constrained by class and racial boundaries. Instead, she defines herself as "insufficiently religious" and "rebellious," and focuses on her friendships with Native women, old bachelors, and prostitutes.²⁴⁴ The hero of her narrative is Marie, the former dance hall queen, who, as her closest confidante, taught her to cook and explained "babies and their origins," and "wore a halo" in the author's eyes.²⁴⁵ Further, while MacLean draws the parallels between geographical isolation and flexible social boundaries in her own friendships and experiences, she suggests diversity and difference by denying them in others, including the "pretentious" wives of railroad officials. Displacement, anecdote and dialogue also serve as strategies of resistance as she describes how these latter women criticized her for dressing "like a hussy;" for keeping her laundry on the line too long; and for choosing friends of the wrong religion, class and color.²⁴⁶ Juxtaposition and self-deprecation are similarly used to confront essentializing ideologies of race, class, and gender and to further exploit notions of diversity and difference.

For example, MacLean notes how the years she spent in Hazelton represented the height of the Grand Trunk Railway construction period, when hundreds of bachelors, from all over the world and from all walks of life, were her

²⁴³ Ibid., vii.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 14,41,144.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 38, 40, 81.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 68.

closest neighbours. She challenges traditional historiography that suggests geographical isolation and demographic imbalances produced uncivilized, rowdy bachelors, by insisting that she felt “safer there in a sea of men than on the streets back home” in urban Ontario.²⁴⁷ Finally, MacLean defies similar stereotypes of uncivilized Natives, by juxtaposing Native and non-Native personal relationships and drawing parallels between their cultural customs, and more subtly with anecdotes, such as the one where she describes the cold winter evenings when the entire community of Hazelton gathered on a nearby lake, to skate and dance to the strains of “Strauss waltzes” and “Sousa marches,” provided by a local all-Native orchestra.²⁴⁸

Rubber Boots for Dancing

Among Nan Bourgon’s many feminist narrative strategies is a subtle misrepresentation of her work. I suggest so, because *Rubber Boots for Dancing and other Memories of Pioneer Life in the Bulkley Valley*, while clearly an autobiography, could be easily mistaken for a community generated local history.²⁴⁹ This is implied by the book’s title, which infers a collective voice, and by its physical size, of 8 ½ x 11 inches, which is more common to the local history genre than to autobiography. Therefore, from a feminist, deconstructive position, the title and size of the book can be interpreted as a narrative strategy aimed at minimizing Bourgon’s autobiographical narrative position. However, Bourgon does not disguise her primary motive of resistance, but states clearly in the forward to her work that she writes

²⁴⁷ Ibid. For scholarship that suggests otherwise, see Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871*.

²⁴⁸ Eva MacLean, *The Far Land*, 101.

²⁴⁹ Nan Bourgon, *Rubber Boots for Dancing and Other Memories of Pioneer Life in the Bulkley Valley*, ed. Marjorie Rosberg (Smithers: Tona and Janet Hetherington, 1976).

“because she does not want her memories to be fictionalized.”²⁵⁰ Like Fredrickson, she provides an overview of her entire life, but focuses on her pioneering experiences. In this case, they do represent most of her life. Bourgon, a British emigrant, was single and thirty-three years old when, in 1914, she settled in the Bulkley Valley. Soon after, she married Joe Bourgon, a local bachelor, farmer, and French emigrant from eastern Canada. This “mixed” marriage, as she calls it, is the focal point of her narrative resistance, directed towards ideologies of autonomous marriages and uncomplaining, passive, rural women.

Bourgon's strategies of resistance are similar to that of MacLean, but she relies even more heavily on dialogue, humility, and self-deprecating humor to express her agency and independence and her active resistance to the oppression she faced within her marriage. All three of these narrative strategies, for example, are in play in the following passage:

I wanted a couch and an easy chair...He said, ‘What for? You are not going to have time to sit in them. Besides, that stuff goes down in value each year. We had better buy a calf, it will grow while we are sleeping.’²⁵¹

Instead of criticizing her husband in the name of gender, Bourgon conceals the feminist “undercurrents of [her] forbidden discourse,” by suggesting that her husband’s shortcomings were caused by his ethnicity. Accordingly, she writes:

I liked Joe, but he was not my kind of man. He was French Canadian and Catholic....he treated me as if I was his inferior and that was hard to swallow, because if I thought about it, I would figure he was my inferior. What a mess.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 9.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 67.

²⁵² Ibid., 37, 59.

Bourgon also adds silence and omission to her narrative tool-box, implicating further unspoken oppression with such phrases as “there is no use for me to complain,” and, “there is so much more which could be said.”²⁵³ She also uses juxtaposition to both affirm and challenge the dominant cultural script, by countering her many examples of marital oppression with a few less emotionally charged statements about her husband’s successful farming and parenting skills.

The tension and contradictions between the realities and ideologies of Bourgon’s female identity are succinctly expressed at the beginning and end of her autobiography. Early in the text, she recalls being asked about her constant laughter, “What makes you so happy?” and how she responded by saying, “I’m not happy. I don’t know what else to do.”²⁵⁴ In a similar manner, she chooses humility to end her narrative, thereby rejecting the allusion of power and self-importance implied by her autobiographical position. In the book’s final pages, Bourgon writes, “I wish someone else could have written this and made a better job of it.”²⁵⁵ But, at ninety-three years old, she tells it herself and when she is done, she marvels at this transgression of social and literary boundaries, by asking her readers, “Who would ever think it would be me, a woman, writing these things?”²⁵⁶

Stoney Creek Woman

Mary John’s *Stoney Creek Woman* represents the region’s only other female-authored formal autobiography. Disguise as a narrative strategy is also suggested here; however, this time around the misrepresentation is not in the title or

²⁵³ Ibid., 94, 105.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 105.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

size of the book, but in by the fact that it is a biography, disguised as an autobiography.²⁵⁷ The text, while written from the first person narrative position of its subject, Mary John, a Carrier woman from the Stoney Creek Reserve, near Vanderhoof, is authored by Bridget Moran, a non-Native social worker and friend of Mary John. For Moran, this strategy necessarily allows her to avoid the narrative marginalization of Mary John's Native voice. It is also a more effective method for challenging the frontier cultural script, which in this case, is directed less at restrictive ideologies of women, and more towards its negative stereotyping of Natives. Moran also states her primary motive, by stating that she writes "so others will know the truth of Native lives."²⁵⁸ Using Mary John's life experiences as the focal point of her narrative, she presents the realities of early 20th century racial discrimination, economic and political oppression, poverty and death. Moran parallels these themes with examples of John's agency, leadership, and active resistance, as exemplified by the many years she spent advocating for healthier social conditions on the Stoney Creek Reserve and for improved political, social and economic relationships between the Native and non-Native communities of Stoney Creek and Vanderhoof.

Like the other three female autobiographers, Moran also couches her narrative protest with traditional domestic language and strategies of juxtaposition, contradiction, anecdote, dialogue, humor, and humility, that allow her to both resist and affirm ideologies of John's gender identity within her Carrier cultural community and outside of it. Using these methods, Moran effectively constructs parallels

²⁵⁷ Bridget Moran, *Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John* (Vancouver: Vancouver Tillacum Library, 1989).

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

between Native and non-Native cultures. For example, she draws attention to the similarities and the differences between the gendered experiences of John and emigrant rural women, using juxtaposition and repetition to accentuate them with such phrases as, “Like most women, I date many of the happenings in my life from the times when my children were born,” and, “like most women, I do not forget the dates when my children were lost to me.”²⁵⁹ Irony, as a strategy of resistance, is also in play here, as John’s personal tragedies are not like that of most women. She has unduly suffered, by enduring the tragic deaths of five of her children, her parents and her siblings. Finally, like the other three authors, Moran begins and ends her narrative with humility. However, she adds irony to humility, by highlighting one of the pivotal moments in Mary John’s life, when, in 1979, she was honored as Vanderhoof’s “Citizen of the Year.” As John’s voice tells it, it was a “come as you are” surprise, and so she did, in her work clothes. Upon discovering that she was the guest of honor, she adds, “I could have crawled through the floor.”²⁶⁰ This honor bestowed upon John, as Moran suggested, represents both irony and social change, because Mary John was receiving the ultimate recognition from a community that had for many years shunned her.

In summary, these last two chapters draw attention to the discordant relationship between the realities of rural women’s experiences and the ideological representation of them in local discourse. In spite of having authorial control over most of the local historical record, rural women themselves have consistently understated the significance of their early 20th lives. Instead, they have used

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 73, 76.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 129.

conventional pioneer language to depict themselves first and foremost, as domestic housewives and helpers to men. On the other hand, a purposefully feminist deconstructive reading also reveals a subtle narrative resistance to these restricting paradigms of rural women. Most importantly, by analyzing the discourse from various reading positions, these two chapters emphasize the interpretative possibilities that lay within these texts, and how women can be seen as both oppressed and empowered by their rural experiences.

Chapter Four

One Daughter's Reckoning: Realities, Ideologies And Rural Women

Women will starve in silence until new stories are created which confer on them the power of naming themselves.

- Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar²⁶¹

In order to fulfill the objective of both recovering and analyzing rural women's experiences and voices, this study has utilized traditional historical and post-structural linguistic strategies that required a reading of the discourse from various different interpretative positions. This approach, in turn, has drawn attention to the complexities and the narrative discontinuities, between the realities and ideologies of north-central British Columbia's rural women. This final chapter attempts to reconcile some of these tensions, by building on previous multi-generational deconstructive methods to further emphasize the importance of all (her)stories and the many narrative layers that exist within all discourse. The appropriate metaphorical interpretative position this time around is that of a daughter, who is in "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction."²⁶² In other words, she is re-examining the discordant layers of interpretation and multi-generational voices she has inherited, which in turn, will provide new growth in her understanding. But first, as all daughters must, she revisits the interpretative memories of those who came before her.

In the archival attic, the fresh, young reader finds a treasure chest, overflowing with an eclectic array of historical material. They include diaries, letters, journals, newspapers, court records, as well as more recent materials, such as local histories, oral history collections, memoirs, reminiscences, and published

²⁶¹ As cited in Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, 29.

²⁶² Adrienne Rich, as cited in S. Leigh Matthews, "Bound to Improve," 26.

autobiographies. Attached to these records, she finds three very different stories about early 20th century rural women of north-central British Columbia. She recognizes the first as that of her grandmother, because of its traditional appearance, and because it focuses on the gendered experiences and material realities of rural women. In the details, the cultural backgrounds of her grandmother and other emigrant women appear to merge with geography and gender, to create a sub-narrative of independence, autonomy, freedom and choice in women's experiences. Attached to the story are many photos of her grandmother and other single, married, divorced and widowed women engaged in a broad range of private and public economic, political and social activities. While she finds this story interesting, the young reader is left feeling that the story is somehow incomplete.

She searches for her mother's story and finds it partially deconstructed, but resting safely on the surface of the other written materials. She notices many differences between this story and that of her grandmother. While her grandmother seemed to be most concerned with where rural women came from, where they settled, and what they did, this story is more complex and pays more attention to words and relationships between genre, voice, gender, language and the ideological representation of rural women. Clearly, her mother has asked different questions, such as, who speaks for rural women, to whom do they speak, and for what purpose? Although many rural women are represented in the story, their lives appear similar and primarily defined by traditional domestic activities. She finds her mother's story interesting as well, but is still left feeling that the story is incomplete.

The young reader digs further down under the surface layer of the historical materials to find her sister's story, carefully hidden beneath the others. Wrapped around it is a pair of feminist reading glasses, the ephemera of her sister's life, and an amazing collection of narrative strategies, which are unconsciously woven together and in an advanced stage of deconstruction. This story has many devious and subversive sub-plots, and is much harder to follow. Once again, the women are wearing identities of difference and diversity, some boldly exploiting their experiences, while others are obscuring their faces of anger, defiance, and confrontation. At times, she recognizes the parallels between this story and her grandmother's, but at others, the plot seems to shift, conforming more closely to her mother's story. The young reader is confused by the unresolved contradictions and tensions between and within these stories. As the daughter inheriting them, she must add to them and she wishes she could somehow get the story right.

Genre, Gender and Power Revisited

Throughout this inquiry, issues of genre, gender and power repeatedly surface to explain the apparent contradictions and tensions between the material and discursive levels of rural women's identities. Looking first at genre, we find that, by and large, rural women are not represented in scholarly or traditional archival

historical records, but that they do dominate all local genres, except published autobiographies. Further, it appears that all but the latter narrative form have a function and purpose that makes it difficult for women to write themselves out of a restricting and deeply rooted pioneer cultural tradition. Instead of empowering themselves by exploiting their agency, independence and the diversity of their gender roles, rural women create essentializing images of themselves in their texts that reflect traditional domesticity and subordination to men. Why, given these implied constraints, do they restrict themselves to the collective genres of local discourse? If, as Foucault suggests, all discourse is a source of power, who holds the restricted patent on autobiography?

Power, in the context of this discussion, according to Heilbrun, is being able to “take one’s place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one’s part matter.”²⁶³ One can assume, therefore, that if rural women had the power to fully represent themselves, more of them would choose the less restricted narrative position implied by formal autobiography. The differences between the genres and the narrative freedom offered by autobiography is evidenced, for example, by the stories of Nan Bourgon, Olive Fredrickson, Eva MacLean, and Mary John, which more explicitly demonstrate the diversities and differences of rural women’s experiences, thus offering a less nostalgic and more female-centred rendition of the past. However, as the historical record indicates, autobiography is a narrative form traditionally dominated by males. With so few female models to follow and affirm women’s place within the genre, rural women will continue to avoid it,

²⁶³ Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman’s Life*, 18.

thereby ensuring that the traditional androcentric early settlement narrative will persist.

Rural women are not the only females who rely on the collaborative narrative position. Canadian women's scholarly record, I would argue, is also over-represented by collaborative narrative works.²⁶⁴ Several feminist scholars, including Adele Perry, have also noted this phenomenon, as well as the "dominance of article length studies", which Perry attributed to persisting patriarchal controls, whereby women "continue to work under conditions of limited security within the academy."²⁶⁵ While Perry and others link genre, gender and power, by suggesting patriarchal structures restrict the narrative voices of women, it is equally conceivable that women's preference for the collective narrative voice speaks as much to the inherent characteristics of female gender identity, as it does to issues of genre and power.

In a recent work, sociologist Judy Long suggested that women avoid the genre of autobiography because it is a narrative form characterized by self-display and an ego-centred individualism, which are traits more commonly linked to the

²⁶⁴ See, for example, Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds. *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: McLennan and Stewart, 1977); and *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 1985; Beth Light and Alison Prentice, eds. *Pioneer and Gentlewomen of British North America 1713-1867* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1980); Beth Light and Joy Parr, eds. *Canadian Women on the Move, 1867-1920* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1983); Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds. *No Easy Road: Women in Canada, 1920 to 1960s* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990); Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchenson and Naomi Black, *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988); *Ibid.*, 2nd ed., 1996; Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, eds. *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1986); 2nd ed., 1991; 3rd ed., 1997; 4th ed. (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds. *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); and Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds. *Gender and History in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996).

²⁶⁵ Adele Perry, "Feminism, History and Writing British Columbia's Past," in *Atlantis* 25:1 (Fall/Winter 2000): 70. Publishing companies are also dominated by men, who assumably have the power to deny women equal access.

masculine personality.²⁶⁶ For example, a published autobiography infers that the author believes his or her personal experiences are significant enough that they will change the context of history. As a woman, these egotistical assumptions are risky, because they contradict traditional female virtues of modesty, humility, and concealment.²⁶⁷ This also explains why Bourgon, MacLean and Moran rely so heavily on silence, self-deprecating humor, modesty, and concealment in their narrative representations of self. The collaborative nature of local histories, on the other hand, is more compatible with nurturing feminine characteristics, because it provides the narrative space to speak for others, to focus on the relationships between people, to express belonging to community, and most importantly, to identify with other women.²⁶⁸ In other words, the collective genres are more suitable for a woman who prefers to write, “not to extricate her own voice, but to inscribe it within, to hold it in dynamic balance with the other voices of her community, voices that her sense of the othered nature of her identity makes her own.”²⁶⁹

What happens when we take genre out of the equation and consider gender and power on its own? It is also conceivable that the discontinuities between the experiences and representations of rural women reflect persisting patriarchal ideologies and contemporary social tensions between rural men and women. After all, as Emma Curtin suggested, idealization is “frequently a defense ideology and an expression of tension within the society.”²⁷⁰ If rural women asserted the power and agency necessary to openly exploit their shifting gender identities, they would be

²⁶⁶ Judy Long, *Telling Women's Lives*, 15-26.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶⁹ Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 94.

²⁷⁰ Emma Jane Curtin, “Daughters of Empire: British Gentlewomen in Alberta, 1880-1914,” 90.

diminishing the contemporary social power and privilege of their male counterparts, whose self-images are constructed around ideologies of their heroic pioneering experiences. Further, we must also consider that the differences between rural women's past and present lives are equally relevant to the discursive discontinuities in local discourse. It may well be that the identities of rural women articulated within these sources pertain more to their present realities than to their pasts. After all, the early settlement period signified a unique political, economical, cultural, and psychological moment for rural women, when geography, gender and emerging rural societies created unprecedented freedom and opportunities for expanding their identities as women. However, by the end of World War II, improved gender ratios and a decline in subsistence and agrarian lifestyles, coupled with an increase in male-dominated breadwinner households, returned many rural women to previous systems of dependencies and to culturally devalued domestic roles. Therefore, when they write their pasts, rural women may be constructing ideologies of subordination that more accurately reflect their present-day domestic realities.

The contradictions between the experiences and representations of rural women can also be seen as a marker of difference between the women themselves. Most of the female voices in local historical records are of women in their senior years, who, as a whole, tend to be rather conservative in their views. For example, Florence Ray, of Fraser Lake, seemed to accept that her lot in life was to follow her man and be happy doing so. When women like her narratively conduct their life reviews, they are guided by desires to confirm their cultural belonging and collective, community identities, not by feminist impulses to protest the cultural script that

narrowly defines them. Clearly, many of the female authors and editors of these texts have taken the stereotypes for granted and not questioned their truths. For example, when Pat Turkki, author of Burns Lake's local history, wrote about the area's "pioneers...and often their wives," it is unlikely that she gave any thought to the subordination of women implied by her statement.

We must also consider the possibility that for some women, traditional domestic roles were their reality. It is important that we, as scholars, not devalue the everyday, ordinary experiences that many women's lives and identities continue to be built upon. Although rural women's domestic ideologies do not reflect all of their early 20th century experiences, they do represent many of them. By privileging the non-domestic in our studies, we risk contributing to patriarchal notions that managing households and raising children are somehow inferior or subordinate to the public economic and social activities of women. In other words, we are perpetuating the gender hierarchies we seek to change. On the other hand, some feminist scholars argue that women who buy into domestic ideologies participate in their own oppression.²⁷¹ We need to consider the implications of making such assumptions.

In any case, as this study also suggests, some early 20th century rural women of north-central British Columbia did have proto-feminist ideologies that guided their narrative representations. Like Laura Wakefield and Isabel Tyner Ford, they expressed them overtly. Others positioned themselves on both sides of the fence, alternating between their collective and individual identities and creating

²⁷¹ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 21.

contradiction and tension in their narratives that reflect this personal internal conflict. Finally, it is possible that some women were intuitively aware of the multiple stories they were creating. This notion is supported by the texts of Fredrickson, Bourgon and others who shift from the first to third-person voice when presenting ideological representations of self. Helen Buss, in her analysis of the 19th century early settlement narratives of Susannah Moodie, Anna Jamieson and others, proposes that these female authors were “sophisticated in [their] knowledge of the devious purposes to which narratives could be put and of the politics a woman encounters in self-representation.”²⁷² As such, one cannot assume that in the late 20th century, rural women were any less aware of their feminist narrative strategies.

In the realities of their lives, rural women manipulated domestic ideologies in order to assert their agency and independence and affect political, economic and social change devoid of gender conflict. Years later, as they wrote their pasts, they may have used similar methods to disguise their resistance to androcentric narrative traditions. After all, even in present-day rural societies, overt expressions of feminism is likely to incite gender conflict and cultural criticism.

Reflexivity

Finally, I must consider my own role in the interpretations of rural women offered here. Like the subjects of my inquiry, I am an observer, participant and historian, in the sense that I share a similar inter-subjective connection to these sources. In other words, my familial roots in north-central British Columbia are as deep as the subjects I study. Admittedly, I, too, own personal insights and a privileged understanding of the places and people that I write, which are not

²⁷² Buss, *Mapping Our Selves*, 94-95.

common to scholarly inquiries. On the other hand, I believe that generational distancing allows me the level of objective space necessary to recognize and understand social change. My age, gender, middle-class socio-economic status, life experiences, scholarly skills, and critical understandings similarly influence and enrich my work, just as they do others' studies.

In order to balance my subjective relationship to this inquiry, I have purposefully chosen methods and theories that would produce several interpretations and, in turn, ensure that I considered rural women from a variety of perspectives. Although I recognized the parallels between this metaphorical multi-generational methodological approach and my own realities, I had no idea of the irony they would come to represent. During the making of this thesis, my sister, my mother and my grandmother were lost to me. My sister, Sandy Stickney, succumbed to ovarian cancer on November 2, 2002. She was forty-eight years old, and like many rural women, combined an active public career with a private life on the family farm, where she lived with her husband, two sons and a menagerie of horses, sheep, ducks, dogs and cats. Four months later, on March 6, 2003, I lost my mother, Bessie Whitehead, at seventy-five years old, to cancer, as well. Like the subjects of my inquiry, many of whom she knew, she was a rural woman who quietly pushed gender boundaries and asserted much agency and independence throughout her life. Then, on June 28, 2004, my ninety-seven year old grandmother, Ivy Middleton, passed away, not so unexpectedly, but creating an equally painful void in my life. Ivy represents the link between my personal and academic paths, for it was during an oral methodology course in my final undergraduate year that she

broke her code of silence and agreed to share her life with me in a four day interview marathon. It was then that I learned first-hand about reticence, humility, modesty and concealment in rural women's narrative voices. Grandma Ivy's stories created as many historical gaps as they filled, which intrigued me and set me on this path of historical inquiry, aimed at understanding her life in a broader context. Along the way, I have come to a new level of maturity in my understanding of early 20th century rural women of north-central British Columbia. My quest, however, has not provided closure or discerned any absolute truths relative to their identities.

Most importantly, this metaphorical four-generational journey draws attention to the many truths that lie within local discourse (no pun intended) and influence our understanding of rural women. Secondly, although a multi-pronged analytical process and personal insights have helped determine the discontinuities between the realities and ideologies of rural women in the local historical record, they have not produced any multi-generational female instincts whereby I could pretend to know what motivated rural women's voices. Obviously, these narratives have "a core of subjectivity knowable first hand only by those whose minds and bodies 'lived' the experience."²⁷³ Many truths are possible. My scholarly growth in understanding has been the quest itself. It is also here that I am once again reminded of Ruth Pierson's call for "epistemic humility" and the need to avoid appropriation by letting the rural women "narrate their own reality and express their lived experiences in their own voices."²⁷⁴ It is also here, in the details of rural women's experiences, in the patterns of their stories, and in the many connections between genre, gender,

²⁷³ Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experiencing Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History," 83.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 83, 92.

language, and power, that we, as researchers, can continue to have meaningful discussions, in which we explore the possibilities for revising our paradigms of early 20th century rural women. In the final analysis, early 20th century rural women in north-central British Columbia have asserted power, agency, independence and resistance by writing themselves into the local historical record. They may be “telling it slant,” but there is power in the telling.²⁷⁵ As quiet feminists, they have exploited the diversities of their experiences, their skills, their solidarity with other women, and their contributions to building rural societies. In doing so, they have also rejected identities of oppression. That, I believe, is a step in the right direction.

Who Cares?

If this thesis draws attention to any of the following, the past three years of my life have not been in vain. First, it is my hope that this work creates an awareness of the need for more scholarly research of rural British Columbia and specifically, of rural women. Second, that it emphasizes the scholarly possibilities offered by the “quiet archive” or the non-traditional narrative forms that constitute local historical records in all communities. Moreover, that such sources have value, not only for reclaiming rural women’s lives, but for understanding the roles genre plays in the cultural production and reproduction of women. Third, that this inquiry demonstrates the value of separating experience from language in our analyses, and how applying several different methodologies and inter-disciplinary theoretical perspectives to our sources alters our interpretations and enhances our understanding of the power and instability of language. Fourth, that this study emphasizes the need for self-reflexivity in all scholarly inquiries. Finally, as a rural woman of north-central British Columbia,

²⁷⁵ Judy Long, *Telling Women’s Lives*, 37.

it is my hope that this study will empower and challenge the way present and future generations of rural women read and write themselves into local historical records. As Thomas King reminded us, “there are no truths, only stories.” It is important, therefore, that we create stories that resist the inequalities under which we live.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Archival Collections

British Columbia Provincial Archives. (BCA) Victoria, B.C.

MS 0150. Telkwa Women's Institute Records.

MS 0261. Mary Carolina Greenwood (nee Williams) Diary, 1922-1935.

MS 0489. Frank H. Chapman, By Trail and Packboard: North-Central British Columbia, 1871 - 1918. n.p.

MS 0526. Houston Women's Institute Records.

MS 1252. Mildred McQuillan Diary 1927.

MS 1297. John Henry (Jock) McMillan Journal, 1924-30.

MS 1342 and 1421. Quick Women's Institute Records.

MS 1504. Fraser Lake Women's Institute Records.

MS 1639. Southside Women's Institute Records.

MS 1906. John Henry (Jock) McMillan Journal, 1919-20

Bulkley Valley Museum. Smithers, B.C.

Bernice Martin Letters. 1911-1915.

Bulkley Valley Historical and Museum Society Oral History Collection.

O'Neill, Wiggs. A Lifetime in British Columbia and Early Days.
Unpublished memoir.

Pioneer Women of the Bulkley Valley. n.p. Bulkley Valley Museum. 1995.

College of New Caledonia. Prince George, B.C. Oral History Series.

Fraser Fort-George Regional Museum. Prince George, B.C.

A 985.54 Diary of Edna A.W. Tyner, Fort George, 1912-1922.

Fraser-Fort-George Oral History Collection.

Fraser Lake Museum. Fraser Lake, B.C.

Sweetnam, Vera. The Sky Pilot's Wife: Memoirs of Vera Pearle Sweetnam: The Cariboo Road and North Central British Columbia 1885-1929. Unpublished memoir.

Philpott, Vesta. Vesta: Daughter of Pioneers. Unpublished memoir.

Hazelton Public Library. Hazelton, B.C.

Greta G. Miles. Hazelton Area Historical Association Archive Project. Hazelton: Greta G. Miles, 2003. Oral History Collection.

MackKay, Alexandra G. The Story of James and Mary MacKay. n.p. 2000.

Pioneers: A Two Mile School Project. Smithers: School District 88, 1978. Oral History Collection.

Lakes District Museum. Burns Lake, B.C.

Allen, Alma. The Early Days and Depression Years in the Lakes District. Unpublished memoir.

Mrs. Henkel's Reminiscences. Unpublished memoir.

Holmes, Ivan. Reminiscences of the Good Old Days. Unpublished memoir.

Lakes District Historical Society Oral History Collection.

Letters from Rachel Nott to Elizabeth Dowson 1939-1940 (Anglican Sunday School Mission).

Mills, May. The Mills Story. Unpublished memoir.

Nechako Valley Museum. Vanderhoof, B.C.

Bailey, Bessie. Reminiscences of Bessie Bailey. Unpublished memoir.

Bradley, Milly. Recollections Over the Years. Unpublished memoir. 1974.

Brain, Margaret. The Braithwaite Story. Unpublished memoir. 1978.

Evans, Florrie. Florrie Evans Memoirs. Unpublished memoir.

Morrow Johnson, Kathleen. Memoirs. Unpublished memoir.

Nechako Valley Historical Society Oral History Collection.

Neufeld, Peter. Personal Diary of Peter Neufeld 1917-1918 Re: Mennonite Settlement at Vanderhoof. Vanderhoof: J.V.Neufeld, 1984.

Redmond, Sara E. Redmond Family History. Unpublished memoir.

Wright, Rose E. From Southern England to Sob Lake: The Wright Story. Vanderhoof: The Wright Family, 1980.

Prince George Public Library. Prince George, B.C.

Carbutt Collection: Radio Shows and Interviews Broadcast from CKPG In Prince George during the 1960s. Transcripts prepared by the Prince George Oral History Group, 2001-2002.

Pioneer Tapes, Vol. 1 & 2. Transcripts of Audio Tapes produced by the Local History Committee of the Prince George Public Library.

Prince George Oral History Group Collection. Prince George.

Private Collections

Ivy Middleton. Interview by author, 28 November, 1998, Terrace, B.C.
Tape recording. Private collection, Quesnel.

Government Publications

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics. Census of Canada, 1911, 1921, 1941.

Newspapers

Fort George Herald (Prince George)

Interior News (Smithers)

The Observer (Burns Lake)

Omineca Herald (Hazelton)

Omineca Miner (Hazelton)

Omineca Express (Vanderhoof)

Local Community Histories

Belsham, Alice and J. Phillip Meyers. History of Fort Fraser. Fort Fraser, B.C.: Belsham and Meyers, 1958.

Bulkley Valley Stories Collected from Old Timers Who Remember. Smithers: Heritage Club, c1974.

Christenson, Bev. Prince George: Rivers, Railways, and Timber. Burlington: Windsor Publications, 1989.

Deeper Roots and Greener Valleys. Fraser Lake: Fraser Lake and District Historical Society, 1986.

Giesbrecht, Jean Clark. Heritage Lost: A People's History of the Ootsa Lake Region 1905-1955. Likely: Quesnel Lake Publishing, 1994.

Hancock, Lyn, ed. Vanderhoof: The Town That Wouldn't Wait. Vanderhoof: The Nechako Valley Historical Society, 1979.

History of Palling. Palling: Women's Institute, 1951.

Hols, Grace. Marks of a Century: A Story of Houston, B.C. 1900-2000. Houston: District of Houston, 1999.

Moran, Bridget. Prince George Remembered. Prince George: Moran Publishing, 1996.

Mould, Jack. Stumpfarms and Broadaxes. Saanichton: Hancock House Publishers Ltd., 1976.

Pioneer Women. Smithers: Bulkley Tweedsmuir Women's Institute Convention, 1967.

Rudland, Lenore. Fort Fraser (Where the Hell's That?). Sechelt: Eric and Lenore Rudland, 1988.

Runnalls, F.E. A History of Prince George. Prince George: City of Prince George, 1983 [1946].

-----, "Boom Days in Prince George, 1906-1913." In BC Historical Quarterly. 8:4 (1940).

Shervill, R. Lynn. Smithers: From Swamp to Village. Smithers: Town of Smithers, 1981.

Smedley-L-Heureux, Audrey. From Trail to Rail: Surveys and Gold 1862-1904. Vanderhoof: Northern B.C. Book Publishing, 1990.

-----, From Trail to Rail: Settlement Begins 1905-1914. Vanderhoof: Northern B.C. Book Publishing, 1989.

-----, Northern BC In Retrospect. Vanderhoof: Audrey Smedley-L'Heureux, 1979.

Smith, Elnora C., ed. Marks on the Forest Floor: A Story of Houston, British Columbia. Houston: Houston Centennial '71 Committee, 1971.

Turkki, Pat. Burns Lake and District: A History Formal and Informal. Burns Lake: Burns Lake Historical Society.

Autobiographical Works

Baity, Earl S. I Remember Chilako. Prince George: Prince George Printers Ltd., 1978.

Boudreau, Jack. Crazy Man's Creek. Prince George: Caitlin Press Inc., 1998.

-----, Grizzly Bear Mountain. Prince George: Caitlin Press Inc., 2000.

-----, Mountains, Campfires & Memories. Prince George: Caitlin Press Inc., 2002.

Bourgon, Nan. Rubber Boots for Dancing and other Memories of Pioneer Life In the Bulkley Valley. Edited by Marjorie Rosberg. Smithers: Tona and Janet Hetherington, 1979.

Dahlie, Hallvard. Memories of a Young Immigrant: Norway to the Bulkley Valley 1929-1942. Sundre, Alberta: Peak Printing, 2002.

----- Life in the Bulkley Valley: Memories of the 1930s. Sundre: Peak Printing, 1999.

Fredrickson, Olive A. with Ben East, The Silence of the North. Toronto: Paperjacks Ltd., 1980 (1972).

Gardner, Margaret. Wooden Sidewalks: From the Metropolitan City of Zurich to the British Columbia Hinterland. Prince George: Repository Press, 1983.

Gilgan, William Wren. Olden Days. Burns Lake: William Gilgan, 1998.

Glen, J. Sr. Where the Rivers Meet: The Story of the Settlement of the Bulkley Valley. Duncan: New Rapier Press Ltd., 1977.

Harrison, A.J. (Alf), A Glimpse of the Past. Burns Lake: Alford Harrison, 2000.

MacLean, Eva. The Far Land. Prince George; Caitlin Press, 1993.

Moran, Bridget. Stoney Creek Woman: The Story of Mary John. Vancouver: Vancouver Tillacum Library, 1989.

Mould, Wayne. Uncle Ted Remembers: 26 Short stories describing the history of the Lakes District of North-Central British Columbia. Kelowna: Kettle Valley Graphics, 2003.

Olds, Charles Sr. Looking Back Down Time and Track. Prince George: SpeedDee Printers, ca 1975.

Shelford, Arthur and Cyril. We Pioneered. Victoria: Orca Book Publishers Ltd., 1988.

Strimbold, E. Archie. A Little Bit of Bullshit from the Past. Burns Lake: Archie Strimbold, 2001.

Sugden, Jessie Bond. In the Shadow of the Cutbanks: A Story of Growing Up In Prince George. Prince George: Jessie Sugden, 1985.

Walker, Russell R. Bacon, Beans 'n Brave Hearts. Lillooet: Lillooet Publishers Ltd., 1972.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Books

- Armitage, Susan et al, eds. Women's Oral History: The 'Frontiers' Reader. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2002.
- Armitage, Susan and Elizabeth Jameson, eds. The Women's West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.
- Barman, Jean. The West Beyond the West: A History of British Columbia. rev. ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996.
- Beddoe, Deirdre. Discovering Women's History: A Practical Guide to Researching the Lives of Women Since 1800. New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc., 1998.
- Black, Iain S. and Robin A. Burlin, eds. Place, Culture and Identity. Sainte-Foy Quebec: Laval University Press, 2001.
- Blair, Karen. The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914. New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers Ltd., 1980.
- Boyd, Blaine. "The Coming of the Steel," pp.96-105. In Pioneer Days in British Columbia. Vol. 2. Edited by Art Downs. Surrey: Heritage House Publishing, 1975.
- Bridge, Kathryn. By Snowshoe, Buckboard and Steamer: Women on the Frontier. Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1998.
- British Columbia Women's Institute. Modern Pioneers: 1909-1958. Vancouver: Evergreen Press, 1959.
- Bumby, Anna. "The Sales Campaign of George J. Hammond and the Natural Resources Security Company," In Local History Seminar Research Essays, Spring 1981. Prince George: College of New Caledonia, 1981.
- Buss, Helen M. 'Repossessing the World': Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2002.
- , Mapping Our Selves: Canadian Women's Autobiography. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993.
- , "Canadian Women's Autobiography: Some Critical Directions." pp. 154-166. In A M A Z I N G Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing. Edited by Shirley Newman and Smaro Kambouli. Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1986.

- , "Settling the Score with Myths of Settlement: Two Women Who Roughed It and Wrote It," pp. 167-183. In Great Dames. Edited by Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dickin. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.
- , "Constructing Female Subjects in the Archive: A Reading of Three Versions of One Woman's Subjectivity," pp. 23-34. In Working in Women's Archives: Researching Women's Private Literature and Archival Documents. Edited by Helen M. Buss and Marlene Kadar. Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2001.
- Burton, Antoinette. Dwelling in the Archive: Women Writing House, Home and History in Late Colonial India. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Calam, John, ed. Alex Lord's British Columbia: Recollections of a Rural School Inspector, 1915-36. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1991.
- Carter, Sarah A. Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1997.
- Cavanaugh, Catherine A. and Randi R. Warne, eds. Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000.
- Converse, Cathy. Mainstays: Women Who Shaped BC. Victoria: Horsdal and Schubart, 1998.
- Cramer, Michael H. "Public and Political: documents of the Woman's Suffrage Campaign in British Columbia, 1871-1917: the View from Victoria," pp. 55-72. In British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women. Edited by Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1991
- Creese, Gillian and Veronica Strong-Boag, eds. British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992.
- Crow, D. The Edwardian Woman. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1978.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall. Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Domosh, Mona and Joni Seager. Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World. New York: Guilford Press, 2001.

- Fiske, Jo-Anne. "Carrier Women and the Politics of Mothering," pp. 198-216. In British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women. Edited by Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992.
- "Fishing is Women's Business: Changing Economic Roles of Carrier Women," pp. 186-98. In Native Peoples, Native Lands: Canadian Indians, Inuit and Métis. Edited by Bruce Alden Cox. Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1981.
- Ehrlich, Susan. "Critical Linguistics as Feminist Methodology," pp. 45-74. In Changing Methods: Feminists Transforming Practice. Edited by Sandra Burt and Lorraine Code. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1995.
- Floyd, Janet. Writing the Pioneer Woman. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002.
- Furniss, Elizabeth. The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999.
- Gattrell, Tanja. "Booze, Belles and Bistros: Carmen Elliot, A Woman Entrepreneur of the North," pp. 6-16. In Work In Progress: A Collection Of Local History Essays. Edited by Theresa Healy. Prince George: UNBC Print Services, 1996.
- Gluck, Sherna Berger and Daphne Patai. Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History. New York and London: Routledge, 1991.
- Hale, Linda L. and Jean Barman. British Columbia: Local Histories: A Bibliography. Victoria: BC Heritage Trust, 1991.
- Halpern, Monda. And On That Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001.
- Harris, Cole. The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism And Geographical Change. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997.
- Healy, Theresa. "Finding Women in British Columbia: A Select Bibliography," pp. 431-449. In British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women. Edited by Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag. Vancouver: Press Gang, 1992.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn. Writing a Woman's Life. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.

- Hennessy, Rosemary. Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. The Age of Empire, 1875-1914. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.
- Iacovetta, Franca and Mariana Valverde, eds. Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992.
- Jackel, Susan, ed. A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen In the Canadian West, 1880-1914. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982.
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy. Frontier Women: 'Civilizing' the West? 1840-1880. rev. ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy. Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880. New York: Hill and Wang, 1979.
- Jones, John Paul III, Heidi J. Nash and Susan M. Roberts. "Introduction," pp. In Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997.
- Kealey, L., ed. A Not Unreasonable Claim. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979.
- Kelm, Mary-Ellen and Lorna Townsend, eds. In the Days of our Grandmothers: A Rader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.
- Koroscil, Paul M. British Columbia: A Settlement History. Burnaby: Simon Fraser University Press, 2000.
- Lambrech, Kirk N. The Administration of Dominion Lands 1870-1930. Regina: Canada Plains Research Centre, 1991.
- Latham, Barbara and Cathy Kess, eds. In Her Own Right: Selected Essays On Women's History in B.C. Victoria: Camosun College, 1980.
- Latham, Barbara and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds. Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia. Victoria: Camosun College, 1984.
- Light, Beth and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds. No Easy Road: Women in Canada, 1920 to 1960s. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990.

- Light, Beth and Joy Parr, eds. Canadian Women on the Move, 1867-1920. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1983.
- Light, Beth and Alison Prentice, eds. Pioneer and Gentlewomen of British North America, 1713-1867. Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1980.
- Little, Jo. Gender and Rural Geography: Identity, Sexuality and Power in the Countryside. Harlow, UK: Prentice Hall, 2002.
- Long, Judy. Telling Women's Lives: Subject/Narrator/Reader/Text. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- McClintock, Anne. Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- McManus, Sheila. "Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women, 1905-1929," pp. 123-146. In Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History. Edited by Catherine A. Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000.
- McMullen Lorraine, ed. Re(Dis)Covering our Foremothers: Nineteenth-Century Canadian Women Writers. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990.
- Moane, Geraldine. Gender and Colonialism. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
- Moyles, R.G. and Doug Owsram. Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada, 1880-1914. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988.
- Myres, Sandra. Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984.
- O'Helly, Dorothy and Susan M. Reverby, eds. Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History: Essays from the Seventh Berkshire Conference on the History of Women. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Osterud, Nancy Grey. Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in 19th Century New York. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Parr, Joy. "Gender History and Historical Practice," pp.8-276. In Gender and History in Canada. Edited by Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld. Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1996).
- Passerini, Luisa. "Women's Personal Narratives: Myths, Experiences, and Emotions," pp. 189-197. In Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory

- and Personal Narratives. Edited by Personal Narratives Group. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Perry, Adele. On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race and the Making of British Columbia 1849-1871. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001.
- Pierson, Ruth Roach. "Experience, Difference, Dominance and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History," pp. 79-106. In Writing Women's History: International Perspectives. Edited by Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson and Jane Jendall. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Pittenger, Rochelle. "The 'Necessary Evil': Opposition to Prostitution in Early Prince George," pp. 2-14. In Prince George in Context: Students from History 407, Local History and Methodology, 1997-1999. Edited by David Peterson del Mar. Prince George: UNBC Print Services, 1999.
- Poovey, Mary. Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Prentice, Alison et al, eds. Canadian Women: A History. 1st and 2nd ed. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1996 (1988).
- Pulido, Laura. "Community, Place and Identity," pp.11-28. In Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation. Edited by John Paul Jones III, Heidi J. Nash and Susan M. Roberts. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997.
- Radner, Joan Newlon, ed. Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Rasmussen, Linda et al. A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976.
- Riley, Glenda. Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981.
- Rose, Gillian. Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- Radner, Joan Newlon and Susan S. Lanser. "Strategies of Coding in Women's Cultures," pp. 1-29. In Feminist Messages: Coding in Women's Folk Culture. Edited by Joan Newlon Radner. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

- Rasporich, A.W. and H. Klassen, eds. Frontier Calgary. Calgary: McClelland And Stewart West, 1975.
- Samuel, Raphael and Paul Thompson. "Introduction." In The Myths We Live By. Edited by Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- Sandwell, R.W., ed. Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999.
- Sangster, Joan. "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History," pp. 220-233. In Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History, 4th ed. Edited by Veronica Strong-Boag, Mona Gleason and Adele Perry. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Scott, Joan Wallach. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," pp. 152-180. In Feminism and History. Edited by Joan Wallach Scott. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Silverman, Eliane. The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930. Montreal: Eden Press, 1984.
- , "Women's Perceptions of Marriage on the Alberta Frontier," pp. 49-64. In Building Beyond the Homestead. Edited by David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1988.
- Slotkin, Richard. Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973.
- Smith, Sidonie. A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson, eds. De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography. Minneapolis: University Of Minneapolis Press, 1992.
- Starr, Louis. "Oral History," pp. 39-61. In Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology. 2nd ed. Edited by David K. Dunaway and Willa Baum. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1996.
- Stromquist, Sheldon. "A Sense of Place: A Historian Advocates Conceptual Approaches to Community History," pp. 181-188. In The Pursuit of Local History: Readings on Theory and Practice. Edited by Carol Kammen. Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1996.

- Strong-Boag, Veronica, Mona Gleason and Adele Perry, eds. Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History. 4th ed. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Strong-Boag, Veronica and Anita Fellman, eds. Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History. 1st, 2nd, and 3rd ed. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1997 (1991) (1986).
- Sundberg, Sara Brooks. "Farm Women on the Canadian Prairie Frontier: The Helpmate Image," pp. 71-90. In Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States. Edited by Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg. Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1983.
- Thorner, Thomas, ed. SA TS'E: Historical Perspectives on Northern British Columbia. Prince George: College of New Caledonia Press, 1989.
- Thompson, Elizabeth. The Pioneer Woman: A Character Type. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991.
- Thompson, Paul. "Believe It or Not: Rethinking the Historical Interpretation of Memory," pp. 1-16. In Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience. Edited by Jaclyn Jeffrey and Glenace Edwall. Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994.
- Trofimenkoff, Susan Mann and Alison Prentice, eds. The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History Vol. 1 & 2. Toronto: McLennan and Stewart, 1985 (1977).
- Van de Vorst, Charlotte. Making Ends Meet: Farm Women's Work in Manitoba. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2002.
- Van Kirk, Sylvia. "A Vital Presence: Women in the Cariboo Gold Rush," pp.21-37. In British Columbia Reconsidered: Essays on Women. Edited by Gillian Creese and Veronica Strong-Boag. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1992.
- Vansina, Jan. Oral Tradition as History. Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985.
- Wrye, Harriet and Jacqueline Churilla. "Looking Inward, Looking Backward: Reminiscence and the Life Review," pp. 145-157. In Women's Oral History: The Frontiers Reader. Edited by Susan H. Armitage, with Patricia Hart and Karen Weatherman. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2002.
- Zacharias, Alexandra. "British Columbia Women's Institute in the Early Years: Times to Remember," pp. 55-78. In In Her Own Right: Selected Essays

On Women's History in British Columbia. Edited by Barbara Latham and Cathy Kess. Victoria: Camosun College, 1980

Journal Articles and Theses

- Anderson, Rosemarie. "Intuitive Inquiry: Interpreting Objective and Subjective Data." ReVision: Journal of Consciousness and Transformation. 22:4 (2000): 31-39.
- Backhouse, Constance. "Married Women's Property Laws in 19th Century Canada." Law and History Review. 6:2 (1988), 211-57.
- Barman, Jean. "The West Beyond the West: The Demography of Settlement in British Columbia." Journal of Canadian Studies. 25:3 (Fall 1990): 5-18.
- Baskerville, Peter. "Women and Investment in Late 19th Century Urban Canada: Victoria and Hamilton, 1880-1901." The Canadian Historical Review. 80:2 (June 1999): 191-218.
- Baskerville, Peter. "She Has Already Hinted at 'Board': Enterprising Urban Women in British Columbia 1863-1896." Histoire Sociale 26:52 (November 1993): 205-227.
- Bliss, Jacqueline. "Seamless Lives: Pioneer Women of Saskatoon, 1883-1903." Saskatchewan History. 43:3 (1991): 84-100.
- Buddle, Melanie. "The Business of Women: Female Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901-1941." Journal of the West. 43:2 (2004): 44-53.
- Buddle, Melanie. "Women, Family and Entrepreneurship in British Columbia, 1901-1971." PhD. University of Victoria, 2003.
- Buss, Helen. "Listening to the Ground Noise of Canadian Women Settlers' Memoirs: A Maternal Intercourse of Discourses." Essays on Canadian Writing. 60 (Winter 1996): 199-214.
- Chapman, Terry L. "Women, Sex and Marriage in Western Canada, 1890-1920." Alberta History. 33:4 (1985): 1-12.
- Clarkson, Christopher. "Remoralizing Families? Family Regulation and State Formation in British Columbia, 1862-1940." PhD. University of Ottawa, 2002.
- Creese, Gillian and Veronica Strong-Boag. "Taking Gender into Account in British Columbia: More than Just Women's Studies." BC Studies. 105/106 (Spring/Summer 1995): 9-25.

- Curtin, Emma Jane. "Daughters of Empire: British Gentlewomen in Alberta, 1880-1914." M.A. University of Calgary, 1990.
- Davidoff, Leonore. "Gender and the 'Great Divide': Public and Private in British Gender History." Journal of Women's History. 15:1 (2003): 9-39.
- de Lauretis, Teresa. "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness." Feminist Studies. 16:1 (Spring 1990): 115-150.
- Dennison, Carol J. "Women's Institutes in British Columbia: Housewives 'For Home and Country.'" M.A., University of Victoria, 1983.
- Fiske, Jo-Anne. "And Then We Prayed Again': Carrier Women, Colonialism and Mission Schools." M.A. University of British Columbia, 1981.
- Furniss, Elizabeth. "Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier: The Landscape of Public History in Rural British Columbia." BC Studies. 115/116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/98): 7-44.
- Grandma Wakefield – Bulkley Valley Pioneer." Northwest Digest. 14:3 (June 1958): 9, 31-35.
- Harrington, Robert F. "The Bannock Trail." BC Outdoors. February 1977.
- Kerber, Linda. "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History." The Journal of American History. 75:1 (June 1988): 9-39.
- Koroscil, Paul. "Soldiers, Settlement and Development in British Columbia, 1915-1930." BC Studies. 54 (Summer 1982): 63-87.
- Laverty, Susann M. "Hermeneutic Phenomenology and Phenomenology: A Comparison of Historical and Methodological Considerations." International Journal of Quantitative Methods. 23:3 (September 2003). Retrieved April 22, 2005 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_3final/html/Laverty.html.
- Mackie, Ida. "How B.C.'s Residents Earn a Living – Prospector." Northwest Digest. 13:2 (March/April 1957): 8, 37-39.
- Matthews, S. Leigh. "Bound to Improve': Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs And Intersections of Culture, History and Identity." PhD. University of Calgary, 2001.

- McPherson, Kathryn. "Was the 'Frontier' Good for Women? Historical Approaches to Women and Agricultural Settlement in the Prairie West, 1870-1925." Atlantis. 25:1 (Fall/Winter 2000): 75-86.
- Moffatt, Aileen. "Experiencing Identity: British-Canadian Women in Rural Saskatchewan, 1880-1950." PhD., University of Manitoba, 1996.
- Perry, Adele. "Feminism, History and Writing British Columbia's Past." Atlantis. 25:1 (Fall/Winter 2000):
- Perry, Adele. "Oh I'm Just Sick of the Faces of Men: Gender Imbalance, Race, Sexuality and Sociability in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia." BC Studies. 105-106 (Spring/Summer 1995): 27-43.
- Rollings-Magnusson, Sandra Lynn. "Hitched to the Plow: The Place of Western Pioneer women in Innisian Staple Theory." M.A. University of Regina, 1997.
- Runnalls, F.E.. "Boom Days in Prince George, 1906-1913." BC Historical Quarterly. 8:4 (1940): 281-306.
- Scott, Joan. "The Evidence of Experience." Critical Inquiry. 17:4 (Summer 1991): 773-797.
- Stoeltje, Beverly J. "A Helpmate for Man Indeed': The Image of the Frontier Woman." Journal of American Folklore. 88 (Spring 1975): 25-41.
- Stortz, Paul and J. Donald Wilson. "Education on the Frontier: Schools, Teachers and community Influence in North-Central British Columbia." Histoire Sociale 26:52 (November 1993): 265-90.
- Tuttos, Lillian Christine. "Documented Displacement: The Archival Texts of the Women of Sterner Stuff." M.A. University of Regina, 2001.
- Van Daele, Christa. "Making Words Count: The Experience and Meaning of The Diary in Women's Lives." PhD. University of Toronto, 1990.
- Wilson, J. Donald. "I Am Here to Help If You Need Me': British Columbia's Rural Teachers' Welfare Officer, 1928-1934." Journal of Canadian Studies. 25:2 (Summer 1990): 94-118.
- Wilson, J. Donald and Paul J. Stortz. "May the Lord Have Mercy on You': The Rural School Problem in British Columbia in the 1920s." BC Studies. 79:3 (Autumn 1988), 24-58.