ALL ELSE MUST WAIT: SASKATCHEWAN WOMEN AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

by

WENDY EILEEN WALLACE
B.A. (Hon.), University of Victoria, 1984

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department

of

History

ACCEPTED
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
[redacted]
DEAN
DATE 02 June 1988

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

[redacted]

Dr. I. MacPherson

[redacted]

Dr. J. Hendrickson

[redacted]

Dr. M. Langer

[redacted]

Dr. C. St. Peter

Supervisor: Dr. I. MacPherson

In this thesis I have attempted to recreate the reality of life in the 1930s as experienced by the women of Saskatchewan. That this group as a whole has largely been ignored by historians writing on the Depression is understandable as, unlike men, women staged no marches, protests or riots. Yet unemployment was a reality for some of them; so too were relief lines and poverty. Most were mothers, who faced the daily problem of trying to keep children clothed and fed on very little money. Unlike women in British Columbia or in Eastern Canada, they also faced the problems that came with a seven year drought.

In seeking to discover how the Depression affected Saskatchewan women, both individually and as group, I have made extensive use of letters written to newspapers, particularly to the women's page of The Western Producer, and to Prime Minister Bennett (the latter are located in the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa). Published local histories, interviews, questionaires plus correspondence with thirty-nine women in Saskatchewan helped flesh out the Depression story.

In looking at these women's experiences it is apparent that many of them shared a poverty that is largely unknown in Canada today. Without the assistance of today's programs of unemployment insurance and welfare, some faced starvation. For the most part, women helped each other as government assistance was often too little and too late. In groups they sought to alleviate the immediate problems of their unemployed sisters; individually they reached out to provide comfort and assistance where needed. The Depression experience served to reinforce the concept of the home as the "proper sphere" for women and to reduce their stature in the labour force.

[redacted]

Dr. I. MacPherson

[redacted]

Dr. J. Henrickson

[redacted]

Dr. M. Langer

[redacted]

Dr. C. St. Peter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

It is conventional at this point to thank all those who have provided assistance with the research and writing of this thesis. The list of people to thank here would be endless so I will, for the most part, make my thank you very general and hope that all of you will know who you are. First a big thanks to my friends and family, for listening, encouraging, commiserating, criticising, and knowing when to do each; and to the numerous women in Saskatchewan who took the time to write to a stranger with their stories from the 1930s, as well as those former Saskatchewan residents who agreed to be interviewed. A special thank you to John for his support when this thesis was little more than just an idea, to Ginny and Kathy for their encouragement and the use of their home during the "dark days", to Dr. I. MacPherson, my thesis supervisor, for his advice and his support, and most especially to Lyle for the use of his venerable computer (a godsend!), for his assistance in editing, and for his unshakeable belief that this too "will eventually come to the end."

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Margaret Connatty, and to the silent army of women like her who carried the country through the "Dirty Thirties". Like the unknown soldier, they are nameless and faceless except to those who knew them as individual women; yet without their efforts and their sacrifices many Canadian families may not have survived the Great Depression.

"The Farmers Wife
(in the Drought Area)"

by Edna Jacques*

The crop has failed again, the wind and sun
Dried out the stubble first, then one by one
The strips of summer fallow, seared with heat
Crunched, like old fallen leaves, our lovely wheat.
The garden is a dreary blighted waste
The air is gritty to my taste.

And now I ask, O Lord, a mother's prayer!
Help me to know these fields so brown and bare
Are not of Thee, that all this stricken land
Is not because of Thine avenging hand
But ours the fault; we did not farm it right
And now it answers us with wind and blight.

I don't know how we will face another year
Help us somehow to know that you are near.
The children need so many things, and I --
I don't mind so much, but oh I'd love to buy
A nice new dress, a soft blue silk that clings.
O God, forgive me for such trivial things.

I know we'll manage somehow, but today
It is all dark, I cannot see the way
The months loom up with all their snow and cold.
Oh, give us something, Lord, some faith to hold,
Something that we can count on, look ahead
Above these stricken fields so brown and dead.

And even as I wait before Thine throne
New strength flows in, and I am not alone;
This hour with thee has brought me strength and grace.
I shall go on now with courage to face
Whatever comes, the children will be fed:
Give us each day, O God, our daily bread!

*Drifting Soil Moosejaw: Times Co. Ltd. no date. Edna Jacques was a very popular Saskatchewan poet during the 1930s. While her work lacked depth, "the warmth with which it was received during the thirties indicated, no doubt that she spoke for more than herself." (Shirley Paustain "Literature About the Depression 1929-1939 in the Prairie Povinces of Canada" Ph.D 1975, p.110)

INTRODUCTION

Any study of the effect of a particular time period on a group of individuals bound only by gender and the geographic area in which they live is made exceedingly difficult by the great diversity that exists inevitably within such a group. When that group is the female half of the entire population of a province such as Saskatchewan and the time period a Depression that lasted a decade, the difficulty becomes apparent. To compound the problem, few records were left by the vast majority of these women. For most of them, the Depression was a time of increased work and decreased leisure; not many had either the time or the energy -- or felt the need -- to record their daily thoughts and activities.

Few women could remain unaffected by the economic Depression in a province where at one time almost half the population was on relief.(1) If they were not on relief themselves, they often had relatives, neighbours or friends who were; or they belonged to groups such as church auxiliaries or the Homemakers Clubs and through them became involved in relief activities. Those families still fortunate enough to have a wage coming in faced frequent pay cuts. Only a very small minority on fixed incomes actually benefited as the cost of living index dropped. For the majority of Saskatchewan's women the reduced or, in not a few instances,

the almost non-existent income resulted in a greatly lowered standard of living. While this meant there was less of everything for the family as a whole, one woman noted a probable truth in 1930 when she wrote:

> in nearly every case it is the mother that goes without, very often smiling and trying to make herself and everyone else think she really did not need anything and that perhaps that labour saving device she had wanted would only have worried her trying to use it.(2)

When looking at the decade of the thirties, it is important to view it within the time frame in which it took place. For instance, it is too easy to look at women who washed and sewed by hand and who lacked running water and conclude that life was just like that "back in the old days." It must be remembered in any discussion of the 1930s that such "modern" labour saving devices as gas and/or electric washers, stoves, irons and vacuum cleaners were available as early as the 1920s. So too were items such as sewing machines, radios, phonographs and indoor plumbing. On farms, where even in better times buying equipment to lighten the burden of the housewife usually took a back seat to the purchase of modern equipment to increase the productivity of the farm, many women did lack such amenities even before the Depression. During the 1930s even fewer women were able to obtain these "luxuries."(3) Those that had them found it impossible to replace or repair them as they began to wear out. As a farm woman commented:

> I, like many others, find myself gradually losing the few labour savers I got through hard work and sacrifice. My copper wash boiler, in use for 16 years, could have been made usable with a new bottom but $2 was needed for the job so the boiler joins the cream separator, washing machine, sewing machine etc. Am more in need of them now as I am not getting any younger.(4)

While the primitive conditions many women lived under in the 1930s may have been a continuation of the earlier pioneer period for some, for a large number of others they were not.

Like women today, Saskatchewan women in the 1930s wanted labour saving devices, decent clothing and adequate food for their families, toys for their children and a home with room for everyone. Some wanted jobs. Mothers were concerned with both the physical and mental health of their children, were inundated with advice on child rearing and home making, and had their own dreams and aspirations. During the 1930s these needs had to wait, as economic and, in not a few cases, physical survival took center stage.

Keeping up the home became more difficult for many women as the Depression dragged on. Labour saving devices were abandoned as the money to operate, repair or replace them disappeared. Clothing and bedding now had to last longer, which meant more mending and patching had to be done. Food, often no longer plentiful because of drought or the shortage of money, had to be stretched by careful and imaginative cooking. Household

furnishings, as well as supplies such as soap that had previously been purchased, now had to be made at home. All this took time -- women's time. In rural areas, the lack of money to hire farm help meant that farm wives and daughters frequently had to take on outside chores as well as the extra work in the home. For many rural women, running water was a rare luxury, and lifestyles reverted to the earlier pioneer period.(5) As one survivor of the Depression era recalls:

> We had our wood, but it had to be cut, hauled, sawed and chopped, then finally hauled into the house and ashes carried out. Fires were not kept up during the night for fear of fire, so water froze in the house by morning. We had snow but it had to be hauled in ... and so with water from a well pulled up by rope, pulley and pail, but it also had to be hauled out after washing and bathing. We had scraps of fat and it had to be made into soap. We had outdoor bathrooms, or outhouses as it [sic] was called, but we had to go out even in below zero weather. That was the thirties.(6)

In many such homes stamps were a luxury, and letters sent or received a rare treat. They were often the only link with the outside world for women on isolated farms, who frequently went months without seeing or talking to another woman. Fortunately, some of these letters can still be found in archives and in private collections; they provide a rich and often painful insight into a type of scarcity and hardship that can hardly be imagined by someone from today's more affluent society. If poverty can be defined as "not having our share of the goods of our time", then in the material sense a large percentage of the

women of Saskatchewan were poor even by the standards of their day.(7)

For single unemployed women, the 1930s was a period of hardship and uncertainty. Many were forced to return to their family home where they resumed the out-grown role of dependent child. Others left friends and family behind as they travelled across the country in search of work. Unemployed women and their concerns were, for the most part, overshadowed by the actions and demands of their more numerous, more vocal and more organized male counterparts, whose protests led to the 1935 "On To Ottawa Trek" and the subsequent Regina Riot.(8) When an awareness of the plight of these women did filter through to government, the solutions it found -- domestic work and training -- were at once both simplistic and demeaning; they served to remove the "problem" from view (at little cost to the government), but they also confirmed the domestic role of women in society.

For the wives of the unemployed, government assistance was no more imaginative. Relief (which fostered a dependence on a father-figure -- the government) consisted of only the barest essentials for survival. The lack of an allottment for outer clothing confined many women to their homes during Saskatchewan's long cold winters. The loss of their telephones as a result of relief requirements cut them off even further from the world

outside. While government assistance provided food for the body, it provided little, if any, for the soul, and none at all for a woman's self-esteem.

The women of Saskatchewan worked hard during the 1930s; they did so not out of a sense of nobility or devotion to duty, but because there was work to be done and there was no one else to do it. Often confined to their homes by long hours of work and, in many cases, by the lack of adequate clothing, they kept their families clothed and fed under difficult conditions. Their isolation in the home and the general acceptance then, as well as now, that such "women's work" was no more than what was expected of women as wives and mothers, has kept their role in Depression history from the public eye. As a group they have been unappreciated by historians, yet through their efforts these women made a significant contribution to pulling the country through the Depression. By:

> substituting their own labour for goods and services previously bought in the marketplace, women often provided the difference between making do and doing without for their families.(9)

Frequently functioning as midwives, nurses, counsellors, homemakers and even morticians for their neighbours, they filled needs that had yet to be met through the implementation of the social services found in today's society. One must be careful, however, not to view them as anything other than what they

were -- ordinary women doing what then had to be done in order to survive. As one Saskatchewan woman commented, "They were hardy and hard working, but they were not saints!"(10)

In looking back on the Depression decade, the women interviewed for this thesis appeared to remember only the good times. This may be because time and later experience have dimmed the harsh realities of their lives during the 1930s; it may also be that small pleasures assumed a greater importance during those times of hardship and were thus longer remembered. Whatever the reason, the women tended to play down the hardships they endured and when they did talk about them it became evident that the struggle to "make do" brought with it a sense of achievement and pride at having met and mastered the challenges of the Depression. Perhaps it is for this reason that the women look back with some nostalgia, recalling the strengthened feeling of community that existed and the close friendships formed with neighbours and friends. It "seems everyone was friends then ... we cared about someone else" remarked one woman from northern Saskatchewan.(11) Because no one had much, there was no need to "keep up with the Joneses", others recalled; instead, friends and neighbours helped each other and shared what they had. These women remember a slower pace of life, when people seemed to have time for each other and to appreciate what were often infrequent (due to distance and/or the lack of transportation) visits from

neighbours. Invariably, they spoke with evident pleasure of dances at the school house, of community concerts and plays, of picnics and house parties and of quilting bees and other social gatherings. Families shared these activities; children were rarely left with sitters. The resulting feeling of closeness in most families was summed up by one woman who wrote:

> I don't think anyone today could imagine what support and strength there is in a family doing things together ... If we had nothing else during the thirties we were still not poor, we had the love of each other.(12)

The majority of Saskatchewan women survived the Depression; like survivors of other calamities, they shared both a pride in having survived and a fear that disaster might strike again. As individuals, the decade changed them; as a group it served to reinforce their primary role as mothers. Though some managed to create their own personal triumphs in the midst of the Depression, the decade represented an overall loss to women in general. On the labour front, the gains made in the 1920s were eroded away as the economic depression continued and the increased competition for jobs forced women into lower paying, lower status occupations. Areas of white collar employment opened to women in the twenties became less, rather than more, accessible in the thirties. This was particularly true in teaching where large numbers of women were gradually replaced by male teachers in Saskatchewan schools. Society's attitude toward

women in the workforce underwent a change as well; the growing acceptance of working women in the 1920s was replaced by a disapproval of, if not outright opposition to, women who worked in the 1930s. The belief that women took jobs away from family men who needed them became firmly entrenched in much of Saskatchewan society. Married women seeking work faced particular discrimination, some of it the result of government legislation. The concept of women's right to work, championed so earnestly by the early feminists, was dealt a crushing blow as the emergent trends of the previous decades came to a halt in the 1930s; it would take a world war before they would appear to get moving again.(13)

Footnotes

1 Western Producer, Aug 12 1937, p. 19.

2 Ibid., January 16 1930, p.16. It is worth noting that the majority of women who wrote to the "Mainly for Women" column of the Western Producer used function-pseudonyms such as "Co-operator", "A Mother" or "A Farm Wife", while others used their initials only; yet men writing to the "Open Forum" column of the same paper signed with their names and addresses. Apparently women felt the need to remain anonymous; this same need was still apparent in women contacted by letter, questionaire or in person for this thesis, most of whom asked that their names not be used. The need for privacy and to keep up appearances may be part of the reason for this as the letters to the editor and responses to the questionaires often touched on family financial circumstances. Contact with women who had lived through the Depression in Saskatchewan was made through letters sent to a number of Saskatchewan newspapers, including the Regina Leader-Post, which asked for information on life during the Depression period. Respondents were subsequently sent a questionaire to complete; extra copies of the questionaire to pass along to their friends were also sent. Other contacts were made through mutual friends or relatives. Thirty-nine women, the majority of whom had lived on farms during the Depression, either as teenagers or young adults, were contacted in this way. Women interviewed were now retired in Victoria B.C.; most had been teachers in the 1930s. Interviews with women who had resettled in the northern part of Saskatchewan were also purchased from the Saskatchewan Archives Board for use in this thesis.

3 Veronica Strong-Boag argues that feminism in the 1920s took the form of pressing for improvements in the lot of the farm wife; it was hoped to counter the practice of spending family income almost entirely on equipment to make the male farmer's work more productive, "Pulling in Double Harness or Carrying a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie" Journal of Canadian Studies (Fall, 1986): 33-52.

4 Western Producer, August 29 1935, p. 11.

5 Ibid., September 29 1938, p. 11. Even toward the end of the Depression few farm women had running water and one in five homes in Regina had neither running water nor sewage disposal. Many farm homes were without electricity until the 1950s.

6 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

7 Western Producer, August 24 1933, p. 10 -- definition of poverty used at Chicago's "Century of Progress" World Fair.

8 The trek came to a halt in Regina which resulted in a riot July 1. According to one account a few young Regina girls were among the local youth who helped organize an ammunition column at the onset of the riot. Boys and girls alike "came riding bicyles in from side streets, their carrier baskets loaded with rocks...." Ronald Leversedge, Recollections of the On To Ottawa Trek, ed. Victor Hoar, (Toronto, 1973); for one woman's eye witness account of the riot see Barbara Stewart, "The Regina Riot", Labour History (Fall, 1978): 15-16.

9 Susan Ware, Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s, (Boston, 1982) p. 198.

10 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

11 Interview with Karen Vaadeland by Anna Theisen, October 31 1978, Saskatchewan Archives Board.

12 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

13 The large scale entry of women into the labour force during World War II did not represent a signifigent change in attitude toward women in the work place. As a result of the labour shortages during the war, women were simply regarded as "a large labour reserve, to be dipped into more and more deeply as the labour pool dried up." Once the war ended they were expected to return to the home. Ruth Pierson, "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Labour Force in World War II", The Neglected Majority, ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, (Toronto, 1977): 125-145.

CHAPTER ONE

"The Proper Sphere:" Saskatchewan Women Prior to 1930

The prevailing attitude toward women and their place in society prior to the 1930s had its roots in the middle class Victorian concept of the home and family as the "proper sphere" for women. This concept grew out of the gender-based differentiation of roles resulting from the emergence of an industrial society in Canada during the late nineteenth Century, and it served to exclude women from the "public sphere" of politics and most of the work place. By the turn of the century the idea of the home as the proper sphere for women had become firmly entrenched in Canadian society.(1) It should not be assumed, however, that women were passive in accepting this role. As early as the 1880s, Canadian feminists had begun the struggle to open new areas in education and employment for women.(2)

In Saskatchewan, as in the rest of Canada, these efforts were aided by the labour shortages resulting from World War I. During the war a growing number of single women entered and gained acceptance in the work force, though the type of work they did was generally of a menial and subservient nature.(3). Riding on the crest of the reform movement, which itself also sprang from the increasing industrialization of Canadian society, women's groups in the first decades of the this century sought to

improve the fabric of Canadian life by extending their "private" housekeeping into the public sphere. The belief that this could best be done by taking their place with men at the ballot box resulted in a demand by women for the right to vote. Beginning in 1912, Saskatchewan women began to press for female suffrage.

Unlike in Eastern Canada, the suffrage movement in Saskatchewan was first and foremost a farm and a small town movement. The first resolution calling for the extension of the vote to women was presented to the provincial government by the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association in February, 1912, followed by a similar request by the Trades and Labour Congress later that year. The reasoning behind the male farmers organization's support for suffrage was simple: because farm wives had often played an important and active role in the farm economy, it was therefore assumed that wives would share their husbands' political views when it came time to vote, thus strengthening the farmers' voice in the legislature. While labour may have shared a similar view of suffrage initially, aside from the original presentation by the T.L.C., female suffrage was not a high priority with the male-dominated labour movement.

The issue of full suffrage was taken over by women's groups in 1914, when the newly formed Women Grain Growers Association began to press actively for the extension of suffrage to women.

The Association was quickly joined by the Women's Christian Temperance Union which was also engaged in a "Ban The Bar" campaign. In advocating political equality, these two women's organizations shared a common goal--both saw the vote as a means of gaining the power or influence necessary to bring about improvements in the fabric of Canadian life. A third group to endorse the vote, the Moosomin Political Equality League, was formed the same year, and was joined by several other leagues the following year. At the instigation of Violet McNaughton, the Provincial Equal Franchise Board of Saskatchewan was set up in 1915 as an umbrella organization for those groups working for female suffrage.(4)

The new organization's first step was to present a petition containing eleven thousand signatures favouring female suffrage to the Saskatchewan legislature. This was rejected by the Scott government on the grounds that it did not indicate sufficient interest in the vote on the part of Saskatchewan women. A second petition the following spring bearing ten thousand additional names, gathered throughout the cold prairie winter, proved more successful. On February 14 1916 Saskatchewan women received the vote, after little more than four years of agitation. The struggle for the vote had been brief and had met with relatively little ingrained opposition. This may have been because the population of the province was largely made up of immigrants,

many of whom had come from European countries and nearby American states where female suffrage had already been granted. The lack of an established tradition in regard to the status of women in a province only nine years old, as well as the active role played by women in settling the frontier, may also have been a factor.

The role of the pioneer woman in prairie history has attracted the interest of many historians in recent years. In their book on the American Plains experience, Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier, Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg dispute the generally accepted view of the farm wife as a passive helpmate whose needs always came second to those of her husband and children. Basing their study on primary sources such as letters and diaries, as well as numerous interviews with pioneer women, the authors charge that this blanket image hides the real diversity of these women's lives. While some were simply ancillary to the work of men on the farm, or, at worst, unpaid farm labour, many others were equal partners with their husbands and were often the initiators in the family's decision to move to the prairies. The majority of these women found themselves playing an active role in farm life as providers of valuable goods and services.(5)

It should not be assumed that all prairie women were wives; just as the west provided room for enterprising and independent men, so too did it give some single women the opportunity to break away from the traditional roles imposed on them. Though they were excluded from receiving free land under the Homestead Act unless they were heads of families (an issue that occupied much of the attention of feminists until 1930), many single women came west, purchased land, and set about farming on their own. Others came as home or farm help, later marrying and setting up their own homes on the prairies.(6)

The frontier provided new opportunities for women, though it did not free them from their primary tasks of childbearing and housekeeping. According to historian Seena Kohl, survival on the prairies "necessitated the learning of new skills and the putting aside, or holding in abeyance, of the traditional concepts of feminine behavior."(7) The result was a loosening of sex-role expectations. Many prairie women inculcated the Victorian myth of women as "gentile ladies of leisure" with the reality of pioneer life by effectively dividing farm work into men's work (outside) and women's work (inside).(8) However, most did more than "just" cook, clean and look after children, they also worked as farm hands along side their husbands. These pioneer women were expected to be, indeed the country demanded that they be, self-reliant.

The isolation experienced by pioneer women on lonely farms miles from their nearest neighbours was "one of the overwhelming factors in a pioneer woman's life".(9) Rural organizations such as literary clubs, debating societies, as well as social and sports clubs sprang up in response to women's need to break out of this isolated existence. Because of their close involvement with the day-to-day operations of the farm, women also became actively involved with farm movements such as the Patrons of Industry and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association. Though women appeared to play only a traditional role as "suppliers of tea and providers of song" initially, the sight of women at meetings allowed other women to overcome their reservations about the female component of the association, and encouraged them to become more active participants.(10) The primary concerns of women -- health, education, child care and the production and sale of secondary farm products such as eggs and butter -- were not those of the S.G.G.A. and as a result the women formed a group of their own, the aforementioned Women Grain Growers Association. In his extensive study of the early years of the W.G.G.A., Rudy Marchildon claims that its most significant legacy was "its arousal of thousands of previously uncommitted farm women into a spirit of dedicated activism."(11) According to Marchildon, this activism (termed maternal feminism by historians such as Carol Bachi) focused not only on improving home life for

wives but also on community and provincial issues affecting the quality of rural life in Saskatchewan.(12) Community centers, libraries and even hospitals are some of the legacies of the W.G.G.A. and other similar women's groups. All served to make life a little richer for women and their families on the emerging frontier.

According to Eliane Silverman, women in the pre-Depression years had a different expectation of marriage than do women today. Following extensive interviews with early pioneer women, she concluded that these women saw intimacy in marriage as:

> preferable to distance and loneliness. Love was not, however, what marriage meant. Before 1929, its primary purpose was not emotional. Rather marriage was a working partnership designed for survival, productivity, and reproduction. The marriage of two people was the means of economic survival. Friendship might result from a couple working together. Respect might unite them. However deprivation, poverty, isolation, or downright meanness could make married life unpleasant, even violent.(13)

Silverman goes even further to state that regardless of whether the marriage was satisfying or not, "the major source of a woman's identity on the frontier world lay in the children she bore and raised." Her view is shared by Veronica Strong-Boag who concludes that children often compensated for poor marital relationships, loneliness and other disappointments common to frontier prairie life.(14) Linda Rasmussan, in A Harvest Yet to Reap, agrees, adding that pioneer women worked under primitive conditions and for most, life was:

> a hectic chorus of milk, weed, pump, chop, churn, bake, and scrub. If she had children ... and families tended to be large in those days ... they added their giggles and howls.(15)

As tough and tedious as women's work may have been, it was a means of fulfillment for some and, at the very least, a barrier against loneliness for many others.

Though they may have been equal partners in the work on the farm, in the early years of settlement pioneer Saskatchewan women had few legal rights in relation to money or property. Husbands controlled not only their own material property but also that of their wives. This changed with the passage of the Married Women's Property Act in 1907 which gave wives the right to manage their own money and property as though they were single. Further protection was granted to women under the Homestead Act of 1915 which, while still refusing to grant homestead rights to all women, did give wives the right to prevent the sale of the home quarter sections or city lots without their consent. To aid deserted wives or those forced to live apart from their husbands because of cruelty, the provincial government enacted the Deserted Wives Maintenance Act in 1920, under which a husband could be forced by the court to pay up to twenty dollars per month toward his wife's support. The Widow's Relief Act, passed in 1928, enabled a widow to apply to the court for relief if, under the terms of her late husband's will, she received less

than if he had died intestate. If such cases the court had the power to overrule the terms of the will. This act came as a relief to women whose husbands had left their estates to their sons, a common practice in the early years of settlement.

The introduction of the Mother's Allowance during the inter-war period came as a welcome relief to many Saskatchewan mothers. Established in 1917 on the theory that "the child's mother is the very best person to whom the state can entrust the care and upbringing of its future citizens", the Mother's Allowance (or mothers pension as it was originally known) provided a monthly non-repayable grant to women who were the sole support of their children as the result of their husband's death, desertion or imprisonment. The amount paid each mother was based on the number of children in the family under the age of 16. Unwed mothers were pressured to give up their infants by their exclusion from the Mother's Allowance, which was seen as:

> a measure of social investment, on the part of the state whereby mothers, of whose fitness for these responsibilities, the state assures itself, are indirectly subsidized by public grant, in exact proportion to their actual needs, to enable them to perform their parental responsibilities.(16)

Apparently the state did not regard the unwed mother as fit for parenting. The intent of the legislation was to keep children with their mothers after a family breakup and prevent them from becoming a public charge in orphanages. It was expected that

mothers in receipt of the grant would no longer have to work, thereby leaving their children alone or in the care of others.

On the labour front, working women gained some protection under legislation such as the The Factories Act, 1909, which was the first to include provisions regarding working conditions for women. Christine Smillie, in her recent study of working women in Saskatchewan, claims the provisions of this legislation reflected the existing Victorian ideology of women as being helpless, inferior to men, and in need of protection by them. As evidence she cites the Act's concern with issues relating to the protection of female workers in matters such as hours of work and physical safety on the job, and its failure to address the subject of wages.(17)

Racism was evident in the apparent concern with protecting the morals of young female workers which prompted the Saskatchewan labour movement to press the government for legislation to prevent "Orientals" from hiring white girls in laundries and restaurants. An act to this effect was passed by the government in 1912. It was amended the following year to remove any reference to "Japanese" or "other oriental persons", though it still contained the word "Chinese". In 1918 the Act was repealed and replaced by a law disallowing anyone from employing white women in any capacity in laundries or restaurants requiring

them to live in, without a special license from the municipality.(18) This law remained in effect until 1969.

Working women received some protection from exploitation in the workplace with the passage of the female Minimum Wage Act in 1919. The act, however, had several major weaknesses. First, in many instances it set the minimum wage below the amount its own investigations found that single woman needed to have in order to live in reasonable comfort. Second, while it provided for the prosecution of offending employers, the Act originally contained no provision by which employers could be ordered to pay back-wages to individual workers. This was not amended until 1926. An even more serious flaw was its confinement to urban areas and certain occupations. It thus excluded a large number of women from its provisions, such as the 38% of the female labour force working long hours for very low wages in private homes as domestic help.(19)

The need for paid domestic help in the home resulted from the new freedoms gained by middle class women in the late 19th and early 20th Century. Historically, there existed a close relationship between this middle class need for servants and the federal government's attempts to provide them. Domestic help was initially recruited from the working class but the demand soon exceeded supply. Immigration provided a solution to both

Britain's surplus of women and Canada's shortage of domestic help, and government-funded schemes to encourage British domestics to emigrate to Canada were introduced. World War I and the rise in industrialization resulted in a serious decline in the number of domestics available in either country as women turned to better paying jobs in factories. The problem was compounded by the reluctance of immigrant girls to settle outside urban areas and by their tendency to join their sisters in factories. Once again, the Canadian government responded to the problem, this time by amending its immigration policy to encourage greater immigration of potential domestic workers from eastern Europe. Attempts were also made to promote the training of domestics at home through the introduction of domestic science into the schools.(20)

In the 1920s the Free Employment Bureaus set up in the provinces with the assistance of Ottawa concentrated on placing women in domestic work. As women from "better" homes were not expected to seek such work, the Bureaus aimed their programs at working class women.(21) The production of labour saving devices and the creation of the advertising image of woman as an idealized housewife and mother in the decade prior to the Depression increased rather than decreased the need for domestic help. While the use of labour saving devices, such as the electric washer and the vacuum cleaner, eliminated some of the

heavy work formerly done by domestic workers, the added services and responsibilities expected of, and imposed on, the homemaker as a result of the social pressures of advertising as well as the increased knowledge of diet and the psychology of child care meant women actually worked longer hours in the home. According to a 1929 survey by the Bureau of Economics, farm wives worked an average of sixty three hours per week while city wives, who spent more time on family care and management, worked an average of fifty one hours per week.(22) As the workload of wives increased, so did the need for domestic help. Despite the gains made in other areas of female employment in the 1920s, such as in teaching, nursing and clerical work, domestic work provided, and would continue to provide, the greatest opportunity for employment for the majority of the province's women.

During the inter-war period, working women received little support from organized labour, perhaps because the labour movement itself was weak in Saskatchewan at the time. Though some interest had been shown by the Regina Trades and Labour Congress in assisting with the establishment of a union for laundry workers as early as 1908, nothing came of the matter, and there appears to have been little effort made to organize the female labour force. One exception occurred in 1918 when the Council assisted with the organization of waiters and waitresses in Regina.

Women and women's issues received some attention from the The Communist Party of Canada in the early 1920s. The party channelled much of its party line through the Women's Labour League which came increasingly under its influence during that decade. Several such leagues were established in Saskatchewan, but they appeared not to play any kind of a major role in matters relating to current women's issues. Their membership consisted primarily of working class homemakers, whose activities were confined to fund raising and support work.(23)

Two branches of a more active organization of working women, the Employed Girls Councils, were formed during the same period, one in Regina and another in Moose Jaw. The councils concentrated on issues relating to the concerns of working women and were particularly active in pressing for action on minimum wage violations.

In the decades prior to the Depression, women's participation in the province's labour force had risen from 6% in 1911 to 11% in 1931.(24) A quick look at the percentage of women in major occupational fields shows that, with the exception of nursing, by 1931, only two years into the Depression, the gains made by women in white collar, skilled occupations after W.W.I were already beginning to be eroded away.

TABLE I

Percentage of women earners employed in selected occupations based on census data from 1911, 1921 and 1931.(25)

Occupation	1911	1921	1931
Agriculture	12	9	9.6
Domestic and personal service	54*	38	43
Office and Clerical	9	14	13
Teachers	4	17	16
Nurses	1.5	4	4.9
Saleswomen	4	6	4.8
Telephone and telegraph operators	1	2.8	1.8
Textile workers and seamstresses	5	2.4	1.4
Totals	90.5	93.2	94.5

* The Saskatchewan figure was considerably higher than the national rate of 38%.

The 1920s had been a period of optimism for prairie women. The growing acceptance of women in the work force and the production of consumer goods designed to ease their workload in the home promised a new era ahead.(26) Though many women in rural areas still lived in what were little more than shacks without running water or electricity, there was an increasing awareness of the need to improve the homemaker's lot. While this changing awareness can, in part, be traced to the growing

interest in psychology and the welfare of the family, it was also owed to a feminism which focused on giving assistance to women in the private sphere of the home. It has been suggested by some historians that feminism "died of an acute case of disillusionment" after achieving full suffrage, but evidence suggests otherwise. As pointed out by Strong-Boag, feminism merely took on a new form in the 1920s.(27) Lacking a focal issue such as the vote, it became diversified and muted but it did not disappear. Instead, it concentrated on raising public awareness of women's work and in seeking improvements on the domestic front. During the 1930s, the hopes of the previous decade "along with machinery and homes, ran downhill."(28)

The 1930s will not be forgotten by those who lived through them. Ushered in by the Wall Street crash in the fall of 1929 and ending with the onset of World War II in Europe ten years later, it was a period of great economic hardship for many Canadians. The collapse of Canada's vulnerable export markets, combined with seven years of drought on the Prairies, produced the most economically disastrous decade in Canada's history. Of all the industrial nations affected by the world wide depression of the 1930s only the United States was harder hit.(29) In Canada progress not only came to a halt, it took a giant step backward. In many parts of the country, particularly on the Prairies, horses once again became the primary mode of transportation.

Hitching them to engineless cars produced modern day carriages disparagingly termed "Bennett buggies" after the luckless Prime Minister of the day. In countless homes and on the farms, muscle power replaced engine power as money for gas, electricity or parts disappeared. While those with steady incomes actually benefitted from the drop in the cost of living, (which was often greater than the cuts in wages) others were not so lucky. The Depression decade was particularly hard on the province's thousands of unemployed, its handicapped, its elderly, and its farmers. Many were forced out of their homes by drought or foreclosure. For them, poor housing and inadequate food and clothing turned life into a struggle to survive under pioneer conditions.(30)

Though literature abounds on the experiences of the thousands of men who wandered the country aimlessly during this period in search of work (or were herded into work camps by worried governments), little exists on the lives of women during the 1930s. As wives, mothers, daughters and/or workers they shared the hardships of men, yet their place in society made their experience different. For the most part, they were silent. They organized no protest marches and staged no hunger strikes. The Depression defeated some, strengthened others, and affected them all. Basically ignored as a group by all levels of government, they did what women have always done -- they helped

each other. This was particularly true of the women of Saskatchewan, the province hardest hit by the Depression.

In examining the experiences of these prairie women it will become evident that the backward step in technology during the 1930s was matched by a backward step for women in Saskatchewan society. During this period many women were forced, out of economic necessity, to enter (or to remain in) the work force, yet the Depression enhanced rather than minimized the domestic role for women.(31) To understand how this came about it is first necessary to look at conditions in Saskatchewan at the time, and at the initiatives taken by government to alleviate them.

Footnotes

1 For a complete discussion of the emergence of the concept of public and private spheres see Ramsay Cook and Wendy Mitchinson, eds., The Proper Sphere (Toronto, 1976); also see Mary Hartman and Lois Banner, eds., Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women (New York, 1974).

2 For examples of women who sought to change their allotted roles see Linda Kealy, ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s (Toronto, 1979); Isabel Bassett, The Parlour Rebellion: Profiles in the Struggles For Women's Rights (Toronto, 1975); Blanche Norcross, Pioneers Everyone: Canadian Women of Achievement (Toronto, 1979); Janet Ray, Emily Stowe (Don Mills 1976); Susan Jackel ed., Wheat and Women (Toronto, 1979). For a study of the emergence of women's reform groups in Canada see Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Setting the Stage': National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late 19th Century," The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History eds. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, (Toronto, 1977, reprint 1981): 87-103.

3 See Graham Lowe, "Women, Work and the Office: the Feminization of Clerical Occupations in Canada, 1901-1911," Canadian Journal of Sociology (Fall 1980): 361-381; also Veronica Strong-Boag, "Working Women and the State: The Case of Canada, 1889-1945," Atlantis (Spring 1981): 1-9. Strong-Boag argues that there was a close relationship between the notion of the ideal family structure in a capitalist economy and state policies affecting female wage earners. By working with other institutions in society, she claims, the state was able to confine women's activities to a narrow range; For a brief discussion of the exploitation of female workers during the W.W.1 period see Kathryn Kearney, "Canadian Women and the First World War," Canadian Woman Studies (1981): 95-96.

4 McNaughton was the first president of the WGGA. For more information on the suffrage movement in Saskatchewan see Christine MacDonald, "How Saskatchewan Women Got the Vote," Saskatchewan History (October, 1948): 1-8.

5 Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg eds., Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier (New Jersey, 1983): 85

6 See Linda Rasmussen, A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of

Prairie Women (Toronto, 1976); see also Eliane Leslau Silverman, The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930 (Montreal, 1984).

7 Kohl, Seena B., Working Together: Women and Family in South Western Saskatchewan (Toronto, 1976).

8 Eliane Leslau Silverman, "Women and the Victorian Work Ethic on the Alberta Frontier: Prescription and Description," The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905-1980, eds. Howard Palmer and Donald Smith, (Vancouver, 1980).

9 Linda Rasmussen, Harvest Yet to Reap, p. 42.

10 Rudy Marchildon,"The Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association: A Study in Agrarian Activism," M.A. University of Victoria, 1979, p. 16.

11 Ibid., p. 123.

12 For a further discussion of maternal feminism see Carol Bacchi, Liberation Deferrred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists 1867-1918 (Toronto, 1983).

13 Eliane Leslau Silverman, The Last Best West, p. 57; it is difficult to ascertain from oral history alone if women's memories of their expectations prior to marriage are accurate after such a length of time.

14 Ibid., p. 59; also Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load," p. 39.

15 Rasmussen, A Harvest Yet to Reap, p. 42.

16 Canadian Welfare Council Papers, National Archives of Canada (hereafter the N.A.C), MG 28 1 10, Vol.10.

17 Christine Smillie, "The Invisible Work Force: Women Workers in Saskatchewan From 1905 to World War II," Saskatchewan History, (Spring 1986): 62-63.

18 Ibid., p. 69. The same protection was not extended to non-white women.

19 Ibid., p. 71.

20 Marilyn Barber, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," Ontario History

(September 1980); Jeanne L'Esperance, The Widening Sphere: Women in Canada, 1870-1940 (Ottawa, 1982); See also Jennifer Stoddard and Veronica Strong-Boag, "And Things Were Going Wrong at Home" Atlantis (Fall 1975): 38-44.

21 Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of a New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," Labour/Le Travailleur (1979): 136.

22 Western Producer December 12 1929, p. 17; this is born out by Ruth Schwartz Cowan in "A Case Study of Technological and Social Change: The Washing Machine and the Working Wife," Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women, eds. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner, (New York, 1974). For a complete discussion on how advertising shaped the role of the homemaker in the 1920s see Elaine Fisher, "The Angel and the Whore: The Growth of Psychological Advertising and its Focus on Women in Canada," M.A. Thesis University of Victoria, 1983; See also Mary Vipond, "The Image of Women in Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s," The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice,(Toronto 1977, reprint 1981).

23 Joan Sangster, "The Communist Party and the Woman Question 1922-1929," Labour/Le Travail (Spring 1985): 33.

24 Smillie, "The Invisible Work Force," p. 63.

25 Ibid., p. 64.

26 See Elaine Fisher, "The Angel and The Whore"; also Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of the New Day".

27 Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness," p. 33.

28 Ibid., p. 39.

29 L.M. Greyson and Michael Bliss, The Wretched of Canada (Toronto, 1973), p. viii.

30 Letters written to Prime Minister Bennett and to newspapers tell of a poverty hard to imagine in today's society.

31 In Canada the growth rate for women in the paid labour force was less rapid between 1931-1941 than it had been in the previous three decades. The greatest percentage increase actually occured between 1901-1911. Census of Canada, 1951 Vol. X , p. 62.1 and p. 62.2.

CHAPTER TWO

"Little Food for Man or Beast"; The Great Depression

"This scene of desolation beggars description": So wrote Federal Minister of Labour Gideon Robertson following his tour of the drought stricken province of Saskatchewan in 1931.(1) His reaction to the province's bleak stretches of farmland covered with blown soil, often to the depths of several feet, is not surprising. In three years Saskatchewan had undergone an incredible transformation. Regarded in 1928 as one of the most prosperous agricultural communities on the North American continent, by 1931 it was one of the poorest.(2) In seventy-five communities an estimated one hundred and fifty thousand people lived with "little food for man or beast", while thousands of acres lay cultivated but not sown and "thousands more [were] entirely blown out".(3)

When the world-wide Depression struck Canada in 1929, agricultural Saskatchewan, which had relied heavily on export sales of its grain to England and continental Europe, fared the worst.(4) The weakness of its economic base became grimly apparent as world markets shrank and farm prices fell. Between 1929 and 1932 wheat plummeted from $1.80 per bushel to a mere $0.38 per bushel.(5) Used to a "next year philosophy", farmers initially regarded the economic crisis as merely a temporary

setback which followed a financially expansive period of fair to good crops. Most believed a return to prosperity lay "just around the corner."(6) A decade would lapse before that corner was finally turned; in the meantime Saskatchewan experienced greater hardships and struggle than at any previous time in its history. However, not all of Saskatchewan's problems in the 1930s were the result of the economic depression. Starting in 1929 and continuing throughout the following decade, drought, the combination of below normal rainfall and hot winds during the growing season, meant recurrent crop failures. The little grain that did grow was often destroyed by grasshoppers or cutworms. When the rains finally fell in the southern and eastern sections of the province in 1935 they brought an epidemic of stem rust and little relief to the parched earth. For the beleaguered farmer all "the problems of drought, insect pests, erosion, low prices for produce and high winds occurred simultaneously and continued year after year after year".(7)

Hardest hit by drought was the southern third of the province which had experienced frequent, though not as serious, droughts during the previous decade. There drifting topsoil filled ditches, covered roads and sifted through cracks in windows and doors. In vain, farm wives waged a daily battle with the dust to keep it out of beds, food and clothing. Russian thistle and trench weeds, the only vegetation hardy enough to survive the

severe drought conditions, were blown into drifts nearly ten feet high against fences, often covering them completely. Huge cracks which appeared in yards, roads or other areas subject to heavy travel lent a bleak desert-like appearance to the landscape. Gale force winds, heavily laden with topsoil and termed "black blizzards", left layers of dust inches deep in their wake and often were severe enough to make it unsafe for children to travel to school.(8) It is not without some justification that the decade is often referred to as the "dirty thirties"!

The combined effect of the drought and the Depression on the economy of the province is evident in the drop that occurred in net farm incomes.

TABLE II

Net Farm Income in Saskatchewan, 1928-1939.(9)

Year	Net Income	Year	Net Income
1928	184,665,000	1935	27,708,000
1929	51,321,000	1936	18,402,000
1930	38,202,000	1937	-36,336,000
1931	-31,117,000	1938	28,868,000
1932	- 1,473,000	1939	96,081,000
1933	-14,483,000		
1934	- 1,821,000		

This was a "reduction of income quite unmatched in any civilized

country".(10) In 1936 alone, 11,222 farms totalling 2,486,253 acres were abandoned by farmers who left in search of better opportunities elsewhere.(11) By the end of the decade Saskatchewan had lost 155,000 people to other parts of Canada and to foreign countries. A 1934 estimate that it would take $30,000,000 to restore the clothing of Saskatchewan's rural population to its pre-Depression standards only hints at the personal deprivation experienced in the 1930s.(12)

Saskatchewan farmers, who had enjoyed a relatively high standard of living only a year or two before, now found themselves destitute. Expensive heavy machinery stood in blown-out fields, high priced cars remained in garages for want of the gas to run them, and fur coats often hid ragged clothes underneath. All were tangible reminders of the vulnerability of farmers who risked everything on the hope of a good crop. Many had been tempted by the successive profitable good years and the easy credit of the 1920s to extend themselves beyond their means. When nature failed to co-operate, they lost everything. Though it was greater during the 1920s as more material goods became available for purchase, borrowing on next years crop was not a new phenomenon in Saskatchewan. According to historian P.A. Russell, the province:

> had been a debtor community from the days of settlement. Farmers borrowed to buy land and machinery, depending on

> next year's crop to pay the bill. Merchants borrowed to build their shops and stock them, depending on the farmer's anticipated income. Credit was Saskatchewan's backbone. The depression broke that backbone.(13)

Representatives of at least two large insurance and mortgage associations in the drought area argued that while the emergency situation was owning to crop failure, other serious factors were also involved. They claimed that holdings were too large and that the majority of farmers were carrying commitments far beyond the earning power of their holdings, adding that "farmers did not farm, but mined the land".(14) They further criticized farmers for failing to diversify their crops, charging that many simply planted a single wheat crop, then left for an extended holiday, returning in time for the harvest. Whatever the forces behind the economic downturn, the result was the "complete destruction of a way of life, of the hopes and aspirations of hundreds and thousands of people".(15)

In the province's urban area the picture was not much brighter. Almost entirely dependent on the secondary activities of an agricultural population, the cities reflected, immediately and severely, the depressed conditions resulting from falling markets and successive crop failures. Retail sales alone dropped more than twenty three percent between 1929 and 1933.(16) Thousands of male and female urban workers found themselves without work as a result. Though accurate figures are not

available, estimates place the unemployment rate at somewhere between nineteen and twenty-seven percent.(17) Those remaining on the job usually faced harsh wage cuts and reduced hours of work. Hardest hit were those at the lower end of the wage scale. Their low pay and the seasonal nature of many of the jobs they held meant they frequently were poor to begin with. Few had any resources to fall back on; they soon were forced to turn to relatives or private charities for aid. Some joined the drought-stricken farmers who, like earlier pioneers, loaded up their families and their often meager possessions and headed north to the forest region in search of new and better land. Those fortunate enough still to have a car (and the money to run it) made the journey in relative comfort. Others hitched horses to "Bennett buggies" or to covered wagons for the trip.

Initially, the movement north was merely a trickle, but as conditions worsened the numbers increased. The Federal government had formerly controlled all the country's natural resources, but in 1930 these were turned over to the respective provinces. In Saskatchewan the newly-elected Co-operative government under the premiership of J.T.M. Anderson looked almost immediately to the province's northern forested area as a possible solution to the growing relief problems in the south. Consequently, on May 1, 1931, and despite the warnings of the 1930 Swanson Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement that

much of the forest area "should not have been opened to general homesteading", the Anderson government, with federal backing, passed the Land Settlement Act.(18) Under this plan, qualified persons with farming experience were given financial assistance to settle in unoccupied land in the north suitable for farming.(19) By mid-August of 1931 more than 500 families had been approved for assistance. Not all of these were from rural areas; forty-two Saskatoon families with farming background were given forty dollars and provided with transportation to the Loon Lake district by the Saskatoon city council.(20)

This "back to the land" movement was expanded in June 1932 with the passage of the Relief Settlement Plan, which omitted any mention of "qualifications" or the "suitability" of land. Under this plan the federal government agreed to make a non-repayable grant of up to one third of six hundred dollars per family. The remaining two thirds came from the provincial government and the municipality involved. Figures vary, but it is generally estimated that as many as seven thousand families were re-established in the north under this and the later Homestead Act.(21) The latter act further reduced the requirements for the acquisition of land by eliminating the need for a thorough survey.

Though some found good farmland in the north and were able

to make a living farming, others were not so fortunate. Those with poor land, without the means to break it, or lacking in farming skills found themselves "back to the hard grind of pioneering again with inadequate machinery, lack of money, and few prospects beyond the immediate task of providing shelter, fuel, food and clothing for the family".(22) Many found themselves in small one room shacks with tarpaper roofs and empty cupboards. For them the struggle to survive was as grim in the north as it had been in the south, only now there were no familiar faces or places to provide relief from the harsh reality of their lives. For women the hardships, the isolation, and loss of familiarity was particularly difficult. A young mother spoke for many as she wrote to Prime Minister Bennett in 1935:

> I am desperate. I do not wonder when I read of so many suicides. There is no pleasure in life when one is hungry or cold and can hear one's little children crying for food.(23)

When it became apparent in 1931 that drought conditions were no longer merely a temporary setback and the burden of relief had grown beyond the ability of the municipalities to cope, the Anderson government established the Saskatchewan Relief Commission.

This Commission, a non-political supervisory body made up of representative citizens, including one woman, was initially responsible for co-ordinating relief efforts in the southern and

drought areas. Later, local improvement districts, including the new area in the north, came under its mandate. The eight cities, sixty-one towns and one hundred sixteen municipalities not in the drought area were left to their own initiatives (although they reported to the provincial Department of Railways, Labour and Industries). The method of financing varied according to drought conditions in the region, but the system of administering relief was standard in all areas covered by the Commission. Necessity was the only criterion for receiving relief. In an effort to remove the stigma of charity and thus encourage those in dire need to accept relief, all applications included an undertaking to repay the amount received from the Commission.(24)

The amount of relief given was deliberately kept to a minimum to avoid any unnecessary applications, and steps were taken to avoid any perceived abuses. Relief recipients who failed to disclose fully any family revenue or assets (such as a secret hoard of grain), who refused to accept a job, or who purchased beer or liquor, were immediately removed from the relief rolls. Similarly, most relief recipients were not allowed to have telephones; car licenses also had to be turned in to prevent any relief monies being used on "frills". The Saskatoon Relief Board, in its zeal to prevent abuse of the system, issued press releases urging people to come forward with information on cheating families.(25) Life was not made easy for those forced to

apply for relief. Most only did so as a last resort; this was particularly true in the early years of the Depression when applications for relief were often included in newspaper accounts of municipal meetings. The basic amount granted for food in most areas ranged from $8.00 per month for a couple with two children to $19.00 per month for a family of twelve. A further $2.50 to $6.25 per month was allowed for milk and $.49 to $4.98 for flour for families with one to ten children. From the total amount allowed, 5% was deducted if the applicant already had potatoes; if he or she had any beef or pork on hand, a further 10% deduction was made for each.(26) The Commission adopted and maintained a policy of buying Canadian and, where possible, locally. Therefore, applicants were asked to name their preferred grocer, then given a voucher to be used at that grocery store. All prices were fixed by the Commission. Limited quantities of essential clothing were issued in a similar manner. Without wooded land in the south, fuel distribution had to be organized on a larger scale. Here again, local coal was purchased at a price fixed by the Commission. No provision was made for shelter except in cases of eviction, when each case was treated individually. Seed grain and animal fodder were supplied, where necessary, by the Commission, though not always to everyone's satisfaction. One relocated farmer in the north found it difficult to get feed from the relief officer in his district and

thus wrote to Prime Minister Bennett:

> I could not get any feed whatever out of him until my four horses and seven head of cattle (my two best cows included), 16 pigs (some of them weighed over 100 lbs) and most of my poultry had actually starved to death. If I had been given sufficient feed in the first place my stock would be alive and most of those hogs would now be ready for market. We would then have some meat for our table and the rest would have repaid the relief I needed and most likely would have left something to take me off the relief list for a time at least. Now we cannot farm the land I had rented because I haven't a horse left to farm with.(27)

Considering the enormity of the problems and the inexperience of the people in charge of allocating relief monies, it is not too surprising that errors of judgment were made. Up to June 1932 the Commission had handled eighty percent of relief distribution in the province at a cost of $1,300,000 per month! The numbers on relief were estimated at 320,000 people.(28)

Destitution knew no social boundaries; lawyers as well as labourers were on relief. The amount received was sufficient to keep body alive, but its acceptance often destroyed the spirit of those receiving it. Pride kept many who needed help off the relief roles. Others saw relief as outward evidence of their personal failure, a feeling reinforced by the use of vouchers and the lack of an allowance for shelter.

The case of Mr. and Mrs. Bates and their eight year old son illustrates the often devastating effect of the Depression upon

the mental health of the newly poor. Until 1929 the Bates had operated their own meat market in a small town in Saskatchewan where they were well respected by the rest of the community. As conditions worsened the couple sold their business and moved to Vancouver where they purchased a grocery store. But it too failed and they were forced to apply for relief. Ineligible for relief because they had not resided in the area for the required period of one year, they turned to the Salvation Army, who provided them with the fare to Saskatoon. There they were again refused relief on the same grounds as at Vancouver, but were given a few days room and board on the understanding that they would return to their home town. The couple, "overcome by the shame of returning to Glidden destitute...decided on a suicide pact". They sold the remainder of their possessions, rented a car, bought gas, and with their son attempted to commit suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning. Ironically, their poverty prevented their death; the car ran out of gas before the deed was completely done, but not before their son was killed. Overcome by grief:

> Mrs. Bates asked her husband to kill her with the crank of the car. He attempted to do so by hitting her three times on the head, but did not succeed in killing her. He then cut her throat with a knife, but did not succeed in this either. Shortly after this Mr. Bates cut both his wrists with a razor blade and Mrs. Bates cut one of her own.(29)

Incredibly, they were found half dead, rushed to medical aid and survived, only to be charged with the murder of their son.

Residents of their home town came to their support, claiming that their son had been "the sunshine of their lives", and that "their minds had snapped" as a "direct result of the Depression".(30)

The Bate's reaction was no doubt extreme, but the shame which engendered it was not. A more passive outlet for many was a mental depression just as devastating as the economic one. By the end of the decade, according to Saskatchewan politician T.C. Douglas, there was a "large percentage of people who were in mental hospitals, particularly women, who never recovered from the effects of the Depression".(31)

Difficult for all people, the 1930s were particularly difficult for women. Many were isolated in their homes by weather, distance, or poverty, unable to escape even briefly the often harsh reality of their daily lives. Those who were better off financially turned much of their efforts during this period to helping those less fortunate than themselves. Each endured the Depression in her own way.

Footnotes

1 Report of the Minister of Labour, July 1933, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1433.

2 S.M. Lipset, Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan; A Study in Political Socialism (Toronto, 1950).

3 Robertson to Bennett, June 23 1931, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1433.

4 Michiel Horn, The Great Depression of the Thirties in Canada (Ottawa, 1984): 5.

5 Barry Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years (Toronto, 1973): viii.

6 J.F.R. Wright, Saskatchewan: A History of a Province (Toronto, 1955).

7 John Archer, ed. Saskatchewan: A History (Saskatoon, 1980): 226.

8 Ibid., p. 217-18. For a personal account of drought conditions in Saskatchewan see Mrs. A.W. Bailey, "The Year We Moved," Saskatchewan History (Winter 1967): 223-238.

9 Canadian Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Handbook of Agricultural Statistics Part II, Farm Income--1926-1965", as cited in Archer, p. 217.

10 Archer, Saskatchewan: A History, p. 215.

11 Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936, Vol. 1, p. 722.

12 G.E. Britnell, "Economic Conditions in Rural Saskatchewan," The Canadian Forum (March 1934): 210.

13 P.A. Russell, "The Co-operative Government's Response to the Depression, 1930 to 1934," Saskatchewan History (Autumn 1971): 86.

14 Report on conditions in Saskatchewan 1932, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, M. G. 28, I 10, Vol. 13, N.A.C.

15 Lipsett, Agrarian Socialism, p. 97. While 96.1% of Saskatchewan farmers owned their land in 1901, by 1936 this

percentage had been reduced to 60.7%; see Pat Bird Of Dust and Time and Dreams and Agonies (Ontario, 1975): 118.

16 Horn, The Great Depression, p. 14.

17 Ibid., p. 10.

18 The Canadian Welfare Council's Report on Saskatchewan, 1932, p. 127.

19 To qualify, the applicant had to be a resident of Saskatchewan for 5 years and a Canadian citizen who possessed livestock or farm equipment to the value of $200.

20 T.J.D. Powell, "Northern Settlement, 1929-1935," Saskatchewan History (Autumn 1977): 89. For further accounts see also John MacDonald's, "Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan," Prairie Forum (1981): 35-55, and Isabelle George's, "The Moose Mountains in the 1930s," Saskatchewan History (Spring 1980): 71-74.

21 Powell, "Northern Settlement," p. 83.

22 Archer, Saskatchewan: A History, p. 226.

23 Claudia Langerok to Bennett, September 26 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1325.

24 For a more detailed account of the commission's activities see Blair Neatby, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1931-1934," Saskatchewan History (Spring 1950): 41-56, and Alma Newman, "Relief Administration in Saskatoon During the Depression," Pages From the Past ed D. H. Backing, (Saskatoon, 1979): 239-258.

25 Greyson et. al., The Wretched of Canada, p. xiii.

26 Report on conditions in Saskatchewan, p. 119.

27 P.R. Mulligan to Bennett, March 3 1934, Bennett Papers, N.A.C. M1450.

28 Canadian Welfare Council Papers, Report on Saskatchewan, p. 122.

29 R.C.M.P. Report File no. 33B 636-13 G19, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1450.

30 George Cooper to Bennett, December 18 1933, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1450.

31 Tommy Douglas, "Highlights of the Dirty Thirties," The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada ed. R.D. Francis and H. Ganzevoort, (Vancouver, 1980): 165.

CHAPTER THREE

Each In Her Own Way: Factors Affecting The Depression Experience of Saskatchewan Women

Though in many ways the Depression was a shared experience, for each of Saskatchewan's more than one hundred and sixty four thousand women it was a uniquely personal one. How it affected and shaped their individual lives depended on a variety of interconnected life factors such as economic status, location, previous experience, attitude and marital status. Heightened by, but unrelated to, the Depression itself, such factors determined, to a large extent, the course of these women's lives in the 1930s.

Economic status, prior to, and during the Depression was a major determinant in the Depression experience. With a few exceptions, such as single working women or female heads of families, most women in the 1930s played only a passive role in determining their own economic status. For the most part, their status was dependent on the education, occupation and ambition of the dominant males in their lives, either their fathers, their husbands, or, in the case of many older widows, their sons. In this sense, they were victims of the economic downturn as they had little direct control over their economic destiny; they could only react to changes to it. While some did so by seeking employment, as will be discussed later in this thesis, most

adjusted to it by doing the best they could with what they had.

For middle class women who had experienced a high standard of living in the previous decade, the reduction in the family paycheck, or, even worse, the layoff of the head of the family, came as a shock. Many suffered a loss of prestige and great embarrassment as a result of their lowered standard of living. In an article written in 1932, titled "Middle Class Misery", John Paul Jones examined the effect of the Depression on "the fairly well-to-do who have been accustomed to think of life more or less in terms of comforts and advantages which are bought with money." He found:

> The kind of adjustment they are called on to make is heroic ... They undergo months of torture before they darken the door of a relief agency.(1)

These kinds of adjustments had to be made by many in Southern Saskatchewan, where "homes worth thousands of dollars with high priced cars in the garage and heavy equipment in the fields, housed families on relief." There it was not unusual for people to come in for relief in fur coats "but clothed practically in rags underneath."(2) The drop in income was often rapid and dramatic; in small towns even "the druggist, jeweller, and merchants who dealt in lumber, etc." were on relief. No occupational group entirely escaped the effects of Depression.(3)

According to a Canadian Council Report, those who retained

their jobs but suffered drastic salary cuts were often worse off than those on relief. They found that:

> [the] heaviest malnutrition and worry existed among the families with reduced pay in towns and villages, or those who had attempted to stay off relief in rural areas.(4)

While many formerly middle class women and their families experienced real physical deprivation, as well as the emotional trauma of applying for relief during the 1930s, for others the hardships were more psychological than real. Those who had experienced a rise in their standard of living during the 1920s, particularly in terms of more material goods and a greater ease of living, had developed a new definition of economic need. This definition had been "influenced by the availability of consumer goods and mass advertising,"(5) and was no longer confined to the basics such as food, clothing and shelter but frequently included the latest appliances, a car, an annual vacation, and piano lessons for the children. With the drop in (or loss of) income the family had to reconsider its own definition of need. The frustration experienced as a result of this downward mobility was directly related to the level of the family's expectations. Studies have shown that the greater these expectations, the greater the resulting frustrations.(6) While some reacted to their income crisis by trying to keep up appearances, even to the extent of cutting back on essential items such as food in order to be able to retain such non-essential items as the family car,

others were more realistic.(7) Choices had to be made as to what was essential to the family's real needs and what could be done without. These choices varied according to personal values and the family's perception of its needs; but their effect was felt most frequently by the wives and daughters in the household. Laundry formerly sent out now had to be done at home, as did the baking and canning, store bought goods often being a luxury the family could no longer afford. Household help often had to be let go. The increased work load in the home, coupled with the lack of money, meant less opportunity or time for the outside activities the homemaker may formerly have enjoyed.

In rural areas, where the needs of the farm traditionally took precedence over those of the home, planned improvements such as running water and indoor plumbing now had to be postponed. Some families cut back on their home entertaining in order to lessen the possibility of others discovering their true circumstances; for others, home entertainment replaced the more expensive outside entertainments the family had enjoyed. Vacations were cancelled or postponed by most families until times improved.(8) All this meant more work for the homemakers. The more affluent 1920s had convinced these women they could "reign in [their] kingdom like a queen.(9); in the 1930s this still seemed possible for those with secure, comfortable incomes, but it was no longer true for the "newly poor". Far from

"reigning like a queen", most of these women now:

> scrounged and scrimped and patched and glued and sewed and borrowed and copied and worked day in and day out with not much hope and took a second look at every nickel they spent and kept their kids clean and visited neighbours who were sick, and ... did a lot of praying.(10)

The exact number of middle class Saskatchewan families who experienced acute deprivation during the 1930s is unknown. Some indication of their numbers can be derived from looking at the drop in enrollment at private schools, often one of the first luxuries to be dispensed with. The statistics for the prairie provinces suggest that Saskatchewan's middle class was harder hit than that in either Manitoba, where the drop in enrollment was less severe, or in Alberta, which experienced no drop in enrollment at all.

TABLE III

Enrollment in Private Schools on the Prairies.

Year	Sask.	Alberta	Man.
1921	1,608	2,274	3,149
1926	2,358	2,281	4,534
1931	2,853	2,944	5,864
1936	2,003	3,083	5,131
1937	1,931	3,594	5,157
1939	2,026	3,839	4,764

Source: Canada Year Books, 1922-1940.

The decline in the number of automobiles in operation in the province during the Depression is a further barometer of the financial difficulties experienced by many middle class families.

The automobile was still relatively new in the 1930s and was perhaps even more of a status symbol than it is today. In 1930 a license to operate a car cost from ten to twenty-five dollars per year, a considerable sum at the time. The number of licenses issued annually fell sharply during the worst years of the Depression. Though they had recovered to some extent by the end of the decade, they were still well below the 1929 figures.

TABLE IV

Automobile Licenses Issued in Saskatchewan, 1929-1939.

Year	Number	Year	Number
1929	128,426	1935	94,792
1930	127,193	1936	102,270
1931	107,981	1937	105,060
1932	91,275	1938	109,014
1933	84,734	1939	119,018
1934	91,461		

Source: Canada Year Books, 1931-1941.

For working class women, the loss or reduction of income experienced during the Depression generally had less of a psychological impact; many were familiar with periods of little or no employment.(11) What was different in the 1930s was the length of time off work. Because their financial resources were often meager at best, they were quickly used up without the opportunity to replenish them. The same was true on the farms in

the drought area. Poor crop years were to be expected on occasion, and it was hoped they would be compensated for the following year. But year after year of poor crop or no crop at all brought unrelenting and increasing hardship to large numbers of farmers and their families. A Red Cross study of the drought area in southern Saskatchewan brought this report:

> Household plenishings, during the famine years, have become exhausted. In many cases, kitchen utensils are entirely inadequate. Stove grates have been broken and remain unreplaced. Children are inadequately clothed and often, the supply of bedclothes have [sic] so dwindled that they have had to be reinforced by old newspapers, placed between coverlets in an attempt to keep out the cold. Many of the houses, now almost entirely without paint, have been banked up with earth and even manure, to prevent the entrance of the icy gale which seeks out each chink and crevice.(12)

Loss of prestige became less of a problem compared to the daily struggle for economic survival. The plight of some of these women and their families was illustrated in a speech to Parliament by Tommy Douglas, a minister who turned politician in the mid-thirties. He charged that:

> last fall there were children going to school in Saskatchewan with only gunny sacking wrapped around their feet. We have gone into homes and found mothers and children lying on piles of bedding in a corner; they did not have the proper bedding equipment or the proper clothing to meet the rigors of a very cold winter.(13)

While hardship for many middle class mothers meant denying their children little treats, for the poor it meant not giving them essential foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables. Toys and other childhood pleasures were out of the question for many of

these families. It is not difficult to imagine the pain of the mother whose little girl wrote this letter to Prime Minister Bennett in 1932:

> I was a good girl all the time and Mama tells me her and Daddy has no money to give Santa for my little brother and me and we can't hang up our stockings up [sic] would you send me some money and I will send it to him or do you think Mr. Bennett he would forget Brucey and me my I hope he don't. I wish you write and tell him I'm here and I will be so good, but if Daddy has no money to give him he can't come. Will you write and tell me if you wrote to Santy?(14)

Or that of the mother who stated "It is very trying to have the children asking for an apple or some change from dry bread and butter in their lunch."(15)

Regardless of economic status, the Depression meant change for most women and hardship as well for many others. For those who retained their comfortable incomes, the changes were minor; for those who lost them, the changes were traumatic. In either case, because of their economic dependence on their spouses, women had little choice other than to accept and adapt to the changes in their economic circumstances.

A woman's experiences during the 1930s were further influenced by where she lived during that period. On farms outside the drought area, where basic food usually could be grown, and where, in most areas, a sense of community already existed, the degree of hardship differed from that in the towns

or cities. Yet even in rural areas not all experiences were the same. For farm women in the burnt out areas of the south even nature seemed to conspire to make the experience worse. Here efforts made to grow a few vegetables were thwarted time and again, as this mother found:

> With us the hoppers completely killed 95% of the first garden. The second was dry so long it never came up. And the third planting with endless water carrying (to fill the trenches with water before sowing) resulted in the third garden being nicely up with the rain. Hail followed which cut everything to pieces, the small stuff being completely obliterated.(16)

Another mother of several small children who found her garden frozen wrote:

> I don't know what we will do. I'm almost beyond caring ... Last year we had no crop but this year conditions are a hundred times worse.(17)

Some of these families were reduced to eating Russian thistle, a weed that was often the only thing to grow in the near desert conditions. Those who were shocked at the prospect were reminded "in times like these they are green vegetables where no others are available." (18) Frequently, families in the area were so poor they:

> couldn't wait until spring to plant, not when they saw their children starving before their eyes and they boiled the seed wheat, they made porridge and gruel and bannock out of it, and this is the way some of those farmers got their families through the winter.(19)

Women in the south faced other difficulties unknown to those in the north or in the urban areas. Grasshoppers that came in

millions, blackening the sky, so thick that they would "fly into the sides of houses and barns and afterwards the side of a house would be stained a brown colour" made life miserable for many farm wives.(20) Trains were often stopped by the juice of the millions of grasshoppers squashed by the wheels, and the pests frequently "chewed through the shirts on the backs of motorists in cars and farmers in the field." (21) Despite the thousands of dollars spent by the grassland municipalities to eradicate this pest, the grasshopper plagues continued throughout the decade.

Equally destructive and unpleasant for the farm wife were the crawling masses of caterpillar or army worms which moved across the land "leaving a path of destruction, destroying even Russian thistles, the last hope of farmers in the dried out district for winter cattle feed."(22) Trees were stripped bare and gardens destroyed by the worms which travelled in a straight line, going over or eating through everything in their way. Cows browsing for food often swallowed thousands of the pests daily, making their milk unpalatable.

But it was the "black blizzards" that were the hardest for many women to bear. In the drought areas dust storms were often:

> so bad that I could only see the outline of the things in the house. You could not even see each other plainly. The storm even cracked three windows with small pebbles.(23)

During the storms, which lasted anywhere from a few hours to

several days, visibility was so poor that even in the middle of the day mothers were forced to place lighted lamps in the windows so that their children could find their way home from school and their husbands could find their way in from the barn or fields.(24) Even without a dust storm, the steady, dust-carrying winds made it impossible for women to keep their homes clean. Dishes had to be placed on the table upside down; when they were turned over for dinner they left a white patch on a cloth already gray with dust. Housewives fought a losing battle daily, trying to keep the dust out of their homes, bedding and clothes. Women working in their garden often put vaseline in their nose then wrapped a water soaked dishtowel around their mouth to keep the dust from getting into their lungs and causing what was known as dust pneumonia. Clothes could not be left on the line during the day; they had to be hung out at night and brought in very early in the morning to avoid becoming covered with ground-in dust. It was not just the dust, but also the steady roar of the almost constant wind that made life miserable for many. As one prairie woman recalled:

> The wind had a moaning sound, sometimes a high piercing sound, it made my head ache. The wind blew day and night for, I am sure, five years.(25)

In many ways winter was easier for farm women. It provided a welcome relief from the constant battle against the grasshoppers, army worms, flies and the endless dust. Snow outside the door

meant less water had to hauled into homes without running water. This came as a welcome relief to farm wives who, during the rest of the year, spent numerous hours carrying water into and out of the house for washing, cooking and bathing.(26) But winter had a negative side as it also increased the isolation felt by those on farms miles from the nearest neighbour. Without cars or the money to operate them, even short trips away from home were difficult. It was not uncommon for a woman to go months without seeing anyone other than her family. That was the case with a woman who, in January, 1938, wrote:

> I went to Church on Nov. 7 and since then I have not seen one woman and only one man besides my husband. Before that it was three months during which I saw only one woman ... I feel like I am going crazy.(27)

Poverty made the isolation worse:

> We seem to be shut out from the world altogether...we have no telephone, Radio or newspaper. For this past couple of years we ... could not afford to have them.(28)

Many farm women were further trapped in their homes by the lack of warm clothing for themselves or their children. The long winter was hard on those cooped up with small children. One such woman declared:

> .... now we are all most [sic] starving, nothing in the house ... we stayed shut all winter but what will we do in the spring, the children need clothes very bad and so do I and flour too and we cannot get it, the children are ages 10,8,6,4,3 years old. I still [have] not lost hope.(29)

Isolation and deprivation in the 1930s increased rural

women's need for beauty to offset the harshness of their environment and their lives. Many were like the woman who had "no money for the commonest necessities at this time" but wanted:

> a bed of just some flowers in front of my kitchen window, where I do much of my work ... I rarely ever get to town as we have no car and only a lumber wagon for a buggy.(30)

For another, nasturtiums came to symbolize all that was wrong with the lives of poverty-stricken farm women during the Depression. These flowers conjured up a picture of her sister's farm with its rutted road, its barnyard littered with rusting equipment, and the unpainted, sun bleached-barn and house. The latter had, as she recalled:

> Six rooms, counting the fly-blown summer kitchen smelling of fresh milk in the churn. There are rows of beets and carrots, peas and corn, gulping for air among the weeds. But on the sheltered side of the house, there are the nasturtiums. Blazing in colour. The only sign of gaiety and bravery around.(31)

Her sister, mother of five, died:

> from overwork. The dreaded T.B. of the Thirties. She died years ahead of her time ... when she went, the nasturtiums didn't get tended and watered again and the dust moved in and buried what was left and the family just moved out and left that whole section of the land to the grasshoppers.(32)

Years later the flowers were "still vivid in my mind because their brightness and colour represented, I suppose, the ultimate mockery.(33)

Many women from farms and towns in the south found themselves uprooted and moved to the north as part of the

resettlement plan. There, loneliness added to the hardship faced by the families. Many who came from the city were ill-prepared for life in the bush. Resettlement was easier when groups of families from one city or farm district moved to the same area of the north, thus establishing instant communities and making the transition to a new way of life easier. Unfortunately for a large number, the move brought no end to the family's difficulties. According to a report by the Canadian Welfare Council in 1932:

> There was undoubted evidence of need and suffering on the part of many of the new settlers ... for instance, in one of the small hospitals the nurse in charge stated that some of the women brought in for care showed the most pitiful conditions of malnourishment and general need.(34)

Many of the women lived in poorly constructed homes, often no more than one-room tarpaper shacks with dirt floors. Inadequate roofing material used in many homes meant "when it rained outside it rained longer inside," forcing families to sit under umbrellas inside the house. Such hardships had to be endured "as we needed what little money we had to buy the bare necessities of life. All else had to wait."(35) Often it was only the kindness of longer established neighbours that enabled families to make it through the tough first years. In 1932, more than five hundred of the fourteen hundred families who had resettled in the Meadow Lake and Loon Lake areas of the north had applied for relief.(36) Family income was frequently supplemented by trapping and cutting cordwood, while food supplies were augmented by wild foods such

as berries, and fish or game that was shot or trapped.(37) More than one family lived on potatoes, saskatoons, choke cherries and wild meat. According to one young woman who had relocated in the north with her family:

> if dad got a moose, then we were okay. I remember two years in a row he didn't shoot a moose. Then we starved. Some days in winter mother wouldn't let us get out of bed, the three of us. She said it was too cold and we'd lose our strength. Everybody forgot us, it seemed, and when the government came and took us out after a big flood it was like being rescued from a prison. We were in a prison, starving in a prison those years.(38)

Her negative feelings about life in the north were shared by a woman who, in a plea to women still living in the south, asked:

> Do the women in town ever give a thought to their sisters who have been forced up into "back of beyond"? Do they realize the log shacks, sometimes without floors, the lack of furniture except homemade, the lack of company, the lack of stamps, mail and reading matter? Women who still remain in their own homes amid familiar surroundings, among friends, must find it hard to imagine the primitive conditions in which many unfortunate women find themselves, of which the hardest to bear is the isolation and loneliness and the memories of "days of yore". There is a feeling that one has been shoved out of life; some call it a living death.(39)

Some women succumbed to what came in the north to be known as "homesteaditis." This "special bacillus", it was said:

> thrives and flourishes particularly well in log shacks about 12X16, where moss and mud have fallen out in chunks and a vigorous wind circles in below-zero weather. It thrives too in the same intense heat that induces the sprightly mosquito to sport in millions upon the inoffensive homesteader. This microbe works well among people who have insufficient food. I wonder whether three course meals of potatoes, spuds and murphies might be called injudicious? It thrives upon homesteaders with insufficient clothing so it finds plenty of scope for its gentle pastimes

here in the winter.(40)

The symptoms of this "malady" were deemed to consist of impatience, intolerance, ill-temper and a mental and spiritual blindness to the beauty of nature and the freedom of the homesteader. The cure?

> a change of dwelling, from the aforementioned shack or hovel to a pleasant, light roomy house preferably divided into rooms and containing at least three doors and a few chairs instead of the inevitable boxes...a variety of foods must be administered, very little moose meat, potatoes and whole wheat porridge, if any, and plenty of butter, sugar, fruit cake and fruits. As regards clothing, all that has been completely patched should be discarded, otherwise a relapse will occur. Refooted stockings must go, likewise old fashioned dresses, every dud and uncomfortable shoe ... some books, a rain water barrel, a washing machine ....(41)

While poor housing, primitive conditions, hard work, loneliness, and the scarcity of food made life difficult for many of the women forced to resettle in the north, others who were fortunate enough to settle on better land or who came better prepared, managed to eke out a satisfying existence. One such family arrived in the north in April 1932 and had a garden in by June 1.

> Taken in conjunction with the wild fruit such as raspberries, strawberries and blueberries, the garden formed a large part of our living during our first year in the north.(42)

The north was not the only area of the province to be resettled. Between 1932 and 1934 sixteen families and two bachelors were relocated in the Moose Mountain district of south east Saskatchewan. Most of the families came from Regina and knew

little about farming. While some city wives may have had doubts about the wisdom of moving to a farm when they had little if any knowledge of farming, they kept such doubts to themselves. As one woman remembered:

> I didn't want to go. I knew Art was no farmer. But my dad said: 'go on, now, you'll have a little farm and a garden. You'll be alright.(43)

But most were not "alright". As in the north, the wives and families of men without carpenter skills often lived in "the poorest of shacks, some even with only earthen floors."(44) One woman who settled in the area said of her new home:

> Someone had been on this land before us, so there was already a shelter of sorts. But it was a terrible place. One log room, about 14X14, with just a tar-paper roof. In the winter we took turns sleeping so we could keep the fire going.(45)

Of the relief families relocated in this area only one had any success at farming. For the rest, life was a daily struggle; few stayed more than two years and some even less than one.(46)

Whether she lived in the north or south, in the city or on the farm, a woman's past experience played a major role in how she was affected by and reacted to the hardships of the Depression decade. For women who had already gone through the pioneer period, the thirties came as less of a culture shock than it did for others; in fact, for some it appeared to be little more than a continuation of it. These were women who still carried water into homes that lacked electricity and home

appliances, who made all the family's clothing and helped make their farms self-supporting by making cheese, butter and other products. Already experienced in making do and doing without, it seemed:

> the skills and endurance of the pioneers served them well ... They were "battle hardened", so to speak. The weaklings had been weeded out in the early days.(47)

These women were a valuable source of information for the younger, inexperienced homemakers. Women who already knew how to make soap, cottage cheese, soup from cabbage leaves, "Bennett coffee" from ground wheat or how to can fruit without sugar passed this knowledge on to those who did not. Homemade remedies, such as molasses and sulphur tonics, mustard plasters for chest rubs, cold tea for burns and sore eyes, onion poultices for earaches, and vinegar dressings for rheumatism were also exchanged. With medical help frequently thirty, forty, and even more miles away, such knowledge was often essential for survival. Experienced women also acted as midwives for their neighbours when doctors or nurses were needed but unavailable.

Meetings of church groups and women's clubs such as the Homemakers Clubs provided a forum for exchange of household information.(48) At some clubs' meetings, members responded to a roll call with housekeeping tips, favorite recipes or other kinds of useful information. Newspapers columns, such as "Mainly for Women" in the Western Producer, the farm families' weekly

"Bible", were another important medium of exchange. Each week the column carried requests for recipes and other information such as how to make a homemade brooder for chicks, or how to brighten up a kitchen floor without paint. Readers responded with answers to these questions as well as other tips of their own. How to stretch relief dollars was a frequent topic throughout the decade and it was here that the experiences of the earlier settlers were the most useful. Without this assistance, many women might not have gained the knowledge necessary to enable them to utilize the meager resources they did have to their fullest extent.

At the onset of the Depression almost twenty-five percent of the female population of Saskatchewan had lived in the province for less than ten years; most of them were foreign born.(49) For those women new to the province and the country in the 1930s, the hardships of the new land combined with the loss of family, friends and familiar places was often too much, particularly for those further isolated by their inability to speak English. One woman whose family had emigrated from Poland to Saskatchewan in 1930 recalls:

> I remember Mom crying her eyes out, lonesome for her family, and the hardship of the new land ... we couldn't speak English so it was hard to communicate with our good neighbours ... it was hard to believe one could come to such a change in living.(50)

Overcoming the language barrier was often the hardest for mothers in the home as, unlike the rest of the family, they usually had

the least opportunity to hear or use the new language. Once they did then the knowledge they brought with them, such as new ways of preparing foods, could be shared with others. In most areas of the province there appears to have been little, if any, prejudice against these newcomers. Most women apparently discovered a common bond in coping with economic problems and developed an "we're all in it together" attitude.

Indeed, attitude had a tremendous bearing on how women survived the 1930s. Most women shared a "next year" outlook common to the prairies where people had become accustomed to pinning their hopes on next years' crops. With this attitude seemed to go "a mentality that simply refused to accept ultimate defeat."(51) Such an outlook enabled many women to take a more positive approach to their lives. These were the women who could say,"It is no use moaning. We must all do the most with as little as we can and be sure to keep as cheerful as we can."(52) They refused to let the Depression beat them: "I have seen those who could not stand the disappointment," wrote one homemaker in 1937:

> some are dead, some are nervous wrecks, some the years of deprivation have left bodily and mentally so ill that they will never be the same again ... I will not let the depression get me. I am no different from others but I refuse to sit down and give up while I have brains to think and hands to work ... I have hobbies and my interests and the days are all too short for the things I want to do, and see and enjoy. I refuse to let hard times get me down.(53)

Taking back the production of household goods that had

traditionally been done by women prior to industrialization made some women feel more useful. They recognized the importance of their role in ensuring the family's survival and found satisfaction in surmounting their daily problems. They refused to worry:

> I am not going to worry about the future but just live one day at a time. I can honestly say that I am happy ... happier than when I was earning a good salary. My days are full, active and I hope useful and since this is a short life I am going to enjoy the present.(54)

Others found it difficult to maintain such a positive outlook:

> Who could be cheerful while standing over a worn-out washtub with one eye on the cracks in the washboard and the other on the rapidly filling motley array of tin cans under the sink put there to catch the drip, drip of dirty dishwater ... Who can keep cheerful under the strain of trying to keep the last tablecloth and the one and only pair of sheets clean for company? Then there is the teapot with the broken spout; the iron-holder that won't hold...the worn out linoleum whose holes can no longer be covered by the clever arrangement of rugs; the cups without handles; the leaky saucepans and kettles ... Some day I know I will get so desperate that I will open the door and throw out the whole works.(55)

Community and family activities helped women maintain their cheerful outlook. These included community dances and plays at the school, quilting bees, picnics and club activities. In at least one area a "Hard Times Fun Club" was organized to "fight that spectre 'worry'"; members met once a week and took turns providing entertainment.(56) Many of the community events were free. The Stoughton Agricultural Rally provides an example of the "home grown" fun enjoyed in communities across the province

during the Depression. This evening rally began with a number of silent movies courtesy of the Wheat Pool. These were deemed to be "clean and carried a good laugh" and were followed by a local talent show with six participants. Lunch was scheduled to follow but when the coffee was found not to be ready two men with violins accompanied by a lady on the piano stepped into the breach and "brought back those melodies that dad and mother used to dance to ... a genuine hour of old time dance memories" that got everyone dancing. The delayed lunch was followed by a modern dance that lasted from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m.(57) In other communities free movies resulted in packed halls, with families "coming a distance of 7 to 9 miles in cutters, sleighs and covered rigs" in forty-five below weather.(58) Recognizing that they were all in the same situation, people in most communities pulled together in the 1930s, creating an atmosphere that was satisfying to many women, as one woman recalled:

> It is hard for anyone who has not experienced the Dirty Thirties to realize how rich and satisfying rural living was at that time ... It seems that in those days there was so much more time for visiting than we have now ... In spite of poverty, poor roads, drought, and poor crops, many were happier than they have ever been since.(59)

As satisfying as rural life may have been in retrospect, in the 1930s many of Saskatchewan's women would have liked nothing more than:

> To kick up our heels and have a thorough change of scene; say goodbye to old drudgery and have a good time while we

> have energy left to enjoy it. Not only dream of beauty and art but have a chance to enjoy them.(60)

It was easier for women to maintain a positive attitude if their children were not starving, if their husbands were not cruel, and if they were not worked to the point of exhaustion. Churches, frequently hardpressed to provide even for their ministers, nonetheless were a source of strenght and comfort to many women. For the most part, however, it was support from other women that helped many women through family tragedies. After the birth of her stillborn child, one woman was touched by the kindness of her neighbours:

> Two of our close neighbour ladies came to my husband and said, we want to make a little coffin. They found new white cotton in my house, so it was used to cover the padded box they used. To add to the beauty of the lining, one of our friends took the lace from her new slip, so with some pink ribbons it looked lovely. It was a beautiful work of art crafted by loving hands.(61)

Women without such support had a difficult time. Many had nervous breakdowns; some committed suicide. According to officials at the Battleford Provincial hospital, admissions for 1932-1933 were expected to be "far greater ... than at anytime."(62) It took more than attitude to prevent some women from falling victim to the mental depression that so often accompanied the economic depression and drought of the 1930s.

As important as economic status, location, past experience and attitude were in shaping women's experiences during the

1930s, none played as important a role as marital status. The experiences of married and single women differed during the Depression; these differences will be the focus for the remainder of this thesis.

Footnotes

1 Jones, John Paul, "Middle Class Misery," Survey (September 1932): 402. For a discussion of the type and behaviors of the new poor appearing on relief rolls see Pauline V. Young, "The New Poor," Sociology and Social Research (Jan.-Feb. 1932): 234-242; also "The Human Cost of Unemployment," Sociology and Social Research (Mar.-Apr. 1933): 361-369.

2 Canadian Welfare Council Papers, Report on Conditions in Saskatchewan in 1932, p. 162, M.A.C.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. p. 158; for a look at the lives and working conditions of some working people see G. Makahonuk, "The Working and Living Conditions of the Saskatchewan Deep Seam Coal Miners, 1930-1939," Saskatchewan History (Spring 1980): 41-55; see also J.D. Hanson, "Estevan, 1931," On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1914-1929 (Toronto, 1975): 33-71.

5 Bolin, Winnifred D. Wandersee, "Economics of Middle Income Family Life," Journal of American History (June 1978): 64,74

6 Elder, Glen, Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience (Chicago, 1974).

7 Bird, Caroline, The Invisible Scar (New York, 1966): 274.

8 In a study done in the United States it was found that 40% of those studied decreased the amount of entertaining done at home while only 13% reported an increase in social activities; 16% took fewer vacations. Winona L. Morgan, The Family Meets the Depression (Minnesota, 1939). A similar study of families where the breadwinner was unemployed found that 47 of the 59 families studied experienced a major reduction in their social life. The extent of their resulting social isolation was "very striking", according to reasearchers, and resulted from the lack of money, the disloyalty of friends, and from feelings of humiliation and of inferiority to friends who were still employed. Mirra Komarovsky, The Unemployed Man and His Family (New York, 1972); such an isolation was also noted by Caroline Bird, The Invisible Scar, p. 60. While similar studies of the Saskatchewan experience do not exist,

correspondence with survivors of the Depression suggest that at least some experienced a similar sense of isolation.

9 Fisher, Elaine, "The Angel and the Whore: The Growth of Psychological Advertising and its focus on Women in Canada," M.A. University of Victoria, 1983, p. 105.

10 Broadfoot, Barry, Ten Lost Years (Toronto, 1973): 274.

11 Bakke, Wright E. Citizens Without Work: A Study of the Effects of Economic Depression upon a Worker's Social Relations and Practices (New Haven, 1940): 234-239.

12 Loveridge, D.M. and Barry Potyndi, From Wood Mountain to the Whitemud: A Historical Survey of the Grasslands National Park Area (Ottawa, 1983): 216, from Red Cross File "A General View of the Drought Area" n.d. p.4, N.A.C.

13 Lovick, L.D. ed., Tommy Douglas Speaks (Vancouver, 1979): 50 Caroline Bird argues that the Depression "did not depress the conditions of the poor. It merely publicized them. The poor had been poor all along." The Invisible Scar, p. 37. She states that the poor often "made do" by staying in bed a lot to conserve energy and stay warm, by eating parts of animals normally discarded, by cooking only once a week and by heating only the kitchen. Shoes were conserved by taking them off at home and by resoling them with rubber from an old tire or with cardboard. Ibid., p. 38-39.

14 Ruby Schultz Leney Lake, November 30 1932, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1325 400736.

15 Mrs. R. Wylie to Bennett, September 27 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1323 398417.

16 Western Producer, August 1931, p. 9.

17 Ibid., August 10 1933, p. 10.

18 Ibid., August 12 1937, p. 11.

19 Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, p. 89.

20 Ibid., p. 41.

21 James Gray, Men Against the Desert, p. 55, as cited in From Wood Mountain to the Whitemud, p.214.

22 Western Producer, September 2 1937, p. 2.

23 Ibid., July 8 1937.

24 Sinclair Ross has captured the effect of the prairie blizzard and the Depression on farm wives in his short story "A Lamp at Noon," A Book of Canadian Short Stories, ed. Desmond Pacey (Toronto, 1947); see also his stories "A Field of Wheat," Queen's Quarterly (Spring 1935): 31-42, and "September Snow," Queen's Quarterly (Winter 1935-36): 451-460, which also deal with the effect of the prairie on women during this period.

25 Westside Echoes Book Committee, Westside Echoes (Saskatchewan, 1980) p. 445.

26 Surveys done in the 1920s showed that a large number of farm homes were without running water and other improvements to lighten the farm wife's work. According to historian Veronica Strong-Boag, feminists in the 1920s concentrated on raising female and public consciousness regarding the extent of the housewife's labour, particularly that of the farm wife. See Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load."

27 Western Producer, January 6 1938, p. 11.

28 Horn, The Dirty Thirties, p. 232.

29 Francis Dziddyk to Bennett, April 3 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1324 400011.

30 Regina Leader Post, May 16 1931, p. 7.

31 Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, p. 54.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Canadian Welfare Council report.

35 Loon Lake Historical Society, The Loon Lake Story (Saskatchewan, 1983): 321.

36 Turtleford Sun, January 14 1932, p. 1.

37 Women were left alone to run the farm and do the chores while

their husbands were away cutting wood, trapping or thrashing. Many recall the loneliness and isolation they felt. See Rose Valley & District Historical Society, A Tribute to Our Pioneers (Saskatchewan, 1981): 458, and Arborfield History Book Committee, Echoes From the Past; A History of Arborfield and District (Manitoba, 1981) for personal accounts.

38 Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, p. 81.

39 Western Producer, February 8 1934, p. 10.

40 The Country Guide, January 1934, p. 15-16. The "murphies" referred to are a type of Irish or white potato.

41 Ibid.

42 Western Producer, April 20 1933, p. 17. For an account of one woman's reactions to her new home in the north see Mrs. A. W. Bailey, "The Year We Moved," Pages From the Past, ed. D. H. Hocking, (Saskatoon, 1979): 223-238.

43 George, Isabelle, "The Moose Mountains in the 1930s," Saskatchewan History (Spring 1980): 73.

44 Ibid., p. 72.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., p. 73.

47 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

48 Homemakers Clubs were the equivalent of the Women's Institutes which began in Ontario in 1899 as an adult education organization, on the premise that by educating women entire families could be educated. Nancy Sheehan, "Women's Organizations and Educational Issues, 1900-1930," Canadian Woman Studies (Fall 1986): 91.

49 Census of Canada, 1931, Vol. 1, Table 18, p. 458-9.

50 Rose Valley & District Historical Society, A Tribute to Our Pioneers (Saskatchewan, 1981): 490.

51 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

52 Western Producer, August 20 1931, p. 17.

53 Ibid., December 9 1937, p. 11.

54 Ibid., November 10 1932, p. 10.

55 Ibid., January 28 1937, p. 11.

56 Ibid., October 30 1930, p. 14; Reading was an important form of recreation; readers often travelled 20 miles or more by horse to exchange library books. Most small town newspapers carried a weekly chapter of a novel, usually romantic or escapist in nature, such as "Occasional Wife" by Edna Robb Webster and "The Heart of the North" by Byron Movery; The popular novels in the thirties were generally "regional idylls", novels of local colour and sentiment, portraying the life of a small area of Canada, usually a rural or semi-rural area, in a way that stresses its beauty", such novels emphasized domesticity, optimism and the goodness of the world where values such as thrift, integrity and industry always win out. See Carl Klink et al. ed., The Literary History of Canada (Toronto, 1965); also Dick Harrison, "Fiction of the 1930s, "The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada, ed. R.D. Francis et. al. (Vancouver, 1980) and Victor Carl Frieson, "The Rural Prairie Novel and the Great Depression," Prairie Forum (Spring 1977).

57 Stoughton Times, November 7 1936, p. 1.

58 Ibid., February 20 1936, p. 1; The Depression brought about changes in the music world on the prairies. While formal music was active in cities in the 1920s, this generally changed in the 1930s as more home grown music evolved and rural dance and talent shows gained in popularity. There was a resurgence of vaudeville in cities and towns, born of unemployed musicians looking for places to play their music. See T.B. Rogers and P.J. Rogers, "Some Folk Songs From the Thirties," The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada, ed. R.D. Francis Ph.d and H. Ganzevoot Ph.d (Vancouver, 1980).

59 Quill Historical Society, Reflections by the Quills (Saskatchewan, 1981) p.137-8

60 Western Producer, June 13 1935, p.11.

61 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

62 Western Producer, December 29 1932, p. 15; According to Caroline Bird, doctors in the United States blamed the effect of the Depression on personal and domestic harmony for the

steady increase after 1931 in "madness after childbirth"; The Invisible Scar p. 290.

CHAPTER FOUR

"But Woman's Place Is In The Home": Marriage and Motherhood

Married women's problems in the 1930s differed from those of their single sisters. Besides the difficult task of keeping the family clothed and fed on less money than before, many also had to deal with the psychological stress of the Depression on their husbands and children. The greater the financial hardship, the greater the stress. Loss of income through layoff or crop failure resulting from the drought was a reality for a large number of families. In 1936, at the height of the Depression, 9,604 out of 53,523 married men were unemployed. Of these 1,546 were on relief in Regina and another 747 in Saskatoon.(1) How families dealt with and survived this loss depended to a large extent on such factors as previous experience with unemployment, financial resources and obligations, family size and health, and the extent of their mutual activities. Rigidity of roles within the family was often a determinant in the survival of the family -- where the role of husband and/or wife was rigidly set and the "authority pattern was distinctly based on this specialization of function", severe disruption of the family often resulted.(2) This was particularly true in cases where unemployment of the husband forced the wife to assume the role of family breadwinner.

Sex roles were still as clearly defined in the Thirties as they had been in the previous decades despite the efforts of feminists to break down sexual stereotypes. This is evident in an essay on the role of the housewife published in the women's pages of the Western Producer in 1934. According to its female author, there was:

> no higher, holier, or more important mission than the making of a happy home ... there is no public official, no professional man, whether he be lawyer, doctor, clergyman or businessman, so important to civilization as the mother, the home-maker ... the wife and mother is the center, the mainspring of all true homelife ... She is working not for herself and her family alone, but for her country, for all humanity.(3)

Motherhood was deemed by society to be a woman's principal means of fulfillment. The husband was regarded as the provider and head of the household. In the rural areas most of the farmers, many of whom had lived alone for some time in extremely harsh conditions, were believed to have truly appreciated their wives:

> But from a superior position ... If a woman had a superior business sense she delicately guided her husband onto the right channel, and he was always seen to be the decision maker in public ... The place for women was in the home, if they had to work they were looked upon with pity, and their husbands lost some respect from the neigbours.(4)

Yet, as the depression continued, the housewife:

> who had never worked outside her own home is appearing in heavier numbers, on the application and relief lists; as her husband finds it impossible to get work, she seeks employment in housework or at "odd jobs" in an endeavor to earn the rent, or other income.(5)

The result was often a radical reversal in roles within the

family, one that required considerable adjustment on the part of all family members. In many cases fathers feared a loss of their traditional authority within the family unit. Such fears may have been unfounded. In a limited study of fifty-eight families on relief in the United States during the Depression, researchers found that despite these fears actual loss of authority occurred in only one fifth of the families studied. When it did, it was almost always the result of the predepression attitude of the wife and/or the husband's own behaviour during unemployment.(6)

As Caroline Bird suggests in her study on the effects of the depression on American women, even if women did not enter the labour force they were in many ways better off than their unemployed husbands as "even when there was not a cent in the house they had an occupation."(7) They did not experience "the formlessness of the day and the week, the absence of any required tasks, [that] caused a letdown and weakened the drive for any activity," a reaction that was a part "of the generally paralyzing effect of unemployment".(8)

Unemployment of the head of the household and the resulting shortage of money frequently brought potential differences and disagreements between husband and wife into open conflict. Wives, whose job had become more difficult with the loss of income, now had to cope with husbands under foot much of the day.

Some of the tension within the marriage came from wives who, perhaps unfamiliar with the true extent of the economic downturn, criticized their husbands for not finding a job. In the early years of the Depression at least, it is likely that such wives shared the view of many in society who still believed that anyone could find work if "he" really wanted to.(9)

On the farm, disappointing crop failures year after year were hard on both husband and wife, but it was primarily the woman who then had to stretch the available resources for yet another year. When the crops failed or the job disappeared, wives and husbands had to cope not only with their own disappointment, but also with each other's as well, all of which put a strain on the marriage and the family.(10) Studies done in the United States during the Depression have shown that after a period of disorganization and heightened tension following the loss of an income the majority of families dealt with the challenges of the Depression in much the same manner in which they dealt with other crises affecting family life. A family that was stable and well organized prior to the Depression generally experienced less catastrophic consequences than one that was not.(11) The same was likely true of Saskatchewan families. According to some of the women interviewed for this thesis, as children they often were unaware of the difficulties experienced by their parents. If there were any strains between their parents, they conclude, they

were well hidden. Others were not so fortunate and remember the stress and unhappiness of their parents, particularly that of their mothers. As one woman recalled, her mother "cried a lot and the suffering written on her face is still vivid in my memory."(12) Another remembered that:

> life was very difficult and my mother was nervous, tired and cranky and often sick ... we felt desperate and didn't know how to help. We felt we did something bad.(13)

In some homes stress, and the failure of the family to adjust to its reduced economic circumstances, resulted in the breakup of the family. Sometimes a parent escaped family problems through mental illness, desertion of the family or even through suicide. In other instances it was one or more of the children who left home.

In Saskatchewan the effect of the Depression on the family is reflected in the growing number of divorces that occurred each year. While the divorce rate had increased steadily since 1918 when only one divorce took place, these figures jumped dramatically between 1937 and 1939. Between 1929 and 1939 the number of divorces granted annually in Saskatchewan doubled.

TABLE V

Divorces Granted by Courts in Saskatchewan 1918-1939

Year	Number	Year	Number
1918	1	1929	69
1919	3	1930	62
1920	26	1931	51
1921	50	1932	61
1922	37	1933	48
1923	41	1934	62
1924	28	1935	60
1925	42	1936	79
1926	48	1937	109
1927	60	1938	122
1928	55	1939	132

Source: Canada Year Book, 1930-1941.

While the exact number of husbands who walked away from what, for them, had become a hopeless round of worry and no work may never be known, discussions with the survivors of the Depression, coupled with accounts in local histories suggest their numbers were not small. While some no doubt returned, others left their wives and children to manage as best they could. Just as devastating for other women was the loss of their husbands to mental illness or, less frequently, to suicide. One such attempt, reported in the Stoughton Times in 1933 cited

"financial worries with lack of sleep from overwracked nerves" as the reasons why one farmer from Corning drank formalin and then shot himself in the head. He survived his attempts to put an end to his problems; when questioned as to his motives he expressed the despair of many husbands when he replied simply "No good to live."(14) For men who felt themselves responsible for their family's much lowered standard of living, it was not "only a matter of the physical suffering, it was the hopelessness of the situation" that caused them to break down.(15) When these men could no longer cope, they left their wives to carry the burden alone.

In the 1930s there were still few options open to the female heads of one-parent families. Some received assistance from friends or family, or from relief agencies.(16) Others remarried. Many more remained on the farm. One farm widow recalled how, after her husband had committed suicide, she had:

> burnt off a quarter section of land of weeds and insects, it was as clean as a whistle. I traded thatched wheat for Apex Durham wheat and grew a wonderful crop ... four towns vied for it ... this gave me a tremendous boost ... I farmed it for 15 years in all, paid off all my debts, fourteen years of debt to start with, paid every cent for the farm, raised three children.(17)

Hers was not an isolated case. In 1936 more than 2,400 of the 4,582 divorced or widowed women in the province were engaged as farmers or stock raisers.(18) The number of widows in the province increased considerably during the Depression, climbing

from 14,748 in 1931 to 18,965 in 1941.

There was also a steady increase in the number of women applying for Mother's Allowance during the years of poor crops and high unemployment.

TABLE VI

Families Receiving Mother's Allowance, Saskatchewan, 1929-1939.

Year	Number	Year	Number
1929	1,214	1935	2,826
1930	1,800	1936	2,944
1931	2,183	1937	2,958
1932	2,372	1938	3,007
1933	2,511	1939	3,071
1934	2,608		

Source: Canada Year Book 1930-1941.

An amendment to the Child Welfare Act in 1937 made the Allowance, which was extended to women who were the sole support of their children as a result of the death, desertion or imprisonment of their husbands, a charge against any land owned by the father, mother or child. This represented a significant change in government policy as the Allowance had formerly been non-refundable and was a reflection of the province's tough financial position at the time. A further amendment in 1939 extended the Allowance to mothers whose husbands were

permanently disabled or in instances where the father, "having resided in Saskatchewan, moved out of the province, leaving his wife and child or children in the province, and died within one year thereafter."(20) Historians such as Veronica Strong-Boag have argued that the introduction of the Allowance with its low rates merely provided minimal subsistence for families, while it created a large pool of part-time labour and reinforced the concept of motherhood as women's sole function. The dependence on a group of men (government) rather than one man (husband) was, she claims, simply "the familiar dependency in a new form."(21)

Though Strong-Boag may be correct in her assertions, the fact is that the Allowance enabled a large number of women to provide for their young children and, therefore, keep them at home. Without such assistance many of these mothers would have had to place their children either with relatives or in the care of the government. The latter would have resulted in the children being placed in foster homes or orphanages, thus adding to the province's financial burden. As a result of the Allowance, by 1936 the number of children admitted to care in the province had dropped to 172, down from 649 in 1927.(22)

Of the six provinces which had enacted Mother's Allowance legislation by 1930, by 1937 Saskatchewan had by far the lowest rates. Unlike other provinces where the Allowance was intended to

provide an income that would enable the mother to remain at home with her children, in Saskatchewan the administration reportedly regarded the grant "merely as an assistance towards the maintainence of the family rather than as its main source of income."(23) Such an outlook, combined with the heavy demands on government resources, resulted in rates so low that:

> the mother is faced with the necessity of augmenting the allowance by any means in her power, to a point which will enable the family to eke out existence...this may be done as a result of doles obtained from the City Relief department or private sources, by the mother's long and arduous labour outside her home to the neglect of her children, by the maintainence of lodgers and boarders, most frequently of the male sex, and by other means, some of which are certainly open to question.(24)

By 1936 the rates were lower than they had been in 1930. The low rates undoubtedly reflected the province's own serious financial difficulties and the enormous pressures on its resources resulting from the Depression.

TABLE VII

Rates for a Mother and Three Children, 1936.(25)

Province	$ per mo.
Alberta	54.00
British Columbia	50.00
Manitoba	60.00
Nova Scotia	determined by family need, average 29.02
Ontario	45.00, 40.00 or 35.00--dep. on loc.
Saskatchewan	16.00

The province's low rates meant that many women who were "barely managing to keep body and soul together in better years," were by 1936 "in a truly desperate plight in a large proportion of cases."(26) This caused the Canadian Welfare Council to doubt "that the Government's annual investment on behalf of Canada's future citizens, would be likely to ensure maximum returns".(27) The Council was also concerned by what they perceived to be a lack of adequate staffing to supervise the distribution of the Allowance. Such a lack, it suggested, was of particular significance in regard to the number of foreign born women whom they felt needed "to have those Canadian Standards of living which are essential to the well being of their children interpreted to them by outside agencies".(28) Such a statement supports the view of Veronica Strong-Boag, who further argues that the Mother's Allowance served as the means by which "the state entered into inadequate homes as the active agent of middle-class values.(29)

Regardless of its weaknesses or its role in inculcating middle class values in the working class, the Allowance did guarantee a small monthly income to deserted and widowed mothers who were the sole support of their children. In 1934, for example, seventy-four deserted wives received Mother's Allowance.(30) The number had risen to eighty-seven in 1935.(31) The major drawback to the Allowance was the exclusion from

benefits of children over the age of sixteen; this often resulted in young people dropping out of school to look for work. In some instances, where hardship existed, those over sixteen were granted relief.

Wives of men who left home in search of work faced many of the same problems as those who had been deserted. Raising children alone, doing chores formerly done by two, they struggled with the uncertainty of whether their husbands would find work, whether they would return, or if they themselves would have to move. Sometimes the search for work was fruitless and only added to the family's problems. In a letter to Prime Minister Bennett, one mother explained the difficulties caused by her husband's unsuccessful search for a job:

> work is very hard to get so in March we got word that there was work in Timmins Ont. So my husband managed to get money from the council which amounted to fifteen dollars to get there and so far he has got nothing ... he is penniless and cannot get home ... We have four children nearly without food and clothes.(32)

This woman was fortunate in that she still had her home and could wait there for her husband's return. Others, having sold or lost their homes and belongings prior to their husbands' departure, were forced to live with family or friends. One such woman described how she and her husband had sold all their possessions in order to raise the money for him to search for work at the coast. No longer having a home of her own, for three months she

had:

> been visiting my home and friends and now my sister. But they are merely existing on a low salary and I am an added burden on them with son, 14 mo. old, and ill health.(33)

With or without a husband at home, it was not easy to be a homemaker and mother during the Depression. The hardships experienced by many were expressed by one who, in a letter to the Western Producer, wrote:

> At present I do the work of two women for the reason that I am compelled to use every makeshift I can think of and do without everything. We are all so ragged we can't go to our nearest neighbour. For breakfast we have porridge, bread, butter, tea and milk. Dinner and supper there is nothing but bread and butter and milk ... What I have written is all that we have had to eat for about five months and two months of that we had no milk or butter.

Besides the problem of the lack of food for good nutrition, the lack of basic household equipment made housekeeping much more difficult, as she describes:

> When I wash clothes I use a homemade washboard, an oil can to wash things in and another one to boil them in. Usually I have no soap, but put homemade lye in the water I boil things in. There are no curtains at my windows, no sheets on my beds, no paper on the walls; I've two pillow cases of flour sacks. The other sacks must be used for clothing; I've two clothes-pins and clothes-line of binder twine. I sweep my floor with an old rag.

But the psychological hardship was probably the hardest to bear. Like many others at the time she saw:

> my children growing up without any of the benefits of healthy happy childhood. I see my husband working himself to death for -- what? I see myself growing old before my time; growing cynical and bitter and dragging myself along doing the work of two and without the strength to do the

work of one, needing medical attention as well as food.(34)

Health and the lack of medical attention appears to have been a universal concern for Saskatchewan women in the 1930s. The poor health of themselves, or their family, is mentioned in a large majority of the letters written to newspapers or to Prime Minister Bennett by Saskatchewan women. There is little doubt that the lack of proper food and clothing took its toll in the health of a large number of families. In 1933 Premier Anderson's claim that no one in the province had died or would die of malnutrition was disputed by the superintendent of Hafford General Hospital. Responding to an inquiry by the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section), Dr. Arthur Rose confirmed that a young girl admitted to the hospital with typhoid fever actually died of malnutrition. In declaring Anderson's claim to be only partly correct, he stated:

> Dr. Anderson is well aware that children are constantly dying from diseases which they have contracted, which under normal conditions with proper nourishment they would have been able to successfully resist.(35)

The child in question was one of three from a German Mennonite family admitted to hospital. The doctor went on to add that the family had been found to be living entirely on starches and as a result:

> both their protein and vitamin elements were absolutely lacking ... Any scientist will agree with me that it is just as truly a starvation as is the starvation which results from the complete lack of food.(36)

By 1937 cases of scurvy were being reported by medical men in various parts of the province.(37) The Relief Commission's refusal to permit purchases of fruits or vegetables other than potatoes or dried beans was a real hardship to those without gardens, or whose gardens had been destroyed by pests, drought, hail or frost, and likely contributed to the health problems of relief recipients. The lack of access to hospitals and doctors because of poverty or distance contributed to the problem as well. Speaking in the mid-thirties of the deaths of two young men with families, Tommy Douglas, then a minister at Weyburn, claimed they:

> died because there was no doctor or hospital available, and they hadn't the money to get proper care ... What do you say to a woman whose family is on relief, whose husband has died because they couldn't get the kind of medical care he needed, a woman who has no prospects for the future and very little in the way of social assistance?(38)

Even where Red Cross outpost hospitals existed, conditions were often primitive; at one such hospital a carpenter had to build an extension to each end of a dresser so that the doctor could perform an appendectomy.(39)

There was an effort in the 1930s to make better health care available to all Saskatchewan residents. It became more accessible to people in rural areas with the passage of the Rural Municipality Act, 1929-1930. Under chapter 34, section 173, municipalities without the services of a doctor were allowed

to pass such laws as were necessary to allow the municipality to use its taxes to pay a grant to a doctor agreeing to set up a practice in the municipality. This grant was not to exceed $1,500 per annum (or the amount necessary to bring the doctor's salary up to that amount). The maximum salary allowed any municipal doctor under the plan was $5,000. The intent was to encourage doctors to move out into the rural areas while at the same time assuring them a minimum salary.

The municipal doctor generally agreed to assume the duties of Medical Health Officer in his or her area and to give free medical services to indigent patients, thus assuring relief recipients within the municipality of medical services.(40) Under the legislation resident ratepayers received free medical services as well as free vaccinations against smallpox and diptheria.(41) Although it was not recognized as such, the plan was the first step toward state medicine which would come later. It did little for those outside municipalities or from municipalities which were too poor to obtain or maintain the services of a doctor.

The call for state medicine toward the end of the Depression received the support of many women in the province as individuals and organizations alike pressed for its implementation. Proponents of state medicine sent letters to

newspapers citing cases of sever suffering that had occurred as the result of inadequate or absent medical care. A few examples here will indicate the kind of medical hardship experienced during the 1930s.

One mother from the drought area encountered problems in obtaining medical assistance for her small son whose tonsils enlarged to the point of closing his throat. Lacking transportation into town because "we have no car, only a Bennett wagon and the horses were busy cutting what crop we had", she found a neighbour who was willing to take them to the nearest hospital. There she found the doctor expected a fifteen dollar fee before performing the needed surgery. Lacking the necessary fees she finally convinced the doctor to go ahead with the operation, but only after considerable argument.(42) Another mother told of losing her unborn twins prematurely because she could not afford to get medical care when problems developed during the pregnancy.(43)

The lack of care received by her neighbour's teen age son who was suffering from polio, prompted one writer to ask:

> Have you ever tried to keep things going on seven dollars a month, to nurse a very sick boy in a dark log shack without adequate bedding, food or equipment? Have you ever watched your eldest boy change from a strong healthy lad to a restless tossing shadow? Have you ever tried to help a tottering baby of sixteen to walk, only to have him fall fainting at your feet? These parents did.(44)

It was four months before "a benevolent government sent him to a

Regina hospital," she concluded.(45)

In rural parts of the province where it was not uncommon for families to live fifty or sixty miles from the nearest doctor or hospital, the medical care that was available was often the direct result of the actions of women's groups. Beginning in the 1920s, these groups had organized school dental clinics and established health centers where pre-school children were examined and mothers advised on proper care.(46) Tonsil clinics were also sponsored in some parts of the province. Had it not been for the efforts of women, many more children in Saskatchewan would have been denied even basic health care.

As in earlier decades, children were an important part of life for married women during the Thirties. Large families of five or more children were relatively common, particularly in the rural areas.

TABLE VIII

Number of Children in Rural and Urban Families, Saskatchewan, 1931.

Number	Rural	Urban
1	22,678	14,931
2	20,667	12,532
3	16,309	8,439
4	12,602	5,289
5	8,883	2,991
6	8,026	1,728
7	4,257	983
8	2,912	517
9	1,684	246
10	920	128
11	448	58
12	188	20
13	78	3
14+	50	2

Source: Census of Canada, 1931, Vol 5, Table 98 p. 1396

Of the fifty families with fourteen or more children, almost half were of German origin. With so many mouths to feed, the news of another pregnancy was often a disaster rather than a blessing for the family.

Women in the 1930s had long sought, "if only unconsciously, some control over their bodies."(47) Though they did not always accept the inevitability of having large families, many knew little about birth control. What they did know they found out in confidential conversations with other women. Prolonged nursing, withdrawal, abstinence, jellies and condoms were all used to prevent conception. The rhythm method, used since the turn of the

century, had become a more reliable means of birth control for some after the establishment of the correct ovulation cycle in the 1920s. Homemade douches such as the one made from cocoa butter, boric acid and tannic acid were popular with some women, more because they were easily obtained than because of their high rate of effectiveness. Long a private issue, birth control had become a public one in the 1920s as the socialist working class movement began to press for changes in the law prohibiting the advertisement and sale of contraceptives.(48) By the 1930s the issue had been taken over by middle class reformers who saw the social and economic benefits of promoting birth control among the poorer classes.

Birth control in the 1930s was as controversial an issue as abortion is today. Few people were neutral on the topic. Opponents to the practice saw its use as a perversion of the family which reduced marriage to little more than legalized prostitution. Others argued that control of the body organs would result in pathological conditions.(49) Few doctors had much knowledge of contraceptive techniques; those who did seldom were willing to help women worn out from bearing and caring for too many children by providing them with birth control information. Regardless of a woman's economic situation and the number of children she had already, motherhood, it was argued, was:

her distinctive functioning ... motherhood sets her apart

> in a world of brooding and pain and self-sacrifice into which man cannot enter. This is the holy of holies of our common humanity where woman makes her sacrifice for the race. At the threshold of that sacred place man can only kneel in hushed devotion.(50)

Others declared "if a woman looks on housework and the care of children as a bore she should decline that life" and remain single.(51)

As early as 1928 the women's section of the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) had considered a resolution pressing for the lifting of the ban against safe contraceptives, for the training of all doctors in their use, and for the establishment of birth control clinics in all hospitals. The motion, tabled at the 1928 convention, was passed at the 1930 convention without dissent or debate. The convention's action prompted a flurry of letters to the women's page of the Western Producer, both for and against the action. A practical approach to the controversial issue was expressed by one woman who wrote:

> Whether we like it or not the use of contraceptives is more and more increasing and it is impossible to stem the tide. Let us be intelligent therefore and handle the problem in an intelligent manner.

Questions of physical health, she concluded, were for doctors and psychiatrists, not priests.(52)

Apparently, the controversy raised by the resolution proved too much for the U.F.C.(S.S.), which was considering public involvement in politics at the time. At their 1931 convention

heavy debate over the issue prompted a successful motion by Louise Lucas to have the resolution rescinded for the sake of unity.(53) To appease those on the other side, a milder resolution asking doctors to work within the law to make birth control information available on request was passed.(54) This complete about-face raises some interesting questions. It is difficult to believe that the split over birth control was the result of the members' personal beliefs; if this were the case the resolution would not have passed the previous year without dissent. It is more likely that the public controversy it aroused proved too unsettling for the members of the U.F.C. (S.S.) who were more concerned about the party's possible standings at the polls than about the problems of women and unwanted pregnancies. Thus the women of Saskatchewan entered the Depression with the legislation that could have helped make many of their lives easier still beyond their reach.

The official government stand on the entire question of birth control was made clear in a booklet on the topic published by the Canadian Welfare Council in 1934 and circulated throughout the country. Its author, Helen MacMurchy, claimed that birth control:

> is against one's better judgment. It is unnatural. It is contrary to one's higher instincts. It is repugnant to a member of the medical profession whose work and whose desire is to promote health and happiness.(55)

The argument that the use of contraceptives would ultimately result in healthier and happier mothers who would then have more energy for the children they did have was completely overlooked by the author whose only concession to the use of birth control was in cases where:

> the health of mother has suffered from excessive child-bearing ... Help in these cases is a matter of such urgent importance to the individual, to the family, to the medical profession and to the community that in some way it should be given.(56)

The 1936 trial of Dorthea Palmer, charged with distributing birth control information in Ontario, brought into the open a practice that had already been accepted by a large number of women.(57) The Palmer defense was based and won on a loophole in the law which permitted the sale of contraceptives when it was in the interest of the "public good". In view of the the tough economic times, and in the case of poor families, the defense argued, birth control was in the best interests of the country. Thus the economics of the 1930s accomplished what women's claims to a better life in the 1920s could not.(58)

The growing acceptance and practice of some form of birth control regardless of legality is probably reflected in the birth rate which began dropping in the 1920s and continued to do so on into the 1930s.

TABLE IX

Live Births, Saskatchewan, 1921-1939.

Births	Numbers	Rate Per 1,000 pop.
Av. 1921-25	21,580	27.7
Av. 1926-30	21,298	24.7
Av. 1931-35	20,325	21.9
1937	18,640	19.9
1938	18,230	19.4
1939	18,059	19.0

Source: The Canada Yearbook, 1941, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Ottawa: King's Printer, 1941.

When birth control methods failed, women, as in earlier decades, frequently resorted to abortion as a second line of defense against an unwanted pregnancy. While some went to abortionists, most tried home remedies first. These included bleedings, hot baths, strenuous exercise, consumption of large quantities of gin or "drinking an infusion of one of the traditional abortifacients such as tansy, quinine, pennyroyal, rue, black hellebore, ergot of rye, savin or cotton root" all of which were believed to have the ability to bring on menstruation.(59) Commercial abortifacients were also available; advertisements alluded to their intended use while being careful not to break the law forbidding the advertisement or sale of "any medicine, drug or article intended or represented as a means of

preventing conception or causing abortion."(60) The following quotation from an advertisement "One Woman to Another", which appeared in the Stoughton Times in 1935, hinted at the product's real use:

> Don't be alarmed or nervous when nature fails. Get a married woman's dependable secret about regulating happiness and relief from distress...used by physicians and nurses for over a quarter of a century because of reputed power to relieve pain and aid in restoring a normal flow.

Included in the advertisement were testimonials from users, such as "I was delayed for nine weeks. Had natural flow in three days" and "I was two months overtime ... started menstruating on 5th. day," which left little doubt about the product's supposed abortifacient powers.(61)

If drugs failed and a woman was desperate, she might take the risky step of attempting to dilate the cervix with slippery elm, a sponge tent, catheter or coat hanger. An abortionist was often the last resort. Because abortion was illegal it is not possible to determine how frequently it was practiced and whether it became more common as the Depression dragged on. What is available, however, are statistics as to the number of women who were reported to have died from abortions. If the number of these deaths is indicative of the actual number of abortions that took place then it is clear that a larger number of women resorted to abortions during the toughest years of the Depression.

TABLE X

Maternal Deaths in Saskatchewan Resulting From Abortions and Self-induced Abortions, 1929-1939.

Year	Total	Abortions	Abortions (self-induced)
1929	3	3	0
1930	3	3	0
1931	16	10	6
1932	21	18	3
1933	13	9	4
1934	12	9	3
1935	10	9	1
1936	13	11	1
1937	20	16	4
1938	11	11	0
1939	7	4	3

Source: Canada Year Book, 1933-1941.

It is not possible to tell from these statistics how many of these unfortunate women were married and how many were single, or whether abortions occurred more frequently in rural or in urban areas. There may have been many other instances where women died from an abortion but whose deaths were reported as something else, such as infection or excessive bleeding, in order to save the family embarrassment.

Despite abortion and birth control, women continued to have more children than they either wanted or could afford. The desperation of mothers in this situation is made painfully clear in this mother's plea for assistance of some kind:

> I am the mother of eleven children and am to have another. I am on the very edge of a nervous breakdown. I haven't had a holiday since my first baby came, which is nearly fifteen years ago. We are too poor for me to go into a sanatorium. But I was wondering if I could go to a maternity home or some quiet place. I would be willing to help other patients or care for babies, as long as I could get a good rest in between time. You understand with a big family there is always work to be done and I'm not one who can sit around and leave it undone even if I am not feeling well.(62)

In spite of the country's rapture with the Dionne quintuplets and the intense race for the most children in Toronto's so called "stork derby", the reality for most women in the 1930s was that too many children meant more work and greater stress as well as less of life's necessities for everyone.(63)

Though it may not have been any consolation to a woman faced with an unwanted pregnancy, the general improvement in medical care and the greater awareness of health and nutrition during the Thirties resulted in a drop in maternal mortality rates in Saskatchewan. This reflected a general downward trend throughout Canada as a whole.

TABLE XI

Maternal Death Rates, Saskatchewan 1926-1939

Year	No. of Deaths	Per Live Births
Av. 1926-1930	126	5.9
"" 1931-1935	91	4.5
total 1936	86	4.5
1937	86	4.6
1938	46	2.5
1939	59	3.6

Source: The Canada Year Book, 1941, p. 103.

The sharp drop in the number of maternal deaths in 1938, followed by a rise the following year is not reflected in the statistics for Canada as a whole which remained stable at 4.2% both years. At the present there appears to be no apparent reason why such a drop occurred. While these statistics are useful, they do not reveal the areas of the province where the deaths occurred. They provide no answer as to whether the mortality rate was higher in any particular area, such as areas without access to health care, than they had been in previous years, or among particular ages or groups of women. Without further information the answers to such questions can only be a matter of speculation.

For pregnant women on isolated farms or in municipalities without a doctor, however, basic medical care was still

frequently physically and economically out of reach or at least difficult to obtain. If there was no money for gas for the car and the family lacked a horse and wagon, then the expectant mother often had to walk miles to the nearest doctor or community hospital for her check up. In a letter one woman recalled the difficulty she experienced in getting to a doctor for a prenatal check up:

> To accomplish this my husband took me 6 miles to my father who took me 10 miles by team, to South Fork to go on a train to Shaunovan.(64)

Fortunately she had family in Shaunovan and was able to remain there until her baby's arrival. Many farm and poorer women gave birth without a doctor in attendance, some with the help of a midwife, others with only a neighbour or their husband in attendance. Lack of money frequently was a barrier to receiving medical help; many rural doctors received meat or produce in payment for their attendance at a birth.

With the exception of 1932 and 1937, infant mortality rates, which had declined throughout the twenties, continued their downward trend during the Depression.

TABLE XII

Infant Mortality Rates per 100,000, Saskatchewan, 1921-1939.

Year	Number
Av. 1921-25	1,789
Av. 1926-30	1,559
Av. 1931-35	1,261
1936	1,030
1937	1,245
1938	941
1939	930

Source: Canada Year Book, 1941. Table 23, p. 97

Again the statistics do not tell the whole story as they are not broken down as to cause or place of death.

Not infrequently infant deaths occurred when parents were unable to get their ill child to the doctor, either because of their isolated location or because of the severe Saskatchewan winters. While similar conditions had existed in the previous decade, in many cases they were compounded in the 1930s by the loss of the family car. The pain of losing an infant this way is evident in this mother's account of the death of her four month old son:

> We couldn't get him to the doctor and Doctor Nichol could not get to where we lived because of a snow storm and drifts. So we buried him in the Llewelyn cemetery with only us, the family, attending.(65)

While distance, weather and poverty denied many new mothers and their infants medical assistance in times of need, some effort was made during the 1920s and 1930s to ensure that low income, expectant mothers had access to basic health care. During this period many pregnant women with little or no income received assistance from the Saskatchewan government in the form of a twenty-five dollar maternity grant. The grant was introduced in 1920 with the aim of reducing:

> maternal and infant mortality by assisting in providing medical attention for those mothers living remote from a city, town or village where a physician is resident and who are financially unable to secure the necessities for the confinement or the services of a physician.(66)

The grant was expected to cover the costs of prenatal and postnatal examinations as well as medical attendance at the time of birth, all of which had to be obtained to ensure eligibility. This meant that the new mother would receive at least minimal health care. It also meant that the grant did not arrive until well after the baby's birth; in some cases the baby's first birthday arrived before the grant. During the Depression this often created a problem for new mothers. Those who relied on it to obtain clothing for the new baby had to make do as best they could. One first time mother, who had to wait more than a year for the maternity grant, recalled how she managed to acquire a layette for her new baby:

> my stepmother bought flannelette on her relief check & made 1 doz. diapers for me. My mother-in-law gave me her old

> baby clothes ... very old fashioned ones. I hand sewed under shirts from my father's worn out woolen underwear.(67)

As a result of the downturn in the economy, a growing number of women became eligible for the grant, putting an increasing strain on the already hard pressed financial budget. Between May and September 1931 alone, 9,462 mothers applied for and received the grant. In the fall of that year it was discontinued by the provincial government.(64) The decision was based strictly on finances; with seven months still to go in the fiscal year, the $30,000 budget had already been exceeded by $9,000!(69)

The government replaced the grant with a maternity package in September 1931. Like its predecessor, it was a direct, non-repayable grant. The stated value of the package was ten dollars and it included:

two cotton shirts

one yard of eiderdown flannelette for a blanket

one cake of soap

one pair of booties

nine diapers

ten cotton binders

two flannelette gowns

one package of pins

Hardly excessive, the package was criticized by women who claimed the same items could be purchased for less than four dollars from

the Eaton's catalogue. When the question was raised in the Saskatchewan Legislature in 1933, it was admitted that the package had a value "when purchased in quantity of $2.90."(70) It is not surprising that the package met with such criticism!

While it did provide clothing for the new baby, albeit somewhat sparse, the package did not assist the mother in obtaining medical care. This gap was partly filled by the Lieutenant Governor's Emergency Distress Fund, also initiated in 1931, which provided a grant of fifteen dollars for maternity cases where the family was experiencing severe hardship.(71) The money for the fund came, in part, from various non-profit groups; the remainder came from the government.

The same delays and red tape involved in the maternity grant were carried over into the maternity package, often making it difficult to obtain for the very women it was designed to help. Such was the case with one woman who, in a letter to the Western Producer, told of her frustrations with government bureaucracy:

> I wrote to the Department of Health at Regina for the maternity parcel and received a letter and papers to fill out but those had to be witnessed by a J.P. We live 19 miles from one and it would cost me from 25 cents to $1, when I did not have one cent. I filled the papers out and sent them back to Regina explaining that it was impossible for me to walk 10 miles to have them filled out by a J.P. I explained that we did not have the money to get them signed and also that there was not a doctor nor a hospital here; that the Red Cross was 19 miles away and the doctor 25 miles away and we had no way to get there but to walk. The Department of Health sent the papers back to me to be

> witnessed by the J.P., and by that time the baby had arrived and nothing but the papers from the Department of Health to wrap him in ... I was all alone when the time came and had to be nurse and doctor both, as my husband was threshing to get a few dollars for food this winter.(72)

In 1934, as a result of the combined pressure from women's and farmer groups, the government reintroduced the maternity grant.

The return of the grant was a welcome relief to expectant mothers who were already struggling to stretch the family's often limited resources. It was also a victory for those who saw the need to make basic medical care available for all new mothers.(73) Though the birth rate had continued the decline begun in the 1920s, as birth control information became more available and its practice more acceptable, the temporary increase in infant and maternal mortality rates in 1932 was a clear indication of the need to assist those who could not afford medical attendance during pregnancy. It is not just a coincidence that both mortality rates rose during the worst years of the Depression.

For far too many Saskatchewan mothers, life in the 1930s was a continual round of work and worry. Indeed, worry was regarded as one of the leading causes of poor mental health in the province during the 1930s; as early as 1932 women's organizations were asked to help their "community to become better informed on this ever increasing problem."(74) Wives, it seemed, were most

apt to experience poor mental health, perhaps because, as one woman suggested, they felt "the hard times more than men because we have not the same opportunity of talking about them; we stay at home and worry."(75) Author Max Braithewaithe, a teacher in Saskatchewan during the Depression, described the mothers of his students as all having "the same look of tired resignation", it was only briefly that he caught a glimpse:

> of what that face had been before the years ... only a few really ... of drought and cold and worry and childbearing had cast them in the sad mould. The prairies are hard on women.(76)

There is little doubt that the Depression years compounded the difficulties faced by women on the prairies. How many succumbed to its pressures or, having survived, bore permanent emotional scars as a result of its physical and emotional hardships will never be known. Because they were hidden in the home, the suffering of women was seldom made public. While the small town newspaper report of a woman who "had a nervous breakdown on February 8" and for whom "hopes for...recovery are faint" was rare, the condition it described, unfortunately, was not.(77)

Footnotes

1 Census of Canada, 1936, Vol. 2 p. 602.

2 Wright E. Bakke, Citizens Without Work: A Study of the Effects of Economic Depression Upon the Worker's Social Relations and Practices (New Haven, 1940).

3 Western Producer, March 29 1934, p. 15.

4 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

5 Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada, June-August, 1932, Report for the Prime Minister Office, U.N.B. Library, Bennett Papers, Vol 781, as quoted in Michiel Horn, The Dirty Thirties (Canada 1972): 265-266

6 Mirra Komarovsky, The Unemployed Man and His Family (New York, 1940, reprint 1972)

7 Caroline Bird, Invisible Scar (New York, 1966): 57.

8 Komarovsky, The Unemployed Man, p.39.

9 Jane Adams, "Social Consequences of Depression" Survey (January 1932): 370.

10 For a personal account of the effects of living on relief see James Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto, 1966).

11 Dr. Ruth Shonle Cavan and Katherine Howland, The Family and the Depression (Chicago, 1938, reprint 1972): viii.

12 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

13 Ibid.

14 Stoughton Times, May 4 1933, p. 1.

15 Lewis H. Thomas ed., The Making of a Socialist: the Recollections of T.C. Douglas (Edmonton, 1982): 70.

16 For example the Census of Canada, 1936, Table 22, p. 602 records 26 married women on relief.

17 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

18 See Census of Canada, 1936, Table 7, p. 502.

19 Census of Canada, 1931, Table 18 p. 639; Census of Canada, 1941, Table 7, p. 94.

20 Labour Gazette, June 1939, p. 583.

21 Veronica Strong-Boag, "Wages for Housework: Mother's Allowance and the Beginning of Social Security in Canada," Journal of Canadian Studies (1979): 33; for another view see Phillip H. Hapworth, "Family Policy in Canada: the Case of Mothers Allowance," Social Policy and Administration Network Newsletter (June 1980).

22 Ibid p. 46.

23 Canadian Welfare Council Memorandum on Mother's Allowance in Saskatchewan, p. 1, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10, Vol. 62.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid. The Saskatchewan government should not criticised to harshly for the low Allowance rates. At a time when demands on its resources had increased tremendously as a result of the Depression, its own income had declined sharply. Between 1929 and 1933, provincial revenues had declined 72%; Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion Provincial Relations: Canada, 1867-1939 (1940), Book 1, p.150; as cited in S.M.Lipset, Agrarian Socialism (Toronto, 1950): 93.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Strong-Boag, "Wages for Housework"; for an account of the efforts of child care experts to usurp the authority of the mother over herself and her children in the 1920s see Strong-Boag's, "Intruders in the Nursery: Childcare Professionals Reshape the Years One to Five, 1920-1940," Childhood and the Family in Canadian History, ed. Joy Parr (Toronto, 1982)

30 Labour Gazette, March 1935, p. 244.

31 Ibid., April 1935, p. 332.

32 Mrs. MacRae to Prime Minister Bennett, July 6 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., 399003.

33 Mrs. Joudrie to Bennett, July 3 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1325 400463.

34 Western Producer, September 10 1934, p. 10.

35 Ibid., May 4 1933, p. 8.

36 Ibid.

37 S.M.Lipset, Agrarian Socialism (Toronto, 1950): 95.

38 Thomas, The Making of a Socialist, p. 59.

39 Loon Lake Historical Society, The Loon Lake Story (Saskatchewan, 1983): 143.

40 An amendment to the legislation the following year defined an indigent as "a person who is actually destitute of means from his own resources of obtaining medical assistance and treatment," Saskatchewan Valley News, May 1 1930, p. 1.

41 F.C. Middleton, "The Municipal Doctor Scheme in Saskatchewan," Canadian Nurse (June 1980).

42 Western Producer, September 15 1938, p. 11.

43 Ibid., January 7 1937, p. 13.

44 Ibid., February 3 1938, p. 11.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., July 23 1939, p. 13.

47 Eliane Leslau Silverman, The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930 (Montreal, 1984): 59.

48 See Angus McLaren, ""What Has This To Do With Working Class Women?" Birth Control and the Canadian Left, 1900-1939" Social History (November 1981): 435-454.

49 The perception of a relationship between a woman's reproductive organs and pathological conditions in other parts of her body had its roots in the Nineteenth century. At that

time it was believed that conditions such as depression and hysteria could be cured by removing the patient's ovaries; See Wendy Mitchinson, "A Medical Debate in Nineteenth-Century English Canada: Ovariotomies," Histoire Sociale/Social History (May 1984): 133-147; Also "Historical Attitudes to Women and Childbirth" Atlantis (Spring 1979): 13-34.

50 Helen Macmurchy Sterilization? Birth Control? (Toronto, 1934): 129.

51 Western Producer, June 5 1930, p. 11.

52 Macmurchy, Sterilization, p. 113.

53 It is difficult to determine where Louise Lucas stood on the question of birth control. It may be, in this instance, that she regarded the question of the 100% wheat pool, one of the party's main platforms, to be of greater importance. Lucas played a prominent part in the organization of the C.C.F. In 1932, she was elected to the board of the National Council and assisted with the drafting of the C.C.F. Manifesto. She was a tireless campaigner in Saskatchewan throughout the 1930s. For an autobiography see J.F.C. Wright, The Louise Lucas Story (Montreal, 1965).

54 Candace Savage, Foremothers: Personalities and Issues From the History of Women in Saskatchewan (n.p., 1975): 8.

55 Helen Macmurchy, Sterilization, p. 148.

56 Ibid., p. 151.

57 It was estimated in 1934 that 90% of Canadian married couples used some form of birth control, Ibid., p. 116.

58 For more information on the the Palmer case see Dianne Dodds, "The Canadian Birth Control Movement on Trial, 1936-37," Ontario History (March 1983): 411-428.

59 Angus McLaren, "What Has This To Do With the Working Left?" p. 330.

60 Ibid. p. 323; reference to the 1892 Criminal Code, section 179c.

61 Stoughton Times, February 14 1935, p. 4.

62 Western Producer, October 24 1935, p. 11.

63 When Charles Vance Millar died in Toronto in 1926, his will directed that the bulk of his $750,000 estate (a fortune at that time) be left to the Toronto mother who gave birth to the greatest number of children in the ten years following his death. Ultimately the prize was shared by four mothers who had given birth to nine children each, but not until after several court cases and much publicity. See Mark M. Orkin, The Great Stork Derby (Markham Ont., 1982).

64 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

65 Saltcoats & District Historical Society, Saltcoats Roots & Branches (Saskatchewan, 1982): 761.

66 Western Producer, November 14 1934, p. 1; though the amount appears small, there is no evidence to suggest it was insufficient to cover the intended costs. It may be that in such cases doctors based their fee on the amount of the grant; at a time when doctors often received farm goods in exchange for service (or no fee at all) the grant guaranteed a cash payment -- when it arrived.

67 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

68 Journal of the Saskatchewan Legislature, 1932, Vol xxx, p. 207.

69 Western Producer, October 15 1931, p. 10.

70 Ibid., March 2 1933, p. 11.

71 Ibid., February 4 1932, p. 10.

72 Ibid. December 8 1932, p.10.

73 See Suzann Buckley, "Efforts to Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality in Canada Between the Two World Wars" Atlantis (Spring 1977): 76-84.

74 Western Producer, April 7 1932, p. 10.

75 Ibid., June 12 1930, p. 19.

76 Max Braithwaite Don't Shoot the Teacher (Toronto, 1965): 56.

77 Saskatchewan Valley News, April 27 1938, p. 1.

CHAPTER FIVE

"It Was a Sort of Survival": Life on Relief in Saskatchewan

With no established welfare system to turn to at the onset of the Depression, the families of the unemployed quickly became destitute. Once their private resources ran out they had only two choices -- to apply to a charity for help, or to approach their local municipal council for assistance. The latter was potentially embarrassing; accounts such as the following were common in small town newspapers early in the Depression:

> That the following accounts be passed and paid, relief for the Stennel family ... Mrs. Cornelia Russel, Sec. tres. Fraser School District No. 275 drawing attention to strained circumstances of the Glasser family and pointing out that as a result the children were unable to attend school because of the need for clothing.(1)

These became less frequent, and largely disappeared as the decade wore on and the number of people on relief grew.

Assistance to needy families was haphazard during the first year of the Depression, but by the fall of 1930 the Red Cross, the Wheat Pool and the United Farmers of Canada had agreed to co-ordinate relief activities in the province. They did so until the establishment of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission in 1932, although even afterward they continued to assist when and where possible. The Red Cross remained particularly active, supplying clothing and medical assistance to most of the rural areas of the

province.

Relations between the Red Cross and the Relief Commission on matters of clothing were not always cordial. In 1933 the Red Cross was accused of poor management in this matter by Commission Chairman H. Block, who, in a confidential letter to Prime Minister Bennett, wrote:

> There was over one hundred suits of underwear and that in one size, there was more than the total consumption of Canada for one year and there was so many small sized mackinaw coats that this stock could not fill 25% of the ordinary orders. You will readily understand if these coats had been oversized instead of small sizes they would have met the relief requirements.(2)

The clothing issued by the Commission was not without its critics either. Some women complained that the clothes they received from the Relief Commission were of poor quality:

> Our relief clothing (what we were allowed, which wasn't much) was hardly worth bringing home. Boys' fleece-lined underwear was "holes" after the second washing, shoes were "hole" in the sole after three weeks wear. All stockings were poor, children's stockings when washed got so long and narrow in the feet that they could hardly be worn. Men's mitts were the poorest, overall denim and much of the other material was punk. No matter where you go around here, you hear the remark the clothing given out was rubbish, but still it was not cheap priced.(3)

For those in need, the shortage of adequate clothing was a problem that became more acute as existing clothing wore out and reserves used to make over clothing became exhausted. Saskatchewan's cold winters combined with poorly heated homes heightened the need for warm clothing.(4) The problem became

even more serious in 1933 when the economically hard pressed Commission ceased to supply clothing to needy families. Some of the more fortunate of Saskatchewan's destitute women received bundles of used clothing gathered by relatives in other parts of Canada or elsewhere. The rest relied on local charities. Even this source threatened to dry up, according to the Western Producer, which, in the fall of 1933, reported "that there (was) practically no second-hand clothing available for the country."(5)

Assistance continued to come, however, from churches, service clubs and women's groups around the province and across Canada. Throughout the Depression, Canadians opened their closets and sent out bundles of clothing to those in need in Saskatchewan. In 1931 the United Church of Canada alone, in an "adopt a church in the dried out area" program, sent 15 tons of clothing to Saskatchewan.(6)

While the contents of such bundles usually revealed the generosity of the donors, occasionally they showed a complete lack of understanding of the basic nature of the need. On one such occasion, mothers who received boxes of clothing from the United Church Missionary Society hoped for sweaters, coats and mitts; what they found were women's high button shoes, whale bone corsets, satin and crepe evening dresses, fancy hats and a

feather boa!(7)

Out of necessity, women were often imaginative in making over the donated clothing that did not fit the member of the family most in need. Some used comic strips, or the children's cut out section of the newspaper, as an inspiration for their efforts:

> We used Jane Arden's fashions and we could take anything and make it into high fashion. That was recycling and we had it down to a science ... it was a sort of survival.(8)

The feelings of those who had to rely on donated second hand clothing varied. In some families "trying on" days when clothing arrived were regarded as fun.(9) While most could accept these gifts, recognizing the temporary circumstances that made such assistance necessary, others shared the shame and degradation felt by the woman who wrote to the Western Producer:

> I trust that you may never know the feeling that goes with having to wear "a stranger's cast-offs" and I hope that life has no more bitter hour in store for me than the one I went through when I received my bundle of used clothing, tied up with a binder twine and none too clean."(10)

Under guidelines set out by the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, the allotted clothing provided for women by that agency included one vest and bloomers, one pair of shoes, one pair of stockings, one slip, one print house dress and sweater or one wool dress. Corsets and corselettes were not provided. Nor were coats except in cases where the woman worked; rubbers were

provided only where urgently needed.(11)

The lack of provision for outer clothing for housewives meant confinement in the home for women such as this one, who, in a letter to Prime Minister Bennett, wrote:

> I didn't go out of the house all winter on account of having no shoes to my feet. Really it has been the darkest days of my life.(12)

In at least one family it was found that the "girls and mother need coats badly, in fact they have to take turns to go out with the one coat (a summer one at that)."(13)

In 1934, the Relief Commission was abolished, following the defeat of J.T. Anderson's Conservative government. Under the new Liberal government, relief was handled by the Bureau of Labour and Public Welfare which allotted clothing assistance to families on a sliding scale. Rates ranged from twelve dollars per year for one person to fifty-eight dollars for a family of seven and one hundred and twenty-five dollars for a family of twenty. These were maximum amounts and were never given "where a lesser amount will take care of the urgent requirements of the applicant."(14) Most frequently, the actual amounts given were considerably less. The difficulty in clothing the family on the meager funds available was expressed by numerous women in letters to the women's page of the Western Producer and in letters to the Prime Minister. This letter to the newspaper is typical of

the experiences described by others:

> We are a family of six, on relief. A farm family though we went broke farming ... I can't go to the nearest neighbour as I have nothing that will serve as a coat. We received the sum of $5 each for clothing. My husband absolutely has to have underwear, mitts, rubbers, overalls, shorts and a cap and he badly needs a coat. How happy I'd be if some of you who think we "reliefers" are living in the lap of luxury would budget that $5 to cover all these needs for one year.(15)

Women, however, did not always meekly accept the clothes they and their families were allotted. In Saskatoon mothers protested both the quality and the type of the clothing given out by the city's Clothing Relief Bureau. They objected to "the regimentation of the styles, the cheap quality of the materials, and the lack of variety."(16) In 1938 they appeared before the council asking for cash for clothing. The women claimed that "depot clothing" was creating a class of recognizable paupers "reducing their initiative and self-respect." Furthermore, they stated, it was drab and marked children as children on relief. The depot was closed the following spring.(17)

As early as 1931 Zoa Haight, garden columnist for The Western Producer, had suggested that Saskatchewan wool, for which there was virtually no market, be purchased and a mill set up in Regina where it could be made into clothing for the needy as part of a relief program. She also suggested that hides which were a glut on the market could be made into boots and gloves by

those on relief. She urged:

> Let's stop importing cotton for relief, use Saskatchewan wool and hides for Saskatchewan needs and give relief work to Saskatchewan people.(18)

There is no evidence that her suggestion was ever acted upon, though in 1933 a self-help league was established in Regina for unemployed men and women. The women's section of the league made dresses for women and girls, layettes, quilts, rugs, cushion tops and knitted goods of all kinds which they offered in exchange for raw wool, eggs, butter, vegetables, milk and fresh meat from farmers.(19) In another relief work program, this one in Prince Albert, two canning centers were operated "through a special committee of women on relief".(20) Here the city supplied sugar and fuel, while voluntary services provided sealers, and donated fruit and vegetables. Sometimes the latter were purchased from, or donated by, wholesale companies. Wild berries picked by women on relief were also canned. The centers operated twice a week throughout the summer.(21)

The distribution of food by the Relief Commission (or its post-1934 successor the Bureau of Labour and Human Welfare) was not without its problems. Some of these were related to the personalities of the relief officers themselves. Few had any training in dealing with the needy and had "no conception beyond vouchers for rent, food and garments for the distressed."(22) The only qualifications required in those appointed as relief

officers were "good judgment and a willingness to work hard."(23) Many, faced with the need to stretch available resources among far too many, appeared unfeeling to those seeking assistance. One woman, frustrated with the bureaucracy which referred her to the Relief Commission which sent her to the municipality which in turn referred her back to the Relief Commission which again referred her to the municipality, declared:

> it seems a game they have ... to save as much money as th.y can for the government ... we could starve to death waiting and trying for relief.(24)

In Saskatoon a relief store, operated by the city from May 1932 until October 1934, was opposed by recipients as being inconvenient, restrictive and high priced. Government investigation found conditions:

> far from satisfactory. People were not getting the proper proportions of food, and many people went without for one and a half days before they received their next allowance ... the relief board appeared quite unconcerned about conditions and harsh in their application of relief regulations.(25)

The store was closed and cash vouchers given for the duration of the Depression. In Regina, standard grocery orders were used for most food items; special orders were issued for bread or milk. The average family received $7.95 a week, while a family with two to four children received $6.05 in 1932. For the same period the average family in Saskatoon received $6.30; in smaller towns, such as Weyburn, the amount was $6.50.(26) This seldom seemed to be enough (see appendix II & III). According to one mother:

> There is a great deal in the papers about how the government will not let anyone starve, but if our storekeeper had not been very kind we would have been very near it. Even so we have known what it is to be really hungry ... I have received relief for three months and have tried different budgets but have never managed to make it last the full thirty days.(27)

To stretch the meager relief allotment was a challenge to mothers, many of whom wrote to the women's page of newspapers for assistance. For example, in 1936 one mother wrote:

> How can any mother buy the necessary food for growing children on the paltry sum doled out to us? How can one dress a growing boy or girl decently and warm enough for Saskatchewan winters on $7? Why shoes and rubbers or overshoes alone for a year cost that much. I have no doubt many other mothers are worrying about the same problem.(28)

As the hardships in the province continued, freight car loads of donated fruit, vegetables and other food from people in various parts of the country began arriving in Saskatchewan. The fresh fruits and vegetables "seemed like a real God-sent gift" to many families.(29)

The lack of a set policy for the province meant that distribution of food from the cars varied from district to district. In some areas:

> Everything is handled in an honest, fair and square way and no one makes a cent at the other fellow's expense. We, like many others, were not in town when the apples and potatoes came in but ours were brought out by neighbours who were glad to save us a trip.(30)

In these areas as many people as possible were notified of the cars arrival by those in charge of distribution, and food was

then unloaded into a warehouse for inventory. There the contents were classified from lists of people in need and divided according to the size of the family.(31) Distribution was less fair in other districts:

> There was nothing for the needy farmers in outlying districts after the tradesmen had helped themselves. In fact the relief car had come and gone before many farmers knew...The veneer of our so-called civilization wears thin at times. One wonders where the pride of these people is when so many who really need assistance are valiantly trying to get along without and would scorn to use such methods to get something for nothing.(32)

In some instances there was not even the pretense of an attempt to distribute the food fairly:

> A car of vegetables, fruit etc., came from the East to our town last winter. Two ministers came out from the city to handle it and they simply opened the car and told those around to help themselves.(33)

Part of the problem stemmed from the controversy over whom the cars were intended for. In some areas they were believed to be a gift for everyone rather than assistance for just the needy:

> It is given out a little to everyone ... Our bank manager was one of the first ones to drive up with his new car and get his share ... it was given out to all, but some of the most needy got nothing, not even a smell. Some of the clothing was given to the Red Cross to sell tickets on.(34)

In other districts a charge was made for the food as well as for the clothing:

> Our apples arrived here in November, so many pounds per person, but a charge of five cents per head again. Some apples were left over and again divided between families with children and five cents per family was demanded again but this time not paid. Many times I wondered what would happen if this contemptible little graft were not paid. I

> intended to put this matter to the test the next time anything would be doled out but was unintentionally outwitted. Three hearty cheers for the much abused but ever ready Red Cross. They did a fine job ... I found my blankets at one of my neighbours bundled and tagged with my name. That neighbour in turn got the stuff at a place still further away. He said "you owe me ten cents" "why did you lay this out for me" I asked. "Well, I got them from X, he brought over all the bundles for this corner and paid for all of them" So what could I do, but let my poor neighbour lose his ten cents. I paid the dime with bitter protest in my heart.(35)

Regardless of how distribution took place, the fresh fruits and vegetables were a welcome addition to diets that consisted primarily of starches. Slightly less welcome was the dried cod sent out from B.C. Few prairie residents knew how to cook it, and the results when they did were frequently unsuccessful.

Although most of the women who were interviewed or responded to questionaires for this thesis declared that, because most people were in the same boat, there was no stigma attached to being on relief, a look at letters written to the newspapers of the day disputes this claim. Such letters suggest that there were those in areas unaffected by the drought who understood neither the cause nor the extent of the problem. Some felt people on relief were simply lazy or poor farmers. One woman went so far as to suggest those on relief should lose their franchise. This raised the ire of those struggling to keep their families clothed and fed. One respondent declared:

> Did the old-time explorers lose their vote because they accepted government help? That was given to help them carry

> on their work. The relief is loaned to the farmers to allow them to carry on theirs.(36)

Another refuted the claim that relief recipients were lazy:

> For two years we have not thrashed a bushel and no grass to feed cows on, so I'd like to see "Farm Lassie" have lots of meat, butter, eggs and milk under such conditions. We don't do without milk because we are too lazy to milk ... Last year we planted a garden twice, it all blew away.(37)

The painful contrast between the life of those on relief and those still fortunate enough to have an income was clearly illustrated on the front page of the Stoughton Times as the Depression came to an end. A December 1939 issue carried an advertisement from Thurlby's Store which read, in part:

> The Christmas Season with all its pleasant implications and family reunions will soon be here...Our grocery department is complete with every good thing you need for Christmas-nuts, oranges, grapes, wines, mincemeat, the finest raisins and currents ... We have everything you need in eats for Christmas.(38)

Next to it appeared the following news item.

> The relief cars for the rural municipality and village arrived last Saturday and was distributed on Monday. Cheese, beans and chicken haddie were in demand, but there is a quantity of cured cod still available.(39)

Life during the Depression was one of such contrasts, not only between the haves and the have nots, but between what families had and what they used to have. Though the drought had almost come to an end by the time war broke out in 1939, it would be several years before life returned to normal for most women. Many would carry the scars of the Depression for decades to come;

in interviews and on questionaires woman after woman told of their reluctance, even today, to spend savings or throw used clothing away. The fear that the hard times might return was difficult to overcome. Most could identify with the woman who, after being poor all her growing up years, later obtained a good education, a well paying job and married a rich farmer, yet still had the Eaton's Beauty doll she had received as a youngster. To this woman the doll, acquired just prior to the Depression, "provided the only joy I had. She struggled with me so she is still precious."(62)

Life was not easy for those women forced on to "the dole" by circumstances. Because few relief officers or others dealing directly with those on relief had any special training, or previous experience, the degree of difficulty women experienced in getting relief often varied according to the attitude and competency of the relief officer in the area in which she lived.

The trainloads of clothing and food shipped to Saskatchewan from other parts of Canada which came as a welcome relief to those in need; but the failure of the provincial government to provide leadership by establishing a province-wide government policy regarding the distribution of these goods resulted in some receiving less than their share.

Had the government had the resources to increase relief

allowances and train workers, and had they taken the initiative in setting out guidelines for the distribution of donated foodstuffs and clothing, then women on relief might have had an easier time in the 1930s.

Footnotes

1 Stoughton Times, March 20 1930, p. 4.

2 Confidential letter to Bennett from H. Black, chairman of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, September 11, 1933, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., 493946, M1453.

3 Western Producer, April 21 1932, p. 10.

4 In many of these homes the only source of heat was from buffalo chips, nicknamed "prairie coal", gathered by the housewife and children during the summer for use in the kitchen range over the winter. In one instance a Regina family had a friend who had lived in the Arctic visit them in the winter. The house was so cold the friend showed them how to build an igloo and the family lived in it for six to eight weeks. Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, p. 57.

5 Ibid., November 2 1933, p. 10.

6 Regina Leader Post, October 17 1931, p. 8. In many parts of Saskatchewan, churches were hardpressed to meet their own needs and could offer their parishioners little more than faith. The importance of the church to many women is evident in the appeals made to Prime Minister Bennett by women's auxilliaries for funds to maintain their ministers.

7 Coronach Historical Society, From the Turning of the Sod, The Story of the Early Settlers in the R.M. of Hart Butte (Winnipeg, 1980): 243.

8 Barry Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years (Toronto, 1973): 288.

9 Arborfield History Book Committee, Echoes From the Past; a History of Arborfield and District (Manitoba, 1981): 412; also from interviews with a number of Saskatchewan women.

10 Western Producer, April 15 1937, p. 11.

11 Letter to M.J.W.McKeel, Assistant Deputy Minister of Pensions and Public Health, March 1933, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10, Vol. 14.

12 Alice Pinsoneault to Bennett, Mar. 11 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1323 398183.

13 Western Producer, November 5 1936, p. 11.

14 Notice to Municipal Secretaries October 1 1936, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10, Vol. 26.

15 Western Producer, January 12 1939, p. 11.

16 Blair Neatby, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1931-1934" Saskatchewan History (Spring 1950): 252.

17 Ibid., p. 253.

18 Western Producer, November 5 1931, p. 10.

19 Pearl Johnstone, Saskatchewan Relief Commission, to Whitton May 1933, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C, M.G. 28, I 10.

20 Survey of relief situation in Saskatchewan, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10, Vol. 13.

21 Ibid.

22 Labour Gazette, 1932, p. 1249.

23 They were also well paid. Officers were paid $3 per day salary plus $.07 per mile by car, $.10 by horse, and board and lodging while away from home, about $800-$1000 a year. The Relief Inspector, on loan from the Dept. of Labour and Industries, was paid $1,789 per year. Journal of the Saskatchewan Legislature, 1932, p. 326.

24 Mrs. Sims to Bennett, February 27 1934, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1450, 489592.

25 Blair Neatby, p. 250.

26 Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10, Vol.14.

27 Western Producer, August 26 1931, p. 10.

28 Ibid., August 6 1936, p. 10.

29 Ibid., April 23 1937, p. 14.

30 Ibid., April 1 1937, p. 11.

31 Ibid., April 23 1937, p. 14.

32 Ibid., April 8 1937, p. 11.

33 Ibid., April 8 1937, p. 11.

34 Ibid., November 15 1937, p. 11.

35 Ibid., January 7 1937, p. 11.

36 Ibid., June 2 1930, p. 10.

37 Ibid.

38 Stoughton Times, December 15 1939, p. 1.

39 Ibid.

40 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

CHAPTER SIX

"A Politically Powerless Group": Single Women Without Jobs

During the 1920s single women had gained acceptance in the labour force, though it was still generally believed that the real "career" of any woman was marriage.(1) For the majority of young women, work filled the gap between finishing school and getting married; it was happily abandoned when the opportunity for marriage beckoned. This is not surprising considering society's attitude toward the role of women and the fact that most women worked in low skill, low paying jobs. Almost half were employed as domestics or in some other form of personal service. Working women were never large in numbers; by 1931 they still made up only 12% of the labour force.(2) Because they seldom belonged to unions, female workers in the 1930s had little protection from the heavy layoffs which resulted from the economic downturn.

While the recorded unemployment rate for women remained lower than that for men, they experienced many of the same hardships.(3) Unlike the unemployed men whose militancy resulted in the establishment of relief camps and other programs for men, single women without jobs were a passive and "politically powerless group whose problems were ignored by all levels of government throughout the 1930s."(4) Their small numbers, their

lower unemployment rate and the ease with which they could be hidden in the home as "helpers" made their discontent less obvious though none the less real. For the majority of single women without jobs the depression decade was one of delayed independence, abandoned dreams, and lowered employment prospects. The economic hardships of the 1930s, combined with the emphasis on domestic service as a solution to the problem of unemployed single women, ultimately had the effect of narrowing educational and occupational opportunities for single women. The result was a reinforcement of their maternal image and a continuation of their inferior position in the work force.

The shortage of money in many homes during the Depression limited or postponed the education of a large number of women, and, ultimately, the occupational opportunities open to them. This was particularly true in rural areas where public school only went as far as grade eight; to attend a high school, and thus obtain a grade twelve diploma, farm children had to board in a nearby town or city. This was an expense beyond the financial ability of many families during the good years; it became less of a possibility for many more during the 1930s.

An alternative means of obtaining at least part of a high school education became available in 1930 with an amendment to the School Act which required school districts to offer grades

nine and ten where requested. Because this would place a burden on the many rural teachers already faced with teaching up to eight grades, the province's five year old correspondence courses were extended to students in rural schools. Under this plan, a type B program was instituted whereby students received their course materials from the correspondence school but worked under the guidance of their regular school teachers.(5) The program enabled many students to complete these grades and saved school districts the costs of hiring more teachers.

The greatest weakness of the extended correspondence program was its failure to include grade twelve; consequently a high school diploma was still beyond the reach of young women whose families could not afford to send them to a town high school for their final year.(6) This was particularly true in the drought areas where crop failure year after year forced thousands of families onto "the dole". Any money these families did have went toward keeping food on the table. Education under such circumstances was a luxury the families could not afford. Books, pencils and paper were not included in relief allowances and adequate clothing was frequently non-existent; as a result, even where schools were available, many young women and girls missed part of their grade school education. Pride often made the problem worse:

I remember not going to school my fifth grade, because I

> didn't have any shoes. My sister Helen went, though, because she could use the ones I grew out of. My mother was a widow and she asked the relief people for two dollars for shoes for me but they said no, there were folks around who needed things worse than me. I got around, doing chores and that, by making sort of moccasins out of deer hide, rubber from an inner tube and binder twine and staples but my mother wouldn't let me go to school that way. Foolish pride. I missed that year and never went back.(7)

In some families, girls had to share a single pair of shoes or the only coat or dress and to take turns going to school. Mothers sometimes shared the same items with their older daughters. In homes where the family was large and the work made heavier by the Depression, girls were frequently kept home from school to help in the house or around the farm. "In those days", it seemed, "a girl's education wasn't considered so important ... and there was a lot of work to be done on the homestead."(8)

Resettlement in the northern undeveloped areas where schools were not yet established meant the end of education for some young women. In districts where there were schools, tuition fees imposed on new residents kept many children, girls included, from continuing their education. Struggling to resettle in a new area, parents were hard pressed to find the money for food, let alone to pay tuition fees that were as high as $30.(9) This compounded the problems for girls such as this sixteen year old who wrote to Prime Minister Bennett:

> [I] moved north from the drought area of Saskatchewan two years ago ... I was forced to stop school as my parents could not afford to send me anymore. I was in grade IX.(10)

In another rural district a large number of children were kept out of school for years because their parents were unhappy with the way the school was being run. They complained that, as a result of people moving out of the area, control of their school had passed "into the hands of a minority who are absolutely opposed to the traditions of the British race."(11) Parents were not compelled by law to send their children to school and as a result education for many girls was often sporadic during the Depression.

TABLE XIII

Girls Attending school, 1929-1936

Year	Number
1929	113,220
1930	113,589
1931	114,692
1932	N/A
1933	111,893
1934	110,998
1935	109,756
1936	110,998

Source: Canada Year Book, 1930-1937.

Education or training beyond the high school level was even more difficult to obtain in the 1930s. Young women seeking higher education often found it impossible to find a job that paid

enough to enable them to save the money needed to further their education. Often the only work available to these women was as domestics or farm help, neither of which paid much more than enough for their keep. The frustration felt by women in this situation was expressed by one who, in desperation, wrote to Prime Minister Bennett for help:

> I have been out of school for two years. I completed my grade XI. I have been doing housework ever since and with such low wages I have not been able to save anything. I have broke down in health now and cannot continue doing housework. My sole ambition has been to take a business course. I have been offered my board and room if only I could get my tuition fees. Due to the depression, my parents are unable to help me financially. So I was wondering if you would consider helping me, ... I would like about one hundred and fifty dollars.(12)

At a time when farm labour paid about ten dollars a month and most jobs in shops and restaurants paid around thirteen dollars per month, a hundred and fifty dollars was a considerable sum!

The attitude that higher education was wasted on a girl who would just get married was still prevalent in the 1930s. This added to the difficulties of girls, such as one twenty-two year old who had tried to raise the $175 necessary to attend Normal School. She too wrote to Prime Minister Bennett for help, claiming:

> I have asked relatives and many others to no avail. Some of course are afraid to loan money to a girl during the depressed conditions ... I have tried so hard to get help and failed. But I just cannot give up my cherished dream of Normal until I've gone the limit.(13)

The decline in enrollments at normal school and at private business and commercial schools reflected the difficulty experienced by women seeking training beyond the high school level. After growing steadily during the 1920s, attendance at these institutions declined sharply during the Depression. Similar drops occurred in the number of student nurses in training at the province's hospitals during the worst years of the Depression, though they had returned to the 1930 level by the end of the decade.

TABLE XIV

Enrollments During the Depression.

Year	Business school	Normal school	Student nurses
1929	N/A	2,677	N/A
1930	1,153	1,298	633
1931	818	1,252	604
1932	N/A	N/A	549
1933	810	715	446
1934	780	630	412
1935	883	865	556
1936	873	713	614
1937	912	621	627
1938	870	584	645
1939	913	840	651

Source: Canada Year Books, 1931-1941

Of course not all young women were unable to obtain an education during the 1930s. Those whose fathers had a steady job were still able to continue with their plans though perhaps on a more restricted budget. Many stayed in school longer than they might have otherwise simply because there were no jobs available. In some homes, particularly those where education was valued more highly or where children of either gender were seen as a help to their parents in their old age, great sacrifices were made to enable daughters to obtain some training beyond high school. This was usually as a nurse, teacher or secretary, the white collar occupations most frequently open to women at the time. Ingenuity sometimes made it possible for girls to attend university even when money was scarce. Two young women from a farm where food was plentiful but money was not, paid for their board in the city with produce from their parents' farm. In this way they were able to attend university for four years. The arrangement was mutually beneficial as without this help their landlords, who had little money for food, would have lost their home.(14) Help for promising young girls sometimes came from those outside the family as in the case of a young girl whose grade school teacher paid for her high school correspondence courses.(15)

Education, even at the university level, did not guarantee a job during the Depression. In 1931, for example, 661 of the province's 5,706 female teachers were without a school.(16) Even

the option of marriage, the traditional occupation for young women, was affected by the Depression. The marriage rate dropped in Saskatchewan throughout the thirties as couples delayed their marriage plans owing to poor economic conditions or because their wages were needed to support the rest of their family. Not until 1939 did marriages take an upswing; an increase primarily due to increased economic opportunities as well as the pending enlistment of many of the province's young men.

TABLE XV

Marriage Rates in Saskatchewan.

Year	% per 1000
Av. 1926-1930	7.0
Av. 1931-1935	6.1
1937	6.2
1938	6.3
1939	7.7

Source: Canada Year Book, 1941.

Economic hardships at home combined with decreased educational opportunities encouraged many young girls, particularly those living on farms, to leave home in the hope of finding a job elsewhere. Most headed to the cities and towns of Regina, Saskatoon or Moose Jaw. Many who arrived there, penniless and without jobs, were:

> shabbily dressed, their few belongings tied in paper bundles. Some had worked as hired girls at $5 a month, others were fresh out of high school and business college.(17)

Those who arrived by train were frequently met by workers from the Y.W.C.A. who, during the Depression, met as many as two thousand trains a year. Concerned for the girls fresh from the farm and inexperienced in the ways of the city, they found:

> much work had to be done at the stations. The station has become a place for unemployed girls to congregate, and it was here that they had to be watched and warned.(18)

For most, there were no jobs to be found and they joined their city and town-bred sisters, huddled in cheap boarding houses or in rooms at the Y.W.C.A., still hoping to find work. As conditions worsened and layoffs in the urban areas continued, the problem of farm girls heading to the city prompted the editor of the United Farm Women's column in the Western Producer to write:

> Let us find some way by which our girls are to be taken and cared for when they go to the cities seeking work. Conditions for unemployed girls in the cities are a disgrace ... many of you mothers little know what your girls face when they leave your care, and go to the city with scant means to provide food and shelter till they can find work. Work in the cities simply is not there.(19)

To prevent their daughters from migrating to the cities, parents were urged to make farm and home life more attractive to them. This could be done, it was suggested, by giving girls a room of their own or at least a trunk or closet for their things.

Parents were reminded of their daughters' need for friendship and encouraged to let them have their friends visit. "Read-aloud" evenings were also recommended, as well as a little spending money or the chance to earn it. Parents were also advised to praise their daughters' and to encourage them to express their own opinions in order that they might improve their own self image. One final note was to "treat your daughter as a pal and a companion."(20) The suggestions were well meaning but they were beyond the physical and economic means of many families to provide. A room for one in a crowded home was impossible; pocket money where money for food was scarce was out of the question. While this advice was little different than that given to parents concerned about keeping their children on the farm during the previous decade, the degree of the problem in the cities made it more urgent.

The lack of jobs even for those with an education prompted one newspaper correspondent to suggest that parents use funds they may have set aside for their daughter's education to help them develop side lines of their own on the farm at home. Girls could start these projects if their parents would:

> let them live at home in return for help with the general work ... such an arrangement of course is impossible when parents think girls should work hard for nothing but their board, and no ambitious young person could be expected to be enthusiastic over being an unpaid servant for years. On the other hand if she feels she is a partner in the family enterprise there is every incentive to have a vision

> and perform the necessary tasks to make that vision a reality.(21)

Motivated by the belief that "the country would be better off if more girls stayed on the farm", this suggestion, as well as the ones mentioned earlier, revealed a lack of understanding of the economic reasons why so many girls were heading to the city.(22)

It is not difficult to understand why these young farm women congregated in the city. For some, the dream of a job in the city offered an escape from the hard work and, in many instances, the near isolation of farm life. It also meant a chance to gain personal independence from family. The decreased educational opportunities, reduced chances of marriage and limited job prospects in rural areas had forced many young women to accept a "juvenile status" for a much longer period than normal. The situation was made much less tolerable when the family was on relief and had many mouths to feed. Though adult in years, they remained, at the most, children in their parent's home, and, at the least, unpaid labour on the farm.

Their plight did not go unnoticed. Throughout the Depression women's groups, such as the Homemakers Club and United Farm Women's groups, took an increasing interest in the girl "who has left school and who is living at home, in many cases just waiting for some wage-earning opportunity."(23) Such groups sought to introduce programs and activities that would make farm life more

attractive to single girls. The emphasis in such programs was on the domestic role that all women were expected to assume at some time in their life. One successful program was the Farm Girls Camp at Metford which, with the help of the Homemaker Clubs, became a part of the Metford Fair in 1929. The twenty-six teenage participants at the one day event were given lessons in bread making, cake baking and needlework. Judging techniques were also taught and competitions were held. The camp proved to be so popular that by 1934 attendance had risen to over four hundred.(24) Like the present day 4H, the Camp was part of a year round program in rural communities.

The Homemakers Clubs also played a role in the development of a ten day camp for farm girls, first held in Shellbrook in 1933. These camps were designed to fill the gap left when economic conditions reduced the number of girls able to attend the Farm Girls Week which had been established twenty years earlier and was held each summer at the University of Saskatchewan. Designed for young women between the ages of 18 and 25, its program had included practical work in menu planning, cooking and handwork, as well as instruction in dairy and poultry production, farm produce judging, quilt designs, and picture taking and framing. Girls had previously been sent to the Farm Week by their local Homemakers Clubs, Agricultural Societies or United Farm women's groups. When the shortage of money prevented

these groups from sending girls to the central camp, the idea of the ten day regional camp evolved. The intent of these new camps was to:

> broaden the outlook of farm girls, to familiarize them with the most modern and scientific methods of preserving foods, also how to select and care for clothing.(25)

The courses gave the girls, many of whom had never been away from home before, the "opportunity to co-operate with girls of the same age".(21) The ten day camps were expanded in subsequent years; in 1936 over three hundred girls attended ten camps in centers such as Canora, Unity and Shaunavon.(26)

In 1936 the Women's Branch of the Extension Department of the University of Saskatchewan organized the Girls Homecraft Clubs with funding assistance from the Saskatchewan Co-operative Wheat Producers Pool. A younger version of the Homemakers Clubs, the aim of the Homecraft Club was "to encourage rural girls to train themselves for a wider and fuller life". Despite the lofty aim, the clubs activities were limited to projects in which the girls could "learn by doing" and covered topics such as decorating the home, growing tomatoes, knitting, sewing and nutrition.(27) Nonetheless, the clubs were well received: by the spring of 1937 there were 145 active clubs with a combined membership of over 1700 girls.(28)

As popular as they were, the programs could not prevent

every young woman from leaving home. Not all of these women headed to Saskatchewan cities; some joined the growing numbers of men riding the rods and wandering the highways of Canada in search of work. By 1932 there was "undeniable evidence that a small but definite movement of young girls [has] set in along the same lines" as that of the unemployed men, according to a government report on the unemployment situation in Western Canada.(29) The exact number of these female "hobos" is unknown, but in the United States their numbers were estimated at 100,000 to 150,000 or one for every twenty males.(30) In a study done in the United States in 1932 and 1933, it was found that 387 out of the 466 boys and girls interviewed had left home because of economic hard times -- too many children, too little money and no work.(31) While no similar study exists for Saskatchewan, it is safe to assume that girls there left home for the same reason, particularly those from the drought area. Because of its mild winters, Vancouver was one of the most popular destinations for a number of these young women.

By 1934 the problem of what to do with the large number of unemployed Saskatchewan girls congregated in Vancouver became serious enough to prompt the Y.W.C.A. National Council to write to the Saskatchewan provincial president of the Homemakers Club "asking us to use our influence in keeping girls of the prairie from flocking to British Columbia, particularly Vancouver." The

letter from the Council went on to add:

> Our Travellers Aid and associations generally were distressed by the numbers of those coming, as it was found impossible to find employment for them. It was decided therefore to write the Women's Institutes asking their co-operation in advising girls against the venture which only uses up their resources and in many cases causes acute distress since they are unable to return home when employment is not found. I am confident that you know it is not a lack of hospitality but a lack of employment which promotes this letter.(32)

The problem of single unemployed girls in Vancouver had been brought to the attention of the Canadian parliament earlier by the C.C.F. member for Vancouver North who claimed "young women have been sent to questionable sections of the city, young women whose situation has been taken advantage of by touts of the underworld."(33) There was a fear that women, forced by the lack of funds into the "seedier" sections of the city, would be corrupted by it.

Closer to home there was already a concern in Saskatchewan cities over the deteriorating morality of the single unemployed women. Though government camps had been established to deal with the hundreds of unemployed men who flocked to the province's cities and towns, no similar program was ever established for their unemployed sisters. Women were left to look after their own; across the province volunteer women's groups undertook to find a solution to the problem of what to do with the large

numbers of unemployed women.

As a 1932 survey of the province's larger urban centers reveals, without exception, the solution women's groups found to the problem of unemployed women was to place them in private homes where they could work for their board. In Regina, where the number of unemployed women initially was not large, several women's groups co-operated to place most of the unemployed in homes as domestic servants.(34) The few such women not placed were dealt with "individually through the payment of room and board, or grocery orders and room rent at a minimum scale."(35) In Saskatoon placements were made through the co-operation of the Relief Board and the Y.W.C.A. In that city where "our single women are quite a problem ... nearly all our destitute have been placed with families to work for board this winter."(36) Moose Jaw had a similar high rate of unemployed women, and here again domestic work was the solution chosen. Of the two hundred and sixty for whom jobs were found in 1932, all but three were placed in homes, "working either for their maintenance or for this plus wages from $5.00 to $15.00 per month". Those not placed received one dollar in cash and two dollars in groceries if they had a room, or given a bed at the Y.W.C.A. and provided with two meals a day. Placements were made through a committee of women from the Employed Girls Council and the local Council of Women with assistance from the "Y".(37)

Though such placements took care of the immediate problem of survival, there was seldom any allowance for extras such as clothing and entertainment. As one unemployed woman complained:

> it really is impossible for me to get work. I haven't any shoes to wear & no coat ... Here in Moose Jaw it just seems impossible to get relief unless you go & work for your board & room & I can't work like that as I need clothes so badly.(38)

Nor were the emotional needs of the unemployed taken into consideration. There was, however, a growing awareness early in the Depression of the effect of unemployment on the morality of unemployed women. As some groups found, among women:

> who have been longer unemployed and who are not equipped for housework in home placement, morale is breaking and in their group of some 300 they have had over 12 cases of serious immorality, with an impression that it is more widespread than (people) know, and spreading because of the desire of the girls for clothing and other things that they are not in a position themselves to provide.(39)

At the 1934 convention of the Homemakers Clubs a similar concern was expressed over the "startling statistics regarding juvenile delinquency and illegitimacy" and the "apparent breakdown of morals and [resultant] blemish on our community life."(40) There is no record of any action being taken. Their need for concern was not reflected in the number of convictions for juvenile girls which, while up that year following a dramatic drop in 1933, were still lower than during the previous six years.

TABLE XVI

Convictions For Female Juveniles, 1929-1939.

Year	No.	Year	No.
1929	23	1935	12
1930	30	1936	13
1931	26	1937	11
1932	21	1838	4
1933	9	1939	8
1934	21		

Source: Canada Year Book, 1930-1941

While the number of women forced into a life of prostitution by poverty or bad company is not known, statistics do reveal a definite increase in the number of recorded illegitimate births during the Depression.

TABLE XVII

Number and Percentage of Illegitimate Births, 1926-1939.

Year(s)	Births	% per live births
Av. 1926-1930	489	---
1931	638	3.0
1932	652	3.1
1933	646	3.2
1934	678	3.4
1935	640	3.3
1936	703	3.7
1937	651	3.5
1938	641	3.5
1939	673	3.7

Source The Canada Yearbook, 1932-1941.

Illegitimate births peaked in 1936 and, as shown below, were most frequent among girls between fifteen and twenty four.

TABLE XVII

Illegitimate Births, Classified by Age of Mother, 1936

Age	No. Births
Under 15	4
15-19	221
20-24	289
25-29	106
30-34	33
35-39	40
40-44	9
Not Given	1

Ibid

While some unwed mothers were welcome in their family home, particularly on the farm where, in the 1930s, an extra pair of hands was always appreciated, others, who either had no family or were disowned by their family, were forced to turn to charitable organizations for help. As there was no government assistance for unwed mothers at the time, homes for these women were run by non-profit groups. The Salvation Army home in Regina, for instance, cared for over a hundred girls a year while the Women's Christian Temperance Union home in Saskatoon cared for about eighty. Most of the girls at the homes were teenagers, some as young as fourteen or fifteen, and all "more sinned against than

sinning" in the eyes of those who took them in.(41) With no support from the provincial or federal governments and very little from the city, the homes were dependent almost entirely on gifts of food, clothing, and money, in addition to the profits from fund raising events. Most of the girls who arrived at the homes were destitute. One eighteen year old Canadian-born girl who, owing to her inability to obtain any work whatever, had:

> slept on the floor of an empty room throughout the summer, and whose bed consisted of old clothes. Her baby, fortunately for herself, was stillborn.(42)

Girls often remained in the Homes for as long as six months during which time they were "surrounded with wholesome influences," with every effort being "made to give them a fresh and better start in life."(43) This fresh start consisted of:

> instruction in housework, cooking and other household duties, so that on leaving they are in a position to earn their own living as domestic help, or to carry out efficiently the duties in their own homes, if they should be so fortunate as to be married at any time in the future.(44)

Again, as with the unemployed, domestic work seems to have been the only solution considered to the problem of these single women, some of whom kept their babies. However well intended, it resulted in a large number of single mothers and their children living in poverty or near poverty conditions throughout the Depression.

The problem of unemployed single women and the lack of any

government action on their behalf aroused the ire of many women, who questioned the government's actions in setting up relief camps for men while at the same time ignoring the problems of unemployed women. In a letter to the Western Producer one woman asked "Has the time come when women do not require food, shelter and clothing, as do the stronger sex?"(45) Another questioned the government's inaction:

> "Ladies first?" How many relief camps for men, but I haven't heard of anything being done for unemployed women. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of unemployed teachers, nurses, and working girls of all kinds, trained and untrained ... not even the $10 toward room and board and $5 spending money. What is the unemployed girl to do?" (46)

It seems what she was to do was housework. By 1936 more than 12,000 single women were employed as domestics. The demand for domestics remained high throughout the Depression, a demand no doubt generated by the fact that such domestic help could be obtained at very low cost, often for no more than room and board. Because the demand remained high, placement as domestics continued to be regarded as the solution to the problem of unemployed women. Thus many women became trapped in a cycle set in place by the economic conditions of the 1930s.

The easy solution of putting the unemployed in homes failed to take into account the fact that many from the city, such as unemployed office workers, had little or no knowledge of housework, much less of life on the farm where the need for

domestic help was greatest. F. Eliason, secretary of the United Farmers of Canada (S.S.), noted that despite the hundreds without jobs in Saskatoon, farmers offering $5-$12 per month for domestic help "have not been able to find one single girl who is willing to go on the farm."(47) One farmer, needing help for several weeks while his wife was in hospital, tried government offices in Estevan, Weyburn and Regina as well as four small towns before finding a girl. He commented, "the greater the unemployment the harder it is to get help."(48) The need for home help on the farm and the difficulty in obtaining it is evidenced by the large response to a letter in a newspaper from a young woman seeking work. Shortly after it appeared:

> One after another enquiries and offers of employment came trickling in, until the openings far exceeded the original requests ... all were kindly and thoughtfully expressed, and most of them such as would be gladly accepted by any girl who genuinely wanted to make her own way.(49)

Most of the job offers were in farm homes and involved "tending the sick, caring for the aged, and young children, as well as the numberless duties indoors and out."(50)

Unequipped for the kind of work involved on the farm, the majority of unemployed women preferred to take their chances in the city rather than venture out to isolated farms where the work was long and heavy and, in the vast majority of cases, without the basic conveniences such as electricity and running water to

which they themselves had become accustomed. Fitting them into rural life was as easy as "putting a size three shoe on a size five foot".(51) It was much simpler for the country girl to adjust to the more modern city homes. In describing the reality of life as a domestic or farm help during the Depression, a sixty-three year old domestic worker likened her job to slavery:

> During the busy season I am expected to do a lot of the heavy work outside and often arise at 4 a.m. to work in the garden, as working in the hot sun later in the day brings on dizziness and headache. I raised over a hundred little chicks, raising them on grasshoppers as grain was scarce. Then there was the hard work of putting in a garden this last spring and most of the seeds did not sprout because there was no rain. Seeds had to be planted a second time. And then all the water I had to carry or there would have been no garden at all! I help milk and often chop wood so as to cook the meals, drive to town almost every week to take in cream and eggs in exchange for groceries. There are many times when I work from fifteen to seventeen hours a day and for all this I receive only enough to buy clothes. If this is not slavery, then I am at a loss to know what other name would be suitable ... I tried two other places before I came here. In one of them I did not have so much heavy work but there were several small children, and I never had as much as half an hour to myself ... there I did not get any money at all and had to go without warm clothes in the winter.(52)

It is not hard to see why so many women preferred unemployment in the city to work on a farm. And yet, in 1939 a government directive warned that "positions as domestics in rural homes must be accepted by girls or women who are receiving relief, and refusal to accept may mean discontinuation of relief."(53)

The refusal to accept jobs on farms was perhaps the only expression of defiance on the part of those Saskatchewan women

who were unable to find paid work during the 1930s. The failure of the government, in the early years, to address the problem allowed it to be swept under the carpet. Unseen, placed as domestics in private homes, single women failed to receive the attention given to their more vocal male counterparts. When government did finally take some steps, however hesitant and ineffective, to deal with the issue of female unemployment, their actions only confirmed the prevailing attitude that women belonged in the home -- if not in their own, then in someone else's.

Footnotes

1 It was further generally believed that few women with adequate family resources would seek any kind of work. Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of a New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," Labour/Le Travailleur (1979): 136.

2 Christine Smillie, "The Invisible Work Force: Women Workers in Saskatchewan From 1905 to World War II," Saskatchewan History (Spring 1986): 63.

3 The unemployment rate for Saskatchewan males in 1931 was 22.28%, compared to 9.61% for women during the same period. Census of Canada, 1931, Table 1, p. 2; because accurate statistics were not kept during the Depression and because a large number of single women disappeared from the unemployment roles when they returned to the family home, the exact number of unemployed women is difficult to determine.

4 James Struthers, No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941 (Toronto, 1983): 106.

5 Correspondence School Calender (Saskatchewan, 1985): 8.

6. Grade 12 was finally offered through correspondence in 1940.

7 Barry Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years (Toronto, 1973): 79.

8 Loon Lake Historical Society, The Loon Lake Story (Saskatchewan, 1983): 339.

9 L.M. Greyson and Michael Bliss, The Wretched of Canada (Toronto, 1973): 79.

10 Phyllis McLean to Bennett, September 28 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1323 399025.

11 Saskatchewan Sessional Papers, 1st and 2nd Session of 7th Assembly p. 124.

12 Myrtle Hume to Bennett, September 24 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C. M1325 400416.

13 Florence Nelson to Bennett, September 23 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1323 398790.

14 Broadfoot, Ten Lost Years, p. 58.

15 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

16 Census of Canada, 1931, Vol. 6 Table 38.

17 Y.W.C.A Building Fellowship, A History of the Y.W.C.A. in Saskatchewan 1905-1955 (Saskatchewan, n.d.): 98.

18 Regina Leader-Post, May 12 1931, p. 7. The Y.W.C.A. programs were run by middle class women volunteers who saw young women in the city as a group which had been invariably overlooked by religious and social reformers. The "girl problem" thus became a particular mandate of the Y.W.C.A. which, like many other middle class reformer groups, believed the ports and railway stations in Canadian cities were frequented by agents from the "white slave trade" who kidnapped young girls for the purposes of prostitution. Diana Pederson, ""Keeping Our Good Girls Good:" The Y.W.C.A and the 'Girl Problem,' 1870-1930," Canadian Woman Studies (Winter, 1986): 22.

19 Western Producer, May 30 1932, p. 22

20 Ibid., September 25 1933, p. 14.

21 Ibid., June 25 1936, p. 13.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., June 28 1934, p. 14.

24 Ibid., July 27 1934, p. 12.

25 Canwood Times, July 16 1936, p. 1

26 Ibid.

27 Western Producer, June 10 1937, p. 12.

28 Ibid., April 1 1937, p. 11.

29 Bennett Papers, Vol. 781, Report on Unemployment & Relief in Western Canada, 1932, U.N.B. Library, as cited in Michiel Horn, The Dirty Thirties (Canada, 1972).

30 For personal accounts see Susan Ware, Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s (Boston, 1982): 33, also Jeane Westlin, Making Do: How Women survived the '30s (Chicago 1976) and Thomas Mineham, Boy and Girl Tramps of America (New York, 1934); Many Saskatchewan women recalled

seeing women walking the roads and going door to door.

31 Mineham, Boy and Girl Tramps; The authour of the study gained his information by travelling across America dressed as a hobo. It should be noted that women riding the rods was not just a 1930s phenomenon; The Stoughton Times Oct. 30 1924 p. 1, carried a report of a women riding a box car dressed as a man.

32 Western Producer, May 3 1934, p. 11.

33 Canadian Forum, March 1932, p. 5.

34 The number of unemployed women in Regina had reached 580 by 1935. Of these, 133 were housewives, 187 were housekeepers, and 94 were domestics; Unemployment and Relief Analysis, Bennett Papers, Unemployed Miscellaneous, Vol. 2, N.A.C., M1453 493486.

35 Report on conditions in Saskatchewan, p.135, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G., I 10, Vol. 13.

36 City of Saskatoon Relief Officer Frank Rowland to Charlotte Whitton, January 6 1931, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10 Vol. 14.

37 Report on conditions in Saskatchewan, p.140, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G.28, I 10, Vol. 13.

38 Marjorie Halliday to Bennett, March 22 1935, Bennett Papers, N.A.C., M1324, 400391.

39 Ibid p. 140.

40 Western Producer, June 28 1934, p. 14.

41 Louise Lucas Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 27, III D6, Vol. 2 .

42 Western Producer, December 8 1932, p. 16.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., February 11 1932, p. 10.

46 Ibid.

47 Letter to Louise Lucas, January 9 1932, Louise Lucas Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 27, III D6, Vol.II.

48 Stoughton Times, July 18 1935, p. 1.

49 Western Producer, April 29 1937, p. 14.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., November 30 1939, p. 14.

52 Ibid., September 28 1938, p. 11

53 Ibid., November 30 1939, p. 1

CHAPTER SEVEN

When Is A Problem Not A Problem? When It Is A Woman: Women, Government and Unemployment

In seeking an answer to the problem of female unemployment, government, like the volunteer women's groups, failed to look beyond housework, the traditional occupation assigned to women. In doing so, the government followed the recommendations of two influential women, both of whom were government appointees and both of whom firmly believed that the solution to the unemployment problem lay in domestic work.

Following her investigative tour of the prairie provinces for Prime Minister Bennett in 1932, Charlotte Whitton, Director of the Canadian Council of Child and Family Welfare, reported that the problem of single girls could be easily solved by placing them in homes as domestic help such as was done in Moose Jaw. Whitton believed former factory, shop and office workers could easily be retrained for domestic work. Though she recognized that such women were often "unwilling to enter housework", she felt that "with the co-operation of local effort in offering training, and with the skillful handling of employment services, this number can be reduced to a very reasonable minimum".(1) She argued that many of the women who were presently receiving relief were not really entitled to it as their problems were not related to the current economic

conditions. Included in this category, according to Whitton, were women who had never been steadily employed, those who were middle aged with little or no training, often with:

> personality difficulties, who, at the best of times, have but a precarious existence ... There should be no general assumption of this group, under federal emergency relief, they present a problem at any time that should rest primarily upon local resources for treatment.(2)

She also excluded from relief prostitutes or others who had maintained themselves by like uncertain income, claiming in these cases it "is in its essentials a question of social adjustment, and as such, should be handled with the community's local resources for dealing with such social problems."(3)

According to some historians, Whitton's outrage over what she perceived as the waste and inefficiency surrounding the use of federal relief funds was motivated more by concern over the threat posed to the social work profession by the rapidly changing welfare structure in Canada than by a need to prevent monetary waste or to improve the lives of the people she studied.(4) Certainly, Whitton appeared to show a lack of understanding or regard for the fact that any problems of working people, whether they be ones of "adjustment" or uncertainty of employment, are inevitably worsened by any downturn in the economy. To her credit, however, she did recognize the importance of going beyond the immediate provision of work or relief to deal with the "problems of ill health, undernourishment, loss of

morale" which follow long periods of unemployment.(5) This, she claimed, pointed to the need for organized family welfare agencies and the use of professional social workers.

Whitton's view of domestic service as the answer to the problem of women without jobs was shared by Mary Sutherland, member of the National Employment Commission. In 1936 Sutherland declared she "would like to train girls for situations in their own homes ... I would like to see training schools in housework all across Canada."(6) She pressed the government to subsidize the training necessary to raise domestic work to the status of a profession. The result was the introduction of the Home Service Schools in the province as a part of the Dominion-Provincial Youth Programme initiated in 1937.

At the recommendation of the Women's Employment Committee of the National Employment Commission, Home Service schools were established in Regina, Saskatoon and Moose Jaw. Apart from a small dressmaking program, the Home Service schools offered the only employment training available to young women under the federal-provincial program. Though administered by the provincial government, the schools' day-to-day operations were under the direction of local advisory committees. These committees were composed of "women who have a knowledge of, and an active interest in, the method of training young women for household

work."(7) Representatives from labour and youth councils also served on some committees. The committees assisted with setting up the curriculum, supervised the daily operations of the training houses, organized recreation for the girls, and arranged publicity for the schools. Their most important function, however, was to assist with the selection of "suitable" trainees and, through "contact with the local women's organizations", help to place the graduates "in suitable homes, where reasonable working conditions and fair wages apply."(8) What was "fair" in terms of wages was determined by the committee, "having in mind the local conditions and the capacity of the various grades of graduates."(9) Placements were generally found through talks to women's groups by members of the staff or the advisory committee. These talks were considered important because "members of these organizations are the prospective employers of trainees"(10)

It was hoped that the free three-month home service course would attract young women from families on relief. As a report on the Home Service Training Schools reveals, this was not always possible:

> it has been found difficult to get girls from families in receipt of direct relief to undergo such a course or accept work on its conclusion. There is a deep-seated prejudice against this type of work ... it has been the experience that actual residence in school has contributed to break down such prejudices. It has also been found easier to obtain trainees from younger girls, aged 16 to 18, but many of these younger trainees on graduation, are not as well able to take responsibility in the homes in which they are

> subsequently placed. Many employers prefer somewhat older girls. Another difficulty in certain schools has been the number of "problem" girls that have been sent to the school for training ... While a school can absorb a few such cases in each class ... if the number is too large, it lowers the standard for the whole school.(11)

The paper work involved in applying for the course may have deterred some young women from applying; each application had to be signed by the municipal secretary and be accompanied by a recommendation from a person holding a responsible position in the community, plus the names of three responsible people willing to act as referees. The applicant also had to include a statement of 100 words or less stating why she wished to take the course.

Class space in each session was limited, with room for twelve in Regina, fifteen in Saskatoon and thirty in Moose Jaw, per course.(12) A look at a typical day for the residents at the Regina school gives an indication of the instruction the students received:

> Rise at 7 A.M. Divided into three groups which change duties each week. The first group -- two cooks and one waitress. The second, one laundress. The third, two general cleaners. Special duties are assigned each group in the practice house each day, i.e. cleaning pantries, cupboards, silver, woodwork, cleaning, polishing windows, etc. Friday afternoon all trainees spend at the Y.W.C.A. The home economics laboratory is used Mondays to Thursdays as follows: 9 to 12, cookery. 12-4 P.M. sewing. Friday morning and Saturday morning are devoted to field trips, special duties.(13)

The schools experienced no difficulty in placing their graduates,

though some "after graduation, decline[d] to accept employment, and return[ed] to their own homes."(14) From their introduction in 1937 until February 28 1939, the schools trained 184 women; under the Youth Training program as a whole 186 women were placed in employment. It is likely that a large number of these, if not all, came from the Home Service Schools.(15) One goal of the program, to raise the status of domestic work, appears not to have been achieved as "the school at Saskatoon reported there was no visible effect in raising either the prestige or wages."(16)

Other short courses were offered under the Youth Training Programme. These were designed "to help the rural girl become more efficient in her own home and community", and included poultry raising, beekeeping and gardening.(17) They were made available only at the request of the local committee. Over 5000 girls took these courses between 1937 and 1939.(18)

The narrowness of the training offered to women under this program was criticized by many women including a Mrs. Woodsworth, who, in an address on the "Traffic in Women and Children" at the Pan-Pacific Conference in Vancouver in 1937, stated:

> One piece of present day stupidity remains for special censure -- the stupidity that attempts to shove every unemployed girl into domestic service -- This is probably one of the dangers which may arise from the present concentration of the federal training courses for girls on this phase of work. It is generally admitted that most vacancies for girls and women occur in this class of work, and that the majority of girls are not trained for this

> special work. Women employers must admit that wages and general working conditions are not such as to induce well trained and educated girls to enter it.(19)

With almost ten percent of the province's domestic workers already unemployed in 1936, it is difficult to understand the rationale used in setting up the training schools unless one takes into account the federal government's previous involvement in procuring domestics for middle class homes.(20) While the need for domestic help had lessened somewhat in the 1920s, the reverse was true in the 1930s. Not only had the number of potential domestics coming into the country decreased as a result of the dramatic cutbacks in immigration but the money to purchase or repair labour saving devices in many homes had all but disappeared.(21) The result was an increased need for domestic help at a time when the income to purchase it had decreased. The practice, during the Depression, of placing the unemployed in homes as domestics for what was often little more than room and board provided many middle class women with the opportunity to acquire home help at minimum expense; the establishment of the government Home Service schools made certain that such help was adequately trained. While the large number of graduates who found jobs suggests that the training school program was a success, there is no evidence that the working conditions or salaries of these women were any better than those of the unemployed placed in homes as domestics. Certainly, by not providing any other

viable training option for young women the government did little to raise the status of women in the work force.(22)

The Farm Placement Program, the only other measure designed by the federal government to relieve unemployment among women, had a similar emphasis on housework. Introduced by the Bennett government in 1932, the Farm Placement program originally applied only to men. Under the plan, unemployed men were placed in jobs on farms. They were paid five dollars a month wages by the government which also paid the farmer the same amount for their board. A bonus of two dollars and fifty cents a month was paid over the winter months in an effort to keep the unemployed from drifting into the cities after the harvest season. In 1935 the Liberal government of Mackenzie King extended the program to exclude single women. Unlike the Youth Training Programme, which was aimed at those under thirty, the farm placement plan was open to women of all ages. In keeping with Ottawa's policy of equal pay for equal work, the same rates of pay applied for both sexes. As shown on the chart below, wages normally paid to women on farms at the time were about half those paid to men, but were well above the five dollars paid under the program.

TABLE XIX

Monthly Wages (in dollars) on Saskatchewan Farms 1929-1939.

Year	Males	Females
1929	44	24
1933	16	8
1935	18	9
1938	22	10
1939	22	11

Source: Canada Year Books, 1929-1939.

The Farm Placement program provided the farmer with a cheap source of labour, often making it possible for him or her to hire much needed help at a time when he or she might not otherwise have been able to do so. While at first glance the scheme appears also to have benefitted unemployed women by creating jobs, in reality, for the women placed, it meant very hard work for very little reward. Overworked, underpaid and isolated on the farm, few such women voiced any opposition to the program. Some, in despair, wrote letters to the newspapers or to the prime minister of the day, but most just went quietly about their work and, unlike their male counterparts, officially ceased to be a problem.

In looking at the actions and reactions of the government toward women in need during the 1930s, it is evident that the

government lacked a real understanding of the problems faced by women. While domestic work appeared to be an expedient solution to the problem of unemployed women in the cities and towns, it failed to take into account two important facts: first, there were already a sizable number of domestic workers who had been laid off from their jobs.(23); second, the greatest need for domestic work was in rural areas. Few city-born women would have been prepared for the primitive conditions found in these rural homes, most of which lacked such basic conveniences as running water and electricity. In embracing housework as a solution to female unemployment, the government simply reflected the prevailing ideology of the day -- despite the apparent gains by women in the previous decade, the idea of "the proper sphere" was alive and well in Saskatchewan society in the 1930s.

It is easy, from this distance in time, to be critical of the initiatives taken by governments in dealing with the problems of women during the Depression. However, it must be born in mind that all levels of government lacked the infrastructure necessary to deal with the enormity of the crisis (the Saskatchewan government itself was scarcely twenty-five years old at the onset of the Depression!). Costs were enormous and the social upheaval was tremendous. Neverless, whatever the circumstances, the effect was the same. In attempting to solve the problem of female unemployment by shunting women into domestic work, the government

removed them from sight, but did little to lessen the harsh realities of their lives.

Footnotes

1 Report by Charlotte Whitton to Prime Minister Bennett, 1932, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10, Vol. 13.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s," Canadian Historical Review (June 1981): 174; For a discussion of the relationship between her ambition and the development of the profession of social work see also P.T. Rooke and R.L. Schnell, ""Making the Way More Comfortable": Charlotte Whitton's Child Welfare Career, 1920-48," Journal of Canadian Studies (Winter 1982-83): 33-45; For a more favorable view see Carolyn June Forsyth, Ph.D "Whatever My Sex, I'm No Lady" -- Charlotte Whitton, Politician; Welfare Pioneer," Makara (1977): 27-31.

5 Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10, Vol. 14.

6 Saskatchewan Valley News, December 16 1936, p. 4.

7 Report by the Youth Training Branch of the Dominion Department of Labour, p. 2, Unemployed Women File, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 25, Vol. 74.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., p. 3.

10 Ibid., p. 6.

11 Ibid., p. 3.

12 Western Producer, November 27 1938, p. 12.

13 Report by the Youth Training Branch of the Department of Labour, p. 10,

14 Ibid., p. 3.

15 Labour Gazette, May 1939, p. 470-471.

16 Report by the Youth Training Branch of the Department of Labour, p. 6.

17 Western Producer, September 28 1939, p. 13.

18 Labour Gazette, May 1939, p. 470-71.

19 Western Producer, March 24 1938, p. 11.

20 See Chapter One of this thesis.

21 Immigration dropped sharply in all three prairie provinces during the Depression, as the following chart shows.

TABLE XX

Immigration to Western Provinces., 1929-1939.

Year	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta
1929	38,340	11,336	15,300
1930	23,837	6,435	7,812
1931	1,056	1,352	2,213
1932	757	971	1,692
1933	558	727	1,296
1934	390	519	1,098
1935	708	408	735
1936	938	528	917
1937	1,430	616	1,175
1938	1,673	684	1,648
1939	1,316	1,227	1,695

Figures for 1940 show an even more dramatic drop -- Manitoba, 314; Saskatchewan, 250; and Alberta, 458. Source: Canada Year Book, 1941, p. 116.

23 In her 1932 report "Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada" Charlotte Whitten found that a large percentage of the young women on relief were those of British origin who had come to Canada as home help and who had been laid off from their positions; as cited in Howard Palmer, ed., Immigration and the Rise of Multiculturalism (Toronto, 1975): 106.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Downward Mobility: Saskatchewan Women at Work

For those women, married or single, who were fortunate enough to have paid jobs, the Depression was a time of great uncertainty. The vast majority of working women were unorganized and few, if any, had job security. Employers could, and did, lay off their employees without notice and without compensation. There was no unemployment insurance to fall back on as is the case today. The experience of two single clerk typists employed at the Wheat Pool in Regina was typical of the experiences of many. In April of 1932 they were told to take two weeks holiday, which they did. The Friday before they were to return to work each received a phone call stating "We are sorry but your position at the Wheat Pool has been cancelled. We will let you know when it can be filled again".(1) They were never recalled, a not uncommon phenomenon during the Depression. Like many others before and after them, these two women had to give up their apartment, that symbol of their independence, and return to their parent's home. They were "fortunate" -- they eventually found work as domestics.

Their plight is symbolic of what happened to working women during the Depression. It was not just the loss of employment -- which was less by percentage than that for men -- but the

replacement of employment by lower, poverty level jobs that made the Depression such a negative experience for the working woman. Unemployment statistics cannot show the number of dreams and ambitions that were snuffed out by the Depression; these were the true casualties of the 1930s.(2)

Working women in Saskatchewan have sometimes been described as the "invisible work force" because of their small numbers and the isolated nature of their work; yet, by 1929 they had made considerable inroads into occupations such as office work and teaching which had previously been considered male preserves. This trend came to a halt during the 1930s when the competition for jobs and the worsening economic conditions brought to the fore the belief shared by many in society -- that working women took jobs away from married men who needed them. The result, in many instances, was that preference in the labour market was given to men on the assumption that women did not need to support themselves. The gains made by women in the 1920s were gradually eroded away. Between 1931 and 1941, for example, the percentage of women employed in domestic service increased from 43.85% to 47.53% of the female labour force. During the same period the number employed in the professional service field dropped from 23.11% to 19.47%.(3) In white collar occupations such as office work, women made some gains, but only at the clerk level. Women telephone operators continued to hold their own during the

Depression with their numbers declining only slightly, from 671 to 627, while the number of male operators dropped from 118 to 116.(4) The decreases in both cases likely were due to the decline in telephone use during that period.

The area of female employment hardest hit by the Depression was teaching. Throughout the 1920s the increase in the number of women hired as teachers had been greater than that for men but the reverse was true in the 1930s.(5) In Saskatchewan, as in the rest of Canada, only male teachers experienced an increase in employment between 1930 and 1940. As the following statistics show, the total number of teachers employed between 1929 and 1935 decreased by only 21, yet the number of female teachers dropped a staggering 619, or close to ten percent. The corresponding increase of 598 in the number of males teachers employed in the province would suggest that a very large number of women in the schools were replaced by men.

TABLE XXI

Numbers of Teachers in Saskatchewan, 1929-1935.

Year	Male	Female
1929	2080	6384
1930	2285	6232
1931	2394	6021
1932	N/A	N/A
1933	2409	5867
1934	2678	5786
1935	2678	5765

Source: Canada Year Book, 1930-1937.

The problem was even worse for married teachers than it was for those who were single. Though a very small minority in the teaching profession (only 250 out of 5,800 female teachers in 1936), married women who wished to continue teaching experienced an opposition that grew as the number of young girls and men unable to find positions in schools increased.(6) This bias against married female teachers was even voiced by Premier Anderson who, in an address at the closing ceremonies of the Saskatchewan Normal School in 1932, suggested a plan "of granting short term certificates with the idea of eliminating married women from the profession."(7)

Though nothing apparently came of his plan, it did have its

supporters as well as its opponents. Many argued that only those women who were widowed or had husbands unable to support them should be allowed to teach, thus indirectly suggesting that marital status rather than ability and qualifications should be the deciding factor in hiring teachers. Others believed that a married woman could not "give her school her undivided attention and the standings of most schools who employ such will show it."(8) This argument was countered by claims that married teachers were steadier and stayed at the same school longer. One woman, in criticizing Anderson's plan, declared:

> We want our girls to marry, but must they be penalized for so doing? Imagine the howl that would go up were our engineers, lawyers, and doctors told that their certificate would be cancelled if they perpetrated matrimony! Why pick on teachers?(9)

The exaggerated figures in an 1931 report on education in the province reflected the unfounded fears of many in society:

> The fact that over a thousand married women have left their homes to engage again in teaching in order to support their families gives some indication of the distress. These teachers are taking the place of an equal number of young teachers who have been put through High School, University and Normal School, in the majority of cases at a considerable expense to the family concerned and who are expected now to contribute to the support of their homes.(10)

The province's worsening financial condition was hard on its educational system, particularly in the drought area. The difficulty in collecting property taxes in many school districts meant drastic cuts in school budgets; in some rural areas,

it meant closing schools completely. Rural teacher's salaries were reduced dramatically as the following chart demonstrates.

TABLE XXII

Average teacher's salaries, rural and urban, 1926-37.

Year	Rural	Urban
1926	1,017	1,292
1931	863	1,289
1932	861	1,277
1933	620	1,125
1934	506	969
1935	465	914
1936	N/A	N/A
1937	484	1,113

Source: Canada Year Book, 1926-1940.

These salaries are averages only -- many teachers were paid little more than the $200 a year the school board received from the government. In some instances, teachers received "chits" from school districts unable to pay their wages.

In November 1936 teachers, tired of waiting for their salary, threatened to go on strike if arrears were not paid by April 30 1937. The recently formed Teachers Federation took up the question of arrears with Premier Patterson and requested that a minimum salary of $750 per year for teachers be established. A further request that teachers be eligible for relief reveals the reality of teaching for many people in the 1930s. Patterson's response to the Federation's requests was to state that "under the present system of financing education it would be impossible

to institute a minimum salary." He added that if teacher's "purchasing power falls below that of relief recipients every consideration will be given to their case."(11) This rather callous response to the teachers' requests prompted the editor of the United Farm Women's column of the Western Producer to declare:

> eligibility for relief was asked only as a last resort. Teachers on relief can never teach with any real enthusiasm ... If parents send their sons and daughters into the teaching profession under present circumstances it can only be in absolute despair of anything better.(12)

There is no record of teachers carrying out their strike threat. While some teachers quit when the school district could no longer afford their salaries, others remained and, like many of their pupils, existed on relief. Often there was little choice: it was better to be on relief with a job and the hope that next month or next school-year conditions would be better, than to be unemployed and on relief with no hope at all. Still, under such conditions teaching as a profession lost considerable status.

For those who continued teaching, working conditions during the Depression were often grim. Many could not afford warm clothing; a particular hardship if they worked in the many schools which were inadequately heated. According to one teacher:

> At the present time I am in ill health, brought on by deplorable conditions under which we must work. Our school is an old-timer ... windows so drafty the window blinds are kept in constant motion by the wind. The school is warmed

> by an old heater, the grates of which are destroyed ... In cold weather we pull all the seats around the stove and try to study. Some days I have not taken off my outer coat or overshoes all day ... it is doubtful if my doctor will give me permission to return to my school.(13)

Another teacher whose experience was similar concluded "neither teacher [nor] pupil can do efficient work at two degrees above freezing."(14) A 1936 report stated that many teachers in the impoverished southern part of the province were:

> living in filthy school basements, and teaching in schools where the temperature during the winter months was never higher than 25 degrees above zero.(15)

Teachers in rural areas either boarded with farm families or, where they were available, lived in teacherages. While teacherages provided a degree of privacy and had the convenience of being close to the school, they did present problems in transportation for the teacher and were often "lonely and isolated domiciles" miles from the nearest house.(16) Their very isolation subjected the often young teacher to the dangers of "a sudden illness, a criminal on the loose, foolhardy, self-styled suitors, bothersome drunks or even some wild animal."(15) Lonely as living in a teacherage was, it was often preferable to boarding, particularly in areas hard hit by the Depression. Where families could not afford an extra mouth at the table, they took turns boarding the teacher for a month at a time. In such cases meals were often sparse and living conditions primitive. In

less impoverished areas, the teacher was lucky if she got a home where she had her own room and fairly good meals; more often she had to share a room with one or more children in the family, or perhaps with her landlady.

The shortage of money for teaching materials during the Depression forced teachers to be creative. One teacher made her own musical instuments so that her class could have a rhythm band -- sheaf carrier tines became triangles, chair rungs rhythm sticks, oatmeal boxes drums and tambourines.(18) Other teachers used the Eaton's catalogue for a reader, each child reading out the items he or she would most like to purchase. Three hundred Saskatchewan schools received help as a part of the "adopt a school" scheme instituted by the Ontario Teacher's Federation. Under this plan students in Ontario were encouraged to bring items from home for "their" school in Saskatchewan.(19)

Poor wages and working conditions were not the only difficulties faced by teachers; rival factions and small town pettiness often added to the teacher's problems:

> When one clan is seemingly pleased with the teacher, that's a sure cue for the others to disparage him ... If conversation ever lags at a party, all the host has to do is to mention the teacher or Eaton's catalog and its on its way again. They get new issues about the same time too.(20)

Despite the very low pay and often atrocious working conditions, the surplus of unemployed teachers made competition

for teaching jobs so keen that many women felt "a young teacher had to have a "pull" with someone on a school board" if she hoped to get a school.(21) It was not unusual for a teacher to have to wait a year or more before being able to get a teaching position. In the meantime, prospective teachers were forced to find either another kind of work or to remain in the family home as unpaid help. No statistics are available as to the number of such women who were never able to find a teaching position, or, who, discouraged, gave up looking.

Conditions in the field of nursing were not much better. As is shown in the chart below, the number of both graduate and student nurses employed in Saskatchewan hospitals dropped dramatically during the worst years of the Depression. Hardest hit during this period were the student nurses, who learned on the job and were usually paid little more than just room and board. With the exception of 1932, the number of employed graduate nurses generally increased during the 1930s, reaching a peak in 1936. Though the figures dropped somewhat for the remainder of the decade, in direct contrast to the cheaper student nurses whose numbers continued to climb, they were still considerably higher than at the outset of the Depression.

TABLE XXIII

Number of Student and Graduate Nurses Working in Saskatchewan Hospitals, 1930-1939.

Year	Student Nurses	Graduate Nurses	Total
1930	633	371	1004
1931	604	449	1153
1932	547	401	948
1933	446	441	887
1934	412	576	986
1935	556	591	1147
1936	614	650	1264
1937	627	522	1149
1938	645	541	1146
1939	651	569	1220

Source: Canada Year Book, 1931-1940.

Those nurses unable to find work in a hospital sought employment as private nurses, where they frequently worked for just room and board or were paid with produce only.(22) Others turned to different occupations or returned to their family home.

As women were downgraded into low skill, poor paying occupations such as domestic work, they were no longer protected by the one piece of legislation designed to prevent female exploitation, the provincial Minimum Wage Act. While the Act,

which had originally applied only to women in urban centers and in certain occupations, was amended in 1936 to extend coverage to all areas of the province (but not to all occupations), at no time did it cover the province's large army of female domestic workers. Those workers who were covered were not much better off as the already low minimum wage levels were reduced in response to the worsening economic conditions. Reductions were frequent -- 10% in 1932, and again in 1933, and a dollar a week in 1935.(23)

TABLE XIV

Minimum Wage Rates Set in 1935.

Order	Location of employment	Wage per week*	Adult** learner	Hours per week
Order 1	city shops	$14	$9	44-51
Order 2	laundries factories	$13 "	$9 "	48 "
Order 3	mail order houses	$13.50	$9	48
Order 4	hotels restaurants	$12 "	$10 "	49 "
Order 5	beauty parlour barber shops	$14 "	$10.5 "	48 "

* fully qualified workers.
** minors, under eighteen were paid even less.

Source: Labour Gazette, February 1935, p. 151-153.

Because the female minimum wage was less than the wage generally paid to men, it was not without its critics.(24) One woman

charged that politicians operated under a double standard, calling women superior beings and putting them on pedestals at election time, "yet when it comes to paying us cold cash for the work we do, do we get the same scale of wages as men for the same work? We do not!"(25)

As low as women's wages already were, desperation made some women willing to work for even less than the minimum wage. That there were employers willing to exploit them is not too surprising in light of the low fines handed out to offending employers. Though the Act set the maximum fine at $100, in 1932 three employers in Moose Jaw were fined only ten dollars each for paying women less than the minimum wage. In their defense, the employers claimed they had made an agreement with the women for a lower rate, an agreement declared null and void under the Act.(26)

Such infractions were not uncommon at a time when competition for the few jobs available was high. In 1936, for example, there were 1,119 general inspections and 183 special investigations made under the Act. Successful negotiations with employers resulted in almost $6,500 in back wages being paid to 186 female workers. In thirty-five other cases it was necessary to lay charges against employers, thirty-two of which resulted in fines.(27) As a defense against illegal practices by employers,

female employees in Saskatoon organized the Waitress and Shop Assistants Union. The union's goal was to bring alleged violations of the Act to the attention of the Minimum Wage Board, but there is no record of any activity by this group.

As conditions in the province worsened and more people became willing to work for less and less, women faced increasing competition for jobs from "a number of unemployed men that were willing to work for their board or for a mere nothing."(28) This enabled some employers to hire men for less than the minimum wage they would have had to pay a woman. Thus the legislation once designed to protect women from unfair exploitation and guarantee them a livable wage, now excluded them from some low paying jobs. This practice was denounced by the United Farm Women who asked:

> What good is a minimum wage act if it is not enforced? We hear every day of girls being dismissed from their positions ... men, for example being taken into restaurants instead of girls because the girls have the so-called protection of the minimum wage act and men have not ... so can be hired for less.(29)

Female workers received some protection in 1936 when the Minimum Wage Act was extended to cover male employees in shops and factories.

The lack of union activity amongst Saskatchewan women during the 1930s is reflected in the fact that only two strikes involving women were recorded during that period. Both occurred

in Regina in 1937 and were short lived. In February of that year eleven kitchen maids and waitresses at a hospital in Moose Jaw struck for improved living conditions and quarters. The workers claimed their second floor living quarters were in rundown condition, lacked curtains and were infested with mice, cockroaches and rats. Threatened with dismissal and ordered to vacate their rooms, the women ended their strike six days later. In a somewhat meek letter to the hospital board they apologized for their actions stating:

> we did not realize the embarrassment likely to be caused the board and staff. We felt at the time that this was the only manner in which our grievances could be brought to the attention of the board.(30)

They were subsequently rehired "on probation". There was no mention of any changes in their living conditions.

In July, seven of twenty-two employees at a non-union restaurant went on strike to protest the firing of a male employee for alleged misconduct. Six of the picketers were women. The owner charged that the few union members in his shop were making it a target for the union. Business not only continued during the strike, but actually improved as a result of the attention drawn to it by the picketing. The strike ended six weeks later in favour of the employer.(31)

Apart from the Waitress and Shop Assistants Union mentioned earlier, the only other attempt in Saskatchewan to organize

female workers occurred in 1938. In that year an organization calling itself the Domestic Workers Protective Association approached the Regina Trades and Labour Council for assistance in organizing. The Council, apparently uninterested or reluctant to become involved in unionizing this group, referred them to the Minimum Wage Board with the suggestion that they work toward having domestic workers brought under the Minimum Wage Act. Apparently nothing came of the matter, as no more was heard from the Association.(32)

While women as a whole faced considerable difficulty in the labour force during the Depression, for those who happened to be wives the problems were even greater. In speaking to a mass meeting of women in Regina in 1933, M.J. Coldwell, leader of the Farmer-Labour Group, declared that families should not be "compelled to live on the income of one"; yet even in cases of real need, families often had little choice.(33) While single women had become an acceptable part of the work force in the 1920s, married women had not. This discrimination, which "had found as comfortable home as ever in the 1920s", was carried over into the 1930s.(34) As a result, there were few opportunities open to wives who, either out of personal desire or economic necessity, sought employment during the Depression. Their numbers were small, even at the height of the Depression. Of the 41,711 women working in 1936, only 4,413 were married. Another 4,582

workers were either widowed or divorced.(35)

Under Chapter 7, Section 36 of the Public Services Act, which came into effect in 1930, married women were excluded from the provincial public service. According to the Act:

> No married woman shall be admitted to or continued in the public service unless the commission certifies that there are special circumstances which make the appointment or the continuance of the appointment desirable.(36)

Like the 1921 federal legislation after which it was patterned, the provincial act allowed some exceptions in special circumstances. For instance, a married woman could be employed if her husband was unable to work, if it was desirable or necessary and in the best interests of the public service to employ a husband and wife together, or if experienced help for a particular kind of work was not available. In the latter case, a qualified married woman could then be hired, but only on a temporary basis. Such "special circumstances" were rare and subject to the scrutiny of the Saskatchewan legislature.

The experience of a woman doctor whose employment at the Weyburn Mental Hospital was questioned by the legislature in 1932 provides an example of the extent of the discrimination experienced by public service employees who also happened to be wives. Because this woman's husband, a doctor in the Tisdale district, was also a public service employee, the opposition

party charged that her continued appointment contravened the Public Service Act. These charges were denied by the government which claimed her appointment took place in June, 1930, a month before the legislation took effect, and, when her position was subsequently advertised, only one other application was received. An examination was also arranged, since the Public Service Act ruled that:

> no appointment of any person not already in the public service to any permanent office or position therein shall be made unless the Commission is satisfied that a competitive examination under the provisions of the Act has been held.(37)

It was further stated that at this point the second candidate withdrew; the doctor then wrote and passed the examination after which "her appointment on the status of probationary was sanctioned." The appointment of the wife of an Inspector in the Bureau of Child Protection to the position of Chief Assessment Clerk for the Workman's Compensation Board the following year came under similar scrutiny. It appears that marital status, not competence, was the crucial issue in each instance.(38) In 1936 only three out of a total of 653 public service officials were women; of these just one was married.(39) Unlike similar legislation introduced in the United States during the same period, this sort of discrimination appears not to have met with opposition from women's groups.(40)

The government was not alone in its discrimination against

married women. In a 1937 report on legislation affecting women and children, Alex Blackwood, Provincial Deputy Attorney General, wrote:

> This province has not enacted a Sex Discrimination Removal Act but as pointed out on page 2 of the enclosed memorandum men and women are now, generally speaking, admitted to the professions on an equal basis. With regard to whether this has proved effective in practice or if discriminations are still made against married women, I would say that in the Public Service of Saskatchewan married women are not admitted or continued in the Public Service unless special circumstances exist. Some commercial organizations have a similar rule. Women in the professions and important public positions however, may still be deemed as being in the minority at present as a matter of practice.(41)

To say married women were a minority in "the professions and other important public positions" is an understatement. The 1936 census records only one female lawyer, two doctors, one social worker, and two health professionals in addition to the one married woman in the public service mentioned earlier. There were no female justices or magistrates, dentists or professors.(42) For the most part the ministry was closed to women, with the exception of the United Church which, the previous year, had broken with tradition by ordaining Lydia Gruchy, a single woman, as a minister.(43)

The statistics were no better for the divorced or widowed woman. The majority of jobs available to married or formerly married women were of a menial nature, as a 1936 list of the eight most frequent occupations for this group suggests.

TABLE XXV

Most Frequent Occupations, Married, Divorced, Widowed, 1936.

Married		Divorced/widowed	
housekeeper	1,245	farm help	2,438
domestic	687	housekeeper	804
farm help	533	lodging house keeper	221
lodging house keeper	383	domestics	203
teacher	230	retail store owners	85
saleswomen	142	teacher	78
steno/typist	115	saleswoman	70
textile manu.	107	clerical	63
		textile manu.	63

Source: Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936.

The wider range of occupations on a similar list for single women suggests that "commercial organizations" may indeed have followed the example of the public sector in hiring practices regarding married women.

TABLE XXVI

Most Frequent Occupations, Unmarried, 1936.

Single Women

domestic	12,704	saleswoman	1,719
teacher	5,265	nurses	1,278*
steno/typist	2,828	office help	842
housekeeper	1,986	waitress	736

* does not include over 600 nurses in training

Source: Ibid.

Temporary or part-time jobs frequently offered the only employment available to wives. Some such women were very resourceful in finding ways to earn money. One woman who, besides playing at dances with her husband for five dollars a night, also

> worked in Tom Weise's hotel as a cook until (she) got pneumonia. After that (she) took grain prices at the elevator and did maternity work with Dr. Brundage.(44)

Later she did janitor work at the school for twenty-five dollars a month which "made it much easier to keep us in groceries."(45) A number of wives took in laundry or boarders, while others did sewing. Farm wives sold eggs, butter or cream when they could, though the price was often so low as to make the trip into town unprofitable. One enterprising woman sold packets of flower seeds from her own garden at ten cents a package. Another sold Christmas cards, mainly to friends who still had a paycheck, and made fifty dollars the year her husband was unemployed. The

following year, when he was working, she made only half that amount, she found, "when you have to do it you can do it, when you don't have to do it you don't work that hard."(46) More unusual were the women in "sturdy tweeds and brogues" who were among those hopeful miners placing claims in the 1931 "gold rush" in the Coronach and Fife Creek area ninety miles south of Moose Jaw. No gold was found.(47)

An illegal means of supplementing the family income, which often involved wives was the making of home brew, which was a fairly lucrative business during the Depression provided buyers for the dollar-a-bottle brew could be found. Though the illegal stills were most frequently operated by husband and wife teams, it was generally the husband who was charged when the illegal still was discovered. Most were given the option of paying a $200 fine or serving six months in jail. Since it was the lack of funds that usually drew people into the home brew business, and wives of men serving time in jail were eligible for Mother's Allowance, most husbands opted for the jail term. Thus, as one oldtimer recalls "it was the wife that made the brew and the husband did the time ... So, back on the farm it was business as usual with government assistance."(48)

Throughout the Depression jobs for women, married or single, were not only difficult to find but also difficult to keep.

Downgraded into lower status, poorer paying jobs, ignored by unions and discriminated against by government legislation, working women in Saskatchewan lost many of the gains made in the 1920s. Women who entered the work force for the first time during the Depression did so most often out of economic necessity rather than out of a philosophical belief in their right to work. Once in the labour force, they faced considerable opposition from a society that still regarded the home as the proper sphere for women, an attitude that became more firmly entrenched as the decade wore on and the competition for jobs intensified. In light of the tight employment conditions it is perhaps understandable that public opinion should favour jobs going to men with families. What it failed to consider was that wives of unemployed men also had a need to put food on the table, as did single self-supporting women and female heads of families. For these women, work was not a question of choice, but a matter of necessity.

The idea that a job should go to the best qualified person, male or female, married or single, was not accepted during the 1930s. Even today, during periods of recession the right of wives to work is still questioned by those who hold to the belief that working wives take jobs from men with families to support. Just as in the 1930s, the accusing finger is rarely pointed at women in low paying, menial jobs, but at those in better paying

occupations. Then, as now, it seems, working women were regarded as a threat to male employment only insofar as they attempted to move into higher paying, white-collar occupations.

Footnotes

1 Private correspondence in possession of the writer.

2 Some women claim those seeking their first job were exploited financially, and often sexually, as well. See Mary McFarlane, "Recollections of a Wrinkled Radical," Canadian Woman Studies (Winter 1986) p. 99.

3 Census of Canada, 1941, Table 2, Vol 7, p. 11.

4 Ibid.

5 In 1923 there were 1463 men and 5516 women; by 1929 there were 2080 men compared to 6384 women. Canada Year Book, 1924-30. For a look at earlier years in Canada see Alison Prentice, "The Feminization of Teaching," The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History, ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice (Toronto, 1981): 49-65.

6 Census of Canada, 1936, Table 7, p. 505.

7 Western Producer, June 11 1932, p. 10.

8 Ibid., July 11 1931, p. 10.

9 Ibid., June 11 1931, p. 10.

10 "Aid For Schools", A Report on Conditions in Saskatchewan, 1931, U.N.B. Library, Bennett Papers, Vol. 778 as cited in Michiel Horn, The Dirty Thirties (Canada, 1972): 188.

11 Ibid., November 12 1936, p. 13.

12 Ibid.

13 Douglas A.Lawr and Robert D. Gidney, Educating Canadians (Toronto, 1973): 208.

14 Ibid.

15 Western Producer, November 12 1936, p. 13.

16 John C. Charyk, Syrup Pails and Gopher Tails: Memories of the One Room School House (Saskatoon, 1983): 61.

17 Ibid., p. 62.

18 Westside Echoes Book Committee, Westside Echoes (Saskatchewan, 1980): 6.

19 Western Producer, February 10 1938, p. 12.

20 Ibid., April 3 1930, p. 4.

21 Westside Echoes Book Committee, p. 429.

22 Barbara Keddy, "Private Duty Nursing Days of the 1920s and 1930s in Canada," Canadian Woman Studies (Fall 1986): 99-102

23 Labour Gazette, February 1935, p. 151-153.

24 In 1931 women's annual wages were generally 57% of those of men; Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of The New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," Labour/Le Travailleur (1979): 147.

25 Western Producer, February 11 1932, p. 10.

26 Labour Gazette, 1932, p. 1040.

27 Ibid., October 1937, p. 1097.

28 F.J. Reynolds, Commissioner, Bureau of Child Welfare, Government of Saskatchewan, to Charlotte Whitton, August 16 1930, Canadian Welfare Council Papers, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 10 Vol. 14.

29 Western Producer, May 3 1934, p. 11.

30 Regina Leader Post, February 25 1937, p. 1.

31 Labour Gazette, August 1937, p. 850.

32 Smillie, Christine, "The Invisible Workforce: Women Workers in Saskatchewan From 1905 to World War II," Saskatchewan History (Spring 1987): 67.

33 Western Producer, April 1933, p. 11.

34 Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Girl of a New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s," Labour/Le Travailleur (1979): 163.

35 Census of the Prairie Provinces, Saskatchewan, 1936, Table 7, p. 505.

36 The Revised Statutes of Saskatchewan, 1930, p. 163

37 Saskatchewan Gazette, November 29 1930, p. 2.

38 Journal of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly of the Province of Saskatchewan, Vol. XXIX, 1931 p. 161.

39 Census of the Prairie Provinces, Saskatchewan, 1936, Table 7, p. 505.

40 In the U.S., women's defense of the right to work regardless of marital status brought about a change in feminist philosophy. Instead of defending the right to work, they began to explain why women should be allowed to work--i.e. to benefit their family. See Lois Scharf, To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression (Westport Conn., 1980).

41 Letter to E.C. Monk, Esq. B.C.L., Messrs. Vallee, Beaudry, Fortier, Letourneau & MacNaughton, Montreal May 20, 1737, National Council of Women Papers, Correspondence File, N.A.C., M.G. 28, I 25, Vol. 72.

42 Census of Canada, 1921, lists the following women; 4 lawyers, 4 doctors, 2 dentists, 1 judge or magistrate.

43 Not without a lengthy struggle, see Mary E. Hallet, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for the Ordination of Women in the United Church of Canada," Atlantis (Spring 1979): 2-14.

44 Arborfield History Book Committee, Echoes From the Past; a History of Arborfield and District (Manitoba, 1981): 150.

45 Ibid.

46 Interview with Peggy Grey, at her home, April 23, 1986.

47 Regina Leader-Post May 20 1931, p. 1.

48 Westside Echoes Book Committee, Westside Echoes (Saskatchewan 1980): 52.

CONCLUSION

There is little doubt that the Depression decade changed both the collective and the individual lives of the women of Saskatchewan. Some of these changes were apparent; others were not. Changes in attitude, particularly in relation to feminist thought, are perhaps the hardest to determine. Since the women's page of most newspapers consisted primarily of letters from readers, a study of one such page over an extensive period of time does provide some insight into these changes.

The "Mainly For Women" page of the Western Producer, which provided a forum for women where they could express their views on topics of interest and exchange ideas and tips with other women, revealed a gradual change in both the tone and the content of the letters from readers during the ten years of the Depression. These changes suggest that, while feminism was in fact alive and well during that period, it became increasingly focused on women's roles as wives and mothers rather than on their role as individual human beings. Not too surprisingly, since the majority of women in Saskatchewan were married, issues relating to their maternal role brought the greatest response from readers.

One such issue, birth control, brought a generally negative response from women who disapproved of the idea of preventing

pregnancy entirely and extolled the wonders of giving birth. The concept of choice in the matter of whether or not to have children at all was not mentioned. Birth control was accepted only as a means of controlling the number of children (and then primarily as a result of economic conditions) rather than as a means of preventing conception entirely.

In 1931 the question of the nationality of married women brought some response from readers, most of whom opposed the legislation in place in Canada (as well as in many other western countries) under which women at the time of marriage automatically assumed the nationality of their husbands, thus losing their own. For example, a Canadian-born woman of British parents, married to a Ukrainian immigrant became a Ukrainian under Canadian law.(1) Similarly, the European immigrant wife of a Canadian-born male assumed her husband's Canadian status.

Following the example of their British cousins, in the late 1920s women in many parts of Canada, including Saskatchewan, began mounting opposition to this legislation, claiming it discriminated against women. Honors Enfield, secretary of the Women's International Guild, expressed the sentiments of many in the spring of 1931 when she urged women to write to the League of Nations in Geneva, asking that they:

> recognize woman's independent personality and that she no longer be regarded merely as an appendage to

> her husband: but have the same right as a man to retain or change her nationality".(2)

The subject of the nationality of wives was also raised at a meeting of the United Farmers of Canada later the same year. The following resolution was submitted by Saskatchewan's Louise Lucas:

> 1. To embody in legislation the principle's upon which the British "Nationality of Married Women's Bill" is based.
> 2. To send to Geneva a delegation pledged to support the placing of men and women on an equality with regard to their nationality.(3)

In the fall of 1931 the issue came before the House of Commons in Ottawa; as a result, in January of the following year amendments to the Nationalization Act gave women equal rights with men in regard to nationality. This brought Canadian women one step closer to legal, if not social, equality with men.

The response of Saskatchewan women to the nationality controversy would appear at first glance to indicate a growing consciousness of their rights as human beings and represent a distinct departure from the 'maternal feminism' of the earlier decades. Such a response is deceptive, however, as the previous year the passage of discriminatory legislation in Regina, which barred women from the public service on the basis of marital status, had not resulted in even one letter of protest to the newspaper. This would suggest a concern more with matters affecting their rights as women (read wives and mothers), than

with their rights as equal human beings regardless of sex.

The emphasis on women's role as wives is also evident in the controversy over a question on the 1936 Census of Canada, which asked for an estimate of farm production "exclusive of housework." Farm women, whose labour in producing the products needed by families was extensive, were riled by the exclusion of their role in farm production. They regarded such a statement as discriminatory and demanded steps be taken to raise the status of homemaking. Writing to "Mainly For Women", one woman declared:

> If women are satisfied with the present estimation of housework I'm afraid nothing will be done. If not then every woman, individually and collectively as a member of an organization, should make her protests known to the statistical department in Ottawa so that changes can be made before another census is taken.(4)

Another, obviously dissatisfied with the lot of women, declared:

> The ridiculed "old maid" gets paid for her work and doesn't have to look forward to a confinement case for her yearly vacation ... Women if we are downtrodden jellyfish, it is nobody's fault but our own. Our slogan should be "No money, no marriage" for unmarried women, and "No wages, no babies" for married women ... let us stop rocking the cradle for a change, for we can rule the world instead.(5)

A third expressed her own frustration when she wrote:

> If there were only something for all the women in the west to get mad at, all of them at the same time, but nothing stirs the majority from their apathy because the press, the church and their own opinion still fosters in them the belief that they are not actual human beings.(6)

The idea of raising the status of the homemaker was not a new one; it had been the goal of feminists throughout the

previous decade.(7) As early as 1930 Louise Lucas, in reporting on the annual convention of the Provincial Council of Women, stated that U.F.C. activist, Mrs. A. Hollis, had:

> showed us the necessity of raising the standard of the homemaker and urged that we women concentrate on the important topics pertaining to homes and children.(8)

That women did not take any action during the 1930s may have been more a reflection of a lack of leadership than the lack of an issue to unite them. Also it must be remembered that for the majority of Saskatchewan women the immediate problem of clothing and feeding cold hungry bodies left little time for other concerns. For some mothers, isolation and the care of children provided the excuse for inaction. As one such mother wrote:

> I have a nineteen months old baby boy who is at the climbing age and takes no end of watching and washing. Here we have only one mail a week and the post office is six miles off. I suppose for us country women study by mail is the only thing. I cannot tackle dry stuff without an objective, so I hope some definite plans will come to make concerted action ... a possibility in the near future.(9)

Not all women cheerfully accepted their role as wives and mothers to the exclusion of all other possibilities. The ire of several readers was raised by a poem titled "A Wish" which was printed in the newspaper in 1935. The poem began:

> God, give each true good woman
> Her own small house to keep --
> No heart should ache with longing --
> No hurt should go too deep --
> Grant her her age old desire;
> A house to love and sweep.

And concluded with the verse:

> God, let her work with laughter,
> And let her rest with sleep --
> No life can truly offer
> A peace more sure and deep --
> God, give each true good woman
> Her own small house to keep.(10)

Another reader decried the notion that all a woman wanted was a home to "love and sweep." In responding to the flurry of angry letters to the editor that her comments had generated, she declared;

> I am not surprised that my letter aroused a good deal of opposition for it was intentionally a provocative one, and I am aware that my kind of woman is in the minority. Still, even minorities have a right to exist ... I am not so foolish as to decry the necessity for making a home comfortable and happy. I do deny that this is the whole duty of the good woman ... We do need to realize and remember that it takes many different kinds of women -- as of men -- to make a world and we are not helped in our task of making a happy home by lulling ourselves into a mental stupor with self-complacent sentiment.(11)

The reader was likely correct in believing she was in a minority as most letters printed favoured the sentiment expressed by the poem. Any other response could hardly be expected from women whose energies were entirely directed at making such a home under what were becoming increasingly difficult circumstances. To question the view expressed by the poem would be to question the role they had embraced as women.

Nonetheless, one cannot conclude that the followers of the women's page were entirely unknowing about issues outside the

home. Many sought to understand the economic system that had resulted in the disaster they were experiencing. Before each election, women's letters to the editor expressed opinions on the major issues of the day. While women were encouraged to become more involved in politics, such participation was urged in terms suggestive of the maternal feminism of the earlier decades. In 1933 political activist Louise Lucas called on women to:

> Wake up! We have a duty to fill in this reorganization of the public housekeeping ... I am convinced that our greatest hindrance to progress is our false modesty. We are afraid to take our place in public housekeeping for fear someone will think we are pushing ourselves forward; that we are unwomanly ...."(12)

Similarly Sophia Dixon, editor of the United Farm Women column in the Western Producer, urged women to take an active role in politics, claiming a planned economy is:

> just good housekeeping, provincial housekeeping or dominion housekeeping as the case may be ... We shall count on the women to help create public opinion to put a "planned economy", or in other words, a practical housekeeping program into effect.(13)

Though it is difficult to determine whether more women became involved in politics at the grass roots level during the 1930s, the editor of the "Mainly for Women" column reported an "astonishing" number of women delegates and visitors at the United Farmers of Canada convention in 1933, though not as many at the C.C.F. convention the same year. Women took an active part in both conventions, she added. One woman delegate, when asked

why she had become more active, replied:

> I've stayed and cared for my family ever since I was married. Now they are ready to go out in the world and the world has no place for them ... so I'm out to find the reason why.(14)

A farm wife attending an earlier United Farmers of Canada convention reflected a change in the attitude of some women toward their role when she spoke of her husband's belief that a woman's place was in the home:

> until a short time I thought the same myself, and, as well as practicing it, I also preached it. Now I see I was wrong. I also realize I must be a little patient until Tom gets educated to think as I do.(15)

The annual Farm Women's Week, begun in the 1920s and held at the University of Saskatchewan, continued to draw women throughout the Depression, though in smaller numbers. The efforts made by women to attend this convention indicate its importance to them. For many it provided the only opportunity for a holiday from the farm; for all of them it was a chance to meet and discuss with other women issues of concern to them.

While many of the women attending the conventions were sponsored by their local lodge, others made great sacrifices in order to attend. Some sold poultry, seeking individual customers when local merchants were unable to buy their products. In order to attend the 1939 Farm Women's Week, one enterprising woman used the 300 pennies she had saved since the previous convention for

just that purpose. Two other women hitchhiked seventy miles to attend the same year.(16) Others were sent by their Women's Institute or, occasionally, by neighbouring farm women who wanted one of their number to attend. Not suprisingly, a large number of women at the conventions were former teachers.(17) A wide variety of issues relating to women were discussed, including peace and disarmament, economics, mental illness, education, and child care, to name only a few. The value to women in attending the Farm Women's Week was stressed in the editorials of "Mainly For Women" by Violet McNaughton, who recognized the need for women to get together to discuss their common concerns. A feminist herself, she asked "who will mind the farm woman's business if she won't get out and help look after herself?"(18)

How accurate a barometer of the feminist sentiments of Saskatchewan women the "Mainly For Women" column was is a matter of debate. It is impossible, for instance, to know if the women who took the time and were able to write to the editor were typical of the majority of readers, or even if the readers of The Western Producer themselves were typical. Certainly by far the largest number of women who wrote to the paper did so not to express an opinion on a philosophical issue but to seek assistance in matters relating to their immediate home situation. This became particularly evident in the lack of response to editorials in which Violet McNaughton tried to raise the

consciousness of her readers by discussing international events and major issues.

As the Depression continued, the divergence between the topics in the editorials and those in the letters to the editor became greater. The readers, for the most part, were more concerned with stretching their relief dollars and learning to make things they previously purchased. As early as 1932 a reader's survey of the Peace column, which regularly appeared on the women's page, showed that only forty-five readers wanted the column improved or given more space, while another sixty-six suggested it be shortened or discontinued. According to the same survey, the columns the readers most wanted introduced or retained were those on labour saving devices for the home, health, household hints, water supply, and cooking recipes. Little interest was indicated in reading, book reviews or home decorating.(19) A suggestion later the same year, that the number of household hints be reduced to make way for a book column met with considerable resistance from readers who argued that they both wanted and used the "hard time" hints contained in many of the letters.(20)

By the mid-thirties the editorials on world issues and studies were almost completely overwhelmed by recipes for keeping eggs, hints for canning without sugar, debate over the spanking

of children, and other issues of greater concern to homemakers. Only as the prospect of war became more of a possibility toward the end of the decade did the response of the readers turn again to questions beyond Saskatchewan's border.

As the letters to the editor suggest, the continuing poor economic conditions left most women with little time or energy to devote to outside events. As a result, women became increasingly home-oriented during the Depression. In studying the effect of the 1930s on women and families in the United States, historians such as Glen Elder, Lois Scharf and Susan Ware report a strengthening of both family ties and family values. Winnifred Wandersee supports this view and suggests that the Depression experience had the effect not only of restoring family ties but also of accentuating the family's protective function. This occurred within the nuclear family where even children helped supplement the family income by catching gophers or spotting thistle, and spread to the extended family which, in giving material aid, also provided important psychological support and assistance. Elder goes even further to propose that this emphasis on family values and family ties was at the expense of individualistic achievement in areas such as education and career development. Interviews with survivors of the Depression would support this thesis.

In some cases the Depression provided homemakers with the opportunity to "recapture some of their vital economic role within the family."(21) As a result, these women felt their efforts around the home took on greater value and were thus more rewarding to them. An article saved or made was one less to purchase, which left more money for other necessities. This was particularly true on the farm and, in a sense, was similar to the earlier pioneer period when farm wives' labour often determined whether the family survived on the prairie or not.

This strengthening of the homemaker role for women did little to break down sexual stereotypes. Wandersee argues that the Depression fostered the domestic climate in which marriage and family were regarded as the only commitment for women. As children took on more and more adult roles -- girls helping in the home and boys helping to earn money for the family -- the male/female stereotypes were reinforced in the next generation.(22) The emphasis on domestic work for the unemployed and on home projects in girls and young women's organizations strengthened these roles even further. Employment by mothers generally was perceived as an extension of the female nurturing activity.(23)

Women in the labour force were also affected by the Depression. Although they escaped the high unemployment rate

experienced by men because they were less likely to be employed in the vulnerable, hard hit primary industries, as a whole they suffered major setbacks as a result of the decade. The most important of these, and perhaps the longest lasting, was their demotion in terms of occupational status: that is, women were downgraded into lower status, lower paying jobs. The result was a shrinking of their esteem within the work force. Only during the labour shortage resulting from World War II would they once again be regarded as a valuable source of labour. In the 1930s the concept of women's right to work made little, if any, lasting headway.(24)

For working wives the damage perhaps was even greater. The discrimination they faced increased during the Depression because a majority in society, including women, believed that wives took jobs away from men and single women who needed them. The more menial a job, the less apparent this discrimination was, thus creating a climate whereby wives could work, if necessary, but only in low status jobs.(25) Often these were part-time or sporadic in nature, Most wives who worked during the Depression did so out of economic necessity (bearing in mind that each family had its own definition of necessity based on its past expectations). According to Winnifred Bolin:

> The women who worked were working in response to their understanding of family need ... the relationship between home, self and job remained constant. That is, the work of

> the married woman usually reflected the primacy of her home life. She was working to pay for a home, keep her children in school, help her husband with his business, or pay for the "extras."(26)

Faced with opposition to their working, married women (and often single women) were put in the position of explaining why they worked, rather than why they should have the right to work. Working to benefit the family or to meet family needs was more acceptable than working to meet one's own needs in the 1930s. The hopes of a "new day" for working women in the 1920s suffered a major setback during the Depression; it would take the more affluent sixties and seventies before that new day would really begin to dawn. For women in the 1930s, it was a question of meeting the basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter; until those were met, "all else must wait."(27)

Footnotes

1. This is similar to the Indian/white situation which existed in Canada until just recently, whereby Indian women lost their native status when they married white men. It should be noted too that census figures concerning the nationality of women prior to 1936 will give misleading figures because of the old regulation.

2 Western Producer, April 2 1931, p. 19.

3 Ibid., p. 22.

4 Ibid., March 4 1937, p. 11.

5 Ibid., March 25 1937, p. 11.

6 Ibid., April 15 1937, p. 11.

7 See Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Carrying a Double Load."

8 Western Producer, May 3 1930, p. 23.

9 Ibid., March 15 1937, p. 11.

10 Ibid., December 5 1935, p. 11.

11 Ibid., January 23 1936, p. 11.

12 Ibid., November 23 1933, p. 16.

13 Ibid., January 11 1934, p. 15.

14 Ibid., July 13 1933, p. 10; See Georgina Taylor, "Gladys Strum: Farm Woman, Teacher and Politician," Canadian Woman Studies (Winter, 1986): 89-93. At least one woman, Mrs. A. Hollis played a role in the U.F.C. (S.S.)'s move into the political arena in 1931, see George Hoffman "The Entry of the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatchewan Section into Politics: A Reassessment," Saskatchewan History (Autumn 1977): 99-109. For an account of the role played by women in the development of the C.C.F. in the 1930s see Georgina M.Taylor ""The Women...Shall Help to Lead the Way": Saskatchewan CCF-NDP Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-1965," "Building the Cooperative Commonwealth": Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada ed. J.

William Brennan (Regina, 1984): 141-160.

15 Western Producer, April 10 1930, p. 18. Peace movements are not a new phenomenen; there was an active peace and disarmament movement in the decades following W.W.I which had support in Saskatchewan of women's organizations such as the W.C.T.U., the W.I., the National Council of Women; the editor of the "Mainly For Women" page, Violet McNaughton was, herself a staunch supporter of the movement, urging her readers to sign World Disarmament petitions and to press for the abolition of the private manufacture of arms, Western Producer, November 10 1932, p. 10.

16 Ibid., June 29 1939, p. 11.

17 Ibid., August 6 1936, p. 10.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., April 14 1932.

20 Ibid., October 3 1932, p. 10, (and subsequent issues).

21 Susan Ware, Holding Their Own: Women in America in the 1930s (Boston,1982).

22 Ibid., p. 199; Glen H. Elder Jr., Children of the Great Depression: Social Change in Life Experience (Chicago, 1974): 279

23 Lois Scharf, To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and the Great Depression (Westport, 1980): 64-65.

24 See Ruth Pierson, "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Labour Force in World War 11," the Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice (Toronto, 1981).

25 Despite the more "enlightened" views of many in society today, this viewpoint is still not uncommon in the 1980s and quickly comes to the surface during periods of economic recession or in discussions regarding state supported day care centers.

26 Winnifred D. Wandersee Bolin, "Economics of Middle Income Family Life--Working Women During the Great Depression," Journal of American History (June 1978): 74.

27 This quote, and the title of this thesis, was taken from a

letter written by a woman in Saskatchewan who recalled as a child during the Depression desperately wanting a new pair of red shoes and being told by her mother that the farm bills came first, and that "all else must wait." They are words that were very familiar to anyone who lived in Saskatchewan during the Great Depression.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Articles and Books

Adams, Jane, "Social Consequences of Depression." Survey (January 1932): 370-371.

Arborfield History Book Committee, Echoes From the Past; a History of Arborfield and District. Manitoba: Arborfield History Book Committee, 1981.

Archer, John, Saskatchewan: A History. Saskatoon: Western Producers Books, 1980.

Bailey, Mrs. A.W., "The Year We Moved." Pages From the Past. D.H.Hocking, ed., Saskatoon: Western Prairie Books, 1979: 223-238

Bakke, E. Wright, Citizens Without Work: A Study of the Effects of Economic Depression upon the Worker's Social Relations and Practices. New Haven: N.P., 1940.

Barber, Marilyn, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930." Ontario History (September 1980): 148-172.

Bassett, Isabel, The Parlour Rebellion: Profiles in the Struggles for Women's Rights. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975.

Bird, Caroline, The Invisible Scar. New York: N.P.,1966.

Bird, Pat, Of Dust and Time and Dreams and Agonies. Ontario: John Deyell Co., 1975.

Bolin, Winnifred D. Wandersee, "Economics of Middle Income Family Life -- Working Women During the Great Depression." Journal of American History (June 1978): 60-74.

Braithwaite, Max, Why Shoot the Teacher? Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1965.

Broadfoot, Barry, Ten Lost Years. Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1973.

Buckley, Suzann, "Efforts To Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality

Between the Two World Wars." Atlantis (Spring 1977): 76-84.

Butnell, G.E, "Economic Conditions in Rural Saskatchewan." The Canadian Forum (March 1934): 209-211.

Cavan, Dr. Ruth Shonle and Katherine Howland, The Family and the Depression. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938, reprint 1972.

Cook, Ramsay & Wendy Mitchinson, The Proper Sphere. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Coronach Historical Society, From the Turning of the Sod, The Story of the Early Settlers in the R.M. of Hart Butte No. 11. Winnipeg: Inter-Collegiate Press, 1980.

Cowan, Ruth Schwartz, "A Case Study of Technological Change: The Washing Machine and The Working Wife." Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women ed. Mary S. Hartman and Lois Banner, New York: Octagon Books, 1974.

de la Cour, Lykke and Rose Sheinin, "The Ontario Medical College For Women, 1883 to 1906." Canadian Woman Studies (Fall 1986): 73-77.

Dodds, Dianne, "The Canadian Birth Control Movement on Trial, 1936-37." Ontario History (March 1982): 71-85.

Douglas, Tommy, "Highlights of the Dirty Thirties." The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada. ed. R.D. Frances and H. Ganzevoort. Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd. 1980: 163-173.

Elder, Glen H. Jr., Children of the Great Depression. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Fairbanks, Carol & Sara Brooks Sundberg, Farm Women on the Canadian Frontier. Mituchen N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1983.

Friesen, Victor Carl, "The Rural Prairie Novel and the Great Depression." Prairie Forum (Spring 1977): 83-96.

Forsyth, Carolyn June, "'Whatever My Sex, I'm No Lady' -- Charlotte Whitton, Politician; Welfare Pioneer." Makara (1977): 27-31.

George, Isabelle, "The Moose Mountains in the 1930s." Saskatchewan History (Spring 1980): 71-74.

Gray, James, The Winter Years. Toronto: Macmillan, 1976.

Greyson, L.M. & Michael Bliss, The Wretched of Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973.

Hallet, Mary E., "Nellie McClung and the Fight for Ordination in the United Church of Canada." Atlantis (Spring 1975): 2-16.

Hanson, S.D., "Estevan, 1931." On Strike: Six Key Labour Strikes in Canada, 1919-1929. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1975: 33-71.

Hapworth, Phillip, "Family Policy in Canada: the Case of Mother's Allowances." Social Policy and Administration Network (June 1980): 29-54.

Harrison, Dick, "Fiction of the 1930s." The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada. ed. R.D.Francis & H. Ganzevoot, Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd., 1980.

Hartman, Mary & Lois Banner, Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Hoffman, George "The Entry of the United Farmers of Canada, Saskatchewan Section into Politics: A Reassessment." Saskatchewan History (Autumn 1977): 99-109.

Horn, Michiel, The Dirty Thirties. Canada: The Copp Clarke Publishing Co., 1972.

Jackel, Susan, Wheat and Women. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

Jacques, Edna, Drifting Soil. Moosejaw: Times Co. Ltd. N.D.

Jesmer, Jesse, "Education at its Worst." Unpublished manuscript.

Jones, John Paul, "Middle Class Misery." Survey (September, 1932): 402-404.

Kealey, Linda ed., A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979.

Kearney, Kathryn, "Canadian Women and the First World War." Canadian Woman Studies (1981): 95-96.

Keddy, Barbara A, "Private Duty Nursing Days of the 1920s and Thirties in Canada." Canadian Woman Studies (Fall 1986): 99-102.

Klinck, Carl et all, ed., Literary History of Canada. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965.

Kohl, Seena B., Working Together: Women and Family in South Western Saskatchewan. Toronto: 1976.

Komarovsky, Mirra, The Unemployed Man and His Family. New York: Octagon Books, 1940, reprint 1971, 1972.

Lawr, Douglas A. & Robert D. Gidney ed., Educating Canadians. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1973.

Lensky, Helen, "A 'Servant Problem' or a Servant-Mistress Problem? Domestic Service in Canada, 1890-1930." Atlantis (Fall 1981): 3-11

Lerner, Gerda, The Female Experience. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1977.

L'Esperance, Jeanne, The Widening Sphere. Ottawa: Public Archives of Canada, 1982.

Lipset, S.M., Agrarian Socialism. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1950.

Loon Lake Historical Society, The Loon Lake Story. Saskatchewan: Loon Lake Historical Society, 1983.

Loveridge, D.M. & Barry Potyondi, From Wood Mountain to the Whitemud: A Historical survey of the Grasslands National Park Area. Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Enviroment Canada, 1983.

Lovick, L.D. ed., Tommy Douglas Speaks. Vancouver: Oolichan Books, 1979.

Lowe, Graham, "Women, Work and the Office: the Feminization of Clerical Occupations in Canada, 1901-1911." The Canadian Journal of Sociology (Fall 1980): 361-381.

MaLaren, Angus, "'What Has This to Do With Working Class Women?': Birth Control and the Canadian Left." Social History (November 1981): 435-454.

MacDonald, Christine, "How Saskatchewan Women Got the Vote." Saskatchewan History (October 1948): 1-8.

McDonald, John, "Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan." Prairie Forum (Spring 1981): 35-56.

MacFarlane, Mary, "Recollections of a Wrinkled Radical. Canadian Woman Studies (Winter 1986): 98-102.

MacMurchy, Helen, Sterilization? Birth Control? Toronto: The MacMillan Company, 1934.

Makahonuk, G., "The Working and Living Conditions of the Saskatchewan Deep Seam Coal Miners, 1930-1939." Saskatchewan History (Spring 1980): 41-55.

Manly, John, "Women of the Left in the 1930s." Atlantis (Spring 1980): 100-119.

Mather, W.J., "The Trek to Meadow Lake," MacLean's Magazine April 1, 1932.

Middleton, F.C., "The Municipal Doctor Scheme in Saskatchewan." The Canadian Nurse (June 1980): 313.

Mineham, Thomas, Boy and Girl Tramps of America. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936.

Mitchinson, Wendy, "A Medical Debate in Nineteenth-Century English Canada: Ovariotomies." Histoire Sociale/Social History (May 1984): 133-147.

---- "Historical Attitudes Towards Women and Childbirth." Atlantis (Spring 1979): 13-34.

Morgan, Winona L., The Family Meets the Depression. Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1939.

Neatby, Blair, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1939-1941." Saskatchewan History (Spring 1950): 41-56.

Newman, Alma, "Relief Administration in Saskatoon During the Depression." Pages From the Past. ed. D.H. Bocking, Saskatoon: Western Producer Books, 1979: 239-258.

Niacam Heritage Committee, Gleanings Along the Way. Winnipeg: Inter-collegiate Press, 1980.

Norcross, Blanche, Pioneers Everyone: Canadian Women of Achievement. Toronto: Burns and MacEachern, 1979.

Orkin, Mark M., The Great Stork Derby. Markham Ont.: Paperjacks Ltd., 1982.

Palmer, Howard Immigration and the Rise in Multiculturalism. Toronto; Copp Clarke Publishing, 1975.

Pederson, Diana, "'Keeping Our Good Girls Good:' The YWCA and the 'Girl Problem', 1870-1930." Canadian Woman Studies (Winter 1986): 20-24.

Pederson, Mrs. Norah, "Teaching in the 1930s." Gleanings Along the Way Inter-Collegiate Press, 1980: 181.

Pierson, Ruth, "Women's Emancipation and the Recruitment of Women into the Labour Force in World War 11." The Neglected Majority. ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977, reprint 1981: 125-145.

Powell, T.J.D., "Northern Settlement, 1929-1933." Saskatchewan History (Autumn 1977): 81-98.

Prentice, Alison, "The Feminization of Teaching." The Neglected Majority. ed. Susan Mannn Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977, reprint 1981: 49-54.

Quill Historical Society, Reflections by the Quills. Sakatchewan: Quill Historical Society, 1981.

Rasmussen, Linda, A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women. Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976.

Ray, Janet, Emily Stowe. Don Mills: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1976.

Rogers, T.B. & P.J. Rogers, "Some Folk Songs From the Thirties" The Dirty Thirties in Prairie Canada. ed. R.D. Francis and H. Ganzevoot. Vancouver: Tantalus Research Press, 1980.

Rooke, P.T. and R.L. Schnell, "'Making the Way More Comfortable': Charlotte Whitton's Child Welfare Career, 1920-1948." Journal of Canadian Studies (Winter 1982-83): 33-45.

Rose Valley & District Historical Society, A Tribute to Our Pioneers. Rose Valley Saskatchewan: Rose Valley & District Historical Society, 1981.

Ross, Sinclair, "The Lamp at Noon." A Book of Canadian Stories. ed. Desmond Pacey. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1947: 261-273.

---- "A Field of Wheat." Queen's Quarterly (Spring 1935): 31-42

---- "September Snow." Queen's Quarterly (Winter 1935): 451-460.

Royce, Marion, "Arguments Over the Education of Girls: Their Admission to Grammer Schools in This Province." Ontario History, (March 1975): 1-13.

Russell, P.A., "The Co-Operative Government's Response to the Depression, 1930-1934." Saskatchewan History (Autumn 1971): 81-100.

Russell, Peter A., "The Saskatchewan Conservatives, Separate Schools and the 1929 Election." Prairie Forum (Fall 1983): 211-223.

Saltcoats & District Historical Society, Saltcoats Roots & Branches. Saskatchewan: Saltcoats & District Historical Society, 1982.

Sangster, Joan, "The Communist Party and the Woman Question, 1922-1929." Labour/Le Travail (Spring 1985): 25-26.

Savage, Candace, Foremothers: Personalities and Issues from the History of Women in Saskatchewan. N.P, 1975.

Scharf, Lois, To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism and The Great Depression. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980.

Shackleton, Doris, Tommy Douglas. Don Mills: McClelland & Stewart, 1975.

Sheehan, Nancy, "Women's Organizations and Educational Issues, 1900-1930." Canadian Woman Studies (Fall 1986): 90-94.

Silverman, Eliane Leslau, The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930. Montreal: Eden Press, 1984.

---- "Women and the Victorian Work Ethic on the Alberta Frontier: Prescription and Description." The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1905-1980. eds. Howard Palmer and Donald Smith, Vancouver:1980.

Smillie, Christine, "The Invisible Workforce; Women Workers in Saskatchewan From 1905 to World War 11." Saskatchewan History (Spring 1986): 62-79.

Stamp, Robert M., "Teaching Girls Their God Given Place in Life: The Introduction of Home Economics in the Schools." Atlantis (Spring 1977): 18-34.

Stoddart, Jennifer & Veronica Strong-Boag, "And Things Were Going Wrong at Home." Atlantis (Fall 1975): 38-44.

Strong-Boag, Veronica, "Intruders in the Nursery: Childcare Professionals Reshape the Years One to Five, 1920-1940." Childhood and the Family in Canadian History. ed. Joy Parr. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982: 161-178.

--- "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie." Journal of Canadian Studies (Fall 1986): 33-52.

--- "'Setting the Stage': National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late 19th Century." The Neglected Majority. ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977, reprint 1981: 87-103.

--- "The Girl of the New Day: Canadian Working Women in the 1920s." Labour/Le Travailleur (1979): 131-164.

--- "Wages for Housework: Mother's Allowance and the Beginning of Social Security in Canada." Journal of Canadian Studies. (1979): 24-34.

--- "Working Women and the State: The Case of Canada, 1889-1945." Atlantis (Spring 1981): 1-9.

Struthers, James, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s." Canadian Historical Review (June 1981): 169-185.

--- No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State 1914-1941. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983.

Taylor, Georgina, "Gladys Strum: Farm Woman, Teacher and Politician." Canadian Woman Studies (Winter 1986): 89-93.

--- "'The Women...Shall Help To Lead The Way': Saskatchewan CCF-NDP Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-1965." "Building the Cooperative Commonwealth:" Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada. ed. J. William Brennan. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1984: 141-160.

Thomas, Lewis ed., The Making of a Socialist: The Recollections of T.C. Douglas. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1982.

Trofimenkoff, Susan and Alison Prentice, The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977, reprint 1981.

Vipond, Mary, "The Image of Women in Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s." The Neglected Majority. ed. Susan Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977, reprint 1981: 116-124.

Wandersee, Winnifred D., Women's Work and Family Values 1920-1940. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981.

Ware, Susan, Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982.

Westin, Jeane, Making Do: How Women Survived the '30s. Chicago: Folliet Publishing Co., 1976.

Westside Echoes Book Committee, Westside Echoes. Saskatchewan: Westside Echoes Book Committee, 1980.

Wright, J.F.C., The Louise Lucas Story. Montreal: Harvest House, 1965.

---- Saskatchewan, A History of a Province. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1955.

Young, Pauline, "The Human Cost of Unemployment." Sociology and Social Research (Mar-Apr. 1933): 361-369.

---- "The New Poor." Sociology and Social Research (Jan-Feb. 1932): 234-242.

Y.W.C.A., Building Fellowships, A History of the Y.W.C.A in Saskatchewan, 1905-1955. Saskatchewan: Modern Press, n.d.

Government Publications and Records

Bennett Papers, P.A.C

Canada Yearbook, 1921-1941

Canadian Welfare Council Papers, P.A.C.

Census of the Prairie Provinces, 1936

Census of Canada, 1931, 1941, 1951

Journal of the Saskatchewan Legislature, 1932

Labour Gazette

Revised Statutes of Saskatchewan, 1930

Saskatchewan Gazette

Other Records

Louise Lucas Papers, P.A.C.

National Council of Women Papers, P.A.C.

Theses

Fisher, Elaine, "The Angel and the Whore: The Growth of Psychological Advertising and Its Focus on Women in Canada", M.A., University of Victoria, 1983.

Marchildon, Rudolph George, "The Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Grower's Association: A Study in Agrarian Activism", M.A., University of Victoria, 1979.

Paustian, Shirley Irene "The Literature About the Depression, 1929-1939, in the Prairie Provinces of Canada", Ph.D, University of Alberta, 1975.

Newspapers

The Canwood Times

The Country Guide

Farmer & Labour News

The Grain Growers Guide

The Regina Leader Post

The Saskatchewan Valley News

The Stoughton Times

The Western Producer

Turtleford Sun

Correspondence and Interviews

Wilda Adair

Merle Adlem

Patricia Armstrong

Jessie Boles

Margaret Ekelin

Lois Galloway

Edna Golem

Dorothy Greenhalch

Peggy Grey

Eleanor Ingram

Averil Jacobson

Jesse Jesmer

Ivah Laycock

Caroline Lindstom

Myrtle Moorehouse

Mabel Munn

Vera Radbruch

Jean Reinhardt

Mrs. Alan Scott

Maria Wilkins

Mary Wood

And numerous other women who preferred to remain anonymous

APPENDIX I

Questionaire sent to Saskatchewan women as part of the early research for this thesis.

1 The stock market crash in 1929 ushered in the Depression. Where were you at the time? Were you single? Married? working? living on a farm? in small town? in a city? How old were you? (do not answer if you would rather not) under 20? 20-30? 30-50?

2 Did you get your first job during the 30's? Did you lose your job? if so, why?
What was the prevailing attitude toward women working? Was it different for women whose husbands were out of work?

3 Did you hear of any women "riding the rods" or going door to door in search of a handout?

4 Did you belong to any club or group? Was it involved in the relief effort?

5 How did families and neighbours help each other?

6 Do you feel farm women had it easier than those in the towns or cities? If so, why? or why not?

7 Where you or anyone you knew well among the many who resettled in the north? If so what do you remember about the experience?

8 If you were a mother, how did you stretch the dollar to keep your family fed and clothed?
What kind of diet did you live on?

9 What were some of the good things about the 1930s?

10 What were some of the bad things you remember about that time?

11 Did you know any women who committed suicide, had breakdowns, ran away or were abandoned by their husbands?

12 What kind of tensions did the Depression create within your own family? or in families that you knew well?

13 Was there a social stigma to being on relief?

14 What kind of home remedies were used when medical care was unavailable or unaffordable?

15 What do you remember of you mother's experience during this period? your grandmothers?

16 The outbreak of war brought the Depression to an end. Where were you then?
Had the experiences of the Depression changed your life in any way? or your outlook? If so in what way?

APPENDIX II

Budget published by Canadian Welfare Council, 1938.

A typical budget based on annual expenses of an urban family of five with income of $1,100 per annum,

(Father: mother: Girl, 12: Boy, 8: Boy, 4)

Income $91.66 a month or $1,100.00 per year.

Expenditures

Food ...$1.04 a day .	$32.00 a month ..approx.	$384.00 a year
Rent	$22.50 a month	270.00 a year
Clothing..3.40 a week .	13.92 a month ..approx.	167.00 a year

Operating

Gas	$30.00 a year
Hydro	18.00 a year
Soap	7.00 a year
Coal	100.00 a year (furnace)
Water	9.00 a year

Development

Hair cuts and household remedies ..	$1.20 a month	..14.00 yr.
Insurance and amusements	2.40 a month	..29.00 yr.
Replacement furniture, curtains	1.00 a month	..12.00 yr.
Newspapers, books	.55 a month	.. 6.60 yr.
Car fare and tobacco	4.00 a month	..48.00 yr.
Doctor or dentist		5.oo yr.

Source: Managing in the Home on Small Income, Ottawa: Canadian Welfare Council, 1938, p.7-8.

Minimum clothing requirements

Boy (eight to twelve)	Girl (ten to sixteen)
2 pairs of pyjamas	2 night dresses
2 pairs warm underwear	3 pairs bloomers
2 pairs B.V.D.'s	1 pair warm bloomers
2 pairs garters	2 sets warm underwear
2 pairs braces or belt	2 vests or brassieres
3 pairs warm stockings	2 white slips
2 pairs cotton stockings	3 printed cotton dresses
1 pair running shoes	1 silk dress
2 pairs stout boots	1 heavy shirt
1 pair low shoes - if funds permit	1 warm dress
1 pair rubbers	1 warm dress for school
1 pair overshoes	1 pull-over sweater
1 two-pant suit	2 middies or blouses
1 pair serge pants	1 pair shorts
1 pair rough pants	1 bathing suit
2 white cotton shirts	1 sweater coat
2 coloured shirts	1 light coat or raincoat
1 pull-over sweater	1 winter coat
1 sweater coat	1 umbrella
1 rain coat	2 pr. heavy stockings
1 winter coat	2 pairs summer stockings
1 cap	6 pairs silk stockings
1 winter cap	1 pair running shoes
1 pair winter mitts	1 pair house slippers
1 warm scarf	2 pairs stout shoes
2 pairs cotton shorts or overalls	1 pair rubbers
6 handkerchiefs	1 pair overshoes
	1 summer hat
	1 pair warm mitts
	1 pair light gloves

Source: Ibid., p. 33, 34.

Analysis of Annual Expenditures of 639 Saskatchewan Farm Families, 1934. (average family size -- 5.74)

Amount reported for family living -- $532.00
Amount spent on food -- excluding luxuries, potatoes, milk and eggs and other products produced on the farm -- $159.00

Percentage Values of leading food groups furnished and purchased in 1934.

Description	Furnished %	Purchased %
Meats	90.9	9.1
Butter and cheese	90.5	9.5
Flour	26.9	73.1
Canned goods	6.3	93.7
Sugar	----	100.0
Tea and coffee	----	100.0
Miscellaneous	0.2	99.8
Total	63.0	37.0

Source: Ibid., p. 26-27.

APPENDIX III

Annual earnings of male wage earners with families, 1936.

Earnings	Number of families
$1 -- $249	11,041
250 -- 449	4,402
450 -- 949	9,653
950 -- 1,449	10,353
1,450 -- 1,949	5,151
1,950 -- 2,949	2,907
2,950 -- 4,949	785
4,950 and over	147
not stated	1,094

Total number of families -- 47,988

Source: Census of the Prairie Provinces, Saskatchewan, Vol. 2 Table 74.

VITA

SURNAME: Wallace GIVEN NAMES: Wendy Eileen

PLACE OF BIRTH: Duncan B.C. DATE OF BIRTH: March 11 1942

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED, WITH DATES OF ENTERING AND LEAVING:

North Island College, Courtenay, B.C. 1978-1981

University of Victoria, B.C. 1981-1987

DEGREES, DIPLOMAS, Etc., AWARDED WITH DATES AND NAMES OF INSTITUTIONS:

B.A (Honours) 1984 University of Victoria

HONOURS AND AWARDS:

B.C. Telephone Scholarship, 1981

The President's Regional Entrance Scholarship, 1981

The Kathleen Agnew Scholarship, 1983

Graduate Student Award, 1984

B.C. Government Scholarship, 1986

PUBLICATIONS:

none

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis "All Else Must Wait: Saskatchewan Women and the Great Depression" to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the Library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or by a member of the university designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis

All Else Must Wait: Saskatchewan Women and the Great Depression.

Author [redacted]

WENDY EILEEN WALLACE

APRIL 5, 1988