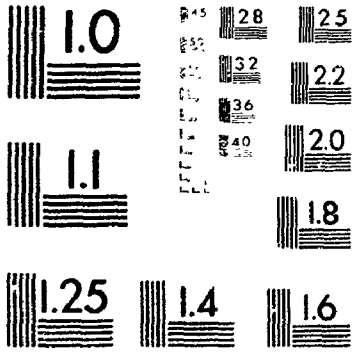

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GENDER, ORGANIZED WOMEN, AND THE POLITICS OF INSTITUTION BUILDING: FOUNDING THE VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES FOR CANADA, 1893-1900

by

BEVERLY BOUTILIER, B.A., M.A.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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"GENDER, ORGANIZED WOMEN, AND THE POLITICS OF INSTITUTION BUILDING: FOUNDING THE VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES FOR CANADA, 1893-1900"

submitted by

Beverly L. Boutilier, B.A., M.A.,

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Chair, Department of History

Deborah Gorham

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22 December 1993

ABSTRACT

The foundation of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) in October of 1893 marked an important departure for the middle-class women's movement in late Victorian Canada. Most Council women in the 1890s believed that a sexual division of labour rooted in women's peculiar responsibility for mothering and homemaking engendered an authoritative female moral voice. Their construction of female authority was grounded in a non-hierarchical understanding of gender relations in which women's institutions and social responsibilities were merely different from, not subordinate to, those of men. As such, they believed that a middle-class women's "parliament" like the NCWC would enable them to transform their traditional religious responsibility for the welfare of poor women and children into a national obligation to protect, relieve, and rescue the female half of humanity.

Council women were initially able to convince legislators that the NCWC represented and spoke for the women of Canada but, as the decade progressed, they found that the NCWC had no real power to effect social reforms that challenged institutionalized male prerogative or authority. This was most forcefully underscored by the NCWC's attempts to found the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada. Originally conceived by the NCWC as a maternal welfare service for isolated prairie women, within a month of the scheme's public inauguration in February 1897 its name was changed from the Victorian Order of Home Helpers to the Victorian Order of Nurses; moreover, by the time the new institution received its royal charter in

May of 1898, it had been recrafted as an urban public health initiative employing only hospital trained district nurses.

Why both the purpose and personnel of the Victorian Order were changed so dramatically between May of 1896 and May of 1898, and what effect the experience of founding this new institution had on the NCWC's non-hierarchical construction of gender relations, is explored in detail by this dissertation. What emerges is a gendered picture of the late nineteenth-century institution-building process in which organized women's conception of their public role, and the domestic and religious bases of their social authority, were severely tested.

For Tweedy and Joe,

two latter day prairie pioneers.

But when a young lady is to be a heroine, the perverseness of forty surrounding families cannot prevent her. Something must and will happen to throw a hero in her way.

— Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

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CHAPTER ONE

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA AND THE QUESTION OF FEMALE AUTHORITY

The foundation of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) in October of 1893 marked an important departure for the middle-class women's movement in late Victorian Canada. Other large, national women's organizations were already at work in Canada by the 1890s, notably the Protestant woman's missionary societies, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the Dominion Order of King's Daughters. The NCWC shared the overtly religious purpose of these aggressively evangelical Protestant organizations, but, seeking to unite organized middle-class women of all faiths and creeds in one institution, it adopted a non-sectarian constitution and an ecumenical form of public worship. The early leaders of the NCWC, under the tutelage of their first president Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, sought to create a pluralistic national institution that would harness the philanthropic, literary, educational, church, and social reform energies of organized middle-class women across Canada. But, eager to avoid dissension within its ranks, and sensible of the need to maintain a veneer of female solidarity, the NCWC attempted to steer clear of such potentially divisive issues as prohibition and woman suffrage. Hence, while the

NCWC welcomed the participation of temperance and suffrage societies, it officially declined to lend its support to prohibition or to endorse the enfranchisement of women during the 1890s.[1]

The non-suffragist position of the church, missionary, and philanthropic women whose societies comprised the largest proportion of the NCWC's membership in the 1890s reveals much about their conception of female authority, and about the kinds of institutions through which they believed women could—and could not—exercise power in an androcentric society.[2] Both suffragists and non-suffragists within the NCWC believed that a sexual division of labour rooted in women's peculiar responsibility for mothering and home making engendered an authoritative feminine moral voice. But while the majority of organized women within the NCWC thought that a middle-class women's "parliament" like the one they had just

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[1]The NCWC eventually adopted woman suffrage as part of its wider reform programme in 1910. For a portrait of the NCWC's oganizational development between 1893 and 1929 see Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976). A new centenary history of the NCWC has been prepared by N.E.S. Griffiths. Unfortunately it was not available in time to consult for this thesis. See N.E.S. Griffiths, *The Splendid Vision: Centennial History of the National Council of Women for Canada, 1893-1993* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993).

[2]I am using the term "non-suffrage" rather than the more usual designation of "conservative" in order to avoid creating a false dichotomy between 'conservative' and 'radical' women within the NCWC according to their rejection or acceptance of the need for the political enfranchisement of women. Nevertheless, the term "non-suffrage" is an equally imprecise and relative construction. It is used here to describe those organized middle-class women who did not necessarily embrace suffrage reform, but who, at the same time, did not actively oppose it. It is not meant to suggest the relative import or significance of their ideas. It must be borne in mind, however, that without further biographical work on the membership of the NCWC it is impossible to regard such categorizations with equanimity, for some overtly anti-suffragist women—like Clementina Fessenden of Toronto, for example—were also active in the NCWC during the 1890s. For a portrait of Fessenden and the anti-suffrage campaign in Ontario, see Sheila Powell, "The Opposition to Woman Suffrage in Ontario, 1872 to 1917 (M.A. thesis, Carleton University, 1987). For a portrait of selected NCWC leaders between 1893 and 1929, see Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 131-178.

created offered them sufficient opportunities to realize their social authority as female citizens, suffragists like those who belonged to the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association of Toronto believed that hierarchical political relations between women and men had to be abolished before women could achieve equality and become citizens.[3]

Most NCWC members viewed the question of women's "equality" and "citizenship" quite differently. They continued to hold that "woman's sphere," both in private and public life, was equal but different. The tremendous social, economic, and spiritual transformations of the late nineteenth century, they argued, had redefined middle-class women's relationship to men of their own social class and to society at large. Elite women were now educated and active citizens, willing to shoulder an equal share of responsibility in the "battle of life." In practice, this meant transforming their traditional religious responsibility for the welfare of poor women and children into a national obligation to protect, relieve, and rescue the female half of humanity. In this way, women would fulfil their uniquely

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[3]The term suffragist is as problematical as non-suffragist. Not all suffragists belonged to separate woman suffrage organizations like the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association (DWEA), although the DWEA was the only 'national' suffrage society to affiliate with the NCWC in the 1890s. Other suffragist women in the NCWC belonged to the WCTU. We cannot infer from these organizational affiliations that some suffrage women in the NCWC were more "radical" or more "conservative" than others, however. Edith Archibald of Halifax, for example, who was the serving president of the Maritime WCTU for much of the 1890s, identified herself to Council delegates in 1896 as an equal suffrage advocate, while in 1894 Dr. Emily Stowe of the DWEA, who has been represented by Carol Lee Bacchi as the quintessential "equal rights" feminist, voiced her concern about the need for domestic training for young women and outlined (perhaps for the benefit of her evangelical audience) the religious basis of women's claim for political and domestic equality. On Archibald's feminist ideas, see Ernest Forbes, "Battles in Another War: Edith Archibald and the Halifax Feminist Movement," in Ernest Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton, NB: Acadiensis Press, 1989), pp. 67-89. For a sympathetic biography of Stowe, see Mary Beacock Fryer, *Emily Stowe: Doctor and Suffragist* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1990).

'feminine' duties as female citizens and contribute immeasurably to the moral and spiritual welfare of the nation-state. A national confederation of women's societies like the NCWC would provide organized middle-class women with the means of assuming this new national obligation in a rational and 'scientific' manner by uniting the forces of "good" in one authoritative women's institution. Thus the non-suffrage stance of the NCWC was predicated on an alternative construction of female authority, one grounded in a non-hierarchical understanding of gender relations that represented women's institutions and social responsibilities as merely different from, not subordinate to, those of men. Support for woman suffrage, then, would have only undermined this evangelical construction of female power, and the equitable representation of gender relations upon which it rested.[4]

Council women were initially able to convince legislators to accept their claim that the NCWC represented and spoke for the women of Canada.[5] As the decade progressed, however, the dominant

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[4]Elizabeth Fox-Genevose distinguishes between equality as a balance of power and equity as a division of responsibility in "Individualism and Women's History," in *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 113-138.

[5]This, of course, was a spurious claim, for the NCWC was an exclusively middle- and upper-class organization, dominated by white Anglo-Protestant women from central Canada. Moreover, it did not represent all *organized* Canadian women from even this highly select racial, religious, and economic grouping. Two of the largest national middle-class women's organizations active in Canada during this period—the Dominion WCTU and the Dominion YWCA—each refused to affiliate with the NCWC in the 1890s, charging that the religious pluralism of the NCWC and, more particularly, its policy of silent prayer were incompatible both with their expressly Protestant mission to evangelicalize the world's women and with their need to acknowledge audibly and publicly their dependence on God and Christ. In addition, the national women's missionary societies of the major Protestant churches also declined to affiliate with the NCWC, despite the interest expressed by their representatives in the "Council idea" at the Congress of Representative Women at Chicago in 1893.

culture's hierarchical construction of gender difference increasingly intruded upon the egalitarian gender ideology of the NCWC. While the NCWC might have authority to influence, its members ultimately found they had no real power to effect social reforms that challenged institutionalized male prerogative or authority. This was most forcefully underscored by the NCWC's attempts in the mid-1890s to found the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada. Originally conceived by the NCWC executive branch in 1896 as a maternal welfare service for isolated prairie women, the Victorian Order of Home Helpers (VOHH), as it was first known, would have sent women specially trained in simple nursing, midwifery, and housewifery to the isolated rural homes of the Canadian Northwest to care for parturient women and to superintend their households during post-partum recovery. By providing heroic pioneer women with a standard of health care that approximated their own expectation of medicalized childbirth, the elite women of the NCWC executive committee believed that their organization would be the means of preserving pioneer women to mother the next generation of citizens.

The VOHH scheme was presented to the Canadian public by Lady Aberdeen in February of 1897 as a national memorial of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, but, within a month, its name had been changed to the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) and, by the time the new institution received its royal charter in May of 1898, it had been recrafted as an urban public health initiative employing only hospital trained district nurses. Why both the purpose and personnel of the Victorian Order were changed so dramatically between May of 1896 and May of 1898, and what effect the experience of founding this new

institution had on the NCWC's non-hierarchical construction of gender relations, is explored in detail by this dissertation. What emerges is a gendered picture of the late nineteenth-century institution-building process in which organized women's conception of their public role, and the domestic and religious bases of their social authority, were severely tested.

The historiographical context for this study is the history of the late nineteenth century women's movement in Canada and the United States. In large measure, the work of Canadian feminist historians has been shaped by the historical debates and practices of American women's history. In order to situate my claim that the history of the NCWC must be re-evaluated from the perspective of gender, this chapter outlines three distinct approaches that have been used since the 1970s to write the history of the women's movement in Canada and the United States. The first section, entitled Politics, considers the initial attempts to reconstruct women's efforts to obtain political equality, and to explain why most "first wave" feminists did not necessarily perceive the vote as a human right. The second section, entitled Culture, considers the emergence of women's culture methodology and its impact on the writing of the history of organized women. The third section, entitled Culture as Politics, examines new work on "female institution building" in the nineteenth-century that characterizes middle-class women's activism in the "voluntary sphere" as an expression of a separate female political culture. The last section, suggests how the historiographical developments outlined in part three can help us understand the NCWC's experience of founding the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada.

Politics

The NCWC's early ambivalence toward equal political rights for women proved troublesome for self-styled "second wave" feminist historians in Canada, whose definition of historical importance was defined—or in some cases redefined—by the political agenda of the women's movement of the late 1960s and 1970s.[6] Drawing inspiration from the American civil rights movement, which challenged the racist and segregationist doctrine of "separate but equal," the liberal women's movement equated the eradication of sexism with economic and legal equality for women. Empowered by the theoretical insight that gender relations are culturally constructed and change over time,[7] feminist historians took up the challenge of reclaiming the historical experience of women in general and the history of feminist campaigns for female equality in particular. Prior to 1970, only one assessment of

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[6]The impact of the women's movement on the academic work of Canadian historian Susan Mann, for example, is apparent when one compares her analysis of Quebec nationalism in her first book, a traditional study of political ideas and the elite clerics and politicians who espoused them, and her second monograph, a wide ranging consideration of the connections between the ideologies of feminism, nationalism, and separatism in Quebec political thought and society. See Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *Action Française: French Canadian Nationalism in the Twenties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), and *Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Quebec* (Toronto: Gage, 1983). See also Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "Nationalism, Feminism and Canadian Intellectual History," *Canadian Literature* 83 (Winter 1979), 7-20, and "Henri Bourassa and the 'Woman Question,'" in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 104-115.

[7]The collected essays of two of the most influential American practioners of women's history provide a useful guide to early methodological development of the field from the "vantage points" of American and European historical scholarship. See Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), and Joan Kelley, *Women, History, and Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). See also Linda Gordon, "What's New in Women's History," in Teresa de Laurentis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 20-30.

the Canadian woman suffrage movement had been written.[8] The newest generation of politically motivated femininst historians in Canada therefore turned to the comparatively better developed historiography of the American and British women's movements for inspiration.[9]

American historiographical preoccupations in particular framed the earliest feminist studies of the late Victorian "woman movement" in Canada.[10] The two most influential appraisals of the American women's movement in the early 1970s were Aileen S. Kraditor's *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement 1890-1920*[11] and William L. O'Neill's *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America.*[12]

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[8]The only full-length study of the Canadian woman suffrage movement prior to 1970 was Catherine L. Cleverdon's *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950). It was reprinted by the same press, with an introduction by Ramsay Cook, in 1974. For comparable American and British studies, see Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (1959; Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), and Ray Strachey, *The Cause: A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (1928; London: Virago, 1978).

[9]Natalie Zemon Davis outlined the history of "first wave" women's history in, "Women's History in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 3/4 (Spring-Summer 1975), 83-103. See also Gordon, in de Laurentis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* pp. 20-30; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "American Female Historians in Context, 1770-1930," *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (Fall 1975), 171-184, and Joan Wallach Scott, " American Women Historians, 1884-1984," in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 178-198.

[10]The historiography of the British women's movement of the turn of the century emphasized the division between militant suffragettes and non-militant or constitutional suffragists, and hence had very little direct application for understanding the dynamics of the Canadian scene. For a discussion of the response of English-Canadian suffragists to the WSPU's militant tactics, see Deborah Gorham, "English Militancy and the Canadian Suffrage Movement," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (1975).

[11]Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

[12]William L. O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave: A History of Feminism in America* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969).

Although different in some respects—O'Neill, for example, extended his study of feminism beyond the progressive era—both historians defined American "feminism" as the pursuit of equal rights for women. In general, their assessments of the turn-of-the-century woman suffrage movement were remarkably similar. Both expressed dismay that not all women activists who sought the enfranchisement of women were motivated by an individualist belief in the inherent equality of the sexes, and each carefully distinguished those women who regarded the achievement of equal educational, legal, economic, and political rights for women as an end in itself from those who regarded the vote as a political lever to further a wide ranging programme of social and moral reforms grounded in a maternalist construction of sexual difference.[13] O'Neill labelled the reformist programme of this latter group "social feminism," thus implying that only advocates of a narrow political or legalistic definition of sexual equality were what he called "hard-core" feminists.[14]

The definition of feminism as advocacy of equal political rights suggested by Kraditor and O'Neill defined "politics" as a "public," male-defined activity from which women, whose experience and identity

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[13]Kraditor described these two strategies as arguments of justice and expedience respectively. She argued that in the 1890s the woman suffrage campaign was dominated by advocates of the justice, or equal rights, argument, but that after the turn of the century, a new generation of more "conservative" woman suffragists turned the campaign toward arguments of expediency. Although subsequent historians have interpreted the term "expediency" as a pejorative indictment of social feminism, Kraditor herself argued that "the expediency arguments that dominated the propoganda during the last generation of the suffrage campaign were themselves expedients, tailored to fit the realities of an industrial age." See Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, chap. 3.

[14]O'Neill characterized proponents of equal political rights for women as "hard-core or extreme feminists." See O'Neill, *Everyone Was Brave*, pp. x.

was rooted in the "private" sphere, were formally barred. How women endeavoured to bridge the experiential and ideological gap between these two "separate spheres," and thus gain access to the kind of political power symbolised by the vote, preoccupied historians of the organized middle-class woman movement in Canada. Historians Veronica Strong-Boag and Wendy Mitchinson turned their attention to the foundation of national women's organizations in Canada during the last third of the nineteenth century, while Deborah Gorham and Carol Lee Bacchi re-examined the English-Canadian woman suffrage campaign. These feminist historians argued that social or "maternal" feminist ideas and activists dominated the organized women's movement at the turn of the century and, with the notable exception of Gorham, each accepted the implied conflict suggested by O'Neill between the 'conservative' ideology of "maternal" feminists and the more 'radical' ideology of "equal rights" feminists.[15]

Veronica Strong-Boag's study of the National Council of Women of Canada was one of the first new histories of the Canadian woman movement to be published in Canada.[16] Drawing on a corporatist analysis of the middle-class response to industrialism in the nineteenth-century United States, Strong-Boag argued that the foundation of the NCWC in 1893 was "part of the shift from 'small-scale, informal, locally or regionally oriented groups to larger-scale, national, formal organizations' which occurred in the late nineteenth

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[15]For a discussion of the application of these terms in a Canadian context, see Veronica Strong-Boag's introduction to Nellie McClung, *In Times Like These* (1915; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972).

[16]Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976).

century."[17] Strong-Boag characterized the NCWC as a feminine branch of the middle-class Canadian "progressive" movement which, under the leadership of male civic reformers, sought "to affirm community leadership, reform social structures and fix class relations." The NCWC's assimilation of this essentially defensive middle-class social vision coloured its reform programme and blunted its "considerable" potential "to change the shape of society itself." Instead of challenging the sexual status quo by seeking equality, Council women pursued a piecemeal reform agenda designed to improve the welfare of women within existing social structures. As such, the NCWC merely became a forum for elite women to articulate, evaluate, and implement "their judgements about women in the community," not a vehicle to realize the more 'radical' suffragist challenge to male political domination.[18]

Strong-Boag argued that the NCWC's vision for Canadian women was shaped by an ambition to "augment and serve the existing social order" and to ensure that Council women "shared in both the responsibilities and rewards of social domination." Council women's desire to use the NCWC to achieve "greater social control" for their class overwhelmed the feminist aspirations of individual members and affiliates like the DWEA, she suggested. As a result, the NCWC demonstrated a limited understanding of the source and nature of women's oppression. In particular, Strong-Boag argues that the NCWC's emphasis on sexual difference and its "domination by

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[17]Strong-Boag cites both the work of Louis Galambos and Robert H. Wiebe in her introduction. See Louis Galambos, "The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History," *Business History Review* 44 (1970), and Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

[18]Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 3, 5-6.

'maternalism'," compromised its authority to "lobby unquestioningly for equal participation in every aspect of community life." While membership in the NCWC did help middle-class women identify with the needs and aspirations of Canadian women generally, Strong-Boag concluded that this new collective awareness of gender constituted the emergence of a "feminine" rather than a feminist consciousness: "So long as the emphasis [of their gender ideology] lay on sexual difference rather than similarities it would be easy to relegate women to 'special', often in practice inferior, roles in the economic, political and intellectual world."[19] In Strong-Boag's estimation, then, the NCWC's view of womanhood, and its maternalist appraisal of the nature and source of middle-class women's power, accorded with O'Neill's construction of social feminism as a conservative and class-based ideology.

Wendy Mitchinson agreed substantially with Strong-Boag's evaluation of the NCWC in the nineteenth century, but sought to situate its foundation and its maternalist reform programme in a broader institutional context.[20] Mitchinson, whose argument was rooted in the prevailing historiographical consensus that equal rights feminism constituted a more radical strain of feminist thought, examined the foundation and work of four national women's "social reform" organizations: the national woman missionary societies of the major Protestant churches, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA),

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[19]*Ibid.*, pp. 6, 182-183.

[20]Wendy Mitchinson, "Aspects of Reform: Four Women's Organizations in Nineteenth-Century Canada" (PhD dissertation, York University, 1977).

the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), and the NCWC. Like Strong-Boag, Mitchinson argued that the extraordinary expansion of women's organized activities in the last third of the nineteenth century was due in part to structural changes such as better communication networks, urban growth, and the increased leisure time of the female members of the newly affluent industrial middle class. The simultaneous removal of production from the household, and the reconstitution of women as the emotional centre of the home and family, elevated the status of motherhood just as urban middle-class women began to bear fewer children and have fewer domestic responsibilities. Mitchinson argued that the "emergence of women from the domestic sphere through women's organizations was a response to their dissatisfaction with this situation."[21]

Members of these new national female reform associations wanted to use the "power and prestige" accorded to women by the cult of domesticity to assert and extend middle-class women's power outside the home. Whereas local women's church and benevolent activities had long sought to amelioriate the symptoms of poverty, Mitchinson argued that these new organizations aspired "to eradicate the source of a specific social ill" and protect the family. The WCTU's

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[21]Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: 'For God, Home and Native Land': A Study of Nineteenth-Century Feminism," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Social Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 151-168. See also Wendy Mitchinson, "Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century: a Step Towards Independence," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 2, no. 2, pt. 2 (Spring 1977), 57-75; "The YWCA and Reform in the Nineteenth Century," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 12 (1979), 368-384; "The WCTU: A Study in Organization," International Journal of Women's Studies 4, no. 2 (1981), 143-156. Wendy Mitchinson, "Early Women's Organizations and Social Reform: Prelude to the Welfare State," in Allan Moscovitch, ed., *The Benevolent State: The Growth of Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: Garmond, 1987).

support for prohibition, for example, was predicated on a convenient class-centered analysis that equated intemperance with crime and sexual immorality on the one hand, and temperance with middle-class morality and active adherence to the Protestant faith on the other. Their own lack of power as women to legislate against intemperance, Mitchinson argued, 'polticized' the WCTU, prompting its otherwise conservative middle-class members to endorse woman suffrage reform by the 1890s. But the WCTU's new suffragist platform did not signal radical support for women's individual rights; instead, Mitchinson argued that its members regarded the vote "as a useful means by which to meet their feminine responsibility—the care of the family." Ultimately, Mitchinson concluded, these four conservative middle-class women's organizations did not regard women's domestic role as a limitation, nor did they perceive any contradiction between their public activism and their maternalist beliefs. On the contrary, she argued, they saw the domestic ideal of womanhood as a dynamic one "which could and did encompass the women's rights movement. They were social feminists, not feminists."[22]

Deborah Gorham suggested an alternative reading of maternal feminism. In a 1975 article on the English-Canadian woman suffrage campaign, Gorham argued that Canadian suffragists used maternal feminist rhetoric as a tactic to advance a much broader feminist challenge to the maternal ideal and the social order. Rather than a conservative effort by a monolithic "middle-class" women's movement to exercise social control, Gorham represented the suffrage campaign

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[22]Mitchinson, "The WCTU," in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim.*

in Canada as a broadly constituted coalition of activists drawn from both the middle and working classes. Various feminist points of view therefore co-existed within the one movement. Gorham further suggested that what historians had called "maternal feminism" actually described a gendered reform programme whose existence reflected an emerging female consciousness among Victorian and Edwardian women of their duties and disabilities as citizens. Therefore the importance of the reformist agenda of the women's movement was ultimately much more 'radical' than advocacy of the vote alone, for it sought to realign gender relations rather than reassert class control.[23]

Although in many respects another indictment of social or maternal feminism, Ellen DuBois's important study of the nineteenth-century American woman suffrage movement likewise endeavoured to overcome the reductionist class analysis that characterized work on the middle-class women's movement.[24] DuBois situated the feminist activism of white middle-class suffragists in a complex of female relationships, arguing that middle-class suffragists between 1848 and 1869 had endeavoured to broaden the women's rights constituency to include the participation of working-class women. Their equal rights suffragist stance was a radical position, DuBois argued. While domestic reformers like Catherine Beecher questioned the relationship between the domestic sphere and the rest of society, they did not challenge

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[23]Deborah Gorham, "Singing Up the Hill," *Canadian Dimension* 10 (1975), 26-38. See also Deborah Gorham, "The Canadian Suffragists," in Gwen Matheson, ed., *Women in the Canadian Mosaic* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1976), pp. 23-56; and "Flora MacDonald Denison," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 47-70.

[24]Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America 1848-1869* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1978).

the 'naturalness' of separate spheres for women and men. Suffragists, on the other hand, recognised that the locus of society had moved outside the home as a result of the advent of industrial capitalism; they therefore believed that equality and social power—both symbolised by the vote—would have to be achieved in the public realm. Suffragists' advocacy of sex equality in the public and domestic spheres thus constituted a fundamental challenge to separate spheres ideology, DuBois concluded—a fact underscored, in her estimation, by the hostile response of male trade unionists to the spectre of an inter-class alliance between middle-class and working-class women to press their common demand for sexual equality.

In contrast to DuBois's efforts to rechart the social landscape of American suffragism, Carol Lee Bacchi argued that the bulk of English-Canadian suffragists were middle-class, reformist, and reactionary.[25] Bacchi's interpretation of Canadian suffragism was still heavily influenced by the work of William O'Neill. Whereas Strong-Boag and Mitchinson had each endeavoured to explain the apparent conservatism of Canada's major women's associations, Bacchi asked why the majority of English-Canadian suffragists were not as "radical" as they should have been. Bacchi contended that the suffrage movement was hampered by conflict and division, as women from different regions, classes and ideological points of view struggled to impose their vision on the movement as a whole. The most important division in Bacchi's estimation was between the "conservative"

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[25]Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

maternal feminist majority and the "radical" equal rights feminist minority. Equating equal rights suffragism with radical feminist politics, she applauded the apparent far-sightedness of the small number of Toronto-based activists whose advocacy of equal rights for women was swamped by the conservative "maternal feminist" agenda of the middle-class women's movement after the turn of the century. Bacchi characterized maternal feminism as a self-serving middle-class ideology, and dismissed the majority of middle-class suffragists whose support for conservative reforms such as temperance had, diluted the radical import of suffrage reform. These elite "ladies" sought the vote only to bolster the existing social order and slow the pace of social change, Bacchi argued, concluding that "female suffragists did not fail to effect a social revolution for women, the majority never had a revolution in mind."[26]

When regarded in light of Gorham's work and the subsequent discovery of "inter-war feminism," Bacchi's analysis clearly over-estimated the extent to which middle-class women would or could share in the spoils of elite power, whether they had the vote or not.[27] In an extended critique of Bacchi's argument published in *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* in 1985, Ernest Forbes argued that Bacchi's

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[26]Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?*, p. 148. See also Wayne Roberts, "'Rocking the Cradle for the World': the New Woman and Maternal Feminism, Toronto, 1877-1914," in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, pp. 15-45.

[27]Veronica Strong-Boag was one of the first Canadian historians to consider the subject of inter-war feminism, and thus question the suffragist periodization of Canadian feminism; see "Canadian Feminism in the 1920s: the Case of Nellie McClung," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 12, no. 4 (1977), 58-68. In a more recent work, Strong-Boag used a life-course model to organize her discussion of the inter-war experiences of Canadian women and girls; see *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988).

representation of maternal feminists as "conservative" and equal rights feminists as "radical" was too simplistic. Echoing Gorham's thesis, he suggested that historians of the Canadian woman suffrage movement must take into account the incongruity between what suffragists did and how they justified their actions. In the case of Halifax suffragists—whose activism Bacchi had completely ignored—Forbes argued that after failing to attain the vote using individualist arguments in the 1890s, these women couched their still radical demand for woman suffrage in maternalist rhetoric in order to assuage the fears of male legislators and other anti-suffragists. Forbes therefore roundly indicted Bacchi for failing to delve beneath their rhetoric to explain their motivation, and for what he characterized as a reductionist analysis of their middle-class affiliation. By stressing class concerns, Bacchi minimized the importance of a distinct women's perspective. Why, he asked, did so many women choose to join a separate female temperance organization and support its radical suffragist platform if, as Bacchi contended, the temperance movement was a monolithic middle-class movement without feminist purpose? The answer, he suggested, was that Halifax suffragists "were clearly evolving a design for basic change in the role of women," and that their aims, if not their discourse, was overtly feminist.[28]

Although Forbes accepted Bacchi's representation of equal rights feminism as "radical," and implied that maternal feminist rhetoric was simply a cloak for *genuine* feminist activity, his arguments highlighted

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[28]Ernest Forbes, "The Ideas of Carol Bacchi and the Suffragists of Halifax," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1985), 119-126.

the chief criticism levied against Bacchi by her critics: that she, and by extension all those historians ascribing to O'Neill's social/hard-core feminist dichotomy,[29] had underestimated the extent to which the experience of gender oppression united and actuated organized women at the turn of the century.[30] Sylvia Van Kirk, in particular, questioned Bacchi's assumption that women activists complacently accepted "the patriarchal social relations between the sexes which characterized the nineteenth-century family," arguing instead that their "campaigns to improve the legal status of wives and mothers,...and even their campaigns for temperance and social purity (often sadly misunderstood today), offered a new challenge to male dominance." Van Kirk argued that the ambivalence of the contemporary women's movement about the place of motherhood and homemaking in women's lives, had "created the paradox that those experiences which were, in fact, central to the female past in Canada are the ones that are least investigated."[31] Rather than denigrate

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[29]See, for example, most of the essays in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979); and Linda Kealey, "Reply to Matheson," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1976), 171. In contrast to Gwen Matheson, who asserted that maternal feminists were more radical than "second wave" feminists were prepared to acknowledge, Kealey lamented that turn-of-the-century woman suffragists and reformers had adopted a philosophy with "evangelical and missionary overtones...rather than a philosophy based on equal rights." See also Gwen Matheson and V.E. Lang, "Nellie McClung: 'Not a Nice Woman'," in Gwen Matheson, ed., *Women in the Canadian Mosaic* (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1976), pp. 1-22.

[30]See, for example, Sylvia Van Kirk, "What Has the Feminist Perspective Done For Canadian History," in *Knowledge Reconsidered: A Feminist Overview* (Ottawa: CRIAW, 1984), pp. 46-58; and Eliane Leslau Silverman, "Writing Canadian Women's History, 1970-82," *Canadian Historical Review* 63, no. 4 (December 1982), 513-533.

[31]Van Kirk, in *Knowledge Reconsidered*. In a review of Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, Ruth Roach Pierson likewise commented that there "seems to be an implication that true feminists would not have concerned themselves with motherhood or addressed themselves to women as mothers. That is, to say the least, an ahistorical expectation." See *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1980).

women's historical experience as childbearers, child-rearers, and homemakers by "relegating it to some private secondary sphere," Van Kirk argued that historians must view women's domestic work and reproductivity as "an inextricable part of the economic and social structures that have evolved." Placing women's reproductive function (whether actualized or not) and their systemic lack of personal and social power in relation to their male counterparts at the centre of historical analysis, she suggested, would serve as a corrective to "the temptation to sacrifice feminist concerns to the more traditional, male-dominated models of class conflict and racial exploitation" employed by Bacchi.

Culture

The analytical blueprint drafted by Van Kirk for Canadian feminist historians reflected the growing influence of "women's culture" methodology among women's historians by the mid-1980s. The history of women's culture originated in the United States where historians like Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Nancy F. Cott argued that, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the ideology of separate spheres and its handmaid, the middle-class cult of domesticity,[32] had

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[32]On the cult of domesticity, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966), 151-174; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catherine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973); Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity 1830-1860* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1982); Julie A. Matthaei, *An Economic History of Women in America: Women's Work, the Sexual Division of Labour, and the Development of Capitalism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), pp. 101-141; Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982; Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour & Love: Women's Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Decline of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987):

fostered the development of a separate "female world of love and ritual" based on female kin ties and other "bonds of womanhood." The proposition that a distinct women's culture grounded in the private sphere had shaped the lives of middle-class women was a direct outgrowth of the kind of "woman-centered history" advocated by Gerda Lerner. In 1975, Lerner urged her colleagues in the United States to redefine themselves as "feminist historians" and to take up the work of writing a "true women's history" that examined women's "on-going functioning in [a] male-defined world, on their own terms." This call was answered by Smith-Rosenberg and Cott, each of whom based their works on hitherto neglected sources generated by literate middle-class women in the "private sphere."[33]

A theory of women's culture was both a reaction against the limitations of writing women's history within the confines of a male-defined historiography and a positive attempt to define the historical importance of "woman's sphere." Although Cott was among the first historians to suggest the existence of a distinct women's "subculture," Smith-Rosenberg was the first to develop the hypothesis fully.[34] In an influential essay published in 1975,[35] she argued that a separate

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and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[33]Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Purposes," in Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, pp. 145-159. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg outlines the history of her own work in "Hearing Women's Words: A Feminist Reconstruction of History," in Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, pp. 11-52. See also Nancy F. Cott, "Feminist Theory and Feminist Movements: The Past Before Us," in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley, eds., *What is Feminism: A Re-examination* (New York: Pantheon, 1986), pp. 49-62.

[34]"Introduction," in Nancy F.Cott, ed., *Roots of Bitterness* (New York, 1972).

[35]Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and*

female world supported by "ties between mothers and daughters, sisters, female cousins, and friends, at all stages of the female life cycle" had shaped the experience of nineteenth-century American women. By analysing the diaries and correspondence of women who lived their lives within the family circle, Smith-Rosenberg argued that she could reconstruct the "very private world of emotional realities" shared between women. Her conclusion that "a female world of varied and yet highly structured relationships [between women] appears to have been an essential aspect of American society" has both inspired and aggravated historians of women in the United States.

Nancy Cott's exemplary study of New England women at the turn of the nineteenth century built upon the work of Smith-Rosenberg.[36] The concomitant development of the cult of domesticity and the women's rights movement in the 1830s led Cott to ask why these two seemingly disparate visions of women's place in society had occurred at the same time. Eschewing social control models, Cott argued that historians' assessment of "women's sphere" would improve commensurately with their reliance on women's own private documents, for the experience of domesticity, she argued, "gave many women a sense of satisfaction as well as solidarity with their sex." New ideals of sisterhood became "bonds of womanhood" as the ideal of domesticity "intensified women's gender-group identification, by assimilating diverse personalities to one work-role that was also a sex-

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Society 1, no. 1 (1975), as reprinted in Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 53-76.

[36]Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

role signifying a shared and special destiny." Although this new identification with their sex-group fostered in middle-class New England women a gendered view of their position in society, Cott asserted that they did not associate sexual difference with inferiority. On the contrary, Cott argued that a "woman discovered among her own sex a world of true peers, in valuing whom she confirmed her own value." Thus Cott concluded that the emerging political consciousness of women in the 1830s was directly linked to a new group consciousness of sisterhood forged among women in the domestic sphere.[37]

At a roundtable session on politics and culture at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women in 1980, five historians discussed the merit and liabilities of women's culture methodology.[38] Ellen DuBois, then the leading historian of the nineteenth-century American women's rights movement, expressed unease with a history that seemed to celebrate sexual difference rather than women's public campaigns to overcome their powerlessness and assert their equality with men. Whereas Gerda Lerner defined women's culture pan-historically as the sum total of women's lived experience, DuBois defined it more narrowly as "the broad-based commonality of values, institutions, relationships, and methods of communication, focused on domesticity and morality and particular to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century." DuBois criticized women's culture as articulated

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[37]Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, pp. 99, 100, 190.

[38]Ellen DuBois, Mari Jo Buhle, Temma Kaplan, Gerda Lerner, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium," *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1980), 26-64.

by Smith-Rosenberg as a potentially regressive conceptualization of women's experience of the past. While not denying its value to women's history entirely, she charged that historians of women's culture had over-emphasized the separateness of "women's sphere," ignored its relationship to feminism, and romanticized "what it meant for women."

DuBois worried that an exclusive focus on women's culture would obscure the larger purpose of women's history which she defined as the examination of women's interaction with social structures such as class and race on the one hand and uncovering the historical bases of women's oppression on the other. In particular, DuBois criticized Smith-Rosenberg for virtually ignoring the impact of the dominant, male-defined culture on the lives of women. "Conflict between the two worlds is underplayed," she observed, "so much so that the concept of women's oppression begins to seem irrelevant." The emphasis that historians of women's culture assigned to women's difference disguised the oppressed nature of this female culture, she charged. The real importance of the concept of women's culture, in her estimation, was its potential usefulness for delineating the dialectic relationship between women's sphere and the development of the nineteenth-century women's rights movement. Citing the work of Cott, DuBois suggested that women's culture investigations would help women's historians uncover the experiential roots of feminist agitation in the nineteenth century. Only by thus situating female culture in a broader context of sexual conflict, she declared, would women's culture methodology prove its worth to women's history.

Historians of feminism and the nineteenth-century women's movement have begun to take up the challenge issued by DuBois to examine the interaction of feminism (which challenged the dominant culture) and female culture (which seemed to acquiesce to it). This revisionist impulse has been undergirded by the "woman-centered" point of view advocated by Lerner. Using the experience of women in the domestic sphere as their point of common reference, various historians have begun to reconceptualize women's experience of organized activism and to reconsider the merits of the social feminist outlook. Ironically, in some circles this process has precipitated a reassessment of equal rights feminism as the most radical strain of thought in the nineteenth-century women's movement.

Historians of organized women have begun to reassess the negative and largely presentist indictment of maternal feminism as "conservative" and "feminine" rather than feminist.[39] In 1982, for example, Linda Gordon asked why nineteenth-century feminists did not support "birth control" and twentieth-century feminists do.[40] Gordon argued that it was ahistorical to brand nineteenth-century feminists as conservative because they did not advocate the use of abortion or contraception to limit family size. Instead, she suggested

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[39]Veronica Strong-Boag has recently observed that early accounts of the turn-of-the-century women's movement, including her own account of the NCWC as a feminine institution, were presentist. See Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 21, no. 3 (1986), 32-33.

[40]Linda Gordon, "Why Nineteenth-Century Feminists Did Not Support 'Birth Control' and Twentieth-Century Feminists Do," in B. Thorne and M. Yalom, eds., *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* (New York, 1982), 40-53. See also Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976).

historians should regard the nineteenth-century concept of "voluntary motherhood" as an inherently radical feminist stance, for it empowered wives to refuse sexual intercourse with their husbands and thus challenged the nineteenth-century doctrine of a husband's "conjugal rights." Advocacy of contraception, Gordon argued, would only have undermined women's moral prerogative to safeguard themselves from both unwanted pregnancies and the physical danger this represented in an age of high maternal mortality.[41]

Much of the energy behind this revisionist tendency among North American feminist scholars has come from the growing recognition of the extent to which evangelical Protestantism underwrote the organizational 'awakening' of middle-class women in the latter half of the nineteenth century.[42] Its importance to

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[41]See also Daniel Scott Smith, "Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America," in Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised* (New York, 1974), pp. 119-133.

[42]Barbara Welter, "The Feminization of American Religion," in Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner, eds., *Clio's Consciousness Raised* (New York 1974); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Religion* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, chap. 5; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); and Joan Jacobs Brumberg, "Zenanas and Girlless Villages: The Ethnology of American Evangelical Women, 1870-1910," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982), 347-371. Much of this new attention to religion has been focused on the women's missionary societies of the Protestant churches. See Jane Hunter, *The Gospel Gentility: American Women Missionaries in Turn-of-the-Century China* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) ; Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: The American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985); Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Candian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); and Rosemary R. Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992). The nineteenth-century temperance crusade has also been reassessed. See Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity*; Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981); Sharon Anne Cook, "'Continued and Persevering Combat': The Ontario Woman's Temperance Union, Evangelicalism and Social Reform, 1874-1916" (PhD dissertation, Carleton University,

understanding the motivation and ideas of the largest proportion of organized middle-class women in nineteenth-century Canada cannot be overestimated. Diana Pedersen, for example, has argued that the middle-class evangelical women who founded and supported the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in Canada after 1870 were motivated by the ideology of "evangelical domesticity."[43] Evangelical women's organizations like the YWCA and the WCTU, Pederson argued, were a manifestation of the nineteenth-century crusade to win the world for Christ. Evangelical religion, and interdenominational organizational strategies, expanded middle-class women's opportunities beyond the home and the church. Pedersen argued that the YWCA offered women an alternative form of activism to politicized women's organizations, as well as a means of furthering women's interests within a religious sphere. YWCA women believed that by helping to strengthen the Protestant churches by winning women for Christ they would be simultaneously helping women, "whose situation, they believed fervently, would be much improved as the impact of the teachings of Jesus Christ were felt throughout the land." Their work for young women was informed by the model of

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1990), and "Letitia Youmans: Ontario's Nineteenth-Century Temperance Educator," *Ontario History* 84, no. 4 (December 1992), 329-342..

[43]Diana Pedersen, "The Young Women's Christian Association in Canada, 1870-1920: 'A Movement to Meet a Spiritual, Civic and National Need'" (PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1987), and "'Keeping Our Good Girls Good': The YWCA and the 'Girl Problem'," *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1986), 20-25.. The phrase "evangelical domesticity" was coined by Sandra S. Sizer. See Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 83-110, esp. 86-87. On the importance of religion in "women's sphere," see Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, chap. 5; Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in America 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

Evangelical Womanhood, an idealization of female usefulness to the nation and a prescription for divine service to others. According to Pedersen, YWCA women linked the improvement of women's lot to remaking Canadian society in the image of the Kingdom of God on earth. Their work, first to rescue "fallen women," and then to supervise and safeguard the virtue of young working women living without family ties in the city, was thus an effort to create a Christian society in which, they believed, women's special qualities and values would be highly esteemed.

Some historians of evangelical feminism have also begun to question the conventional historiographic representation of "equal rights" feminism as the apex of women's political consciousness. Ruth Bordin, for example, has argued that the late nineteenth-century American women's temperance crusade was a movement to educate and empower women. Its transformative vision was never realized, however. In the end, Bordin argued, the woman suffrage campaign, with its exclusive focus on winning the vote, undermined temperance women's more wide-ranging critique of social and sexual relations, thus thwarting the larger promise of social feminism. Because the wider social reform aims of the WCTU were "lost sight of" after the turn of the century, Bordin concluded that "the ballot proved a sterile victory. The larger social and economic disabilities of women remained untouched and the battle had to be fought all over again two generations later."[44]

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[44]Bordin, *Women and Temperance*, pp. 158-159. See also Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Great Britain, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

This climate of revisionism has recently spawned a debate about the nature and periodization of the history of feminism. Karen Offen, for example, argued in 1988 that a comparative definition of feminism was needed to overcome the specificity of Anglo-American historiographical debates and the implicit equation of feminism with suffragism.[45] In some respects her call for a generic definition of feminism was a response to what Judith Allen has called "a new phase of repudiation" of social feminism launched by Nancy F. Cott whose most recent monograph considers *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*.[46] In it, Cott argued that "feminism"—as distinct from the "woman movement" of the nineteenth century—was a temporally specific ideology, born in the United States in the decades immediately before and after the suffrage victory. Cott argued that the woman movement of the nineteenth century represented a temporary alliance between two *ideologies*, one advocating sexual equality and the other seeking to politicize those "qualities and habits called female." Although Cott observed that individual suffragists often employed both arguments in tandem, she concluded that a truly feminist ideology only emerged in the United States after 1910. It is therefore wrongheaded, in her estimation, to apply the term "feminist"—however modified—to describe either the ideas or actions of

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[45]Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), 119-157. Judith Allen has made a similar claim for the history of suffrage campaigns in colonial nations like Canada and Australia; see Judith Allen, Contextualizing Late Nineteenth-Century Feminism: Problems and Comparisons," *Journal of the CHA/Revue de la SHC* 1 (1991).

[46]Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

nineteenth-century women social activists and reformers. While a stimulating thesis, in practice Cott's conflation of the term "feminism" with an individualist ideology focused on winning the vote in the United States after 1910 effectively relegates all feminist argumentation not appropriately "grounded" in time and place to the ideological fringes of feminist history.

In order to counter the kind of particularism inherent in Cott's argument Karen Offen undertook, first, to situate the ideology of feminism in the broader field of Western intellectual history and, second, to define the two "analytically divergent ways of thinking about women and men" that she believes have co-existed in Western political thought since at least the seventeeth century. Offen distinguished between "relational" and "individualist" arguments for women's emancipation from male control. The relational line argument "proposed a gender-based but egalitarian vision of social organization" predicated on "the primacy of a companionate, non-hierarchical, male-female couple as the basic unit of society." In contrast, individualist arguments "posited the individual, irrespective or sex or gender, as the basic unit." Offen argued that as gendered critiques of power and powerlessness, these two streams of thought must be regarded first and foremost as political ideologies. But, in order to situate and define the influence of relational feminism in the Western political tradition, she also argued that a broader definition of what comprises "politics" must be evolved to include women's informal and formal attempts to influence the state.[47]

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[47]Offen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), 136, 142. See also Fox-Genevose, *Feminism Without Illusions*, pp. 113-138; and Paula

Offen applauded the efforts of feminists "to reappropriate the relational path of our intellectual heritage, which we know to be grounded in the heart of Western throught on 'the woman question'; to reclaim the power of difference, of womanliness as women define it; to reclaim its concern for broad social goals; and to reweave it once again with the appeal to the principle of human freedom that underlies the individualist tradition." She concluded by urging historians to "collapse the dichotomy that has placed these two traditions at odds historically," thus forging what she represented as "a more historically grounded, more realistic, moral encompassing sociopolitical vision, one that goes beyond stark individualism." Offen's suggested course of action, and the definition of feminism that she proposed, was not fundamentally at odds with the equality/difference paradigm that has dominated the writing of the history of feminism in North America since the late 1960s. But her suggestion that the relational feminist argument be reclaimed by historians as the central thread of Western feminist thought, and that it be rewoven into the fabric of individualist feminism to create a new feminist politics, was met with thinly veiled hostility from Ellen DuBois and with calls from Cott to expand "the vocabulary of women's history."

DuBois chiefly objected to Offen's representation of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's feminism as relational, a designation she equated with

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Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984), 620-647, esp. 622. See also Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Scott argues that when used as a category of analysis, rather than as a descriptive concept, gender will politicize all relations of life, including how the terms "female" and "male" are constructed and how power relations between women and men are mediated discursively.

"difference." This characterization of Stanton's arguments was historically unfounded, DuBois contended. She argued that Stanton had not only advocated the vote for women on the same basis as men but had also castigated the idea of women's difference as a tool of oppression. In her reply to DuBois, Offen noted her critic's "distaste for relational arguments" and implied that DuBois was motivated by the very sort of "partisan scholarship" that her comparative definition of feminism was meant to overcome.[48] Nancy Cott, on the other hand, expressed her appreciation of Offen's efforts to construct a comparative framework for the history of feminism, but charged "that her research and argumentation have taken a wrong turn, toward a mistaken inclusiveness under the heading 'feminism'." Instead, Cott urged Offen to embark on a different sort of journey, one that would entail a search for a new terminology to describe the ideas and actions of those organized women known to American historiographers as social feminists. In short, she concluded, historians needed "to expand the vocabulary of women's history." In her reply to Cott, Offen declined this invitation, maintaining instead that establishing the provenance of feminist ideology rather than of feminist terminology was the more important exercise. As a final corrective to Cott's attempt to generalize from American experience, she stated that "'feminism' is the most powerful term that we have at our disposal and...we should use it knowledgeably, taking into account its

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[48]Ellen Carol DuBois, "Comment on Karen Offen's 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach'," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15, no. (Autumn 1989), 195-197; and Karen Offen, "Reply to DuBois," *ibid.*, 198-202.

transnational historical provenance and its varied implications across time and place."[49]

Culture as Politics

Efforts to rehabilitate what Offen calls relational feminism as an expression of a separate female political culture have been underway since the late 1970s. Historians of the American women's movement have been particularly industrious in this area, seeking to construct a new definition of "politics" to accommodate the views and activism of those middle-class women who believed, as Paula Baker has argued, that their power to influence came from being "above" politics. The underlying concern of this new interest in women's political culture has not so much been whether these women were "feminist," but whether the maternal feminist claim that middle-class women wielded what Peggy Pascoe has called "female moral authority" had an experiential basis. The very notion that women's voluntary sphere constituted a separate political culture is a refinement of the idea that nineteenth-century middle-class women occupied a separate "female world of love and ritual." That this private female world also had a powerful public counterpart in the network of women's societies and institutions founded by urban middle-class women in the latter part of the century was first suggested by Estelle B. Freedman.

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[49]Nancy F. Cott, "Comment on Karen Offen's 'Defining Feminism A Comparative Historical Approach'," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 15, no. (Autumn 1989), 203-205; and Karen Offen, "Reply to Cott," *ibid.*, 206-209. See also Nancy F. Cott, "What's in a Name? The Limits of Social Feminism; or, Expanding the Vocabulary of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 76 (December 1989), 809-829.

In an influential essay published in *Feminist Studies* in 1979,[50] Freedman argued that a "separatist political strategy, which I refer to as 'female institution building,' emerged from the middle-class women's culture of the nineteenth century." This culture was founded upon women's strong identification with the private sphere of domesticity and with the female relationships that they forged there. These two conditions shaped the political strategy of middle-class women in the public sphere between the 1870s and the 1920s. The creation of a separate female sphere within the public realm, Freedman suggested, was "the only viable political strategy for women" because women's assimilation of the ideals of 'true womanhood' gave them "an identity quite separate from men's." Organized middle-class women therefore framed their activism in their public sphere to conform to "their deeply rooted identities."[51]

Belief in the parity of women's and men's spheres undergirded this separatist institution building strategy, Freedman argued.[52] This assertion of separate but equal spheres for women and men therefore did not admit support for the idea of sexual equality inherent in individualist demands for the vote. Instead, driven by "the negative push of discrimination" in the masculine public sphere, and by "the

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[50]Estelle B. Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3 (fall 1979), 512-529.

[51]Drawing on Freedman's thesis, Diana Pedersen has argued that the Canadian YWCA's institution building programme at the turn of the century was an attempt to create "a female refuge from an inhospitable male environment and a base from which they could attempt to modify that environment in the interests of women." See Diana Pedersen, "'Building Today for the Womanhood of Tomorrow': Businessmen, Boosters, and the YWCA, 1890-1930," *Urban History Review/Revue l'histoire urbaine* 15, no. 3 (1987), 227.

[52]See also Mathaei, *An Economic History of Women in America*, pp. 114-119.

positive attraction of the female world of close, personal relationships and domestic institutional structures," women redefined womanhood through separatist action, extending the scope and influence of their sphere without repudiating its values or value. Freedman suggests that the most significant manifestation of this separatist political consciousness was the middle-class club movement of the late nineteenth century.[53] The club movement--of which the international Council movement that spawned the NCWC was but one example—illustrated "the politicization of women's institutions as well as the limitations of their politics." It did not, however, necessarily illustrate the limitation of their power in the public sphere or their ability to influence the state. Ironically, Freedman linked the demise of women's political culture to women's enfranchisement, the very reform that a majority of organized women had eventually mobilized to achieve. When women won the vote and began to assimilate into male-dominated institutions and networks the separatist foundation of their public power was lost, Freedman contends. As a result, she concludes that women "gave up many of the strengths of the female sphere without gaining equality from the man's world they entered."[54]

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[53]See also Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1980).

[54]She reaches substantially the same conclusion in Estelle B. Freedman, *Their Sisters' Keepers: Women's Prison Reform in America, 1830-1930* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1981). In a paper presented to the recent Berkshire Conference on the History of Women at Vassar College, Freedman extended and elaborated this thesis arguing that although the vote undermined women's power as a bloc by dismantling the ideology of separate spheres as the framework for a distinct and influential women's political culture, where separate women's institutions persisted women continued to wield authority in social work after 1920. They did so by using "female networks" to support controversial positions or practices. See Estelle B. Freedman, "Separatism Revisited: Women's Institutions, Social Reform, and the Career of Miriam Van Waters" (unpublished paper presented to the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, June 11, 1993).

In another important interpretive synthesis called "The Domestication of American Politics," Paula Baker endeavoured to define the source, nature, and decline of women's "power of moral superiority" between 1780 and 1920, and to assess the meaning of the separate female political culture that it fostered.[55] Baker argued that in the nineteenth century gender was the fundamental division in the political culture of white middle-class Americans, with men deriving much of their collective identity from masculine political prerogative. Women's political culture was not founded upon a politics of exclusion, however. Instead, women used the popular veneration of domesticity and motherhood to construct a separate and distinct women's political culture after 1780. Separate spheres ideology undergirded women's claim of moral superiority, which in turn legimitated their claim of being "above" politics, she argues. Baker traces the the notion of female moral authority to the ideology of Republican Motherhood first outlined by Linda Kerber.[56] In the Jacksonian era, it was given added force by "the cultural assignment of republican virtues and moral authority to womanhood," which thus freed men to embrace a brand of partisan politics founded exclusively on self-interest.

This separate female political culture did not aim to subvert male political authority. The mass of middle-class women initially rejected the individualist assertion of women's equality advanced by woman suffragists as a threat to their distinctiveness as women and

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[55]Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984), 620-647.

[56]Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980).

their collective authority to protect the interests of their sphere. Organized middle-class women instead sought to enhance women's power through collective action in the voluntary sphere on behalf of the "home." As Baker notes, nineteenth-century women defined the home expansively, arguing that women's sphere was anywhere that women and children were found. Baker likewise argues that to understand the nature of women's political activism—which she defines broadly as organized activism outside the home—the concept of "politics" must be expanded to include the informal as well as the formal exercise of power. Only in this way can we understand the changing bases of women's moral and political authority before and after the vote was won, both in electoral politics and in the women's movement broadly defined.[57]

Baker's thesis that there were distinct yet complementary male and female political cultures at work in the United States for much of

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[57]Researchers in England and North America are beginning to consider the extent to which these gendered political cultures intersected to create "the welfare state." The work of Jane Lewis is particularly useful. For the most part, her work is removed from the internecine American historiographical debates over the meaning of social feminism and women's culture as a source of female empowerment in the public sphere. But her interest in uncovering the links between middle-class women's social action and the emergence of a consensus favouring state welfare—and hence the interaction between the Victorian ideal of social work as women's work and the later construction of social welfare as a responsibility of the male state—contributes to this discussion. See Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Lewis, *The Politics of Motherhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980; Lewis, "Motherhood Issues During the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Some Recent Viewpoints," *Ontario History* 75, no. 1 (March 1983), 4-20; and Lewis, "Feminism and Welfare," in Mitchell and Oakley, eds., *What is Feminism*, pp. 85-100. For American and comparative perspectives on gender and the welfare state, see Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston 188-1960* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988); Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States," *Journal of American History* 97, no. 3 (June 1992), 19-54; Seth Kovan and Sonya Michel, "Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1990), 1076-1108; and Kathryn Kish Sklar, "A Call for Comparisons," *ibid.*, 1109-1114.

the nineteenth century has informed the latest attempt to recraft the archetypal "lady bountiful" as a political actor. In *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power*, Kathleen D. McCarthy reshifts the focus of discussion to redefine women's political culture as voluntarism and philanthropy broadly defined. "Through gifts of time and money," McCarthy argues, "women have built institutions, provided charitable services, secured the vote, challenged racial and ethnic stereotypes, and opened professions to other women. They have also carved out 'invisible careers' for themselves, pursuing distinctive forms of female entrepreneurship."[58] Female voluntarism provided women with "access to power outside the masculine realms of government and commerce," and shaped women's public roles. The essays in the collection examine the social and political context of women's philanthropy in the United States, colonial Mexico, Tsarist Russia, France, and England. McCarthy notes that researchers have moved beyond "social control" explanations for the dynamic of "charitable exchange" and its impact on the wider society and among the participants themselves. Thus Lady Bountiful re-emerges as a multi-dimensional figure rooted in the experiences of class, ethnic, and racial division and consciousness, as well as in time and place.[59]

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[58]Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Preface," in Kathleen D. McCarthy ed., *Lady Bountiful Revisitied: Women, Power, and Philanthropy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. ix. See also Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Noblesse Oblige: Charity and Cultural Philanthropy in Chicago, 1849-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1984); and Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of St. Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1984), chapter 7; and Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the 19th Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[59]See, for example, Nancy A. Hewitt, "Charity or Mutual Aid? Two Perspectives on Latin Women's Philanthropy in Tampa, Florida," in McCarthy, ed., *Lady Bountiful*

In her own contribution to the volume, McCarthy surveys "the relationship between women's public roles and their voluntary sector efforts."[60] McCarthy's purpose is to delineate how women have endeavoured to wield power "in societies intent upon rendering them powerless." Nonprofit institutions and reform associations, she argues, were women's "primary point of access to public roles." Through participation in the female voluntary sector women "forged parallel power structures to those used by men," thus "creating a growing array of opportunties for their sisters and themselves." She suggests that there are four distinct aspects of women's experience of voluntarism in the United States: institutional development; social reform; political reform; and contributions and careers. Women's and men's organizational responses to public need often differed, for example. Moreover, women used the voluntary sector to mobilize support for a variety of social movements and political reforms, employing distinctive strategies that were shaped within the female voluntary sector to influence the male political culture. Some wealthy women, she suggests, also used financial contributions to lever new

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Revisited, pp. 55-69; Darlene Hine, "'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible': The Philanthropic Work of Black Women," in *ibid.*, pp. 70-93; and Anne Firor Scott, "Women's Voluntary Associations: From Charity to Reform," in *ibid.*, pp. 35-54. See also Anne Firor Scott, "On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility," *Journal of American History* 71, no. 1 (June 1984), 7-21, which argues that historians have under-valued the voluntary work of women by regarding it as apolitical, thus perpetuating its historical invisibility; Scott, *Making the Invisible Woman Visible* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); and Scott, "Most Invisible of All: Black Women's Voluntary Associations," *Journal of Southern History* 56 (February 1990), 3-22.

[60]Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Parallel Power Structures: Women and the Voluntary Sphere," in McCarthy ed., *Lady Bountiful Revisitied*, pp. 1-34. See also Phyllis Rose, *Parallel Lives: Five Victorian Marriages* (New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 1983); and F.K. Prochaska, *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

careers and opportunities for themselves and other women in the public sphere.

How much power organized middle-class women were actually able to wield is the subject of another recent study of middle-class women's institution building and social action at the turn of the century. Peggy Pascoe's *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939*[61] has been heralded by one historian as "a brilliant and broad-ranging critique of women's culture."[62] In it, Pascoe considers the nature and scope of "female moral authority" in the American west between 1874 and 1939 by examining the dynamics of gender, class, and ethnicity in three "rescue" homes administered by middle-class Protestant mission women. Pascoe argues that these women believed they were empowered to act by the cultural consensus that women of their class and race possessed "femal moral authority." This sense of power was not founded in what has been referred to historically as "female moral superiority," Pascoe argues. This term has a pejorative meaning that the mission women whose experiences she examines would not have shared.

Pascoe ultimately concludes that women's authority to act in the public sphere was circumscribed their own shortsightedness on the one hand and by the dominant male culture on the other. She therefore challenges the claim made by advocates of the women's

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[61]Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[62] Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of the Public Woman: Women's Power and Place in the United States 1630-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 273, note 16.

culture as politics thesis that women's prescriptive moral authority translated into real power either as a way of influencing the politics of government in men's sphere or as a way of shaping the politics of womanhood in women's sphere. Their aspirations to reshape their female charges in their own image were thwarted by the unstable foundation of women's authority in the public sphere and by the determined unwillingness of working-class women to be rescued.[63] Hence Pascoe asserts that an ideal of female moral authority grounded in separate spheres ideology was ultimately a self-defeating proposition.[64]

Founding the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada

This dissertation does not seek to answer the question, was the NCWC a "feminist" organization.[65] Nor is this an institutional history of the

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[63]For an extremely useful overview of weakness of the "social control" thesis, see Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives*, chap. 9. See also Ellen Borris, "Reconstructing the 'Family': Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control," in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race & Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentuckym, 1991), pp. 73-86. The most thorough re-assessment of the social control model in Canadian historiography has occurred in the field of education history. See, for example, Susan E. Houston and Alison Prentice, *Schooling and Scholars in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). On the subject of working-class women's historical agency, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1984); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements : Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift : Independent Women Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992); and Diana Pedersen, "'Keeping Our Good Girls Good': The YWCA and the 'Girl Porblem'," *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers del al femme* 7, no. 4 (Winter 1986), 20-25.

[64]Borris reaches this same conclusion, see Borris in Frankel and Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race & Reform in the Progressive Era*, pp. 73-74.

[65]I will take Estelle Freedman's very broad definition of feminist political activity as my starting point. Freedman asserted that "any female-dominated activity that places

National Council of Women of Canada in the 1890s, or a chronicle of the early development of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada.[66] Instead, it is conceived as a case study of female institution building in late Victorian Canada. In particular, it will examine the domestic and religious bases of middle-class women's political culture in the early 1890s; consider how one self-styled group of "representative" middle-class women defined their authority as members of a national inter-faith federation of women's societies; and assess the extent of their power to effect a specific programme of change.

The remainder of the work is divided into five chapters. Chapter two examines the domestic and religious bases of Council women's public identity as the Women Workers of Canada, and asks how their evangelical, domestic, and voluntary construction of

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a positive value on women's social contributions, provides personal support, and is not controlled by antifeminist leadership has feminist political potential. This is as true for the sewing circle, voluntary civic association, and women's bar as for the consciousness raising group, coffeehouse, or women's center." See Freedman, *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1979), 527, note 7.

[66]The history of the Victorian Order of Nurses has not been as well served by academic historians as the NCWC. The only institutional history of the VON was prepared by John Murray Gibbon in 1947 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the VON's foundation. In her study of the NCWC, Veronica Strong-Boag did not discuss the VON, except to note that as an affiliated society after 1898 it drew the NCWC's attention to "the medical aspirations of nurses." The most extensive recent study of the VON is by Suzann Buckley, who, as part of her wider interest in the history of maternal welfare reform in early twentieth-century Canada, briefly examined the VON's relationship to its founders in the NCWC. Like most of the other articles in Linda Kealey's 1979 collection of essays on women and reform, Buckley takes a jaundiced view of the maternal or social feminists who dominated and led the NCWC. See John Murray Gibbon, *The Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada, 1897-1947* (Montreal: Southam Press, 1947); and John Murray Gibbon and Mary Mathewson, *Three Centuries of Canadian Nursing* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1947), pp. 267-276; Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, p. 179; Suzann Buckley, "Ladies or Midwives? Efforts to Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), pp.131-150; Buckley, "Efforts to Reduce Infant and Maternal Mortality in Canada Between the Two World Wars," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 4 (Spring 1979); and Buckley, "The Search for the Decline of Maternal Mortality: The Place of Hospital Records," in Wendy Mitchinson and Janice Dickin McGinnis, eds., *Essays in the History of Canadian Medicine* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), pp. 148-163.

"woman's work" coloured their perception of the new middle-class hospital trained nurse on the one hand and of nursing as a womanly form evangelical social service among the sick poor on the other.[67] Chapter three considers Council women's gendered representation of homemaking as nation building, and their attempts to describe and promote the NCWC's authority to superintend the public and private welfare of "women's sphere." Chapter four outlines the terms of the Victorian Order of Home Helpers and asks why Lady Aberdeen chose to pursue a gendered institution building strategy and what impact this decision had on the purpose and personnel of the proposed order. Chapter five examines the gendered politics of institution building, both in connection with opponents and supporters of the newly revamped Victorian Order of Nurses, and considers the response of Lady Aberdeen to the unexpected lay and medical challenges to the NCWC's authority to help parturient prairie women. And finally,

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[67]Because of the medical nature of the institution founded by the NCWC, the emergence of nursing as an occupation suitable for women of the middling classes in the late nineteenth century is an important historiographical context for this study. A new effort to situate the history of nursing in the broader historiographical discussions and debates of women's history has been underway since the early 1980s. A series of collections of new research by nurse-historians, historians, and sociologists have heralded this interpretive change. See, for example, Celia Davies, ed., *Rewriting Nursing History* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); Ellen Condliff Lagemann, ed., *Nursing History: New Perspectives, New Possibilities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1983); and Christopher Maggs, ed., *Nursing History: The State of the Art* (London: Croom Helm, 1987). In Canada, the history of nursing is only now being written and re-evaluated from a feminist perspective by academic historians. In general therefore research on the history of Canadian nurses and nursing is still largely to be found in theses. For a state-of-the-art survey of Canadian nursing history, see Veronica Strong-Boag, "Making a Difference: The History of Canada's Nurses," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 8, no. 2 (1991). For a survey of contemporary nursing politics in Canada, see Sarah Jane Growe, *Who Cares: The Crisis in Canadian Nursing* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991). The history of teaching as "women's work" is a far more mature field of study in Canada and elsewhere. For an extremely useful overview of international feminist scholarship on women teachers, see Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald, eds., *Women Who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 3-36.

chapter six concludes the discussion by considering the impact of this institution building experience on the NCWC's construction of female authority and the work of middle-class women.

CHAPTER TWO

"WOMEN WORKERS OF CANADA"

RELIGION, DOMESTICITY, AND THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NURSING AS "WOMAN'S WORK"

The ideological supports of home, church, and nation undergirded Council women's corporate identity as the Women Workers of Canada during the 1890s. The National Council of Women of Canada used this designation as the title of its verbatim annual report during Lady Aberdeen's presidency between 1893 and 1898. It was borrowed from the National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain, a national federation of religious and philanthropic women's societies founded in England in the late 1880s "to bring religious principle, womanly pity, and the higher culture to bear upon the perplexing problems of latter-day civilization."[1] On one level, its use

[1]Miss Emily Janes, "On the Associated Work of Women in Religion and Philanthropy," in The Baroness Burdett-Coutts, ed., *Woman's Mission: A Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women by Eminent Writers* (London: Sampon Low, Marsten & Company, 1893), p. 132. Emily Janes was the founder and honourary organizing secretary of the National Union of Women Workers of Great Britain. Lady Aberdeen made the connection between the two organizations explicit in her address to the inaugural meeting of the the Victoria Local Council of Women in 1895. See Public Archives of British Columbia (hereafter PABC), VCW 1981, Records of the Victoria Local Council of Women, pamphlet, NCWC, *Meeting to Inaugerate the Local Council of Victoria and Vancouver Island, on Thursday, November 8, 1894. Address by Her Excellency the Countess of Aberdeen* (Victoria, BC: The Colonist Printing and Publishing Co., 1894), p. 3. Lady Aberdeen was not the only member of the NCWC who was familiar with the National Union. Mrs. Ashley Carus-Wilson of Montreal had attended its 1891 meeting in Liverpool. In an address to the NCWC in 1894, she described the NUWW as a philanthropic institution. See Carus-Wilson, "Co-operation on a General Basis," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada: Being a Report of the*

asserted the public nature of middle-class women's work in the voluntary sector and suggested its importance to the welfare of the nation. On another more significant level, it also imposed a common public identity on a religiously diverse group of organized middle-class women whose express basis of unity was their gender and, more implicitly, their race and social class. But, perhaps most importantly, the phrase suggested the nature and purpose of the new organization, for the modifier "women" before the noun "workers" would clearly signal both to prospective affiliates and to late Victorian Canadians the NCWC's identification with a religious, domestic, and voluntary construction of "woman's work."

In some respects, the NCWC's greatest single organizational achievement in the 1890s was the unification of organized middle-class women of disparate faiths in one institution. This was possible largely because most of the middle-class women who joined the Council in this decade shared a more basic definition of themselves as domestic and religious "workers" whose organized social activism, irrespective of creedal differences, was either defined by religious affiliation or shaped by religious belief. In addition, most Council women regarded themselves first and foremost as "home women" with primary responsibility for the care of their own households and families. Believing that the family was the principal unit in society, they argued that the well-being of the nation and the welfare of the "home circle"—a term they employed expansively as a synonym for "woman's sphere"—were inextricably linked. Women's duty to the

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Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Canada, Ottawa, April, 1894 (Ottawa: Thorburn & Co., 1894), p. 54.

home circle had long justified a wide range of female beneficence to poor women and children and mobilized women to join a variety of evangelical service and reform associations, including the YWCA and the WCTU.[2] Not surprisingly, then, early Council women turned to their common experiences of religiosity and domesticity to solidify the "bond of sympathy" that united them as elite women and to legitimate their participation in an experimental national women's federation like the NCWC.

Membership in an organization like the NCWC offered its members an opportunity to assert the importance of women's traditional domestic and religious responsibilities at a time when new employment opportunities for working-class women and for middle-class women outside the home contrived to degrade the image of the home as a place of meaningful work. During the early 1890s, then, the NCWC responded to the advent of the "modern nurse" with a predictable degree of ambivalence. While its members looked upon the development of trained hospital nursing as confirmation of the importance of "woman's sphere," they were initially reluctant to accord trained middle-class nurses the kind of professional status claimed by male-dominated occupations like medicine and law. Instead, sacred images of trained nursing as an "avocation" and "refuge" for women who chose to serve a higher master than man dominated their initial deliberations on the subject. Moreover,

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[2]On the YWCA and the WCTU in Canada, see Diana Pedersen, "The Young Women's Christian Association in Canada, 1870-1920: 'A Movement to Meet a Spiritual, Civic and National Need'" (PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1987); and Sharon Anne Cook, "'Continued and Persevering Combat': The Ontario Woman's Temperance Union, Evangelicalism and Social Reform, 1874-1916" (PhD dissertation, Carleton University, 1990).

Council women continued to distinguish between the work of hospital trained nurses and the work of nursing as an extension of women's domestic obligations both to members of their own families and to the sick poor. Thus while they acknowledged that only hospital trained nurses should be engaged to nurse in well-to-do households, some evangelical women within the NCWC believed that any woman called to God's service was qualified to nurse in the homes of the sick poor.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the NCWC's early struggle to constitute itself as union of faithful women—rather than as a union of women of one faith—and to redefine the religious unity of organized middle-class women, and therefore the NCWC itself, as a divinely sanctioned moral force. The second section sketches Council women's collective work identity as domestic workers, and considers the NCWC's earliest attempts to define and delimit the meaning of trained hospital nursing as a remunerative occupation for middle-class women. And lastly, section three examines the distinction made by some Council women between the work of hospital trained nurses and nursing as a non-remunerative and evangelical form of womanly service to others.[3]

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[3]The discussion that follows here, and in subsequent chapters, of NCWC ideas is based largely on the speeches of delegates to the NCWC's annual conventions. It therefore necessarily highlights the views of those women who were most active within the National Council of Women of Canada during the early 1890s. A comparison of the delegate lists of 1894 and 1895 with the lists of societies and Local Councils in affiliation with the NCW in these years, for example, reveals that most delegates, but not all, held positions of leadership at either (or both) the local and national level of the Council, or were serving presidents of nationally or locally affiliated societies. In 1894, 57 women attended the annual meeting as delegates. Of this number, 13 (23%) held office within the National Council or a Local Council; 16 (28%) were presidents of nationally or locally affiliated societies (and therefore were also ex-officio vice-presidents of either the NCW or a Local Council); and 6 (10%) were both Local or National Council officers as well as serving presidents of an affiliated society. Twenty-two delegates (39%) occupied no apparent position of leadership. In 1894, then, fully 61% or almost two-thirds of delegates to the NCW's first annual meeting could be

Religion

The federal structure of the National Council of Women of Canada, and its object—to unify women's societies of all types in one authoritative institution—was a direct outgrowth of the late nineteenth-century political culture created by middle-class American women. Driven by the same impulse to centralize, organize, and seek national solutions to social problems that characterized male political culture in this period,[4] the Council idea took root in the United States in 1888.[5] It

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defined as leaders. The ratio of leader to non-leader increased among delegates to the second annual meeting. In 1895, 77 women attended the conference as delegates. Of this number 32 (42%) held office within the National Council or a Local Council; 22 (28%) were presidents of nationally or locally affiliated societies (and therefore were also ex-officio vice-presidents of either the NCW or a Local Council); and 10(13%) were both Local or National Council officers as well as serving presidents of an affiliated society. Only 13 delegates (17%) occupied no apparent position of leadership. In 1895, therefore, more than three-quarters or 78% of delegates could be defined as leaders. For delegate lists and lists of societies and Local Councils in affiliation with the NCW, see NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 1-9, and NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 1-20.

[4]Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984), 620-647, esp. 635.

[5]The "Council idea" as a co-operative movement among organized women originated in 1888, when American suffragists Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton convened an International Congress of Women at Washington, D.C. to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls women's rights convention. Under the leadership of Frances Willard, the well-known president of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and May Wright Sewall, an Indiana suffragist and a leader of the National Woman Suffrage Association, the National Council of Women of the United States took shape, its object to unite in common purposes women organized in professional, educational, cultural, religious, welfare, and reform associations across the country. Although both Willard and Sewall personally supported woman suffrage and belonged to organizations that actively campaigned for the enfranchisement of women, the National Council of Women of the United States quickly jettisoned this controversial issue from its platform in order to appease the many American women's societies who rejected woman suffrage as an unnecessary and an unseemly reform. The basis of assembly was thus not to be shared ideology, cause, or even faith, but rather a common identity as women working, in some organized way, to further the welfare of woman. See the entries for Susan B. Anthony, May Wright Sewall, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Frances Willard, in Edward T. James, ed., *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, vols. 1 and 3 (Cambrige, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971). See also Louise B. Robbins, ed., *Story and Minutes of the National Council of Women of the United States* (Boston: E.B. Stillings & Company, 1898); Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's*

was transplanted to Canada five years later by a handful of Ontario women after the Congress of Representative Women at Chicago resolved to found an international network of "national councils" under the presidency of the British social reformer and suffragist, the Countess of Aberdeen, Lady Ishbel Majoribanks. Her husband's appointment to the Canadian governor generalship later that year provided Canadian Council enthusiasts with an unimpeachable leader for their own institution, for not only did her rank make her a natural social leader, she was also sufficiently removed from local religious and political jealousies to unite the organized middle-class women of Canada.[6]

In contrast to the original American Council which was dominated by well-known suffragists—a fact that accounted for its more limited constituency compared to its younger but more fully established sister Council in Canada—the NCWC was shaped by the concerns and beliefs of the mostly Anglo-Protestant, imperialist, and evangelical church and philanthropic women who constituted the largest proportion of its membership in the 1890s. In general, most

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Rights Movement in the United States, rev. ed. (1959; Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), chap. 13.

[6]See Lord and Lady Aberdeen, *"We Twa": Reminiscences of Lord and Lady Aberdeen*, vols. I and II (London: W. Collins and Sons, 1925), and Ishbel, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, *Musings of a Scottish Granny* (London: Heath, Cranton, 1936). The standard biography of Lady Aberdeen was written by her daughter, see Marjorie Pentland, *A Bonnie Fetcher: the life of Ishbel Marjoribanks, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair, G.B.E., LL.D., J.P., 1857 to 1939* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1952). A more recent biography is by Doris French, *Ishbel and Empire: A Biography of Lady Aberdeen* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988). A number of theses and research papers have addressed various aspects of Lady Aberdeen's involvement with Canadian women. The most recent, and the best of these, is Joanna Dean's exploration of Lady Aberdeen's evangelical and partisan liberal views: "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women: A Study of Evangelism, Liberalism and the Woman Question" (M.A. research essay, Carleton University, 1989).

Council members restricted their social activism to those areas of public endeavour traditionally regarded as extensions of women's primary responsibility for the home and family, including church mission work, church auxiliary work, child welfare institutions, homes for unwed mothers and indigent widows, charitable and benevolent societies, and evangelical mission work. In addition, the NCWC also attracted the participation of a number of "club women," whose cultural and educational societies affiliated at the local and national levels. Only one national society, the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association of Toronto, advanced a view of women's relationship to the dominant male political culture that was at variance with the domestic, religious, and non-remunerative construction of "woman's work" advanced by most Council women.

The foundation of the NCWC in 1893 represented a significant development in the nature and scope of women's activism in late Victorian Canada. Although Protestant women had been organizing national denominational and inter-domination societies since the 1870s,[7] the NCWC joined together Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish women in united endeavour on a national basis for the first

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[7]For a survey of national women's societies at the end of the nineteenth century, see Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Setting the Stage': National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds. *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 87-103. On the denominational activism of Protestant women, see Wendy Mitchinson, "Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century: A Step Towards Independence," *Atlantis* 2, no. 2, pt. 2 (Spring 1977), 57-75; Ruth Compton Brouwer, *New Women for God: Canadian Presbyterian Women and India Missions, 1876-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); Rosemary Gagan, *A Sensitive Independence: Canadian Methodist Women Missionaries in Canada and the Orient, 1881-1925* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); Marilyn Fardig Whiteley, "Modest, Unaffected and Fully Consecrated: Lady Evangelists in Canadian Methodism," *Canadian Methodist Historical Society Papers* 6 (1987); and "'Doing Just About What They Please': Ladies' Aids in Ontario Methodism," *Ontario History* 82, no. 4 (December 1990).

time. The magnitude of this achievement has generally been discounted, however. Instead, the NCWC has been viewed as an undifferentiated mass of middle-class women, whose common class interests overrode the creedal differences that had hitherto divided them from each other.[8] But, like other Canadians in this period, Council women related to each other according to a well-defined religious and social hierarchy of creed, sect, and church.[9] The real achievement of the NCWC, and one for which the leadership of Lady Aberdeen can be credited, was the extent to which it was able to unite its members as women, rather than as adherents of a particular faith or creed.

Despite the evident enthusiasm of early Council women, their first assemblies were marked by an air of hesistancy and uncertainty about the nature and purpose of their work as members of a national federation of women's societies like the NCWC. Joanna Dean argues that Lady Aberdeen therefore used her rank, the force of her personality, and her seemingly bottomless well of energy to fill this

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[8]Veronica Strong-Boag acknowledged the "moral earnestness" of Council women, but divorced their religious beliefs from evangelical ideology. See Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976), pp. 32-33, 38. See also Gail Brandt, "Organization in Canada: The English Protestant Tradition," in Paula Bourne, ed., *Women's Paid and Unpaid Work: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1985), pp. 79-96.

[9]Both the importance of religion as a form of social demarcation and the evangelical temper of nineteenth-century Canadian society is now well established. See, for example, George A. Rawlyk, ed., *The Canadian Protestant Experience 1760-1990* (Burlington, Ont.: Welch Publishing Company, 1990); William Westfall, *Two Worlds: The Protestant Culture of Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Pres, 1989); John Webster Grant, *A Profusion of Spires: Religion in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Phyllis D. Arhart, *Serving the Present Age: Revivalism, Progressivism, and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Pres, 1992); and Marguerite Van Die, *An Evangelical Mind: Nathaniel Burwash and the Methodist Tradition in Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Pres, 1989).

vacuum with her own "vision" for Canadian women.[10] This vision, she argues, was an inherently evangelical one, in which women would take up the moral duties of their gender and class to help realize the Kingdom of God. The NCWC's non-sectarian religious policies and practices were the special handiwork of Lady Aberdeen. Guided by the inclusionary impulse behind the international Council movement and by the liberal evangelical impulse to subsume religious difference to "His ideal of unity,"[11] she endeavoured to forge a national federation of women's societies whose members would be united first by gender and second by a shared conviction that women could best serve the divine progress of humanity by rationalizing their associated work on behalf of the home and family.

Lady Aberdeen regarded the NCWC as a non-sectarian expression of female religiosity. Drawing on evangelical domestic ideology—the Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond, for example, declared that the "hour of the Mother" had come and that it was now incumbent upon women to harness their innately altruistic natures in the service of

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[10]Joanna Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women: A Study of Evangelism, Liberalism and the Woman Question" (M.A. research paper, Carleton University, 1989).

[11]Christian unity preoccupied many Protestant church leaders in Canada during the last third of the nineteenth century. By the mid-1880s, Canadian Presbyterians and Methodists had forged national denominational unions; in 1875, Prebyterians united to form the Presbyterian Chuch of Canada and, in 1884, Methodists followed suit, forming the Methodist Church in Canada. Anglicans, too, were attracted to the ideal of church union, and in 1888 the Lambeth Conference suggested that the prospect of inter-denominational union should be further investigated. This impulse led to the convening of the Conference on Christian Union in Toronto in 1889. It was believed—or hoped—that Christian union would help realize Canada as His Dominion. See Arhart, "Ordering a New Nation," in Rawlyk, ed., *The Canadian Protestant Experience*, pp. 99-101; and Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, pp. 178-179.

humanity[12]—Lady Aberdeen argued that through the NCWC womanhood itself would become a divine social and moral force. At a meeting of the Halifax Local Council of Women in 1894, for example, she declared that the goal of the Council movement was "To make Halifax truly a City of God, to make Canada more and more a Kingdom of God, united with all our sister workers throughout the world to make the world more truly God's world."[13] Believing that the NCWC was an expression of God's will, Lady Aberdeen characterized it as a divinely empowered religious body composed of women united in "the deepest, holiest bonds of fellowship."[14] But, in contrast to Canada's other national middle-class women's associations which demanded adherence to a particular faith or creed, members of the NCWC would be united by the bonds of womanhood, of which a shared experience of religiosity was but one. Lady Aberdeen hoped that the NCWC would become a forum for united action where women of disparate beliefs and purposes could meet together, join in prayer together, exchange information about matters of common interest, and, when necessary, work together to effect specific reforms. As she observed to a

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[12]Quoted in Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women," pp. 58-59. Henry Drummond, whom Dean describes as the "mentor to his generation," was a close friend of the Aberdeens. In his two major theological treatises, Drummond attempted to counter the pessimistic view of human nature advanced by Darwin's theory of origins and to co-opt its challenge to divine history by arguing that the social as well as moral progress of humankind was in the hands of individual men and women. Through directed and "scientific" intervention in the moral "evolution" of society he declared that both the Kingdom of God on earth and, ultimately, the Kingdom of God in Heaven could be realized. *Ibid.*, pp. 49-64. See also Henry Drummond, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (New York: James Pott and Co., 1884), and *The Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man* (New York: James Pott and Co., 1895).

[13]National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. 17, Scrapbook, newspaper clipping, Halifax *Herald*, 25 August 1894.

[14]Lady Aberdeen, "Preface," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. vii.

Toronto audience in 1895, "No society joining the Council necessarily endorses the opinions of any other society, nor is it connected with its individual work, but by [the] influence of united womanhood reforms may be gained, [and] evils remedied that would be impossible for any single society to accomplish."[15]

That the NCWC would be a union of the middle-class "women workers" of Canada was assumed by Council women. A belief in the naturalness of deferential class relations among women of disparate social rank undergirded Lady Aberdeen's idealization of female unity. As a result of her own privileged upbringing in England, she possessed a well-developed sense of class superiority that was shared by most of the middle- and upper-class women who led the NCWC in the 1890s.[16] They regarded the NCWC as a means to assert and exercise the social and moral authority they believed accrued to them as elite women. Lady Aberdeen's representation of the NCWC as a "fellowship" was therefore an appropriate descriptor, for it suggested the social exclusivity of the NCWC's membership as well as the "bond of sympathy" that united them as devout women. While Council women could, and did, claim a bond of divine "kinship" with the working-class women and girls who were the principal objects of their moral

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[15]Archives of Ontario (hereafter AO), F805-10-0-10, Local Council of Women of Toronto Records, Press Releases, 1893-1901, typescript, Toronto *Globe*, 18 April 1895.

[16]The assumption of class superiority pervades the NCWC's annual reports. See, for example, Mrs. Ashely Carus-Wilson, B.A. (Montreal), "Co-operation on a General Basis," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894 , pp. 51-55; Mrs. Julia Drummond (Montreal), "Co-operation as Shown in Associated Charities," in *ibid.*, pp. 55-60; Mrs. S.G. Wood (Toronto), "Preventive Work," in *ibid.*, pp. 123-126; Mrs. Tilley (London), "Nursing the Sick Poor in Their Own Homes," in *ibid.*, pp. 143-146; and Mrs. Helliwell (Toronto), "The Domestic Problem: From the Servants' Point of View,"in *ibid.*, pp. 160-163. See also Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women".

solicitude, their hierarchical social outlook was not flexible enough to admit their less fortunate "sisters" into a "fellowship" of social equals like the NCWC—whose members were united not just by their gender, but by a common experience of affluence and social privilege as well. Thus, in practice the divine authority that Council women claimed as a unified body of Canadian womanhood was intimately linked not only to their gender, but to the social authority they already wielded as elite women.

Lady Aberdeen attempted to bridge the gulf of conscience and experience that divided the NCWC's evangelical Protestant majority from its Roman Catholic and Jewish minorities by asserting that all Council women, irrespective of religious and political divisions, were actuated by a common desire to acknowledge and to serve God, however defined. In her annual addresses to the NCWC, Lady Aberdeen consistently invoked an inclusionary Judaic-Christian image of the divine. Council women were "all children of the same Father," she argued. As such, they were united by a common ambition to bear witness to His "Divine Guidance." She thus urged Council women to signify publicly the religiosity of the NCWC and their shared religious purpose as a group of faithful women by opening their annual meetings in united but silent prayer. This unified profession of faith would demonstrate their "sense of dependence on our Heavenly Father" without imposing any "restriction" or "difficulty" on any member of the NCWC, whether Christian or Jewish. And finally, Lady Aberdeen encouraged Council women to interpret the NCWC's motto—do unto others as you would have them do unto you—as an expression of

religious tolerance.[17] Although sometimes dismissed by historians as an innocuous sentiment bereft of meaning, like silent prayer, the golden rule signalled the religious purpose of the NCWC. As a statement of purpose, its meaning was sufficiently amorphous to capture the essence of Christ's message of love and service without imposing an explicitly Christian mission on the NCWC as a whole.[18]

In part, Lady Aberdeen's determined characterization of the NCWC as a religiously inspired institution or "movement" was a defensive posture. Late Victorian Canadians, most of whom were Protestants of one stripe or another, conflated religion with Christianity and regarded audible public prayer as the most visible sign of belief.[19] A national women's institution like the NCWC, which was predicated on a non-sectarian construction of female unity rather than an expressly Protestant understanding of female religiosity, therefore challenged the dominant evangelical culture of late Victorian Canada. The religious pluralism inherent in the NCWC's desire to unite all Canadian women irrespective of "creed," "church," or "race," and its determination to impose no one "dogma" on any of its members by adopting a form of silent worship in which all of its members could

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[17]Lady Aberdeen, "Presidential Address," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 10-11, 13.

[18]The purpose of the NCWC, as recorded in the preamble of its constitution, was "to further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law." Lady Aberdeen also referred to the golden rule as the "Golden Rule of Love," see "Preface," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. vii. Advocates of audible prayer, like Mrs. Mary McDonnel of Toronto and the Dominion WCTU, represented the golden rule as an edict of religious freedom rather than one of religious tolerance. See Mrs. McDonnell (Toronto), "Reponse on Behalf of Delegates," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 15-16, 17.

[19]Arhart, "Ordering a New Nation," in Rawlyk, ed., *The Canadian Protestant Experience*,; and Grant, *Profusion of Spires*.

participate equally, were interpreted by many Canadians as evidence of a new irreligious attitude among organized Canadian women. So strong were the objections of the national WCTU and the YWCA, that these two aggressively evangelical associations refused to affiliate—despite the initial support each had shown the Council movement at the Congress of Representative Women in Chicago,[20] and despite the decision of many local branches within each organization to affiliate locally with the NCWC.[21]

Because of the persistent opposition of these two large and powerful evangelical women's associations to the NCWC's non-sectarian religious practices, much time and energy was expended by Council women in the early 1890s discussing the religious purpose of the NCWC, and whether gender or faith should constitute its fundamental bond of union. The issue that most exercised the YWCA and the WCTU was the NCWC's adoption of a silent rather than an audible form of public worship at its annual meetings. They viewed the NCWC's failure to institute some form of audible Christian prayer at

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[20]May Wright Sewall, ed., *The World's Congress of Representative Women: A Historical Résumé for Popular Circulation of the World's Congress of Representative Women, Convened in Chicago on May 15, and Adjourned on May 22, 1893, Under the Auspicies of the Woman's Branch of the World's Congress Auxiliary*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894).

[21]Sharon Ann Cook has observed that local WCTU unions demonstrated a greater propensity to co-operate with other women's societies than the Dominion WCTU; see "'Continued and Persevering Combat'," p. 158. Individual members of each society also assumed leadership positions within the NCWC. Mrs. Mary McDonnell, a WCTU activist from Toronto who had attended the Congress of Representative Women in Chicago where she was elected provisional vice-president of the Canadian council, served as the vice-president for Ontario in 1894 and 1895. Similarly, Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless of the Hamilton YWCA, who had been elected as the Canadian representative to the ICW while attending the Congress of Representative Women, served as the treasurer of the NCWC throughout the 1890s; through her influence, the NCWC adopted the introduction of "manual training" for girls in Ontario public schools as one of its first major reform efforts.

its proceedings as a wholesale disavowal of female religiosity on the one hand and as a repudiation of the evangelical purpose of their associated work on the other.[22] Harriet Boomer of London, whose local council had been virtually paralyzed by the prayer "dilemma" for more than a year,[23] argued that some form of audible prayer was needed to quell the erroneous impression that the NCWC was "an irreligious body, 'one from which the name of God is virtually eliminated'," and an institution "that to range themselves in line with it, Christian bodies might as well strike out the very name Christian from 'their style and title'."[24]

For organized evangelical Protestant women, joining together in audible prayer was a visible means of solidifying the bond of faith that united them as women. Both the WCTU and the Dominion Order of King's Daughters (OKD), another large evangelical society that affiliated

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[22]Joanna Dean has suggested that some of the WCTU's animosity toward the NCWC stemmed from Lady Aberdeen's refusal to join the WCTU or to endorse prohibition. Indeed, Lady Aberdeen viewed the cause and tactics of the WCTU with some distaste, characterizing them as "aggressive" and "American". She also refused to bannish alcoholic beverages from Rideau Hall functions or to refrain from consuming them herself. See Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women," pp. 103-105.

[23]Council women in London had done little else but wrestle with the issue of silent prayer since the foundation of their federation in the winter of 1894. The London Local Council of Women reported to the NCWC in 1895 that the question of prayer, "and the innumerable discussions to which it has given rise in our own Council, in our Federated Societies, and those other Societies, which on its account have not federated, has occupied nearly all our time, excluding much other business which might have been done, were this point satisfactorily settled." See "Report of the London Local Council of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 43.

[24]Harriet Boomer (London), "Resolution No. 6: Audible Prayer," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 186, 187. Even while expressing their enthusiasm for the ideal of female unity, the London local council endeavoured to specify in its local constitution that it brought together "Certain Associations of Women who believe in God and in His Son our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" in order to satisfy "the views of the missionary and other religious societies." The change was vetoed by Lady Aberdeen because it altered the "basis" or spirit of the constitution that the NCWC recommended for adoption by local councils. See "Report of the London Local Council of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 40.

with the NCWC in 1895, included some form of audible worship at the sectional conferences they held in conjunction with early Council meetings.[25] Similarly, most of the NCWC's own local councils opened their public meetings with audible recitation of the Lord's prayer.[26] Historian John Webster Grant has observed that evangelical Protestants at the end of the nineteenth century embraced public prayer as a means of reconciling the new evangelical emphasis on human agency that actuated their voluntary work with a belief in divine initiative; thus, for them, "the service of worship owed its privileged position to an expectation that God's presence would be manifested there with a peculiar power."[27] Bearing public witness to their faith in Jesus Christ was therefore of great importance to evangelical Protestant women within the NCWC. Although many evangelical women were evidently satisfied with silent prayer—indeed some characterized it as a "beautiful" and spiritually edifying experience—others needed audible prayer to confirm that they were part of a community of believers and thereby affirm to their own satisfaction the missionary purpose of the NCWC.

Although perhaps the most important episode of self-definition in the NCWC's early history, the significance of the prayer debate of

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[25]The meeting of the OKD was opened by singing a hymn; this was followed by a prayer reading by a member and a Bible talk on Christian love; after the papers were read, the Order's own hymn ("Lead as We Go") was sung. The sectional conference of the still unaffiliated WCTU was closed with "singing and prayer". See "Sectional Conference of the WCTU," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 327; and "Sectional Conference of the Dominion Order of King's Daughters," in *ibid.*, pp. 322-323.

[26]Emily Cummings, "Secretary's Report," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 20-21; "Report of the Montreal Local Council of Women," in *ibid.*, p. 34; "Report of the Ottawa Local Council of Women," in *ibid.*, p. 39.

[27]Grant, *A Profusion of Spires*, p. 185.

1895 has not generally been conceded.[28] There are at least two explanations for this omission. First, the narrow definition of politics employed by many early "second wave" feminist historians in Canada made advocacy of suffrage reform the only recognized litmus test of feminist consciousness. Divisions between suffragists and non-suffragists, or between equal rights feminists and maternal feminists, therefore predominated. The possibility that women's religious beliefs and debates might also suggest an alternative source of empowerment was not considered. Second, Ruth Compton Brouwer has recently suggested that this kind of interpretive lapse is symptomatic of a generalized trend in women's history. Borrowing Deborah Valenze's phrase, she suggests that feminist historians in Canada have imposed an "'unacknowledged quarantine'" around women's experience of religion that is only now being lifted. Brouwer comments that "there has been a certain tendency to 'approve of' women's religious zeal only when and as it has seemed to serve as a way-station on the the road to feminist consciousness. Personal spirituality and transcendent concerns have largely been overlooked, along with forms of religious activism that did not necessarily bear fruit in a larger sphere for women."[29]

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[28]One exception is Joanna Dean who likewise accords great significance to the prayer debate of 1895, aptly characterizing it as a "power struggle." See Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women," p. 106.

[29]Brouwer argues, for example, that Strong-Boag's representation of the diaries of Elizabeth Smith highlight Smith's secular, professional aspirations as a doctor but omit most references to her spirituality. See Ruth Compton Brouwer, "Transcending the 'Unacknowledged Quarantine': Putting Religion Back into English-Canadian Women's History" (Paper presented to joint session of Canadian Society of Church History/Canadian Historical Association, June, 1991), pp. 2-3; and Elizabeth Smith, *A Woman With a Purpose: The Diaries of Elizabeth Smith, 1872-1884*, ed. Veronica Strong-Boag (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). Brouwer's paper has since

The silent prayer debate of 1895 was an important—indeed epiphanic—moment for the NCWC and warrants closer attention here for that reason. The debate itself was lengthy, full of emotion, and at one point stopped for an interval of silent prayer. On one side, Lady Aberdeen's non-sectarian or pluralistic ideal of female unity was advanced by supporters of silent prayer who argued that their new institution should be constituted as a bond of womanhood, uniting women of all faiths in prayer as well as in work. Because each woman could bear witness to her God as her conscience dictated, silent prayer would require no compromise of faith or feeling from any Council member and yet still satisfy the majority's need for a common profession of their faith in God.[30] On the other side, advocates of audible prayer advanced an alternative, sectarian ideal of female unity. This view was championed principally by the local councils of London, Toronto, and Kingston and by Dominion representatives of the YWCA, the WCTU, and the OKD. Believing that the NCWC should unite all Council women in a "practical Christianity," these councils and organizations urged the NCWC to "open its meetings with Silent Prayer, followed audibly by the Lord's Prayer only." Advocates of audible prayer sincerely believed that the Lord's prayer was not a

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been published as "Transcending the 'Unacknowledged Quarantine'," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1992).

[30]Those speaking in favour of the amended resolution (and therefore in favour of silent prayer) were Mrs. Drummond and Mrs. Sutherland Taylor of Montreal; Mrs. George Dickson of Toronto, representing the Yarmouth Local Council of Women; Mrs. McLean and Mrs. R.W. Scott of Ottawa; Mrs. Sherwood and Mrs. Rachel Avery of the National Council of Women of the United States; and Mrs. Gibbs of Port Arthur (Thunder Bay), Ontario. The Governor General, Lord Aberdeen, also spoke during the debate in his capacity as a Life Patron of the NCWC. His arguments favoured the continuance of silent worship within the NCWC. See "Resolution No. 6: Audible Prayer," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 185-212.

"denominational" expression of faith, but rather "the prayer of us all." As such, they asserted that its appeal to "Our Father" would encompass the beliefs of Jewish as well as Christian women, while more fully meeting the need of the evangelical Protestant majority to give public witness to their faith in Jesus Christ.[31]

The silent prayer debate was not about whether the NCWC should pursue a religious or secular institutional course.[32] At least from the perspective of silent prayer advocates, the NCWC's status as a religious institution was never under review. As Lady Aberdeen remarked hopefully at the outset of the debate, "it is now entirely understood that both sides are agreed as to desiring a recognition as definite as possible of the Divine Guidance, and therefore that it is not a question of principle which we are going to consider and to vote on." Instead, she argued, the debate was about "the best *way* of showing that recognition."[33] Nor did the prayer debate represent a simple polarization of evangelical and non-evangelical women. There were avowedly evangelical Protestant women on both sides of the contest; indeed, some supporters of silent prayer like Mrs. Gibbs of Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) and Mrs. Drummond of Montreal argued that use of the

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[31]Those who spoke against the amended resolution (and therefore in favour of audible prayer) were Mrs. Boomer of London; Mrs. Skinner; Mrs. Hodgins of Toronto; Miss Tilley of Toronto, representing the Young Woman's Christian Temperance Union; Mrs. Tilley of London, representing the Dominon Order of Kings' Daughters; Mrs. Hoodless of Hamilton, the NCWC's own treasurer and a *de facto* representative of the Dominion YWCA; Miss Agnes Maule Machar of Kingston; Miss Murray of St. John; and Mrs. Clementina Fessenden, a prominent anti-suffragist. See "Resolution No. 6: Audible Prayer," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 185-212.

[32]For a recent discussion of the secularization debate in Canadian history, see David B. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

[33]Lady Aberdeen, "Resolution No. 6: Audible Prayer," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 185-186.

Lord's prayer alone was an inadequate expression of their faith and hence, they implied, a meaningless gesture. Protestant Council women on both sides of the prayer debate likewise ascribed to an evangelical view of female moral authority, believing that women's special moral nature empowered and specially fit them to serve "In His Name."[34] But whereas audible prayer advocates attributed these morally regenerative powers exclusively to Christian womanhood, supporters of silent prayer were willing to ascribe them to the NCWC as a whole.

Ultimately, then, the debate hinged on one side's ability to divorce female religiosity from an explicitly evangelical Protestant construction of womanhood and the other side's unwillingness or inability to follow suit. The debate was finally resolved when a convincing majority of delegates to the 1895 meeting endorsed the practice of silent prayer.[35] Prominent supporters of silent prayer like

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[34]Mrs. E.H. Bronson (Ottawa), "Associated Charities," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 222-229; Mrs. Julia Drummond (Montreal), "Co-operation as Shown in Associated Charities," in *ibid*, pp. 55-60.; and Mrs. Elizabeth Tilley (London), "Report of the Order of King's Daughters," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 322-323. The motto of the OKD was "In His Name."

[35]Lady Aberdeen used procedural regulations to control and defuse the prayer debate. The original resolution asked delegates to endorse or reject the practice of audible prayer and the use of the Lord's prayer in particular, but a vote against the Lord's Prayer would have been untenable and extremely fractious. As Harriet Boomer warned, "people are watching to see if the representative women of Canada are really going to vote against the united use of the Lord's Prayer at their public meetings. May Heaven forbid it!" In order to avoid such an eventuality, Julia Drummond of Montreal—acting as Lady Aberdeen's proxy in the debate—moved an amended resolution proposing "That the National Council of Women of Canada do open its meeting with Silent Prayer only." According to accepted parliamentary procedure, Lady Aberdeen explained, delegates were obliged to consider the amended resolution first; only if it failed would the original resolution advocating audible recitation of the Lord's Prayer be put to a vote. The practical result of this changed focus was significant: Council women were now no longer being asked to endorse or reject the Lord's Prayer directly as the London resolution demanded, but rather to affirm the Council's existing practice of silent worship only. The debate lasted for several hours, with Council women pausing at one point for an interval of silent prayer. On the whole, the debate was characterized by

Lady Aberdeen took heart from the outcome of the debate, for the vote demonstrated for the first time the resiliency and strength of the Council idea in Canada. Audible prayer advocates had represented themselves as standard bearers for the Christian majority; however, the will of the Council had transformed them into a minority grouping.

From a historical perspective, the silent prayer debate is important for at least two reasons. First, it brings into relief the religious foundation of the NCWC's corporate outlook in the 1890s. That public worship of some kind should open the NCWC's public gatherings was never in dispute, for, despite differences of opinion about its ultimate purpose, most Council women believed that the NCWC should be a religiously inspired institution. And second, the prayer debate demonstrated the readiness of most Council women to subscribe to Lady Aberdeen's non-sectarian, but still implicitly evangelical, ideal of female unity.[36] Her idealization of the NCWC as

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magnanimity, and was even punctuated by moments of humour. Some women were clearly swayed from their original view by the arguments they heard. But, as Lady Aberdeen reminded them, they were "a company of delegates, not representatives." As a result, they had to vote as their local councils and national societies had instructed them. A suggestion that the National Council delay the decision in order to give local councils a chance to reconsider their votes was greeted by shouts of "No, no" from the floor, prompting one delegate to observe, "I think it is quite clear that some people will vote against their consciences. (Laughter.)" After the amended resolution favouring silent prayer had been put to the floor, Lady Aberdeen declared that "The ayes have it." Mrs. Tilley of the OKD, an audible prayer advocate, immediately asked for a division. Two returning officers were appointed and delegates filed forward to cast their ballots. With the result of the ballot in hand, Lady Aberdeen asked for silence. The amendment, she announced, had been carried by a majority of thirty votes. Silent prayer would prevail as the policy of the NCWC. A total of 112 votes were cast, 71 for the amendment and 41 against it. Although only 77 women attended the NCWC's annual meeting as delegates in 1895, many of them were empowered to cast more than one vote. Voting rights were distributed as follows: each local council had six votes, national affiliates had 2 each, and National Council officers voted individually. "Resolution No. 6: Audible Prayer," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 187, 191, 195, 205, 210-212.

[36]Although the negative impact of the vote on the NCWC's membership was immediate, it was not as devastating as critics of silent prayer had forecast. The Dominion WCTU and the Dominion YWCA maintained their boycott of the Council, and some local

the essence of female religiosity was empowering, for it invested an unmodified womanhood, as the residuum of the NCWC's distillation of religious difference, with a measure of divine authority. By creating a "bond of sympathy" between organized middle-class women who were both like and unlike each other, she argued that the NCWC would both enhance the moral influence of individual Council women and reconstitute them as a collective power for good throughout Canadian society.

Domesticity and the "Modern Nurse"

In many respects, the most pervasive "bond of sympathy" uniting organized middle-class women in the NCWC was their shared valorization of domesticity as the essential work of women. Council women in the early 1890s clearly identified with the domestic work-roles of housekeeper, homemaker, and mother. Moreover, they assumed that the NCWC would be a fellowship of women who shared a common commitment to homemaking and mothering as women's "first and holiest duties." Mrs. Helliwell of Toronto, for instance, characterized Council women as "wives, mothers, and housekeepers,"

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council affiliates withdrew as a result of the vote, with the Toronto local council suffering the greatest turnover in membership. But, on the whole, there was no wholesale exodus of religious associations or evangelical leaders from the NCWC. For instance, three leading advocates of audible prayer—Harriet Boomer and Elizabeth Tilley of London and Adelaide Hoodless of Hamilton—remained active members of the NCWC at the local and national levels. Although Adelaide Hoodless was unable to bring the YWCA into the National Council because of the failure of the London resolution, Elizabeth Tilley was able to persuade the Dominion Order of King's Daughters to remain a national affiliate of the NCWC. Although Boomer, Tilley, and Hoodless had supported audible prayer, and presumably voted against the amended resolution favouring silent prayer, during the course of the debate each had declared herself personally satisfied with the practice of silent prayer. See Tilley, "Resolution No. 6: Audible Prayer," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 198; Hoodless, *ibid.*, p. 199; and Boomer, *ibid.*, pp. 186-190.

while the London Local Council of Women described Council members as the "wives, and mothers, and daughters" of Canada.[37] The moral and spiritual influence that Council women accorded to themselves as elite women, and by extension to the NCWC, derived from woman's divinely appointed responsibility for the domestic sphere in their estimation. As Mrs. Edwards of Ottawa stated in 1895, women's "domestic work" was a "work begun by God Himself and committed to their hands for further development."[38] As such, Council women's moral authority as the Women Workers of Canada was intimately linked to their individual and collective competency as elite housekeepers, homemakers, and mothers.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century what Glenna Matthews calls "the golden age of domesticity" had passed.[39] The pervasive impact of evolutionary theory on the late nineteenth-century world view seriously undermined the home's function as a feminized spiritual sanctum and its statu. as a place of meaningful work for

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[37]Mrs. Helliwell (Toronto), "The Domestic Problem: From the Servants' Point of View," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 160, and "Report of the London Local Council of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 44. In the October 1896 edition of *Upward and Onward*, a serial Lady Aberdeen produced for women in Great Britain, she described Julia Drummond, the president of the Montreal Local Council of Women, as "most essentially first and foremost a home woman, and one who will never lend the weight of her influence to any movement which will tend to make women forget or minimize their first and holiest duties." Quoted in Henry Morgan, ed., *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), p. 286.

[38]Mrs. Edwards (Ottawa), "Sectional Conference of the Girls' Friendly Society," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 324.

[39]Glenna Matthews, *"Just a Housewife": The Rise and Decline of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). See also Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); and Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1987).

middle-class urban women. Late Victorians on both sides of the Atlantic equated "progress" with the male market-driven activity and competition of industrial and corporate capitalism.[40] As an emotional haven separate from the public world of "work," Matthews argues that the home came to be regarded as an increasingly anachronistic institution.[41] Although evangelical ideology continued to accord great significance to the social ministry of the Christian mother, it placed less emphasis on the redemptive power of the home. Instead, late Victorian evangelicalism increasingly assigned greatest importance to the moral force of men, believing that the spiritual as well as the material progress of humanity was tied to male initiative.[42] Council women's representation of the home as a powerful female-dominated emotional and religious haven in the early 1890s was therefore shaped by the feminized evangelical domestic ideology of an earlier generation which held, according to Colleen McDannell, that the home "was not only a private sphere unconnected to society but the starting point for

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[40]Jill Conway, "Stereotypes of Femininity in a Theory of Sexual Evolution," in Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. 140-154; Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989). For two historical assessments of the impact of Darwin's theory of origins on Canadian scientific and theological thought, see Carl Berger, *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); and A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1979). Neither Berger nor McKillop considers the issue of gender.

[41]Matthews, *"Just a Housewife"*, pp. 116-144.

[42]On the 'masculinization' of Christ's image at the turn of the century, see Susan Curtis, "The Son of Man and God the Father: The Social Gospel and Victorian Masculinity," in Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meaning for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 67-78, esp. 72-75.

shaping the public world."[43] Moreover, they assumed that domesticity was the work of all women, however situated on the social scale or whatever else they might accomplish within the marketplace, for in common with Harriet Boomer of London, they believed that the household was "the workshop where are homes are made."[44]

Given the value they themselves placed on women's work in the household and for the home, Council women were clearly perplexed by the apparent distaste of working-class women for domestic service. Although domestic service remained the largest single employer of Canadian women until well into the twentieth century, its status among working-class women was very low. By the 1890s, structural changes in the economy and the reorganization of women's work both within and without the household
had created a greater variety of market-oriented employments for working-class women in the manufacturing and service sectors of the economy.[45] Many working-class women exhibited a preference for

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[43]Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. xiii-xv, and 1-19. See also Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 86-87. Council women ascribed to this view of the home as the centre of a wider social system, believing, as one member observed, that "all woman's work for woman, however far-reaching it might become, and however glorious its goal, must *begin* at home where, as wife and mother, woman should be the sun of the domestic and social system, and where she should reign as Queen." See Harriet Boomer (London), "Mother's Unions," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 263-264. See also Lady Aberdeen, "Presidential Address," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 11-13.

[44]Mrs. Boomer (London), "The Domestic Problem from the Mistresses [*sic*] Point of View," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 157-158.

[45]The mechanization of many traditionally male-dominated secondary industries, and the resulting deskilling of the male work force in certain industries like textile and clothing production, enabled employers in central and eastern Canada to utilize the growing surplus of female workers migrating from rural areas to the city in search of employment. But, as Marjorie Griffin Cohen argues, waged labour was never important for more than a small segment of the female work force. In 1891, for example, only eleven percent of Canadian women ten years of age and over participated

employment in factories and shops where work hours, although long, were predictable and where their personal freedom was preserved.[46] Council women feared that, without apprenticing as a servant in the household of a middle-class mistress, or without the benefit of manual training in the public school system, young female factory workers and shop assistants would lack the necessary domestic knowledge to establish their own homes with success. Without adequate training in what Emily Stowe of Toronto called "the art of house-making" they feared that working-class women would be powerless to exert the moral influence over their husbands and families that was their natural prerogative as women. As Mrs. Stevenson of Montreal argued in 1895, "the country is suffering from the need of this knowledge, the consequence of their cooking is that the husband goes out to the saloon and there are most wretched homes."[47]

The expansion of the service sector of the economy in the latter third of the nineteenth century also created new work opportunities

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in the paid labour force, comprising just over thirteen percent of its total. In general, these workers were single and widowed women. Married working-class women, by and large, continued to provide goods and service for their own families, with only the poorest among them attempting to combine waged work with their domestic and familial responsibilities. See Marjorie Griffith Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 118-151.

[46]On the servant issue in Canada, see Marilyn Barber, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domestics for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," *Ontario History*, 72 (1980), 148-173; and "The Servant Problem in Manitoba, 1896-1930," in Mary Kinnear, ed., *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History* (Regina, 1987).

[47]Mrs. Stevenson (Montreal), "Shall a Knowledge of Household Arts form part of the Public Schools Curriculum for Girls," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 96-97. See also Mrs. Edwards (Ottawa), "Sectional Conference of the Girls' Friendly Society," in *ibid.* p. 324; Miss Tilley (WCTU), in *ibid.*, p. 96; and Mrs. Boomer (London), "Mother's Unions," in *ibid.*, p. 264; Dr. Emily Stowe (DWEA), "The Domestic Problem, Cause and Cure," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 165; and Mrs. Day Smith (Hamilton), "Temperance Work: Influence in Social Reform," in *ibid.*, pp. 134-137.

for middle-class women in the market economy. Although some of these, like clerical work, were tied to new technologies, others, like teaching and nursing, were occupations that had been the traditional responsibilities of women in the domestic sphere.[48] The first Canadian hospital nursing school modeled on the Nightingale training system opened in 1874. Only a handful of hospitals followed suit in the 1870s and 1880s. It was not until the 1890s—when over thirty established and newly constructed hospitals opened training schools—that nursing was widely accepted as an occupation suitable for Canadian women of the middling classes.[49] Despite the growing popularity of trained nursing in this and subsequent decades, the perception that nursing was a natural feminine calling and that nurses, trained or otherwise, were domestic workers persisted. The medical profession's representation of trained nurses as subordinate helpmeets, and hospital reformers' exploitation of them as symbols of middle-class domesticity, merely reinforced the popular image of nursing as a specialized department of female domestic labour.[50]

In the 1890s the care of the sick was still widely perceived as an integral part of woman's work in and for the home. For most of the

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[48]Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development*, chap. 6.

[49]No reliable statistics for the number of hospitals opening nurse training schools in the last third of the nineteenth century are available. This figure is based on a compilation of data from two sources: John Murray Gibbon and Mary Mathewson, *Three Centuries of Canadian Nursing* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1947), and the National Council of Women, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1900), pp. 80-83. Between 1891 and 1911 the number of nurses and nursing students in Canada nearly quadrupled; see Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development*, p. 215, n. 120.

[50]Susan Reverby, *Ordered to Care: The Dilemma of American Nursing, 1850-1945* (Cambridge, England, 1987), chap. 1.

Victorian period nursing was a form of domestic labour performed within the family circle either as an act of love by the mistress of the household or, more latterly, by a female domestic under her supervision. As Susan Reverby has argued, as part of "the domestic pantheon that surrounded 'middling' and upper-class American womanhood in the nineteenth century," nursing "became an important manifestation of women's expression of love of others, and thus was integral to the female sense of self."[51] Florence Nightingale's widely read statement that "every woman is a nurse"[52] epitomised this identification of womanhood with nursing. According to this description, nursing was a universal female role, rooted in the common duty to care. A woman's authority to nurse, whether as a wife and mother or as a specialized domestic, was ultimately a function of her gender and the social construction of womanhood that undergirded her experience of femaleness. Nightingale's rhetoric was, to a certain extent, political, however. Her comment was first made in 1860 when the cult of domesticity was enjoying its greatest cultural currency, but before "trained nursing" had even gained a foothold in the Victorian hospital. As such, it should be regarded as an attempt to appropriate the cultural prestige of domesticity for the work of the middle-class nurse.[53]

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[51]Susan Reverby, "A Caring Dilemma: Womanhood and Nursing in Historical Perspective," Nursing Research 36, no. 1 (Januray/February 1987), 5-11, esp. 5-6.

[52]Florence Nightingale, *Notes on Nursing: What it is, and what it is not* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1860; Dover reprint, 1969), p. 3. See also Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 62.

[53]For an extremely useful analysis of Nightingale's political use of domesticity, see Mary Poovey, "A Housewifely Woman: The Social Construction of Florence

By the last decade of the century, however, North American nursing reformers had begun a concerted effort to distance the work of nursing from its association with domestic labour by identifying themselves and other graduates of "recognized" hospital training schools as "professional" workers. In North America, this impulse led to the formation of the American Society for Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses in 1893, to which sixteen superintendents of Canadian hospital schools belonged by 1899.[54] Using the medical profession as their model, these nursing elites attempted, first, to raise the educational calibre of nurses and prevent overcrowding by lobbying hospitals to implement a standard three-year nursing curriculum; second, to rationalize nursing practice by forging a set of recognizable nursing skills; and third, to evolve a code of ethics that would clearly identify public well-being with an exclusionary and hierarchical model of nursing professionalism. These reforms were designed to legitimate trained nursing as a form of paid work for middle-class women, on the one hand, and to imbue its practitioners with an occupational status commensurate with both their social rank and their medical role as "handmaids to science," on the other.[55]

Nightingale," in Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 164-198.

[54]List of Members, 1899, in *Annual Conventions 1893-1899: The American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses* (New York: Garland, Publishing Inc., 1985), pp. 91-94.

[55]In her presidential address of 1898, Agnes Snively, the Superintendent of the Toronto General Hospital School for Nurses, raised these and other "professional" issues; see *Annual Conventions 1893-1899: The American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses* (New York: Garland, Publishing Inc., 1985), pp. 6-10. See also Barbara Melosh, *"The Physician's Hand": Work Culture and Conflict in American Nursing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), chap one; and Celia

In contrast to middle-class hospital trained nurses,[56] who shared an occupational identity forged by a common institutional training and performed work that was publicly valorized by wages, the work of Council women was voluntary and its value asserted rather than formally recognized. Coming of age in an industrializing and urbanizing society increasingly driven by waged labour and specialized knowledge, during its first few years the NCWC eagerly appropriated the language of the paid labour market to redefine the household as a place of business and women's traditional domestic duties and benevolent activities as work. In this way, organized middle-class women also entered the public sphere as skilled workers, armed with expert knowledge about the needs of the home circle and ready to shield it from the threats and temptations of the outside world. The missionary watchword, "woman's work for woman," guided the NCWC's reform initiatives in the 1890s and defined a feminine work ethic built upon the cultural designation of women as the moral and spiritual guardians of society. From this view point, "woman's work," both in the home and in the community, was obligatory, and hence non-remunerative. It was also vocational, infusing the duties of womanhood with moral and evangelical purpose. And, most

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Davies, "Professionalizing Strategies as Time- and Culture-Bound: American and British Nursing, Circa 1893," in Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, ed., *Nursing History: New Perspectives, New Possibilities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1983), pp. 47-64.

[56]Pauline Jardin has constructed a profile of nursing students at the Toronto General Hospital School of Nursing between 1881 and 1914, see "An Urban Middle-Class Calling: Women and the Emergence of Modern Nursing Education at the Toronto General Hospital 1881-1914," *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* 17, no. 3 (February 1989), 177-190.

importantly, its skills were those of domesticity, and as such, they were the exclusive purview of women.

Viewed through this ideological lense, the care of the sick was construed by Council women as both the private and the public responsibility of women. At the NCWC's annual meeting in 1894, delegates gathered to consider the question of "Women's Work in Connection with the Sick." The first speaker, Miss Agnes Harris of the Hamilton Local Council of Women,[57] sketched the development of hospital nursing as an "avocation" for middle-class women and explored its relationship to the NCWC's domestic and non-remunerative construction of woman's work. No longer a degraded occupation reserved for working-class women, nursing was now "a field of labor at once honorable and remunerative." The burgeoning crop of hospitals offering instruction in nursing accounted for the elevated status of hospital nurses, according to Harris, and explained the recent and "remarkable" transformation of the public's attitude toward nursing as an occupation for middle-class women. Trained to bring the skills of domesticity to the work of science, Harris argued that the "modern trained nurse" was

> peculiarly an end of the century production, certified, armed cap-a-pie with technical knowledge, the handmaid and valued assistant of the great corps of workers who labor tirelessly in the interests of humanity and science when the healthy public is sleeping.

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[57]Agnes V. Harris (Hamilton), "Hospital Nursing," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 140-152. Although not a member of the executive of the Hamilton Local Council of Women in 1894, Miss Harris is identified as the President of the Arts and Craft Association of Hamilton in 1896. See NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, p. 5.

"The necessities of the modern physician," then, had "created the modern nurse." Harris most fully expressed her approval of this new breed of woman worker by contrasting her with that archetypal mid-Victorian nurse, Sairy Gamp. "No greater contrast can be conceived," she asserted, "than the type presented by Charles Dickens in his delineation of Sairy Gamp, the typical nurse of his time."[58]

But training alone did not make a good nurse. The personal qualities of nurses themselves were equally important. Just as the drunkennes and disobedience implicit in the image of Sairy Gamp were meant to convey the socially degraded status of the untrained workhouse nurse, the wide range of feminine virtues attributed to the trained modern nurse were meant both to signify the social elevation of nursing work and to suggest the improved moral calibre of the women undertaking it. Only those women fully conversant with the intuitive skills of womanhood would be good nurses, Harris asserted. It must be understood, she reminded her audience, that while the training school could teach the student how to learn and profit from "the ever varying experiences that unfold themselves as she advances in her profession," only a fully developed feminine character would ensure success. "[A]s physicians too well know, there is the trained incompetent as well as the trained competent nurse, for tact and sympathy, and an intuitive sense of how to do the right thing at the right time, are natural gifts that cannot be learned in a training school." In essence, the requirements of the "ideal nurse" were those

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[58]Harris, "Hospital Nursing," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 141; Mrs. Hodgins, "Emergency Lectures," *ibid*, p. 147. See also Joyce M. MacQueen, "Who the Dickens Brought Sairi Gamp to Canada?" *The Canadian Journal of Nursing Research* 21, 2 (Summer 1989), 27-37.

of the ideal woman, whose personal qualities, Harris suggested, were summed up in a few lines by Wordsworth:

> The reason firm, the temperate will,
> Endurance, strength and skill;
> A perfect woman, nobly planned,
> To warn, to comfort and command.

This was not "an impossible combination of virtues," Harris assured delegates, for there were already "such women, both in hospital wards and outside them, and truly they make glad the waste places of the earth."[59]

This representation of the ideal nurse as a "perfect woman, nobly planned" underscored the ambivalence of Council women toward hospital nursing as a source of income for women of their own social class during the early 1890s. The apparent disparity between a traditional construction of nursing as a feminine domestic duty and its reconstruction as an "honorable and remunerative" occupation was a potentially troublesome one, for it threatened to erode the very foundation upon which Council women's identity was built. Echoing contemporary attitudes about the cyclical or temporary nature of women's paid work, Harris suggested that for some middle-class women nursing might prove to be a temporary occupation before marriage. A woman's early retirement from paid work would in no way diminish the value of her professional training, however: "Even if the nurse only followed the calling for a brief period, it would have a tendency to broaden her sympathies and increase her capacities for usefulness in her own home and among her own circle of friends."

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[59]Harris, "Hospital Nursing," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 141-142.

Because the path travelled by nurses was an arduous one that severely tested the strength of their characters, Harris cautioned her audience that only exceptional women should undertake the "avocation of the modern professional nurse," and only after giving the implications of their choice "serious consideration." A willingness to take charge of the care of strangers would in particular test the depth of her calling, for "tasks that are considered a labour of love in the home circle, become repugnant when undertaken for strangers, and only the strong persevere to the end, the strong in mind as well as body."[60]

Although Harris described hospital nursing as a profession and referred to trained nurses as professionals, she used these terms not to suggest the similarity of men's and women's work, but to assert its difference. As a masculine construct, professionalism privileged education, public service, and self-fulfillment as the pillars of an elite occupational identity founded on the cultural and remunerative value of men's work. On a functional level, Harris used the term profession both to denote paid work appropriate for the "certified" daughters of professional families and to signal nurses' subscription to a corporate ethic of service. Yet here any similarity between male and female professional work ended. Culturally, women's work was predicated upon the value of personal rather than public service, and upon the unpaid, reproductive work of mothering rather than the waged work of male breadwinners. Accordingly, the religious and domestic construction of nursing as a "calling" advanced by Harris rejected remuneration as the cornerstone of a female professional identity.

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[60]*Ibid.*, pp. 141, 143.

While hospital training had "had the tendency to elevate the calling [of nursing] almost to the dignity of a profession," Harris argued that the work of nurses belonged not to the "commercial world" of monetary exchange but to the "world of higher human effort." Nursing was thus not principally a livelihood for those motivated by the "spur of necessity." It was a "refuge from sad memories" and a sanctuary for "bruised hearts" who sought solace "in caring for those more unfortunate than themselves."[61]

In contrast to masculine professional ideology which rationalized paid work as a form of public service, the vocational construction of nursing articulated by Harris expressed an ideal of womanly service undergirded by self-forgetfulness and personal self-sacrifice.[62] According to Harris, this feminine notion of service was most fully actuated by the nursing sisterhoods of the Catholic Church. "To-day, as in the past, their deeds are 'speaking deeds,' wrought without desire for the approbation of the world, yet, crowned with the imperishable beauty of conscious self-sacrifice." Their seclusion from the distractions of domestic life, and their training in "habits of self-repression and unquestioning obedience," eminently fit Catholic sisters for the "duty" of nursing, for these circumstances enabled them "to labor for the love of their profession and not for the emolument connected with it." Yet Harris's conflation of the traditional nursing sister with the ideal modern nurse was more figurative than literal. The nursing sister's disavowal of worldly goods and rewards, her

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[61] *Ibid.*, p. 142.

[62] Melosh, *"The Physician's Hand"*, chap. one.

spiritual vocation to serve, and her self-forgetfulness reveal less about nursing sisters themselves than about organized women's idealization of modern nursing as a secular calling for women of their own social class.

As the only institutional model of female social service traditionally known to women of the 'respectable' classes,[63] Council women's association of the modern nurse with the Catholic nursing sister simultaneously enhanced the status of hospital nursing and emphasized the strength of its ties to a domestic and religious construction of women's work. Thus while training of some sort was now required to master the work of nursing, only those exceptional women who eschewed domestic happiness, whether by design or by default, would choose to spend their lives "in deeds of direct beneficence" as nurses. Agnes Harris acknowledged that most middle-class women were not willing to travel "the rugged path of duty" followed by the modern nurse. But this did not mean that there was a lack of sympathy between trained nurses and the women workers of the National Council, and she urged delegates "to give earnest thought and practical aid to this noble calling." "[A]s women," she concluded, "the work belongs especially to us. Let us show ourselves worthy of the trust."[64]

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[63]Martha Vicinus argues that the religious sisterhood was the model for many of the female institutions and professions founded by middle-class women in late nineteenth-century England: *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), chap. two. See also Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).

[64]Harris, "Hospital Nursing," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p.143.

Nurses and Nursing

Trained nurses had no clear voice within the National Council of Women during the early 1890s. Two groups of trained nurses, the Trained Nurses' Association of the Kingston General Hospital and the Hamilton Society of Trained Nurses, affiliated with the National Council in 1895 and 1896 respectively but their representatives did not take an active part in any of the Council's early deliberations on the subject of nursing.[65] In general, trained nurses pursued an alternative reform agenda within their own organizations during the 1890s. In addition to the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses which limited its membership to nursing educators from large general hospitals, during the 1890s trained nurses in Canada and the United States began to forge the local links that eventually resulted in the formation of national organizations like the Nurses Associated Alumnae Associations of the United States and Canada in 1896 and the Canadian National Association of Trained Nurses in 1908. Local nursing societies and hospital alumnae associations addressed, to varying degrees, the problems and issues specific to the work of trained nurses, and offered isolated graduate nurses engaged in private practice the kind of occupational identity and sororal associations they had enjoyed as students in their hospital schools.[66]

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[65]The Trained Nurses' Association of the Kingston General Hospital affiliated with the Kingston Local Council of Women in 1895 and remained a member throughout the 1890s. The Hamilton Society of Trained Nurses affiliated withthe Hamilton Local Council of Women for only one year.

[66]Between 1894—when nurses at the Toronto General Hospital established the first alumnae association in Canada—and 1900, nurses at most hospital training schools in Canada formed alumnae societies; by 1910, many of these had combined to form amalgamated graduate nursing societies in Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, and Montreal.

The relationship of trained nurses to the Women Workers of Canada was explored in some detail by Council women in 1894. Mrs. Hodgins of Toronto, speaking on the subject of "Emergency Lectures," attempted to marry a traditional construction of nursing as "woman's work" to the emergence of trained nursing as a skilled branch of modern medicine. Hodgins applauded the trained nurse as a positive development in elite health care, and enthused that "the new era has brought all that is most desirable in a nurse to our bedside." Tracing the broad strokes of Harris's portrait of the hospital nurse, she observed that "Hundreds of noble and unselfish women of education and refinement have devoted their lives to the profession of nursing." This unique combination of personal and professional qualifications gave "thoroughly trained and efficient nurses" a role as crucial as that played by physicians in the care of the sick: "the doctors will tell us, that honestly speaking in nine cases out of ten the patient owes everything, sometimes even life itself to their gentle and intelligent care."[67]

The development of this skilled band of workers did not relieve laywomen of their obligation to superintend the health care of their own families, however. The "professional skill" of a trained nurse made her an indispensable addition to the middle-class sick room, but in times of emergency a trained nurse was not always on hand. While

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Gibbon and Mathewson, *Three Centuries of Canadian Nursing* pp. 354-356. For a discussion of nursing culture in one nineteenth-century hospital school, see Nancy Tomes, "'Little World of Our Own': The Pennsylvania Hospital Training School for Nurses, 1895-1907," in Judith Walzer Leavitt, ed., *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 467-481.

[67]Mrs. Hodgins, "Emergency Lectures," in *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 146.

previously experience alone had prepared a woman to nurse her own family, Hodgins asserted that the specialized knowledge of the modern health care professions now precluded such a casual approach to nursing. She therefore advised her audience that "a certain amount of training" was now required. A course of St. Johns Ambulance first aid lectures would equip laywomen to meet most emergencies and teach them to appreciate "the thousand and one little things" done by trained nurses to mitigate the suffering and soothe the pain of their patients.

Just as Harris had used the image of the Catholic sisterhood to illuminate a religious construction of trained nursing, Hodgins used the image of trained nurses to empower middle-class laywomen as skilled workers. Like other NCWC commentators in the 1890s, Hodgins equated systematic training with skill, believing that skill imbued an occupation with respectability and the worker who performed it with a recognizable vocation. As another members of the NCWC observed in 1894, "A vocation that requires no systematical or recognized training is not likely to be regarded as very high or respectable,...or have an honored place in the field of labor."[68] Emergency training, despite its cursory nature, would give middle-class laywomen the authority to redefine themselves as skilled nurses within the confines of their own homes. Although she was careful to articulate a clear division of responsibility between "amateur" and

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[68]Emily Stowe, "Domestic Problem: Cause and Cure," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 166. See also Harriet Boomer, "The Problem of Domestic Service from the Mistresses [sic] Point of View," *ibid.*, p. 156.

"professional" nurses, Hodgins implied that the difference between the two groups of workers was more a matter of degree than of kind.

> A quick, light hand, a firm though tender touch, and a cheerful and decided manner, are worth everything to a nurse, whether amateur or professional, and these are possible to all, but like the perfect rose or stately lily require and repay careful cultivation.[69]

Thus while only the professional nurse would make the kind of personal sacrifice required of her vocation, both amateur and professional nurses, when tested, possessed the presence of mind and self-forgetfulness that trained workers needed to apply their knowledge effectively and skilfully.[70]

While Mrs. Hodgins's paper suggests the extent to which trained nurses had become a fixture in the homes of the middle and upper middle classes, their services remained largely inaccessible to working-class families, except in urban charity hospitals. Many late Victorian social reformers nevertheless regarded trained nursing as the ideal antidote for the growing physical and spiritual degradation they perceived among the industrial urban poor. Beginning in the 1850s, English nursing reformers like William Rathbone and Florence Nightingale pioneered a system of urban home care known as district nursing, which they promoted as a specialized department within the

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[69]Hodgins, "Emergency Lectures," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 149.

[70]In addition to Florence Nightingales ever-popular *Notes on Nursing*, which was intended as a manual to instruct women at home, other sources of "expert" nursing advice were available to Canadian laywomen in the 1890s. See, for example, *Nursing the Sick: Practical Information by a Trained Nurse: Directions for Amateur Nursing at Home* (Montreal: Davis & Lawrence Co., Ltd., 1897). For a discussion of the relationship of nursing to women's domestic labour during the first third of the nineteenth-century, see Patricia O'Brien, "'All a Woman's Life Can Bring': The Domestic Roots of Nursing in Philadelphia, 1830-1885," *Nursing Research* 36, no. 1 (January/February 1987), 12-17.

new middle-class discipline of trained hospital nursing.[71] Both Rathbone and Nightingale regarded district nursing as a form of evangelical social service among the sick poor of England's large industrial centres. Nightingale argued that *trained* district nurses would introduce order, cleanliness, and fresh air into the homes of the poor. As "health missionaries" they would help eradicate the environmental causes of poverty by teaching the poor the basic principles of sanitation and hygiene.[72] Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, however, the phrase "nursing the poor in their own homes" assumed many different meanings. Charitable societies, city missions, and churches in Great Britain and in many American cities employed a variety of women to nurse among the poor. Nightingale deplored the tendency of many charities and missions to offer the sick poor material relief rather than good nursing, and she was especially critical of organizations like the Raynard Biblewomen, whose "missionary nurses," she charged, were better equipped with theological knowledge than with nursing skill. Whereas British district nurses trained to Nightingale standards apprenticed in their hospital schools for one year and then undertook additional preparation in district work and often in midwifery, Biblewomen trained for only three months. But, while the methods of district and

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[71]Mitchell Dean and Gail Bolton, "The Administration of Poverty and the Development of Nursing Practice in Nineteenth-Century England," in Celia Davies, ed., *Rewriting Nursing History* (London, 1980), pp. 76-101.

[72]Quoted in Annie M. Brainard, *The Evolution of Public Health Nursing* (Philadelphia: Saunders, 1922), pp. 123-124.

missionary nursing advocates differed, the ultimate purpose of their work was the same: the creation of the Kingdom of God on earth.[73]

Evangelical sentiment also permeated the benevolent nursing enterprises sponsored by organized middle-class women in Canada during the last third of the nineteenth century. By 1900, when the NCWC published its portrait of the life and work of the women of Canada, there were at least a dozen institutions founded or administered by women offering district nursing services to the sick poor. In general, these institutions were of four basic types: female religious orders, missionary nursing societies, hospitals, and diet dispensaries. Members of Catholic sisterhoods like the Sisters of Charity and the newly formed deaconate orders of the Methodist and Anglican churches undertook nursing among the sick poor. The Harbord Street District Nurses and the Nursing-at-Home Mission, two specially constituted missionary nursing associations, were at work in Toronto by 1890. Hospitals, some of which were founded by women's organizations—the Belleville Hospital and the Women's Hospital of New Westminster, for example, were founded by the Women's Christian Association and the WCTU respectively—also sent nurses to the homes of the sick poor. Diet dispensaries like the one founded by the YWCA of Montreal in 1879 provided the sick poor with nursing and medical care as well as basic nourishment. As in Great Britain,

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[73]*Ibid.*, pp. 102-143, 194-202; Françoise Ducrocq, "The London Biblewomen and Nurses Mission, 1857-1880: Class Relations/Women's Relations," in Barbara J. Harris and JoAnn McNamara, eds., *Women and the Structure of Society* (Durham, N.C., 1984), pp. 98-107; Karen Buhler-Wilkinson, "Left Carrying the Bag: Experiments in Visiting Nursing, 1877-1909," *Nursing Research* 36, no. 1 (January/February 1987), 42-47.

then, not all the women undertaking the work of nursing among Canada's urban poor were hospital trained nurses.[74]

In the early 1890s, Council women carefully distinguished between the work of trained nurses and the act of nursing itself. While they acknowledged that only women specially trained in hospitals should be engaged professionally as nurses in well-to-do households, many evangelical women within the National Council believed that any woman called to God's service could nurse among the poor. For members of affiliated societies like the Order of King's Daughters and the Toronto Nursing-at-Home Mission, nursing the sick poor in their own homes was a peculiarly feminine form of evangelical social service. Whether calling their workers "friendly visitors" as in the case of the King's Daughters or "missionary nurses" as in the case of the Toronto Nursing-at-Home Mission, these evangelical women hoped that their organized nursing work would not only bring middle-class standards of physical care and hygiene into the households of the urban poor, but spread the transformative influence of the gospel as well.

How to implement a system of nursing for the sick poor in Canada was discussed by delegates to the NCWC's first annual meeting

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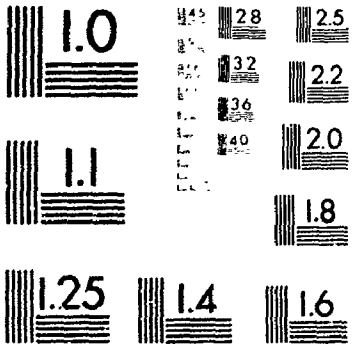
[74]In addition to the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada, the NCWC identified the following twelve "district nursing associations" in 1900: the Nursing-at-Home Mission, the Harbord Street District Nurses, the Methodist Deaconesses, and the the Episcopal Deaconesses in Toronto; the St. Vincent de Paul Hospital, administered by the Sisters of Charity of Brockville; the Belleville Hospital founded and managed by the Women's Christian Association; the St. Joseph's Dispensary run by the Sisters of Charity of Montreal, the Diet Dispensary founded by the Montreal YWCA, the Western Hospital and the Maternity Hospital of Montreal, two institutions managed largely by men for women; the Home Nursing Society of Victoria; and the General Hospital of Winnipeg. See NCWC, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work*, pp. 78, 364, 304, 308, 349, 350, 361, 362, 342-343, 364-365, 353.



in 1894. In a paper entitled, "Nursing the Poor in Their Own Homes," Elizabeth M. Tilley of the London Local Council of Women,[75] outlined two schemes by which local councils might take up the work of nursing. Tilley argued that an organized service to nurse the poor in their own homes was urgently needed. As the Dominion Secretary of the Order of King's Daughters (OKD), an "interdominational religious organization" whose members laboured in witness to Christ, Tilley assumed that the needs of the sick poor were spiritual as well as physical in nature.

> It is a problem that constantly comes before the minds of the women who go in and out of the homes of the brothers and sisters who have not much of this world's goods. In times of sickness, while not being cases for hospital treatment, they are in need of proper care, medicine and nourishment.[76]

Like many of her contemporaries, Tilley regarded nursing the sick poor as a branch of organized charity. In this sense, nursing the sick poor in their own homes was an extension of the kind of "friendly visiting" work undertaken by middle-class women's groups like the Order of King's Daughters, whose members offered "themselves for service, in personal and friendly visitation among the poor, regarding those they visit as friends and neighbors."[77] By extending the hand of personal friendship across class lines, friendly visitors hoped to inculcate the ethic of self-help among the needful poor and, in the

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[75]In 1894, Elizabeth Tilley was the vice-president of the London Local Council of Women and the General Secretary of the Dominion Branch of the International Order of King's Daughters and Sons.

[76]Elizabeth M. Tilley, "Nursing the Poor in Their Own Homes," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 143.

[77]Elizabeth Tilley, "The Need of Organized Charities and How to Adapt Them to Small Communities," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, p. 216.

case of overtly evangelical groups like the King's Daughters, to sow the seeds of religion in previously untilled soil.[78]

But what constituted "proper care" and who was qualified to give it? The most "efficient" method of meeting the health needs of the sick poor, Tilley suggested, was to enlist the services of "a corps of trained nurses" whose members, in tandem with a diet and medical dispensary, would care for the poor. Her "vision" included the erection of a nurses' home, "a centre where they could be found, and from which they would go forth to the homes of the sick poor to nurse and carry nourishment." The latter would be prepared by "those in charge of the home," a Board of Women. While the skill of trained nurses was clearly acknowledged in this scheme, their authority as "woman workers" was not. The hierarchical relationship foreseen by Tilley between the home's female board of management and its nursing staff privileged the "efficiency" of organized middle-class women, not that of their paid agent, the trained middle-class nurse.

A second, less efficient, but also less expensive scheme would establish a diet and medical dispensary, along with a central information bureau for "women who are willing and able to nurse" among the sick poor. Although Tilley suggested that the only difference between this plan and her initial suggestion was the absence of a nurses' home and its consequent expense, more was at stake than she implied. Without the formalization of their authority within an institutional framework like a Home, organized women

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[78]"Sectional Conference Report of the Order of King's Daughters," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 203-204.

would likely lose control of the venture. The establishment of a medical dispensary depended upon the "generosity" of medical men, not the will of organized women. Similarly, as free agents within a medicalized authority structure, trained nurses themselves would no longer be required to labour under the supervision of a hierarchy of laywomen.[79]

Tilley suggested that the absence of a corps of trained women to nurse among the poor constituted an "emergency". The same circumstance that made the amateur nurse described by Mrs. Hodgins necessary in the family circle, thus also compelled some laywomen to care for strangers in the social circle. Although Tilley sought to provide the poor with the same kind of trained nursing care to which members of her own class were becoming accustomed, she also regarded a woman's willingness to nurse among the sick poor as a measure of her assimilation of the OKD's motto, "Not to be ministered unto, but to minister". In this sense, nursing the poor in their own homes was the duty of all women called to God's service.[80] A laywoman's willingness to give physical care to strangers was widely interpreted as a concrete expression of spiritual grace and of individual responsibility "to The King, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"--the avowed object of the Order.[81] Unlike Hodgins, however,

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[79]Tilley, "Nursing the Sick Poor in Their Own Homes," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 144. For a discussion of the relationship between women's authority and their representation on the boards of charitable institutions, see "Representation of Women on Boards of Philanthropic Institutions," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp.171-173.

[80]Brainard, *The Evolution of Public Health Nursing*, p. 141.

[81]In Canada, the Order of King's Daughters established Homes for Friendless Women, for Aged Men and Women, a Young Women's Guild, and a House for Young Women Wage-Earners. In addition, they built and furnished hospitals, organized an annual summer

Tilley did not refer to her workers as nurses; this designation was clearly reserved for the graduates of hospital schools to whom the King's Daughters turned for advice and training.[82] But for evangelical women like Tilley, the skill or proficiency of the women who volunteered to nurse the poor was not the principal concern. It was hoped that nursing the poor in their own homes would offer them spiritual solace as well as physical relief. Caring for both "the souls and bodies of our fellow creatures" was, Tilley informed the Council, the singular purpose of the Order.

Tilley described for her audience the steps taken by London-area "circles" of the King's Daughters to meet the medical needs of their less fortunate neighbours. Helping poor women and children was the principal focus of their efforts. Some circles, which varied in size from six to onwards of twenty women, lent parturient women maternity bags, which provided "all articles needed by mother and infant, including sheets, pillow cases and towels," and visited them daily until they were able to care for themselves. Another very large circle composed mostly of "working girls," engaged in night nursing among the poor. Tilley praised the willingness of these "sisters" to sacrifice their own interests in the care of others. This, in her estimation, marked them as true students of Christ:

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crèche, and supported district nursing work. See Helen R.Y. Reid, comp., "Organized Societies," in NCWC, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work*, pp. 263-264.

[82]"Sectional Conference Report of the Order of King's Daughters," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 203.

> In their desire to help their fellow creatures in the name of Christ, they were willing to take two days of hard, steady work in the factory or shop without a night between for sleep, the night being given to nurse the sick. All honor to these dear sisters who were willing to make personal sacrifice to carry out their Master's teachings. "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ."

Tilley's parabolic narration of another episode implied that the nursing labour of the King's Daughters revealed more than the spiritual grace of its workers; it was also a means of evangelizing among the sick poor and their families. Tilley recounted the efforts of yet another circle to "save" a woman suffering from consumption and neglect, whose brood of small children was too young to care for her or to tend to the upkeep of her house. Although the pair of King's Daughters sent to the house found "a scene of dirt and confusion," their daily visits soon restored order and cleanliness, and gave the woman physical as well as spiritual relief:

> For three weeks they gave several hours each morning to teaching and directing the children how to do the work, often doing a good deal of it themselves. They cared for the sick woman and made nourishment for her, and after attending to her bodily wants one or the other would sit down and read God's Word to her, thus providing food for her soul.

The impact of this care was spiritually transformative, Tilley declared. "The woman's husband, who was a sceptic, told the doctor with tears in his eyes of all the loving care shown to his dying wife, and added, 'I'll say no more against Christians.'"[83]

Another missionary nursing service, the Nursing-at-Home Mission of Toronto, was briefly affiliated with the National Council of

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[83]Tilley, "Nursing the Sick Poor in Their Own Homes," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 145.

Women at mid-decade.[84] According to Mrs. Helliwell, a mission worker who attended the annual meeting of the National Council in 1894, the Nursing-at-Home Mission employed "trained nurses capable of giving most efficient care to women."[85] Her use of the adjective "trained" brings into relief the variable meanings attributed to the term "trained nurse" during the 1890s, and indeed in subsequent decades.[86] Although Mission nurses were reputedly trained "in the latest ideas of nursing," they did not receive the kind of training advocated by nursing leaders who joined the American Society of Superintendents after 1893. Instead, after passing a two-month probationary period and completing a further one-year and ten-month apprenticeship—which included a course of medical lectures in the "rudiments of obstetrical, medical and surgical nursing"— they were examined and awarded the diploma of the Nursing Mission Training School. In contrast to "recognized" hospital training schools which were increasingly concerned with the educational and social

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[84]The Nursing-at-Home Mission affiliated with the Toronto Local Council of Women in 1895. Along with many other affiliated societies in Toronto, it withdrew its support after losing the Silent Prayer vote at the annual meeting of the National Council of Women.

[85]Mrs. Helliwell, "Women's Work in Connection with the Sick: Discussion," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 150.

[86]In 1905, for example, the Canadian-born nursing reformer Isabelle Hampton Robb lamented that the "good nurses do in hospitals is now unquestioned, but outside the hospital the trained nurse is still regarded as a not altogether unmixed blessing." At the root of the problem, she suggested, was the public's failure to distinguish between the professional, modern nurse and her old fashioned competitor, "the well-meaning, enthusiastic, but untaught amateur." See Isabelle Hampton Robb, "The Nurse and the Public," *The Canadian Nurse and Hospital Review* (March 1905), 9-11. Susan Reverby discusses the variable meanings attributed to the terms nurse and trained nurse in late nineteenth-century American in *Ordered to Care*, chap. 1.

backgrounds of pupil nurses, the principal qualifications for prospective Mission nurses were spiritual:

> No one will be accepted as a nurse unless she is an earnest, evangelical Christian, and is seeking to enter the service in order to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ, and with a view to leading souls to Him through ministering to the bodies of the sick whom she visits.

It was hoped that their peculiar combination of training and spiritual resolve would counter the unsanitary conditions that bred the ignorance, crime, and vice that managers of the Mission associated with the poorer homes of Toronto.[87]

In common with the King's Daughters, Helliwell noted that the Nursing-at-Home Mission ministered "to the souls as well as to the bodies of these poor people."[88] To the homes of the "sinful, sick and sorrowing" Mission nurses brought with them "the message of a loving Saviour whose heart was ever filled with compassion and love." Mission supporters likewise believed that nursing the sick poor in their own homes would exert a potentially transformative influence over their lives: "However much of the dark side of life is seen in the work, there are yet many bright spots, where the kindly influence of a kindly nurse has led to right thinking and right doing. Who can estimate the far-reaching influence of kind words and deeds done in

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[87]Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. Toronto Mission Union, Nursing-at-Home Branch. Miscellaneous Papers, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Nursing-at-Home Mission (Branch of the Toronto Mission Union), for Year Ending December 31st 1901*, pp. 4, 9.

[88]Mrs. Helliwell, " Women's Work in Connection with the Sick: Discussion," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 150.

the name of the Master?"[89] As Helliwell told her co-workers in the National Council, many of the homes in which the light of Christ had been ignited by nurses "could have [been] reached in no other way."[90] This comment underscores the ancilliary status of nurses themselves in the world view of the women who founded the nursing service. Theirs was primarily a mission of spiritual relief; the nurses whom they recruited and trained were but one means to this wider end.

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[89]Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto. Toronto Mission Union, Nursing-at-Home Branch. Miscellaneous Papers, *Report of the Nursing-at-Home Mission ...1901*, pp. 3, 4, 9.

[90]Mrs. Helliwell, " Women's Work in Connection with the Sick: Discussion," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 150.

CHAPTER THREE

"THE POWER OF OUR UNITED WOMANHOOD"

GENDER, NATION BUILDING, AND THE MATERNAL HEALTH OF PIONEER WOMEN

Although Lady Aberdeen urged local councils to take up the question of nursing the sick poor in their own homes in 1894, nothing more was said of nurses or nursing at the annual meetings of the National Council of Women of Canada until May of 1896, when delegates to its third annual meeting turned their attention to the medical needs of the Canadian Northwest.[1] The ultimate result of their discussions was Lady Aberdeen's public announcement in February of 1897 that the "women of Canada" intended to found a national frontier nursing service to be known as the Victorian Order of Home Helpers. Just as local council affiliates in London and Toronto hoped that friendly visiting and missionary nursing would realize the Kingdom of God in the poor neighbourhoods of urban Canada, the national leadership of the NCWC looked to nursing—although not necessarily to hospital trained nurses—as a way to empower prairie women as the maternal builders of the Kingdom of Canada.

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[1]Acquired by from the Hudson Bay Company in 1870, the North-West Territories encompassed a vast region that included present-day Alberta, Saskatchewan, northern Manitoba, northern Ontario, northern Quebec, and the Canadian north. Council women generally used the term as a synonym for the prairies, referring to other pioneer regions as "other outlying districts."

The decision of the NCWC to assume responsibility for the maternal welfare of pioneer women raises a number of questions about the nature and scope of organized women's power in late Victorian Canada. Why, for example, did the NCWC, an experimental women's federation that was itself barely three years old in 1896, believe that it possessed sufficient institutional authority to sponsor an ambitious national health care scheme like the Victorian Order? This chapter argues that, during their first two years of organization, members of the NCWC evolved a new understanding of their collective authority as women. Representing themselves as a powerful new "moral force," Council women believed that the unified and "representative" character of their institution necessarily widened organized women's traditional sphere of responsibility to include the very survival of the nation itself. Safeguarding the maternal health of pioneer women was simply an outgrowth of this new political consciousness.

Historians of the late Victorian women's movement in Canada have generally equated political consciousness among organized middle-class women with advocacy of the vote.[2] But this narrow definition of political consciousness and activity is clearly inadequate because it arbitrarily defines politics as a male-defined activity limited to the acquisition and exercise of the parliamentary franchise. Karen Offen argues that we must view all middle-class women's social activism in the nineteenth century as inherently political because on

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[2]Wendy Mitchinson, for example, argued in 1979 that the Canadian WCTU became "politicized" only when its middle-class members endorsed the enfranchisement of women. See Wendy Mitchinson, "The WCTU: For'God, Home, and Native Land': A Study of Nineteenth-Century Feminism," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 151-168.

some level, whether inspired by relational or individualist feminist argumentation, it demanded a redistribution of power along the lines of gender.[3] According to this definition, then, the NCWC was by its very nature a political institution, for its members sought first and foremost to claim and to exercise power on behalf of woman's sphere--a prerogative that the dominant male political culture was not necessarily willing to accord them. The primary goal of the NCWC was to unite in one authoritative female institution those middle-class women whose social activism on behalf of women and children already distinguished them from their unorganized or non-politicized contemporaries. By joining together organized middle-class women of different faiths from all regions of the country, Council women believed that the NCWC would be able to shape public policy regarding the private and public interests of the home circle. At the same time, however, its separatist institutional structure and non-suffragist outlook would insure that the domestic, religious, and voluntary construction of woman's work upon which their collective identity as the Women Workers of Canada rested would not be invalidated.

The NCWC viewed itself as the helpmeet of the state. This understanding of its power to effect change was predicated on a complementary construction of gender relations, in which Council women, like the intelligent wife in the home, possessed the power of influence over male statesmen. This was by no means a widely held view, however. Although a majority of Council women eschewed the

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[3] Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 1 (1988), 119-157. See also Jane Rendall, "Introduction," in Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 1-27, esp. 4.

vote as an unnecessary and unseemingly precursor to citizenship, they did demand recognition from male legislators as the legitimate political voice of the women of Canada. Using what Patricia Hollis has called "the language of separate spheres,"[4] and characterizing their public duties as "homemaking" and "mothering," Council women argued that, because the masculine state lacked the necessary expertise to address the needs of the home circle, it needed the informed counsel of the NCWC in order to legislate effectively on women's behalf. Council women hoped to use both the NCWC and the state to empower themselves and other Canadian women as nation builders. In this way, they would fulfill the Council movement's self-appointed mandate to "conserve the highest good of the Family and the State." Their interest in the question of female immigration and the maternal health of pioneer women in the Canadian Northwest thus represented a convergence of their sense of powerfulness as a unifed body of Canadian womanhood and of their new understanding of the scope of their public duties as the Women Workers of Canada.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Part one examines Council women's complementary construction of gender relations, and asks how this understanding of gender equality shaped their sense of "duty" as members of a national, non-sectarian federation of women's societies. Part two considers the distinction Council women made between male political power and women's power to influence, and examines their earliest attempts to define and exercise this power at

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[4]Patricia Hollis, "Women in Council: Separate Spheres, Public Space," in Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 192-213.

their first two annual meetings. And lastly, part three considers how, at their third annual meeting in 1896, Council women's nation building aspirations found expression in their collective assertion that the NCWC should be authorized by the state to superintend a national system of female immigration, and sketches the process by which they decided that the NCWC rather than the state was best equipped to preserve the maternal health of the heroic women who were building up the homes and communities of the Canadian Northwest.

Gender Relations

The desire to unite all middle-class women under the banner of womanhood was not unique to the NCWC in the 1890s, nor to the international council movement generally. Historian Nancy Cott has observed that a "singular conceptualization of *woman*" undergirded the "woman movement" in the United States and elsewhere at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, several competing definitions of the scope of "woman's sphere" and of the nature of women's social and political relationship to men co-existed within this one movement. Indeed, as Cott argues, by the end of the nineteenth century "the spectrum of ideology in the woman movement had a see-saw quality: at one end, the intention to eliminate sex-specific limitations; at the other, the desire to recognize rather than quash the qualities and habits called female, to protect the interests women had already defined as theirs and give those much greater public scope."[5] The same "see-saw"

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[5]Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 6, 19-20.

quality apparent in the American woman movement was also evident in the late Victorian Anglo-Canadian women's movement. But, as the early membership of the NCWC suggests, in Canada the ideological balance was clearly in favour of women whose politics were predicated on the assertion of sexual difference and class deference, rather than on the promotion of women's individual rights, whether educational, economic, or electoral.

The same tension between suffrage and non-suffrage women evident in the National Council of Women of the United States and in the International Council of Women also characterized the Canadian council movement until 1910, when delegates to the NCWC's seventeenth annual meeting narrowly endorsed woman suffrage as part of their reform platform. The federation of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association (DWEA) in 1894 gave advocates of women's enfranchisement a level of visibility within the NCWC that was incommensurate with the almost negligible stature of the suffrage issue among the religious and philanthropic women who dominated the NCWC in the 1890s. Within the NCWC only the local councils of Toronto, St. John, and Halifax included a single-cause suffrage society as an affiliate in either 1894 or 1895. Local WCTU affiliates contributed some woman suffrage supporters, but their members' linkage of suffrage to a broader social purity programme made their advocacy of women's enfranchisement a secondary rather than a principal objective. Woman suffrage was not wholeheartedly embraced by organized middle-class women in Canada until the 1910s, when, Carol Lee Bacchi tells us, the militant activism of members of the Women's Social and Political Union in Britain gave "the cause" greater

public visibility and, ironically, the NCWC's own endorsement of the issue lent it a measure of social respectability.[6]

In contrast to suffragists like Dr. Emily Stowe of the DWEA, who equated sexual equality with women's enfranchisement, a majority of Council women believed that a reformation in women's social, if not their political, relations with men had already occurred. Most of these women regarded the "ascent" of woman in the nineteenth century as a product of evolutionary Christian teachings. As the mothers of humanity, they believed that God had given women a divine grant of feminine power, thus making women the true complements of men and obviating the need for women's direct access to male political institutions. In their estimation, woman's ascent—of which the NCWC was but the latest and most promising manifestation—was not a selfish opportunity to further themselves as individuals in customary fields of masculine endeavour. It was a divinely engineered opportunity to extend womanly care and divine protection to less advantaged members of their own sphere wherever they might find them. Their definition of women's sphere was expansive. It included their own homes, the homes of other women and men, the figurative institutional "homes" they built to house poor women and children, as well as those public spaces outside the conventional confines of

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[6]Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), pp. 30-31. Bacchi's analysis of the timing of Canadian women's 'conversion' to woman suffrage accords with Nancy F. Cott's analysis of the woman movement and the 'emergence' of feminism and feminist politics in the 1910s; see *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, chapter 1. On the Canadian response to English suffrage militantism, see Deborah Gorham, "English Militancy and the Canadian Suffrage Movement," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1975), 83-112.

women's influence where women and children were now to be found, including factories, shops, and the archetypal brightly lit music hall.[7]

Although Stowe believed that Christ had "proclaimed the perfect equality of the sexes," she rejected the majority proposition that women were now reaping the rewards of this equality. Instead, she argued that Christ's divine grant of sexual equality had been forcibly suppressed by men who now continued to impede women's access to their rightful place in the "home" of the nation.[8] This kind of hierarchical and oppositional analysis of existing gender relations was anathema to most Council women in the 1890s, for it challenged their firmly held belief that men and women had equal but different spheres of God-given social responsibility.[9] Like the American middle-class women described by Estelle Freedman and Paula Baker,[10] Council women's public identity, as we have seen, was rooted in the experience and expectation of domesticity as the essential work of women. Employing the image of separate spheres and the evangelical "language of mission,"[11] they argued that the moral economy managed by organized middle-class women was as important to the human and

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[7]See, for example, "Women's Work With Social Reforms," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 123-140.

[8]Dr. Stowe (Toronto), "The Enfranchisement of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 230-231; and "Sectional Conference of the DWEA and WCTU," in *ibid.*

[9]Mrs. Drummond (Montreal), "The Aim and Work of the National Local Councils," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 220.

[10]Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies* 5 (Fall 1979), 512-529; and Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984), 620-647.

[11]Rendall, "Introduction," in Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different*, p. 10.

material wealth of the nation as the market-driven economy of men. Membership in a separate female institution like the NCWC would therefore enable them to fulfill their "grand woman's mission" to the female half of humanity without causing them to transgress the gendered bounds of private and public responsibility upon which their own self-defined moral and social authority as elite women rested.

A separatist institutional strategy was not regarded as the logical outcome of separate spheres ideology by all Council women, however. Enough of them were uneasy about the separatism of the NCWC to elicit a comment from Lady Aberdeen at the NCWC's first annual meeting in 1894:

> Some seem inclined to regret that this organization was not formed on lines that would have included all workers without respect to sex; but I think we feel that we can probably do best, at least for a time, by keeping by ourselves, and that we need to go through an apprenticeship. Perhaps if we show what we can do, and how we can be successful on these lines, others may follow.[12]

In her study of the Women's Liberal Federation (WLF) of Great Britain, Claire Hirshfield suggests that some elite party political women in late Victorian England regarded a separatist institutional strategy as a fundamental challenge to a complementary construction of gender relations. Conservative party women, for example, formed a women's auxiliary within the male party hierarchy, believing that this was the best way both to serve their party and to help their husbands. Although many Liberal women shared these same objectives, they nevertheless established a separate self-governing organization in

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[12]Lady Aberdeen, "President's Address," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 11.

1886. But, in this case, Hirshfield argues that "maintenance of a 'separate sphere' by the WLF had less to do with submission to Victorian gender norms than with the assertion of women's need for autonomy from male mentors."[13] Lady Aberdeen, who assumed the presidency of the English and Scottish branches of the WLF soon after leaving Canada in 1898, regarded the adoption of a separatist organizational stategy by the NCWC as a necessary means to wield the kind of specialized moral power that she attributed to women. She therefore argued that the NCWC's separatism was not an expression of sexual antagonism, but of "an ever-increased sense of our high responsibilities, and an ever-deeper reverance for the sacred power which is ours to wield by virtue of simple, sincere, loving womanliness, trained for service and entering into all relations of life."[14]

Given the extremely controversial nature of woman suffrage advocacy in the 1890s, Council women took pains to assure members and critics alike that the NCWC would not usurp the prerogatives of manhood nor deny the duties of womanhood. Although, as Julia Drummond of Montreal declared in 1894, they "were proud to claim sisterhood" with women like Mary Wollstonecraft "who suffered loss

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[13]Claire Hirshfield, "Fractured Faith: Liberal Party Women and the Suffrage Issue in Britain, 1892-1914," *Gender & History* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 174. See also Linda Walker, "Party Political Women: A Comparative Study of Liberal Women and the Primrose League, 1890-1914," in Jane Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different: Women's Politics 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 165-191.

[14]Lady Aberdeen, "President—Opening Remarks," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, p. 31. See also Marjorie Pentland, *A Bonnie Fetcher* (London: Batsford Ltd., 1952), p. 149.

for us," they repudiated "utterly those types of strong-minded women so-called, who have brought the name into ridicule and contempt."

> We claim no kinship with her who meanly depreciates and slanders her own sex, nor with the woman who, ostensibly with a moral purpose, indulges in exaggerated tirades against man, attacks which are unjust, sometimes in very bad taste, and nearly always prejudicial to the cause they are supposed to serve.

As this comment suggests, Drummond rejected the kind of antagonistic construction of gender relations espoused by Stowe.[15] At the same time, however, she defended women's need and ability to exercise power on behalf of their gender and their sphere. She believed that the NCWC would assist women by offering them a forum to discuss issues of vital import to the home. But more than this, the NCWC would help humanity reach its divine culmination by marshalling the thoughtful women of Canada to assume their rightful position as the intellectual companions and moral allies of men in the "battle of life." Drummond acknowledged that her egalitarian vision of gendered co-operation was still far from being realized. Although women could now both cultivate and speak their minds "without fear of social or matrimonial loss," men continued to deprecate such organized expressions of women's intellectual independence as the NCWC. She nevertheless hoped that by demonstrating women's seriousness of purpose and their co-operatist intentions, the NCWC would help make men less afraid of the moral power of organized womanhood.[16]

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[15]See, for example, Dr. Stowe (Toronto), "The Enfranchisement of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 229-233.

[16]Mrs. Drummond (Montreal), "The Aim and Work of the National Local Councils," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 218-220, esp. 220.

A belief in the equality of spheres did not automatically cause all middle-class and upper-class Council women to conclude that woman suffrage reform was not needed. As Karen Offen has argued, most feminists since at least the mid seventeenth century have used relational feminist arguments to advance women's claims for a greater measure of public authority and power.[17] Lady Aberdeen, for example, did not share the NCWC's corporate reticence over the need for the enfranchisement of women. In contrast to most other political wives of her social station in Great Britain,[18] Lady Aberdeen was a well-known advocate of both partisan Liberal politics and of woman suffrage reform.[19] Lady Aberdeen's advocacy of the vote was grounded in the language of separate but equal spheres of social responsibility for women and men. Regarding women as the necessary moral complements of men, she declared that women too should be "politicians."[20]

> And so once more I say that the reason why those for whom I speak have become politicians is because we have the strong conviction that woman has a political duty which she owes to her country; not the same as that of men, but, as in all other departments in life, man and woman working side by side, each

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[17]Offen, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no. 1 (1988), 119-157.

[18]Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage, and Politics, 1860-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 210.

[19]At the Congress of Representative Women held in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, Lady Aberdeen represented the following suffrage societies: the Society for Promoting the Return of Women to All Local Governing Bodies, the Women's Liberal Federation of Scotland, and the Woman's Franchise League of England. See May Wright Sewall, ed., *The World's Congress of Representative Women* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1894), p. 19. See also Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women," pp. 96-99.

[20]Ishbel, the Countess of Aberdeen. "Why I am a Politician," *The Gentlewoman* (August 13, 1893).

in his or her own way, will best be able to accomplish the allotted task of leaving the world better than they found it.[21]

Like men, women required every possible resource to fulfill their sex-specific duties as citizens. The object of women s full admittance to the male political realm was not competition with men, however. Women did not seek the vote for "selfish" ends, but in order to enhance the diffusion of women's special moral qualities throughout society. She thus represented an interest in politics as women's Christian "duty," and the vote as one more weapon in their already substantial moral arsenal as God's women workers.

Lady Aberdeen had already weathered a bitter division within the Women's Liberal Federation over the issue of woman suffrage in 1892.[22] She was therefore sensible of its controversial standing among women of her own social station and political outlook, and no less so among the organized middle-class women of Canada whom she sought to unite within the NCWC. In consequence of this, and as a result of the ambiguity of her own position as the supposedly apolitical wife of the Canadian head of state, her endorsement of woman suffrage while residing in Canada was fairly circumspect. Lady Aberdeen was eager to assuage the fears expressed by some organized middle-class

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[21]The Countess of Aberdeen, "Woman as an Actual Force in Politics," in Sewall, ed., *The World's Congress of Representative Women*, pp. 424-430, esp. 439-430.

[22]In 1892, the WLF split into two distinct camps, one advocating woman suffrage as the principal object of the federation and the other, known as the "neutrals" acquiescing to the arguments of the National Liberal Federation that the party must first work to secure reforms such as Home Rule for Ireland before extending the parliamentary franchise to women. After the WLF under the leadership of the well-known suffragist, Lady Carlisle, reaffirmed the centrality of its suffragist platform in 1892, fifty to sixty local association representing over ten thousand women left the WLF to form the Women's National Liberal Association. See Walker, "Party Political Women," in Rendall, ed., *Equal or Different*, pp. 165-191; and Hirshfield, *Gender & History* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1990), 173-197. Lady Aberdeen remained a member of the WLF.

women that the NCWC would be a woman suffrage society. One London member, for example, had worried about what membership in the NCWC might entail: "Should we become 'emancipated'? (whatever that might mean); would that curious conglomeration, 'the new woman,' be evolved amongst us? Should we hustle each one another at the polls, and cry aloud for women's rights, with a good many other, 'should we's'?"[23] Her fears "vanished into thin air," however, after Lady Aberdeen declared that "'Women's duties' and not Woman's Rights, that is to be our cry." At first glance, this slogan would seem to denounce the suffragist cause, and it may be that Lady Aberdeen wished the religious and philanthropic women who composed the bulk of her audience to assume that this was her meaning. But, in practice, her intent was only to reject the "low" and "selfish" motives popularly attributed to woman suffrage advocates. Women's rights, she said,

> has been a very unfortunate term—it is an example of one of those names which has done so much to harm the cause which it is supposed to designate. It has damaged many pure and noble efforts, and we must remember that, according to its popular interpretation, it is a false term, and I assure you it points to aims far lower that those of our Council was formed to further.[24]

The only "right" that Council women claimed, she argued, was "to be allowed to perform our duty."[25]

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[23]Mrs. Boomer (London), "Mother's Unions," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 263-264. See also Lady Ritchie (Ottawa), "Address of Welcome," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 14.

[24]Lady Aberdeen, "Public Meeting," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 177.

[25]Quoted in Pentland, *A Bonnie Fetcher*, p. 75.

Although Lady Aberdeen's juxtaposition of "women's rights" with "women's duties" was clearly a rhetorical ploy to placate the fears of the more conservative elements within the organized middle-class women's movement in Canada, it was not a cynical use of rhetoric on her part. The distinction she made between duty and right also reflected the monarchical and Liberal ideas that had shaped her political outlook since girlhood. Lady Aberdeen's evangelical view of womanhood was overlaid by the twin tenets of upper-class British Liberalism: gradual change and disinterested national service. As such, the concept of duty had a great impact on her construction of women's public role and, by extension, on her vision for the NCWC. Recollecting in later years the 1892 schism in the WLF, for instance, she wrote that it was "manifestly absurd for an organization of women professing Liberal prejudices not to demand definitely and work for the opportunity of doing their full duty as citizens."[26] It is not without significance, as Joanna Dean notes, that in the 1890s Lady Aberdeen sometimes described advocates of "women's rights" as "anti-man," and frequently characterized their arguments as "American"—thus signalling her unease with the rights-based political culture that had spawned the Council movement.[27] In turn, the NCWC's emphasis on "the duties of women and the power of influence" was viewed by the American Council leaders who attended its early assemblies with scepticism.[28] But, for Lady Aberdeen at least, to speak of women's

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[26]Lord and Lady Aberdeen, *'We Twa': Reminiscences of Lord and Lady Aberdeen*, vol. 1 (London: W. Collins and Sons, 1925), p. 272.

[27]Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women," pp. 99-109.

[28]Quoted in Dean, "Lady Aberdeen's Vision for Canadian Women," p. 100.

duties was to speak of an enlarged sphere of opportunity for women, if not in government, then in shaping men's governance of woman's sphere.

Lady Aberdeen's belief that women's moral influence derived from their God-given duties as the mothers of humanity and as the "queens of the home" both reflected and helped to shape the views of the NCWC's evangelical Protestant majority. Using the rhetoric of separate spheres and the evangelical language of mission, Lady Aberdeen argued that the quintessential public duties of the Women Workers of Canada were "homemaking" and "mothering." In some respects, like the distinction she made between duty and rights, her use of these terms was meant to allay some of the criticisms levied against the NCWC and some of the fears of its early members. But Lady Aberdeen also used the concepts of home and motherhood as rhetorical—as well as experiential—weapons to define a broad public mandate for the NCWC and, in the process, to offer even its most conservative members additional avenues of public service outside the conventionally female social realms of church and charity. Woman's "mission to the home," in her estimation, had no bounds: "People try to drive home to us the home mission of women as against our taking part in public work. They forget that a woman if she is to do her duty to her sons and daughters must know the world's trials and tribulations." In her estimation, the NCWC would help women

perform their duty to the home by helping them to become "women of wide views, of great knowledge and of ripe experience."[29]

While women's duty to the home defined the scope of the NCWC's public obligations, Lady Aberdeen characterized the activity of "mothering" as the means by which Council women would fulfill these "home" duties. Addressing the first annual meeting of the NCWC in 1894, Lady Aberdeen asked, "how can we best describe this woman's mission in a word?"

> Can we not best describe it as 'mothering' in one sense or another? We are not all called upon to be mothers of little children, but every woman is called upon to 'mother' in some way or another; and it is impossible to be in this country, even for a little while, and not be impressed with a sense of what a great work of 'mothering' is in a special sense committed to the women of Canada.

Rather than a biological function, then, Lady Aberdeen represented mothering as a set of innately female social skills whose application to national life was the chief object of the NCWC's "grand women's mission." She defined the idea of mothering as "the caring for others, the striving to act towards all who come within our influence in the spirit of our Father."[30] By reconstituting motherhood as a social and religious compulsion, as well as a biological experience, even single Council women, whose marital status otherwise marginalized them, would be able to claim the moral authority of "the home" and of

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[29]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. 15, Scrapbooks, newspaper clipping, *Montreal Daily Herald*, 1 December 1893; and *ibid.*, Vol., 17, Scrapbooks, newspaper clipping, *Quebec Morning Chronicle*, 19 September 1894.

[30]Lady Aberdeen, "President's Address," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 10, 11.

"divine motherhood."[31] As an expansive and inherently feminine form of service, mothering suggested the full range of Council women's responsibilities as women and thus helped to define, at least from their perspective, the function of the NCWC as a national, non-sectarian federation of women's societies.[32]

The Power of Influence

For Lady Aberdeen, homemaking and mothering were political terms, signifying the scope of women's citizenship obligations to the state as guardians of the family on the one hand, and describing the unique contribution women made to the moral welfare of the nation in the home on the other. This representation of female citizenship accorded with the late Victorian idealization of gender complementarity. According to Jane Lewis, the mainstream of Victorian social theory and social action "linked the solution of social problems firmly to the family and to social work performed voluntarily by middle-class women who thereby fulfilled their citizenship obligations."[33] Linking the welfare of the nation to the sanctity of the home and the well-being of the state to the preservation of the

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[31]Single middle-class women in the nineteenth-century were widely regarded as socially marginal or "redundant" if they did not marry and bear children. See Martha Vicinus's discussion of the idea of female redundancy in Victorian England, *Independent Women: Work & Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), chap. 1.

[32]Other Council women likewise viewed female social service as a form of mothering. See, for example, Mrs. Schultz, "Women Worker of Manitoba," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 214, 215-216; and Miss Agnes Maule Machar, "Provision for the Aged Poor," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 289-294.

[33]Jane Lewis, *Women and Social Action in Victorian and Edwardian England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 1.

family,[34] Lady Aberdeen argued that it was now encumbent upon the organized women of Canada to expand their activism on behalf their sphere. By uniting middle-class women "in a strong bond of mutual sympathy and power," the NCWC would provide them with the necessary institutional mouthpiece to represent the interests of woman's sphere to the local and national governments of Canada, "thus binding their individual influences into a national force."[35]

Council women as a whole shared Lady Aberdeen's belief that, by offering organized middle-class women a systematic means of realizing their "own greater unity of thought, sympathy, and purpose,"[36] the NCWC would function as a transformative moral force in Canadian social life. Many locally organized evangelical Protestant women joined the NCWC believing that its broad religious mandate would furnish them with expanded opportunities for divine service. Agnes Schultz, for example, believed that the co-operation of Winnipeg's "most earnest workers" through the NCWC "must have far-reaching results."

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[34]The preamble to the NCWC's national constitution made the connection between the state and the family, and the nation and the home, explicit: "We, Women of Canada, sincerely believing that the best good of our homes and nation will be advanced by our own greater unity of thought, sympathy, and purpose, and that an organized movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the Family and the State, do hereby band ourselves together to further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law." See "Constitution of the National Council of Women of Canada," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 22. The wording of the NCWC's preamble is almost but not entirely identical to that adopted by the International Council of Women in 1893: "We, women of all nations, sincerely believing that the best good of humanity will be advanced by greater unity of thought, sympathy, and purpose, and that an organised movement of women will best conserve the highest good of the family and of the State, do hereby band ourselves in a confederation of workers to further the application of the Golden Rule to Society, custom, and law."

[35]Lady Aberdeen, "Public Meeting," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 178.

[36]Preamble, Constitution of the National Council of Women of Canada, 1894, in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894 p. 22.

for it would increase their "power for usefulness by unity."[37] The very process of coming together as diverse parts of one whole was regarded as an accomplishment by many Council women. Even the London Local Council of Women, which had been preoccupied with the issue of silent prayer since its inception, declared in 1895 that, although its actual work had not been very extensive, "we cannot but feel that much good has been accomplished in bringing the different Federated Societies together, thereby forming a bond of sympathy and interest, which could not otherwise have been done." Similarly, the St. John local council reported that, although the "spirit and aims" of its federated societies varied, they were "united on the common ground of hope and effort for the uplifting of humanity," believing that "the united action of women in Councils is one of the greatest movements of the day, and that it will prove a valuable factor to the Dominion in a bond of common interest."[38]

Despite the consensus about the potential utility of the NCWC, two distinct views of its relationship to the male political culture were proposed by Council women in the early 1890s. A minority view was articulated by the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association.[39]

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[37]Public Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), Winnipeg Council of Women Records, P3605, Scrapbook 1894-1900, newspaper clipping, "Woman's Work. Annual Reports Presented to the Winnipeg Council," Winnipeg *Free Press*, 16 May 1895. See also Mrs. Agnes Schultz (Winnipeg), "Women Workers of Manitoba," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 212-217.

[38]"Report of the London Local Council of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 43; and "Report of the St. John Local Council of Women," in *ibid.*, p. 51. See also the reports of the Kingston, Halifax, West Algoma, and East Kootenay local councils, in *ibid.*, pp. 49, 51, 54, 60.

[39]On the DWEA, see Catherine Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (1950; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 24-29; Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?*, pp. 29-30; and Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Setting the Stage': National Organiztion and the Women's Movement in the Late Nineteenth Century," in Susan

The DWEA initially regarded the NCWC as a means of reinvigorating the campaign for women's enfranchisement which, in Toronto at least, had languished for several years. Through the NCWC, the DWEA hoped to acquaint the women of Canada with "their duties and responsibilities as citizens."[40] In short, this meant convincing women of the need for the "political" as well as the municipal enfranchisement of women. Emily Stowe of the DWEA argued that men lacked the electoral authority to legislate on behalf of women and the home. "We need women in Parliament," she said.

> The Parliament is simply a nation's home, and if woman is needed in the home to represent the full side of humanity, she will be capable of representing the needs of her sex in the nation's home...Women are subject to all the laws in the land, and consequently should have something to do with the framing of those laws.

In contrast to a majority of Council women, the DWEA equated the enfranchisement of women with the acquisition of power. As a result, its members found the resistance to the vote among middle-class women perplexing; indeed, one delegate to the DWEA's first sectional meeting in 1894 observed that non-suffragist women seemed "to take a perverse pride in the insufficiency of power they have."[41]

While the DWEA questioned the mandate of male political institutions to act on women's behalf, a majority of Council women

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Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), pp. 87-103.

[40]Dr. Stowe (Toronto), "Report of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 48-49; and Mrs. Curzon (Toronto), "Report of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 66-67.

[41]"Sectional Conference: Enfranchisement and W.C.T.U.," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 204-206.

accepted the constituted political authority of men. They believed, however, that men were ill-equipped to address the concerns of woman's sphere adequately. Women alone, they argued, possessed sufficient expertise and moral credibility to superintend the private and public interests of the home circle and its weakest inmates. Thus rather than using the NCWC to gain membership in governmental institutions, they argued that it should be used by organized middle-class women to secure systematic access to male legislators who, by virtue of their gender and position, possessed the authority to enact and amend laws affecting woman's sphere. Access to male legislators was needed because of the changing nature of women's work. As more and more women sought remunerative labour in the public realm, the scope of "woman's sphere" expanded commensurately. Women's authority to intervene in the public sphere was limited by their gender, however. Through the NCWC, Council women would demonstrate the importance of the family to the state, and endeavour to recruit the state to protect Canadian women from the otherwise unregulated forces of the male marketplace. In this advisory capacity, members of the NCWC would use their specialized knowledge of the home circle to help other women fulfill their God-given duty to the home and family. Council women, in other words, claimed the power to influence.

Although one is inclined now to be dismissive of these kinds of claims, the potency of this complementary construction of women's power for Council women themselves should not be underestimated. In a sense, Council women envisaged the NCWC—to borrow Kathleen

McCarthy's phrase—as a "parallel power structure."[42] Its self-defined responsibility as the guardian of woman's sphere, its separatism, and its corporate division of authority established it as a co-ordinate female political institution. Veronica Strong-Boag has observed that the NCWC was organized on much the same basis as a federal system of government.[43] While local councils attended to the immediate needs of their communities, a national executive guided and spoke for the organization as a whole. The NCWC would thus facilitate its members' access to politicians at every level of government. By forming a unified women's bloc, it would also enhance the ability of Council women to influence and shape their decisions. Working within this structure, organized middle-class women could now hope to set the political agenda for the women of Canada. Of course, in practice, the NCWC never spoke for the "women of Canada" as its early leaders proclaimed—its economic, racial, and regional membership base was far too constricted to support such an assertion. Its aspiration to do so is nevertheless significant, for it highlights the gendered nature of both the NCWC's corporate consciousness and its social or political outlook.

At least one Council woman idealized the NCWC's relationship to the governments of Canada as a companionate marriage. Adelaide Hoodless, whose own marriage would seem to have conformed to this prescriptive model, argued that, just as husbands and wives should

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[42]Kathleen D. McCarthy, "Parallel Power Structures: Women and the Voluntary Sphere," in Kathleen D. McCarthy ed., *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Power, and Philanthropy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 1-34.

[43]Strong-Boag, "'Setting the Stage'," in Trofimenkoff and Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority*.

support the furtherance of one another's duties without competing for power, the NCWC should help the statesmen of the country realize Canada as "His Dominion." Local councils, she believed, should aspire to wield an influence parallel to that of "an intelligent wife in the home."

> We all grant that a cultured, intelligent woman has a wonderful influence over a husband, and if a husband believes in the sincerity of his wife's work, he will invariably support it; and I believe that the National Council should stand to our Government in exactly the same position, and that we as an intelligent body of women should use our influence by suggestions, not by trying to force anything, and as a usual result of women's tactics, we gain what they think they are gaining.[44]

The image of the companionate marriage sketched by Hoodless was an apt one, for the NCWC did seek to consumate a 'marriage' of sorts between itself and state institutions at the local, provincial, and federal levels of government. Like the ideal companionate marriage, the NCWC would perform its duty first by informing itself of women's needs and then by helping the state fulfill its obligations—as the NCWC defined them—to the female citizens of the country. Although at first glance this does not seem a very satisfactory arrangement, for many of the middle-class women who joined the NCWC it was a fairly radical assertion of women's authority. By enlisting the state as an ally in its battle to defend the interests of women's sphere, Council women hoped, as Ellen Boris has argued of Progressive era reformers in the United States, "to reconstruct public life in accordance with their own ideal of womanhood."[45]

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[44]Mrs. Hoodless (Hamilton), "Resolution: Women Inspectors of Factories (Discussion)," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 224.

At the first two annual meetings of this new co-ordinate "parliament,"[46] seventeen resolutions were deliberated by Council women, five in the first year and twelve in the second. Of these, four addressed 'housekeeping' concerns of the NCWC itself, including an amendment to the constitution, the adoption of standing orders, audible recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and an 1895 motion to congratulate the government of Ontario for acting upon two NCWC resolutions from the previous year. Of the remaining thirteen resolutions, nine asked the state to address some aspect of women's twin work of homemaking and nation building.[47] In general, these resolutions were of three types. The first kind asserted the importance of the family to the nation by asking the state to empower women as homemakers. The resolution introduced by Adelaide Hoodless in 1894 favouring "Manual Training for Girls" was the most prominent memorial of this kind. The second type of resolution asked the state to help middle-class women mediate the often adverse

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[45]Ellen Boris, "Reconstructing the 'Family': Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control," in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1991), pp. 73-86, esp. 73-74.

[46]To express their sense of powerfulness, some Council women referred, albeit obliquely, to their new women's federation as a female parliament. See, for example, Lady Ritchie (Ottawa), "Address of Welcome," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 14; and Miss Tilley (Toronto), "Audible Prayer," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 195-196. Although Lady Aberdeen never referred to the NCWC as a parliament at either of the first two annual meetings, she also represented it as an "assembly." See "President's Address," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 10.

[47]These include three 1894 resolutions—Promotion of Patriotic Feeling; International Arbitration; and Manual Training for Girls—and six 1895 resolutions—Suppression of the Publication in Newspapers of Unnecessary Details of Crime; Representation of Women on Boards of Philanthropic Institutions; Duty on Opium; Statistics regarding Women in Canada; Alteration of Existing Laws regarding bigamy in Foreign Countries by Canadians; and The Study and Practice of Design.

influences of the public sphere on the home circle. Resolutions of this type solicited, for example, greater duty on opium imports and the suppression of "impure" literature. The 1895 resolution favouring the legislated representation of women on the boards of state-funded philanthropic institutions epitomized the third type of resolution, which sought official legitimation of middle-class women's authority to superintend the "public" interests of women and children within their traditional spheres of social responsibility. The four remaining resolutions memorialized the governments of Canada to extend the moral protection of the home sphere to working-class women in factories, shops, and gaols.[48]

In general, this would be accomplished by asking the state to appoint a female proxy—a police matron or a female factory inspector, for example—who would extend, at least figuratively, the moral protection of the NCWC to women and girls who were otherwise at the mercy of unregulated male authority. These four resolutions underscore the NCWC's assimilation of separate spheres ideology, as well as suggest the ways in which its members might use that ideology to claim a greater share of public authority for themselves and their institution. Women factory inspectors were needed to preserve moral propriety on the one hand and to protect the future wives and mothers of Canada on the other. Men, the NCWC inferred, were simply not qualified to offer this kind of supervision or protection by

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[48]These included two 1894 resolutions—Appointment of Women Inspectors for Factories and Workshops Where Women are Employed; and Appointment of Police Matrons—and two 1895 resolutions—Length of Working Hours for Women and Children in Factories; and Women Inspectors of Factories.

virtue of their gender. As one Council delegate observed in 1894, "It comes to our knowledge that a large number of women and girls are employed in these factories and things exist which they can never bring to the attention of men at all" while another commented in 1895 that "We are all aware that men cannot deal with these matters as well as a woman."[49] By asking the state to appoint female officials of this kind, the NCWC hoped not only to imbue the state—and the many other public institutions which it regulated—with the moral values of woman's sphere, but also to assert a gendered division of social responsibility for building up the nation through the preservation of its mothers.

The extent of the NCWC's social responsibility, and by extension the breadth of its authority to act on women's behalf in the public sphere, was debated by delegates to the NCWC's second annual meeting in 1895. The catalyst for this discussion was a resolution proposed by the Kingston Local Council of Women which asked the governments of Canada to reduce the working day of women and children factory workers by one hour, and to appoint a "forewoman" in every shop to insure that women workers received adequate rest stoppages. Agnes Maule Machar, who moved the resolution, believed that long work hours weakened the mental and moral acumen of working-class women, thus rendering them defenceless against "a love

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[49]"Appointment of Women Inspectors for Factories and Workshops Where Women are Employed (Discussion)," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 111; and "Women Inspectors of Factories (Discussion)," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, p. 223. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff discusses the preoccupation of middle-class investigators with the modesty of female factory workers in the 1889 Canadian Royal Commission on the Relations of Labour and Capital, see "One Hundred and Two Muffled Voices: Canada's Industrial Women in the 1880s," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 3 (1978), 66-82.

of sensation and amusement." The moral deterioration of female factory workers, she argued, would debilitate the nation, for "if the mothers of our coming generation are to begin enfeebled, what can we expect the coming generation to be?"[50] A significant number of Council women opposed the resolution, however, believing that it asked the NCWC to intervene in "public" affairs that were beyond the expertise and authority of the home circle.

The Montreal Local Council of Women was not ready to support the Kingston resolution because the question of working hours was connected to other issues like wages and industrial competition, subjects which were beyond its members usual range of expertise. "We are not questioning the need of legislation in these matters," its president contended,

> but I would suggest that we first get our woman inspector to see that the present regulations of the law are carried out and that we then derive from her more intimate acquaintance with factory girls and their needs, knowledge to guide in ameliorating their condition, otherwise we may injure where we most mean to help.[51]

Other Council members questioned the NCWC's competency to intervene directly in the management of work in the factory, suggesting instead that individual Council women would not overstep the bounds of their public authority as women if they simply used their power as consumers of manufactured goods to improve working

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[50]"Length of Working Hours for Women and Children in Factories," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 173-175.

[51]"Length of Working Hours for Women and Children in Factories (Discussion)," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 1773-178.

conditions for factory women.[52] More was at issue in this debate than the extent of women's authority, however. In the end, Council women agreed that preserving the NCWC's credibility as the helpmeet of the state should be its foremost objective. Mrs. Rachel Foster Avery, a "fraternal" delegate from the National Council of Women of the United States, cautioned the NCWC against any action motivated by "unenlightened sympathy," however worthy its object. "I think," she said, "that in order to have the Council have a dignified standing among men, to have a position which will make men respect what it says, it must speak from a sympathy which is begotten of knowledge."[53]

Although hesitant to endorse this particular resolution, the NCWC believed that its power to effect change was extensive and, more importantly, recognized. Miss Shenick of Ottawa, for example, enthused in 1895 that "the Woman's Council is becoming the mouthpiece of the people to reach the Government as far as women are concerned."[54] Moreover, members of the NCWC had been given

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[52]*Ibid.*, pp. 181-183, 179. On the power of middle-class women consumers, see also the comments of Miss Hepburn, the representative of the Women's Protective Union, in *ibid.*, pp. 179-180; and Lady Aberdeen, "Co-operation of Working Women for Protective Purposes," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 61-62.

[53]*Ibid.*, p. 180. The debate, which immediately preceded the NCWC's protracted discussion of audible prayer, was divisive. Lady Aberdeen's management of this debate was just as skilful as her handling of the prayer issue, however. Rather than put the resolution to a division, one of the members of the national executive—treasurer Adelaide Hoodless—proposed a new resolution that asked delegates to put aside the Kingston resolution until the next annual meeting. In the meantime, it directed the NCWC's national executive, its national societies, and its local councils to collect "further material for its guidance." Agnes Maule Machar of Kingston agreed to put aside the motion, but she was critical of the view taken by Drummond and others that the NCWC should act only in accordance with the wishes of industrialists, arguing that "in a question between capital and labor, there would never have been such legislation introduced, I am afraid, if we had waited till the employers were convinced as to its wisdom and practicality." *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 185. The resolution proposed by Hoodless carried unanimously.

positive encouragement by the very men they sought to influence, the legislators of Canada. Among the political luminaries in attendance at the NCWC's first annual meeting in 1894 was Sir John Thompson, the Conservative prime minister of Canada.[55] Thompson's wife Annie was a vice-president of the NCWC and one of Lady Aberdeen's closest Canadian friends. Thompson, who was himself an early advocate of the NCWC,[56] described it as "the 'Great and Happy Parliament of Canada'." To the evident delight of Council women, he assured them of the full co-operation of Canadian parliamentarians for their work. "I think I may safely promise," he said, "that if there be any practical manner in which sympathy can be extended towards the Women's Council by Parliament or by the Administration, that sympathy shall be extended in any form which you may ask for it."[57] Although much of

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[54]See "Congratulations to the Ontario Government," in *ibid.*, p. 224; and Emily Cummings, "Abstract of the Second Annual Report," in *ibid.*, p. 34. Several local councils reported upon their successful bids to achieve specific reforms. See, for example, "Report of the Toronto Local Council of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 30; "Report of the Ottawa Local Council of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 41-42; and "Report of the London Local Council of Women," in *ibid.*, p. 43.

[55]The male platform speakers at the NCWC's 1894 public meeting were what Lady Aberdeen would have called "representative" . Lord Aberdeen (a life patron of the NCWC), Sir John Thompson (husband of a NCWC vice president), Lieutenant-Governor John Schultz of Manitoba (husband of the Winnipeg local council president), and Judge Routhier (husband of the Quebec local council president) represented the political sphere. The clerical representatives were equally illustrious: Rev. Principal Grant of Kingston (Presbyterian), Archbishop Walsh of Toronto (Roman Catholic), the Venerable Archdeacon Lauder of Ottawa (Anglican), and Rev. Dr. Manley Benson of Ottawa (Methodist) conveyed the support of their denominations. See "Public Meeting," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 173-202. Each of these men was sufficiently "prominent" to merit inclusion in Henry Morgan's biographical omnibus, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898).

[56]P.B. Waite, *The Man From Halifax: Sir John Thompson Prime Minister* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. 388-391.

[57]Sir John Thompson, "Public Meeting," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 184-186.

Thompson's speech suggests he was indulging in a rhetorical flight of fancy. Council women received his assurance of practical assistance with due solemnity. As Agnes Schultz of Winnipeg remarked at the close of the meeting, "the good which the Premier's sympathy and kindly words will accomplish can hardly be fully realized at present."[58]

By 1896, when the NCWC turned its attention to the maternal health of pioneer women in the Canadian Northwest, Council women were seeking new ways to expand the NCWC's organized activism on behalf of the women and children of Canada. Julia Drummond's description of the NCWC as "a great and ever-enlarging power for good" captured the sense of confidence that underlaid the NCWC's deliberations in 1896.[59] Although some local councils within the NCWC had suffered a loss of membership after the defeat of audible prayer in 1895 and one local council had discontinued active work, fresh evidence of Council women's apparent power to influence was close at hand. The NCWC's secretary, for instance, reported to delegates to its third annual meeting that not only had the federal government incorporated several NCWC recommendations into government legislation, but their own president had personally placed one of their 1895 resolutions before the Prime Minister himself.[60] This kind of access to the highest political offices of the state

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[58]Mrs. Schultz (Winnipeg), "Public Meeting," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, p. 201.

[59]Mrs. Drummond, "Address of Welcome," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, p. 29. See also Lady Aberdeen, "Preface," and "President's Address," in *ibid.*, pp. v, viii, 30-31.

[60]Mrs. Willoughby Cummings (Toronto), "Third Annual Report," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 34-35.

reinforced Council women's perception of their new women'a parliament as a powerful, albeit complementary, instrument for change. The recognition accorded to the NCWC by Canadian parliamentarians on both sides of the House, as well as by provincial and municipal legislators, also reinforced its members' belief that the NCWC represented and could speak with authority for the women of Canada.[61]

Nation Building

Prior to 1896, the NCWC had successfully lent its growing social influence to a variety of causes, including domestic science training for girls in public schools, the protection of women factory workers, and the suppression of impure literature. Each of the resolutions passed by the NCWC in its first two years had urged the governments of Canada to take note of and act upon the concerns of organized middle-class women, and, implicitly at least, to sanction the NCWC as the institutional mouthpiece of the women of Canada. Some local councils of women in federation with the NCWC had also won the co-operation of civic authorities for a variety of institution building projects in their cities and towns. By mid-decade, for example, the Ottawa Local Council of Women had helped to inaugerate the city's new Associated Charities society and had commenced plans to erect a free public library, while in Regina and Vernon organized middle-class women took advantage of their newfound unity to endow and build civic

[61]At the 1896 annual meeting, representatives from both federal parties addressed public meetings: Sir Charles Hibbert Tupper, a leading member of the Conservative government of Sir Mackenzie Bowell, spoke on the first evening, while Wilfrid Laurier, the leader of the Liberal opposition, spoke on the second.

hospitals. The pattern of success established by the NCWC at both the national and local levels between November of 1893 and May of 1896, when Council leaders gathered in Montreal for their third annual meeting, buoyed the confidence of Council women and made them eager to test the boundaries of their new institution's authority to protect the private interests of women in the public domain.

In 1896, delegates to the NCWC's third annual meeting passed a resolution highlighting the need for increased medical aid among the isolated settlers of the Canadian Northwest. In contrast to previous years, however, Council women did not memorialize the government to take action on their behalf. Instead, they authorized the NCWC itself to formulate a practical solution to the problem of maternal mortality among isolated prairie women. The NCWC's concern for the health of pioneer mothers reflected its members more general interest in the question of female immigration. Spurred on by the Women's Protective Immigration Society of Montreal, delegates discussed the issue at length in 1896, concluding that, through the NCWC, elite organized women should endeavour to assume greater responsibility for the recruitment, protection, and distribution of female immigrants throughout the Dominion. Casting themselves and pioneer prairie mothers in the role of nation builders, Council women argued that Canada's most pressing immigration need was not necessarily for domestic servants, but for "worthy women" whose high moral character and physical hardiness would fit them to build homes and families on the prairies. thus truly claiming the region for both the Kingdom of Canada and the Kingdom of God.

Council women conceived of nation building as a gendered enterprise in which men and women took an equal but different share. While hardy "sons of toil" made a new agricultural region productive by tilling the soil and generating economic wealth, only women's mothering and homemaking skills could truly establish a new community and provide it with the moral and spiritual sustenance it needed to survive. "In the making of any nation," Edith Archibald of Halifax declared, "the women of that nation have a high and holy calling."[62] As mothers and as homemakers women played a crucial nation building role, for they had charge of the moral development of the individual and the emotional well-being of the family. Women, however, were too inclined to underestimate the value of their "quiet, patient, loving service" to the nation. For evidence of their own worth as nation builders, Archibald advised Council women to look to those

> faithful and loyal souls who leaving their beloved mother-land, went bravely forth with their husbands, sons or brothers into untrodden paths of the pine forests, or who, for the love of Christ, ministered to His needy and perishing children in His name, have commanded our deepest veneration and respect. I am sure that we, as Canadian women, are justly proud of our foremothers. We love to recall the stories of their early pioneer days, of their brave endurance of hardship in privation, and of their heroism under circumstances of danger.

Archibald believed that the NCWC would be the vehicle through which the present generation of Canadian women would fulfil their destiny as nation builders. As the institutional embodiment of a new ethos of co-operation among women, the NCWC would function as a positive

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[62]Mrs. Archibald (Halifax), "The Importance of the National Council in Fostering and Developing the Patriotism of Canadian Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 73-74. See also James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration 1830-1914* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), p. 163.

national force. Like their pioneer "foremothers,"[63] then, members of the NCWC had "a sacred mission" to shape the country as a moral British nation by taking up their "God-given right to be the inspiration of the manhood of the nation, the true queens and chosen helpmates of its lovely homes."[64]

Members of the Women's Protective Immigration Society of Montreal (WPIS) endeavoured to convince Council women that they could best fulfill their womanly potential as nation builders by taking up the work of female immigration. The WPIS was a non-sectarian organization founded in 1881 under the patronage of Princess Louise and supported by the female members of some of Montreal's most elite families. In contrast to most of the NCWC's others affiliated societies, the WPIS received all of its funding from an annual federal grant, which its members used to operate and staff the society's reception home. As a semi-official adjunct of the federal government, its purpose was twofold: first, to help 'respectable' British women emigrate to Canada, and second, to insure their protection and placement upon arriving in Canada. Although immigration activists in the WPIS believed that the women they assisted would ultimately become wives and mothers, the immediate objective of their society was to attract competent servants to work in the middle and upper-middle class households of Montreal. Barbara Roberts has argued that members of the WPIS therefore sought to recruit women who had

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[63]Archibald, "Patriotism of Canadian Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 74-77.

[64]*Ibid.*

"'character' and the respectability of the bourgeois wife and mother but the skills and pragmatic attitudes of the respectable working class."[65]

At the 1896 meeting of the NCWC, members of the WPIS argued that a national system of female immigration administered by women like themselves was needed. The adoption of this work on a practical basis would "go a long way to justify the existence of the Women's National Council," they suggested, for it would enable Council women to "do something that will be a lasting work in Canada and that will aid in building up our nation."[66] Believing, like the WPIS, that women were best equipped to protect other women, delegates to the NCWC's 1896 conference gave unanimous approval to the three resolutions it tabled. The first urged the federal government to implement a national system of immigration and place female immigration under the control of a network of women's committees. The second resolution stipulated the any national system of immigration should also include government sanctioned agencies in Canada, Great Britain and "abroad" which, like the WPIS, would be officially empowered to receive, shelter, and distribute female immigrants nationwide. The third and final resolution asked the federal government to alter its

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[65]Barbara Roberts, "Sex, Politics and Religion: Controversies in Female Immigration Work in Montreal, 1881-1919," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1980), 25-38, esp. 27. See also Barbara Roberts, "'A Work of Empire': Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration," in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979), pp. 185-201; and Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, pp. 148-186.

[66]"Sectional Conference Meeting on Women's Immigration," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, p. 533. In 1898, the WPIS formally recast itself as a national institution, changing its name to the Women's National Immigration Society. See Roberts, *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1980), 28.

method of land distribution in the Northwest in order to diminish the isolation and loneliness of prairie women, facilitate the development of prairie communities, and insure that the settlers who were raising "the future citizens of the Dominion" would be provided with adquate educational, medical, and cultural services.[67]

As this latter resolution suggests, the WPIS now believed that supplying the Canadian Northwest with wives and mothers was its greatest priority.[68] Their importance to the region could not be over-estimated. "It would be impossible to speak too strongly about the need of a wife and mother for the settler's home," a representative of the WPIS said. "As a sympathetic companion, an economical manager, an actual helpmeet in the farm work, as a mother of future citizens, and as a standard bearer of civilization, she will always be invaluable." Hardy, "suitable, healthy" women of "the right kind for settlers wives" were therefore needed in the Northwest.[69] In order to obtain this kind of woman from Great Britain, the WPIS cautioned that social conditions in the region would first have to be made more amenable to women. In particular, educational facilities would have to be provided for their children, the problem of their intellectual and physical isolation would have to be addressed, and health care services would

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[67]"Sectional Conference Meeting on Women's Immigration," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 503, 530, 532.

[68]Mrs. Cox of the WPIS continued to lay great emphasis on the need to attract female domestic servants and the great necessity of providing them with adequate "protection" once in Canada, thus preventing the kind of "serious disasters" that resulted from a lack of shelter and womanly advice; see *ibid.*, pp. 198-201.

[69]Mrs. John Cox (Montreal), "The Immigration of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, p. 197; and "Sectional Conference Meeting on Women's Immigration," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 502, 519-520, 522, 523.

need to be extended in order to end "the needless suffering and even loss of life incurred through the want of medical aid or skilled nursing in illness."[70] Delegates from western councils attending the 1896 meeting confirmed the necessity of these measures, arguing that female companionship and medical assistance were the two greatest needs of women in the west. Mrs. McEwen of Brandon, for example, urged that cottage hospitals and medical and nursing services especially were needed in the rural districts of Manitoba and the Northwest, for there were "women and children there requiring medical assistance that may be forty-five, fifty or sixty miles from the doctor."[71]

Lady Aberdeen pointed out to delegates that Council women in different parts of the country were already endeavouring to alleviate the intellectual isolation of rural prairie dwellers through the work of the Aberdeen Association, an organization founded by Winnipeg churchwomen in 1891 to distribute "pure and good" serial literature to prairie homesteads.[72] The Aberdeen Association agreed with its patron that it was women's special duty to prevent the "sterner virtues from becoming too stern" among prairie settlers. By introducing the

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[70]Cox, "The Immigration of Women," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, p. 198.

[71]"Sectional Conference Meeting on Women's Immigration," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 537, 535, 536-537. See also Mrs. Stevenson (Montreal), in *ibid.*, pp. 521-522.

[72]Ishbel, The Countess of Aberdeen, *Through Canada With a Kodak* (Edinburgh: W.H. White & Co., 1893), pp. 102-103. The Aberdeen Association affiliated with the NCWC in 1895. See "Report of the Aberdeen Association," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 70-72; Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Setting the Stage'," in Trofimenkoff and Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority*, pp. 93-94; and Stewart G. Mein, "The Aberdeen Association: An Early Attempt to Provide Library Services to Settlers in Saskatchewan," *Saskatchewan History* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1985), 2-19.

womanly values of domesticity and higher culture into the otherwise primitive households of the frontier, they believed that they could even make the existence of the archetypal "lonely bachelor" more comfortable and complete. Their cultural and religious "mission" to prairie households was regarded by them as a vital form of female nation building.[73] As such, it was informed by a sense of urgency. The desperate loneliness of the prairie winters and the great distances between even the closest of neighbours was a burden that only the strongest could endure without assistance of a womanly helping hand, they argued. By helping the men and women who were "laying the foundations of society in this new land," members of the Aberdeen Association would also empower themselves as nation builders, leaving a national legacy of culture and religion both to their own children and to the children of the "educated and intelligent" British pioneers of the Northwest.[74]

A similar sense of urgency undergirded the NCWC's discussion of the medical needs of the Canadian Northwest in 1896. In contrast to the NCWC's deliberations on female immigration, which had been initiated by central Canadian women, the NCWC's discussion of the "Need of Medical Aid in the North-West Territories" on the fourth and

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[73] Testimonials from grateful recipients of reading matter reinforced this understanding of their work. One father wrote that the literature sent by the Aberdeen Association was "'the light of our home'," while a missionary at work in a western mining camp testified that the men there were always glad to see him after he started delivering packages from the Aberdeen Association. "They adorned the walls their cabins with pictures from illustrated papers. Some cheer and brightness, and a little humanity were introduced, and this was the beginning of better days to a great many of them." See PAM, Winnipeg Council of Women Records, P3605, Scrapbook, 1894-1900, newspaper clipping, Reports of the Aberdeen Association, 5 February 1894, 17 February 1898, 1 December 1892.

[74] *Ibid.*, 1 February 1895, 1 December 1892, 5 February 1894, 24 January 1896.

final day of its third annual meeting was precipitated by western Council women. By 1896, fully half of the NCWC's twenty local councils were located in the west or in the pioneer districts of northern Ontario. Most of these local councils were formed as a result of the direct intervention of Lady Aberdeen, who combined her social duties as vice-regal chatelaine and her public duties as president of the NCWC whenever possible. Lord and Lady Aberdeen had taken a special interest in the welfare of western Canada since 1891 when they purchased a sizeable tract of land in the Okanagan Valley and became part-time residents of British Columbia. In subsequent official visits to the region, Lady Aberdeen endeavoured to interest western and northern townswomen in the work of the NCWC. Since most of the NCWC's western and northern Ontario local councils were located in towns along the western railway route, her work along these lines was largely successful.[75]

While Council women discussed public health concerns such as the typhoid epidemics that periodically plagued male boarding houses in the region's towns,[76] their principal concern was for the physical and moral welfare of rural pioneer homes and families. Delegates agreed that the most pressing health problem within the region was the all too frequent incidence of maternal mortality among women on

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[75]In Manitoba there were local councils at Winnipeg and Brandon; in British Columbia at Victoria, Vancouver, East Kootenay, and Vernon; in the Northwest at Regina and Calgary; and in northern Ontario at Port Arthur (Thunder Bay) and Rat Portage (Kenora).

[76]See, for example, the comments of Mrs. Beneke of Regina: "Need of Medical Aid in the North-West Territories," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 443-444.

isolated prairie homesteads.[77] Their anxiety for the maternal welfare of pioneer women was not misplaced. Throughout the nineteenth century childbirth was a potentially life threatening or disabling experience for parturient women of all social classes and all regions. Maternal mortality rates among Canadian women had changed very little since the mid-century. Although, as Wendy Mitchinson notes, it is impossible to determine the precise rate of maternal mortality in late Victorian Canada, the census data nevertheless suggests the scope of the problem. The census of 1890-91, for example, reports that just under eight per cent of all deaths among Canadian women of childbearing age were the result of complications in childbirth. But, as Mitchinson argues, percentages "do not really reflect the impact of maternal mortality."

> The real toll was in the lives lost and families destroyed. At mid-century one out of every nine children were maternal orphans by the age of ten. One woman in every five who married and started a family did not survive to the end of her childbearing years. Canadian women knew from their own experience and that of the women around them that childbirth could be dangerous if not fatal.[78]

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[77]On women's experience of childbirth on the Canadian prairies, see Candace Savage *et al, A Harvest yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976); Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930* (MOntreal: Eden Press, 1984), chap. 4; Norah L. Lewis, "Goose Grease and Turpentine: Mother Treats the Family's Illnesses," *Prairie Forum* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1990), 67-84; and Angela E. Davis, "'Country Homemakers': The Daily Lives of Prairie Women as Seen Through the Woman's Page of the Grain Growers' Guide 1908-1928," in Donald H. Akenson, ed., *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. III (Gananoque, Ont.: Langdale Press, 1992), pp. 163-174.

[78]Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 224-228, esp. 228, 229; and Beth Light and Joy Parr, eds., *Canadian Women on the Move, 1867-1920* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1983), p. 112.

Although the actual number of maternal deaths remained comparatively low, and the vast majority of women survived childbirth, enough mothers did die in childbirth to create what one historian has called a "collective sense of fearfulness" among childbearing women in late nineteenth-century North America and Europe.[79]

Evidence from Britain and the United States suggests that even elite urban women like those who joined the NCWC in the 1890s regarded childbirth as an anxious occasion, despite their own recourse to what Judith Walzer Leavitt has called "privileged" medical attention. Council women, as we have seen, equated education with skill. The childbearing practices of elite urban women reflected this late Victorian maxim. After mid-century, middle-class urban women increasingly turned to physicians and, in the case of upper class women, to obstetrical specialists to "manage" their pregnancies. But, as Pat Jalland has recently observed, the random distribution of maternal deaths throughout the social strata often undermined the credibility of doctors as 'scientific' birthing attendants among even upper-class childbearing women in late Victorian England. Instead, Jalland argues that these privileged wives of Britain's elite political class—among whose ranks we may place Lady Aberdeen—regarded good nursing care during both childbirth and the two to four week lying-in period that followed as the key to a successful confinement.[80]

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[79]Edward Shorter, *A History of Women's Bodies* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 69.

[80]Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America 1750-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 74-75, 198-200; and Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914*, chaps. 5 and 6. See also Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies*, pp. 190-191.

Council women's discussion of the medical needs of pioneer mothers was circumspect, but direct enough to convey their anxiety about rural prairie women's lack of access to trained medical attendance and nursing care. Several delegates related stories of the suffering endured by prairie mothers and their new born children. Madame Forget of Regina, the NCWC's vice-president for Assiniboia and the wife of the federal Indian Commissioner, lamented that "Our Indians are better cared for than our farmers," who after travelling thirty miles for a doctor often returned to find both their wife and baby dead. The "poor farmers," she said, "have to look after themselves." But, even women with recourse to the services of a doctor suffered, for they still lacked adequate nursing care and domestic help at their time of need. According to Mrs. Davidson of Brandon, most women residing in the isolated districts of the Northwest still lived "in mere shanties removed perhaps twenty miles from any doctor."

> The doctor is sent for perhaps in four or five different cases in the day, and he often finds his patients lying in such misery and discomfort that it is almost impossible for him to do anything—a mother and child lying in a little shanty, with a large stove kept red hot day and night to give heat to other rooms—he finds the woman lying there with no one to assist her.

No woman who understood "what human suffering is," she asserted, could observe such a circumstance with equanimity: "Some of them are ladies in reduced circumstances, and the husband a gentleman, a cultivated man who has never been accustomed to this kind of life." "Those who live in the centres of civilization," she concluded, "can

never understand what these poor settlers have to undergo. The pioneers are always the matyrs."[81]

The original resolution introduced by the Vancouver and Brandon Local Councils of Women asked the governments of Canada to alleviate the

> suffering endured by women and children in the North-West Territories and in other outlying districts of Canada from want of proper medical aid...either by offering inducements to medical men and women and efficiently trained nurses to settle in those districts, or in any other way which they may see fit.[82]

During the discussion of the resolution, however, the question of *how* to help pioneer women became one of *who* should help them. Elizabeth Tilley of London, the Dominion secretary of the Order of King's Daughters, argued that the NCWC should assume responsibility for the health of western pioneer women. In her estimation, the councils "of the far west territories" looked to the NCWC "for suggestions, for aid and for advice, and therefore, I think, that all these resolutions dealing with the North-West Territories should be regarded as special appeals to the National Council, and we should try to aid them in what they want."[83] Two other delegates asked whether the governments of Canada should be memorialized at all. Mrs. Grant Macdonald of Toronto wondered whether the question of health care was even a matter for government action: "one's heart is so touched by the stories of suffering and misery that one does not like to say a word,

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[81]"Need of Medical Aid in the North-West Territories," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1896, pp. 440-441.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 439.

[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 439-440, 441.

but it seems to me that if they wanted missionaries in the North-West, we would certainly not expect the Government to send them. The question is: shall we ask them to send one particular profession to the exclusion of others?" Mrs. Cox of the WPIS, fearing that her society's national immigration scheme might be undermined by this separate western initiative, urged delegates to regard the problem of medical aid in the Northwest as an adjunct of a greater woman-administered scheme to protect and care for female immigrants throughout the Dominion.[84] Although motivated to some extent by self-interest, it is nevertheless apparent that Cox regarded the provision of medical aid to prairie women as the national responsibility of organized middle-class women like herself.

The resolution in its final form differed substantially from the original motion. A series of amendments were proposed and adopted by delegates, each in turn pushing the NCWC toward the assumption of direct responsibility for the health of pioneer women. The first, moved by the Ottawa local council, removed all references to doctors and nurses, believing that the NCWC should not suggest specific remedies to the government.[85] Another amendment, offered by the East Kootenay and Winnipeg local councils, asked the local councils of the Northwest to propose specific schemes to remedy the lack of medical aid in the Northwest; only after organized women themselves

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[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.

[85] Lady Aberdeen, who generally chaired the meetings of the Ottawa Local Council of Women, explained that the authors of the Ottawa amendment were "in full sympathy" with the Vancouver resolution but "did not wish to dictate what should be done." The amended resolution was put to the floor and carried by a majority of seventy-three votes, with ninety-eight votes cast for the amended resolution and twenty-five against it. See *ibid.*, p. 442.

had devised a definite plan of action should the assistance of the state be requested.[86] Two additional riders were added to the amended resolution. The first, sponsored by Mrs. Herridge of Ottawa, stipulated that any schemes devised by the local councils should first be submitted to the NCWC's national executive committee for approval, while the other, moved by a member of this same committee, suggested that the provision of medical and nursing aid to the Northwest and other "outlying districts" was a work for all local councils of the NCWC, not just those in the west. In its final form, the resolution read as follows:

> That in view of the suffering endured by women and children in the North-West Territories and in the outlying districts of Canada from want of proper medical aid, the Local Councils be required to suggest some practical schemes to the Executive Committee of the National Council, which can by them be submitted to the Premier, the Minister of the Interior, and the Premiers of the Provinces, where such need exists.

A majority of delegates agreed with the spirit of self-help embodied in this resolution, believing that, as a national coalition of mothers and homemakers, the NCWC possessed sufficient moral authority and maternal expertise to help parturient prairie women. Thus, while the original Vancouver resolution had effectively divested Council women of any further responsibility for the welfare of their pioneer sisters, the amended resolution passed by delegates empowered—but did not necessarily require—the NCWC executive committee, working in concert with its local councils, to act. It was, they believed, the duty of the Women Workers of Canada to devise and implement a "practical"

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[86] *Ibid.*, pp. 443-444.

solution to a problem which imperilled not just individual lives, but the viability of the nation itself.[87]

The final resolution passed by delegates omitted all references to doctors and to "efficiently trained nurses." This can, perhaps, be explained by the reluctance of some Council women to recommend specific remedies or to solicit the aid of the government. But diffidence alone does not account for the decision. The studied determination of the NCWC's national executive committee to assume responsibility for the maternal welfare of pioneer women also made the omission necessary. In a medicalized hierarchy of doctors and "efficiently trained nurses" organized middle-class women would have little or no authority to direct the work of their own institution. When defined as a department of female domestic labour, however, the provision of nursing aid and houshold assistance to prairie women was well within the scope of their authority. The extension of nursing care to needy individuals was a part of their collective experience and expertise as voluntary workers. Thus, although nursing was needed, helping prairie women survive childbirth would not necessarily entail the recruitment of hospital trained nurses.

It is clear, even from this early date, that the NCWC's national executive committee, which in concert with the Ottawa Local Council of Women had manufactured the final resolution, had alternative plans. The NCWC's national treasurer, Adelaide Hoodless of Hamilton, suggested to delegates that a Dominion scheme, rather than discrete local initiatives, would be a better way to help parturient prairie

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[87]*Ibid.*, pp. 439-440, 443-444, 445.

women and their children. Most needed, in her estimation, was a corps of "sober and reliable" women willing to nurse prairie women during childbirth and provide them with post-partum domestic support. The women sent to help childbearing pioneer women in the Canadian Northwest would therefore need to be as well versed in housewifery as in nursing care. As a result, Hoodless suggested that candidates for "this North-West work" be trained in a special department of Ontario's new Normal School of Domestic Science.[88] Although such a system of training would not meet and might even undermine contemporary standards of nursing education, it would help to elevate the new field of household science, a cause to which Hoodless and, through her influence, the NCWC had already devoted much time and energy.[89] Thus just as the WPIS of Montreal had hoped to use this resolution to further its own national institution building scheme, Hoodless envisaged the provision of nursing care to pioneer prairie women as a way to further her own institution building aspirations and to legitimate the domestic and religious construction of female authority that underlaid them.

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[88]*Ibid.*, pp. 444-445.

[89]Adelaide Hoodless, "Industrial Training for Girls in Public Schools," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 114-123.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THE GATE THAT SWINGS BOTH WAYS"
FOUNDING THE VICTORIAN ORDER OF HOME HELPERS

Early in 1897, the national executive committee of the National Council of Women of Canada, spurred on by Lady Aberdeen, decided that "the women of Canada" would commemorate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897 by founding a maternal welfare organization to be known as the Victorian Order of Home Helpers. In the opinion of NCWC leaders, the object of the new order was clearly within the sphere of authority to which the organized middle-class women of the NCWC had consistently laid claim: the protection and uplift of the Canadian home and family. By sending skilled maternity attendants to the Canadian Northwest and other "outlying districts" of the country, the Order would help preserve the lives of those women and children whose access to professional medical care was geographically circumscribed. In this way, the NCWC would empower all Canadian women to fulfill their God-given duties as mothers, as homemakers, and, most importantly, as nation builders. The chorus of sustained and sometimes virulent opposition that plagued the scheme even after its reformation as the Victorian Order of Nurses was an unexpected obstacle that eventually silenced the NCWC's discourse of patriotic

motherhood and forced its leaders to reconsider the extent of the NCWC's authority to act on behalf of women in the public sphere.

Council leaders envisaged their efforts to help pioneer women as part of the NCWC's self-appointed mandate to protect the Canadian home, to extend the influence of female domestic and religious values, and, most importantly, to redefine motherhood as a peculiarly female form of nation building. As their deliberations in 1896 had made plain, members of the NCWC identified strongly with the new generation of largely Anglo-Saxon women who were building farms and rural communities in the Canadian Northwest before 1900.[1] Like their own pioneer "foremothers" who had helped 'tame' the wilderness of central and eastern Canada in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Council women regarded prairie women as "civilizers" and as nation builders. Council leaders therefore believed that the pioneer women who would "mother" and mould the next generation of Canadian citizens, required all the advantages that they themselves associated with medicalized childbirth. This common bond of mothering that Council women projected upon prairie women anchored their understanding of nation building as "woman's work," and—in the estimation of Lady Aberdeen and the national executive committee that she dominated[2]—made the maternal welfare of

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[1]The majority of people living in British Columbia (59%) and Manitoba (64%) were of British ancestry as late as 1901, while in the North-West Territories British Canadians constituted almost half of the population (47%). *Census of Canada*, 1901, vol. 1, Tables I and XI.

[2]Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1976).

isolated homesteading women one of the most pressing national responsibilities of their new co-ordinate female "parliament."

Although the specific terms of the "Dominion scheme" outlined by Adelaide Hoodless at the NCWC's last annual meeting did not find expression in the Victorian Order of Home Helpers (VOHH), the sentiments that underlaid them did. The decision of the NCWC executive committee to call members of the new order "home helpers" rather than "nurses" valorized a domestic construction of "woman's work," and, initially at least, disregarded the professional aspirations of middle-class hospital trained nurses. Although women joining the VOHH would need to pass an examination in "simple nursing," they would have to be more both than and less than nurses. In order to give prairie women the kind of medicalized maternity care that Council women equated with safe childbirth, and provide them with the necessary domestic support during the extended post-partum lying-in period that elite urban women associated with childbirth, home helpers would also have to demonstrate proficiency in midwifery and housewifery—two skills that hospital trained nurses either did not have or did not want. Thus the link forged by Council leaders between nation building, mothering, and nursing did not necessarily entail the employment of hospital trained nurses. Instead, home helpers were envisaged simply as a means to a much greater end.

Why the NCWC executive committee initially decided to create an order of specially trained helpers rather than to align themselves with the growing numbers of trained middle-class nurses at work in Canada during the 1890s, and why some local councils and individual

executive members resisted this decision, is considered in the first section of this chapter. The second section examines the gendered institution building strategies used by Lady Aberdeen to promote the VOHH as Canada's national memorial to Queen Victoria. In particular, it considers her reasons for seeking the advice of male medical men in Montreal and for establishing a mixed-gender provisional committee and an all male board of trustees to oversee the Canadian Fund for the Commemoration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee which she opened in March of 1897. And finally, section three asks why the name of the new order was changed to the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada, and endeavours to trace the impact of this change on the scheme's purpose and personnel.

The Victorian Order of Home Helpers

In December of 1896, Edith Archibald of Halifax wrote to Lady Aberdeen urging the NCWC to inaugerate a "five and ten cent Memorial Fund" in order to endow "some special object connected with Canadian women as a whole."[3] The precedent for a national women's jubilee memorial, and its form as a national district nursing service, were established by the women of Great Britain in 1887. At the request of Queen Victoria, a portion of the £70,000 they collected to mark the fiftieth year of her reign was used to found the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses, a national corps of trained

[3]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. 1, Correspondence, Julia Drummond to Lady Aberdeen, 19 December 1896. Archibald's letter is quoted by Julia Drummond of Montreal, who first conveyed news of Archibald's plan to Lady Aberdeen. Reference to Archibald's letter, and to other letters making the same request, is made in NAC, MG 28, I25, NCWC Records, Vol. 3, file 1, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 15 January 1897.

district nurses. This kind of royal patronage—members of the Institute were known as the "Queen's Nurses"—did much to legitimate trained district nursing as a work for middle- and upper-middle-class women in Great Britain and, by imposing a uniform set of requirements for local affiliation, to standardize the educational and personal qualifications of its trained practitioners. Extending royal or even vice-regal patronage to the work of trained nurses in Canada was not the immediate object of the VOHH scheme, however.

As first conceived by Lady Aberdeen, the aim of the Victorian Order of Home Helpers was to extend the patronage of the NCWC to the mothers and homes of the Canadian Northwest. Lady Aberdeen was eager to use the jubilee celebrations to create a national women's scheme that would be of lasting benefit to the country. This could best be accomplished in her estimation by combining the NCWC's concern for the maternal health of prairie women with the Queen's stated preference that her reign should be commemorated in 1897 by projects "associated with ministries towards the sick and suffering." Lady Aberdeen argued that "a special order of Nurses, trained in a special and practical way so that they would be fitted to go into the settlers' homes in times of sickness" would meet both of these obligations. Ideally she thought that women already residing in the Canadian Northwest should be given a course of specialized training and then returned to their own homes and districts. In this way, candidates seeking admission to the order would be familiar with "the life and conditions of those they would assist." Although members of

this new "order" would not qualify as regularly trained nurses, they would nevertheless need to meet some standard of examination.[4]

Lady Aberdeen introduced her plan to the NCWC executive committee in January of 1897. Whether an order of this kind should employ specially trained "nurses" or women who had already completed a full course of hospital training was discussed by the NCWC's executive officers. Arguments favouring a shorter training were supported by the insistent claims of western council representatives that the need for such a scheme in their region was great. They once again reminded officers of the many "piteous stories of lives being lost and health permanently impaired by the want of medical or nursing assistance being within reach." Although some centres like Regina were building cottage hospitals this was represented as an inadequate response to the problem faced by prairie mothers. Without anyone to look after their children at home, women could not take advantage of hospitalized maternity care; and even if domestic help could be secured, the great distances to be travelled from home to hospital made the journey almost as perilous as childbirth itself.[5] A small subcommittee was appointed to consider these issues. Ostensibly charged with determining the best way to commemorate Queen Victoria's reign, and to draft the NCWC's jubilee

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[4]NAC, MG 28, I25, NCWC Records, Vol. 3, file 1, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 15 January 1897. See also NAC, MG 28, I 175, VON Records,Vol. 5, file 42, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, typescript, Memorandum Concerning Business Transacted at the Executive Meeting of the National Council Women of Canada Held at Government House, Ottawa, Friday, January 15th, 1897, for Use of Members of the Executive.

[5]NAC, MG 28, I 175, VON Records,Vol. 5, file 42, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, typescript, Memorandum Concerning Business Transacted at the Executive Meeting of the National Council Women of Canada Held at Government House, Ottawa, Friday, January 15th, 1897, for Use of Members of the Executive.

address to her, in practice its purpose was to weigh the merits of Lady Aberdeen's jubilee proposal and to determine whether it should be adopted as the NCWC's national memorial.

Five members of the executive were appointed to serve on the jubilee subcommittee. Inaugurating a pattern that would be repeated on subsequent Victorian Order committees appointed by Lady Aberdeen, a majority of its members were Presbyterians like herself.[6] These women were chosen for their organizational expertise, for their regional knowledge, and for their marital connections to Canada's financial and political elite. Julia Drummond of Montreal and Ella Bronson and Lady Grace Ritchie of Ottawa were all experienced institution builders. Drummond, for example, had recently overseen the interior appointment of the Home for Incurables in Montreal; Bronson helped to found the Ottawa Maternity Hospital in 1894 and continued to head its female board of governors; and Lady Ritchie was instrumental in founding both the Ottawa Humane Society and, later on, the Women's Canadian Historical Society of Ottawa.[7] Drummond, who was an extremely eloquent speaker and writer, was chosen to compose the NCWC's official address to the Queen. Although Bronson's interest in maternal welfare was likely a factor in her appointment, she was also recruited as the proxy representative of the

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[6]These were Julia Drummond of Montreal, Arma Sifton of Brandon (who resided in Ottawa), and Ella Bronson of Ottawa. Henriette Forget of Regina was a francophone Roman Catholic. The religious affiliation of Lady Grace Ritchie of Ottawa is unknown.

[7]"Hon. George Alexander Drummond," in Henry James Morgan, ed., *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), p. 286; "Hon. Erskine Bronson," in *ibid.*, p. 117; and "Lady Ritchie," in Henry James Morgan, ed., *Types of Canadian* Women (Toronto: William Briggs, 1903), p. 283.

Winnipeg local council. The remaining two members represented western councils. Henriette Forget of Regina was the vice-president for Assiniboia and the wife of the federal Indian Commissioner, while Arma Sifton was the serving treasurer of the Brandon local council and the wife of the federal Minister of the Interior, the government department that administered Canada's immigration policy.[8]

This subcommittee endorsed Lady Aberdeen's scheme to establish an order of helpers for service in the Northwest.[9] On the strength of this authorization, Lady Aberdeen proceeded to develop a provisional plan for the order and instructed the NCWC's corresponding secretary to solicit the support of the local councils. For her part, Lady Aberdeen directed her own energies toward securing the support of the male political elite, including the new Liberal prime minister Wilfrid Laurier and representatives of the parliamentary press gallery.[10] Like Adelaide Hoodless of Hamilton and Edith Archibald of Halifax, Lady Aberdeen regarded her new "order of pioneer helpers" as a national scheme. Much more secure of her influence, however—she was able to summon Laurier to an interview at Rideau Hall in late January, for example[11]—Lady Aberdeen hoped

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[8]"Amédée Emmanuel Forget," in Henry James Morgan, ed., *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), pp. 344-345; and David J. Hall, *Clifford Sifton*, vol. 1 (Toronto, 1981), p. 23.

[9]Lord and Lady Aberdeen, *"We Twa": Reminiscences of Lord and Lady Aberdeen*, vol. II (London: W. Collins Sons, 1925), p. 115.

[10]Ottawa *Citizen*, 2 February 1897. Other members of the executive likewise courted the editors of their local papers. See, for example, NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30 , Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, Julia Drummond to Lady Aberdeen, 1 February 1897; and *ibid.*, 2 February 1897.

[11]NAC, MG 26, G, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, Mfm Reel C-746, frame 11306-11314, Lady Aberdeen to Wilfrid Laurier, 22 January 1897.

that the federal government would adopt her scheme as Canada's national memorial to the Queen, or as she described it, as the "spontaneous gift of the country."[12] This, she believed, would entail winning the support of both sides of the House of Commons in order to obtain a parliamentary grant. The remainder of the endowment fund would be collected from wealthy citizens and from individual Canadians of moderate means.

Lady Aberdeen invited representatives of the national press corps to Rideau Hall on February 1st to hear her describe the NCWC's memorial project that was now known as the Victorian Order of Home Helpers. At this meeting Lady Aberdeen clearly identified the scheme as a suggestion made by herself to the NCWC. As the first definite public statement of the scheme's purpose and personnel, it is important, for it provides a reference point for all the changes that were subsequently precipitated by Council women themselves, by the male lay and medical advisors whom Lady Aberdeen recruited, and by organized medical men whose virulent opposition forced Lady Aberdeen in particular to reconsider the viability of her pioneer nursing scheme and, on a more profound level, the extent of her authority as an elite female "politician." Although the details of the scheme had yet to be worked out, the meeting highlighted the principal object of the scheme, indicated a tentative timetable for its implementation, and described its workers.

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[12]NAC, MG 28, I25, NCWC Records, Vol. 67, file 11, Lady Aberdeen to Emily Cummings, 10 March 1897.

Lady Aberdeen's description of the VOHH is a lesson in the gendered politics of female institution building. She began by linking the scheme to a number of prominent or universal female authorities, including her own name, the NCWC, the "women of Canada," and finally the Queen herself. She then indicated that the VOHH scheme had already commended itself to the press and the public, telling reporters that she had received "an immense number of letters" as well as "material support" for the order. Support for the order had likewise been manifested among those leading men best situated to evaluate its merit, including the medical profession—many of whom, she noted, had "volunteered" their advice and assistance—and the government of the day, whose leader had "heartily approved of the scheme."[13] Although the VOHH was "still largely in embryo," she nevertheless predicted that the order would very shortly take "practical shape" after a public fund was opened, and that its first helpers would be "started on their errands of mercy in a few months." It was not proposed to appoint its "nurses" to the cities, she said; instead the order would help subsidize their employment in "the sparsely settled districts" and in the Northwest. The only hint that home helpers would be maternity attendants was provided by her statement that they would be trained through the "hearty co-

[13]Lady Aberdeen had personally secured Laurier's support for the VOHH during a private interview at Rideau Hall on the previous day. See Aberdeen, "We Twa", vol. II, pp. 115-116. Laurier had first learned of the NCWC's plans through his wife, who, as an elected vice-president of the NCWC, was present at the January 15th meeting of the national executive committee. See NAC, MG 26, G, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, Mfm Reel C-746, frame 11306-11314, Lady Aberdeen to Wilfrid Laurier, 22 January 1897.

operation" of the Toronto and Montreal maternity hospitals, and other specialized institutions of this kind.[14]

A public meeting chaired by Lord Aberdeen and addressed by Lady Aberdeen, Wilfrid Laurier, Clifford Sifton, and other representatives of the Canadian Northwest was held a week later at the Ottawa Normal School. Although the audience was composed mostly of "ladies," a number of notable "gentlemen" representing the medical profession, the civil service, civic and national political life, and the churches were also present. Lady Aberdeen once again represented the scheme as the will of the women of Canada; Laurier testified that his "heart and soul was in the movement"; Sifton offered his hearty approval of the scheme and noted the great need for a work of its type, an assertion corroborated by other individuals like Mrs. (Dr.) O.C. Edwards of Ottawa and various clergymen who had resided in the Northwest.[15] The presence of Laurier and Sifton in particular underscored the nation building aspirations of the NCWC executive for whom the VOHH was principally regarded as a means of improving conditions of settlement for "desirable" female immigrants in the Northwest.[16] In turn, Laurier and Sifton apparently regarded the VOHH as a more ambitious version of the Women's Protective Immigration Society of Montreal. Having as yet no reason to suppose that securing a parliamentary grant for the scheme would be anything

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[14]Ottawa *Citizen*, 2 February 1897.

[15]Ottawa *Citizen*, 11 February 1897.

[16]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. 26, Scrapbook, newspaper clipping, St. John *Sun*, 16 October 1897.

but a formality, they presumed that the VOHH would likewise function as a state-santioned and partially state-funded female agent of male governmental policy. With an apparent unanimity of purpose and the promise of success, the meeting closed by passing a resolution, moved by Laurier and seconded by Sifton, that endorsed the terms of the VOHH scheme in principle, and recommended that it be adopted as Canada's national memorial of the Queen's diamond jubilee.

The specific terms of the scheme were made public within a week of this meeting.[17] The principal objective of the VOHH was to provide prairie mothers with a worker who would not only give them the kind of maternity care that Council women equated with safe childbirth, but also take charge of their homes and families during the lying-in period that followed. Lady Aberdeen believed that rural women in the Northwest and other pioneer districts needed a worker who could combine both the medical skill of midwifery and the domestic skills of nursing and housewifery. Women not only needed their lives protected, they also needed their homes made comfortable and clean, and the welfare of their families attended during their incapacitation. Lady Aberdeen was conscious that the home helpers she proposed to send to the Northwest would not be fully trained hospital nurses by North American standards, but believed that the urgency of the region's need for nursing aid justified the truncated training that these "nurses" were to undergo.

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[17]A typescript copy of the circular letter, dated 15 February 1897, outlining the terms of the scheme can be found in NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen.

The nursing scheme devised by Lady Aberdeen reflected the influence of professional district nursing standards in Britain. Despite the elaborate construction of its name, the training provisions of the Victorian Order of Home Helpers were a virtual replication of the training course required by the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses. Like the Queen's Nurses, home helpers would undertake a year-long hospital residency and an additional three month course in midwifery. Members of the "order" would also be required to serve for three years and, as a measure of their vocation or "mission," were to be at least "twenty-eight or thirty years of age" before applying to the Order. This provision echoed the belief of British nursing leaders that the trained district nurse must be an exceptional women, for she would be required to perform her duties without the resources hospital nurses took for granted and to work in conditions that were often hostile to good health. She would also need to exercise good judgement and tact in those circumstances when she was without recourse to medical advice. As a result, leading district nursing advocates in Great Britain like Florence Nightingale and Florence Lees, the author of the first British district nursing handbook, believed that, like themselves, district nurses should be drawn from the ranks of the best families and that they should be required to demonstrate their vocation to serve as "health missionaries" among the poor.[18]

Although Lady Aberdeen adopted the Jubilee Institute's training standards, in practice the Canadian home helper had more in common

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[18]Mrs. Dacre Craven (née Florence Lees), *A Guide to District Nurses* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1889). See also the 1891 address on "District Nursing," in Isabel Hampton Robb, *Educational Standards for Nurses with Other Addresses on Nursing Subjects* (Cleveland: E.C. Koeckert, 1907), pp. 43-54.

with the English "village nurse." A system of village or cottage nursing had been pioneered in rural England during the 1880s to provide isolated communities with "semi-skilled" or "less ambitious" nursing and maternity aid.[19] Village nurses in Britain and home helpers in Canada would not qualify as trained nurses by the standards established by professional nurses in their respective countries. Instead of the two- or three-year hospital apprenticeship required of graduate nurses in Canada, home helpers would train in hospital for only one year, during which time they would learn the basic skills needed to gain admission to the order, including the rudiments of first aid to the injured, simple nursing, and basic cookery. Their training in "midwifery" further distinguished home helpers from regularly trained nurses.[20] More than anything else, this preparation would preclude their designation as "nurses". In Canada, no system of midwifery training or licensure existed as it did in England, where many trained district nurses, including the first superintendent of the Jubilee Institute, were qualified both as nurses and as midwives. Training in obstetrical nursing taught pupil nurses how to assist a

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[19]For a contemporary description of a British cottage nursing scheme which bears a striking similarity to the VOHH, see the discussion of Miss Broadwood's Ockley system in The Hon. Mrs. Wortley, "On Nursing," in The Baroness Burdett-Coutts, ed., *Woman's Mission: A Series of Congress Papers on the Philanthropic Work of Women by Eminent Writers* (London: Sampson, Low, Marsten & Company, 1893), pp. 222-23.

[20]Lady Aberdeen was familiar with rural district nursing practices in Great Britain. In the early 1880s, shortly after her marriage, she engaged a district nurse and established a cottage hospital at Tarves for the 900 tenants of the Haddo House estate, the ancestral seat of the Aberdeens in Scotland. See Jessica Gerard, "Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy," *Victorian Studies* 30, no. 2 (Winter 1987); and Pamela Horn, "Wives and Daughters of the Country House" and " Professional Women: Teachers and Nurses," in *Victorian Countrywomen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 39-71, 192-222.

doctor; it did not prepare, or authorize, them to act as autonomous birthing attendants.[21]

But members of the Victorian Order of Home Helpers would no more be "midwives" than they would be "trained nurses". By the late nineteenth century, "midwifery", or "obstetrics" as it was increasingly known, had been appropriated as a branch of masculine medical science, and its traditional female practitioners largely discredited. As Mrs. O. E. Edwards of Montreal observed in 1900, "Midwifery as a profession for women is almost a thing of the past. Her work is now largely divided between the trained nurse and the doctor."[22] Although middle-class women like Mrs. Edwards and her colleagues in the NCWC had long ceased to employ midwives and, as a social class, welcomed the medicalization of childbirth,[23] the practice of female midwifery continued to flourish in many rural areas and in some urban working-class neighbourhoods of Canada at the end of the nineteenth century. But, largely as a result of the organized medical profession's persistent campaign against the unregulated competition of midwives, the traditional female midwife was now popularly associated with images of dirt, ignorance, and danger.[24] Like Sairey Gamp, the

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[21]Georgina Pope, "Obstetric Nursing," in Isabel Hamilton et al, *Nursing of the Sick, 1893* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949), pp. 164-171.

[22]Mrs. O.E. Edwards, comp., "Professions and Careers," in National Council of Women of Canada, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1900), p. 84.

[23]Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), chap. six; Pat Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1986), chaps. five and six; Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Child-Bearing in America, 1750-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 198-200.

[24]C. Lesley Biggs, "The Case of the Missing Midwives': A History of Midwifery in Ontario from 1795-1900," *Ontario History* 75, no. 1 (March 1983), 21-35. See also Jean

archetypal workhouse nurse, she too had become an "old-fashioned" foil for the cleanliness, training, and medical subordination of the "modern" nurse. Thus, just as an apparent lack of skill would deprive home helpers of the designation "trained nurse," their proposed training in a masculinized branch of knowledge known as midwifery would also set them apart from the degraded image of the midwife. Midwifery, then, was simply one skill that home helpers would need to supplement and even replace the work of doctors in remote pioneer districts; home helpers would not themselves be "midwives".

But, as their name implied, home helpers would be domestic workers. As such, they would be subject to the authority of elite laywomen, rather than part of a gendered medical hierarchy. The name chosen by the NCWC executive for these workers also implied a lack of social hierarchy. As James Hammerton has argued, in the rhetoric of late nineteenth-century social imperialism a home help was a domestic servant of equal social rank to the family in which she served. Use of the term therefore implied that neither party suffered a loss of caste in the exchange of labour.[25] By calling their workers "home helpers", National Council women hoped to neutralize any association of the order with urban poor relief. Moreover, in contrast to urban district nurses whose duties took them into several poor households in one day, like the trained private duty nurse employed in

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Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-professional Rivalries and Women's Rights* (London: Heinneman, 1977), pp. 100-105.

[25]James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, p. 155. The term was still in use in Canada and Great Britain as late as 1912; see Ella Sykes, *A Home Help in Canada* (London, 1912). For a discussion of the American usage of the term "home help", see Faye Duddin, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1983), pp. 4-6.

the well-to-do urban household, the home helper at work on the Canadian prairie would necessarily reside for an extended period of time in the household of the woman she was assisting. The NCWC executive's adoption of this well-known phrase of female emigration suggests that it was meant to reassure pioneer home makers that the woman entering her household would endeavour to lighten her burdens, not add to them.[26]

In contrast to private duty nurses who endeavoured to use their social status and training to distinguish themselves from a household's domestic staff—and to demand service—the home helper would not only be willing but specially trained to undertake domestic labour.[27] Local women, rather than trained nurses, would therefore make the best Home Helpers, Lady Aberdeen argued. Women "who have already lived in these country districts, and who are respected, and have the confidence of their neighbours, would be preferable to all others." As a domestic worker and as a "neighbour," the home helper would integrate herself into the fabric of family life, performing the domestic chores of the household while superintending the post-partum recovery of their patient. Lady Aberdeen conceded that hospital trained nurses who could pass the prescribed examinations and meet the other admission criteria would be welcome in the order, but

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[26]The Hon. Mrs. Stuart Wortley argued that, in England, "less ambitious" nurses were needed in rural areas because rural home-makers expected nurses to care for the domestic needs of the family as well as the medical needs of their patient; see "On Nursing," in Burdett-Coutts, ed., *Woman's Mission*, p. 221.

[27]Susan Reverby, "'Neither for the Drawing Room nor for the Kitchen': Private Duty Nursing in Boston, 1873-1920," in Judith Walzer Leavitt, ed., *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 454-466.

implied that neither home helpers nor trained nurses were the real heroines of this great North-West work. That status was reserved for the nation building prairie mothers whose lives they would safeguard. Like evangelical missionary nurses, home helpers' special combination of practical skills would be the means by which organized benevolent women would achieve their desired end: to empower their "less favored sisters"—as well as themselves—as the maternal builders of the Kingdom of Canada. Ultimately, then, the VOHH would be "a Victorian Order of public servants whose patriotic mission" it would be to meet the want of the pioneer districts for "trained practical women as district nurses."[28]

By late March, all of the NCWC's local councils and nationally affiliated societies had responded to the inquiry sent out by Emily Cummings, the NCWC's corresponding secretary. Although they exhibited varying degrees of enthusiasm for the idea of sponsoring a national women's jubilee memorial, only the Toronto local council entirely rejected the scheme. A local council's endorsement of the scheme did not necessarily entail a commitment to help implement it at the local level, however. The local council of women in Vernon, British Columbia, for example, was one of the first councils to approve the scheme.[29] But, in the winter and spring of 1897, its members were too preoccupied with their own local institution building scheme to take an active interest in the VOHH or the VON. Only in June,

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[28]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, Circular Letter, 15 February 1897.

[29]NAC, MG 28, I25, NCWC Records, Vol. 67, file 11, Correspondence, Corresponding Secretary of the Vernon Local Council of Women, to Emily Cummings, 22 February 1897.

when they prevented the Vancouver local council from raising funds for the VON in Vernon, was the scheme even discussed. They eventually called a town meeting to establish a branch of the Order in July of 1898, when Lady Aberdeen and the first superintendent of the now established Order visited the town.[30]

The support of some Council women was qualified by concern about the order's employment of specially trained workers. The Winnipeg local council, for example, expressed dissatisfaction with the training standards to be demanded of home helpers, resolving that applicants to the order should "possess full qualifications as nurses." Its members also wanted home helpers to receive an adequate living wage and hoped that any scheme devised would include the establishment of cottage hospitals in the region.[31] The most significant criticism of the VOHH scheme from within the NCWC was made by Julia Drummond, a member of the executive subcommittee that had been charged with evaluating its merit in January. In common with many other Council women, Lady Aberdeen regarded Drummond as the next president of the NCWC. Her views therefore carried much weight within the NCWC at the national level. Drummond did not question the principle of creating a national nursing service; her criticisms were directed specifically toward the

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[30]Greater Vernon Museum and Archives, Vernon Local Council of Women Records, Minute Book of the Executive Committee, 4 December 1896, 6 June 1897, 30 July 1898.

[31]NAC, MG 28, I25, NCWC Records, Vol. 67, file 11, Correspondence, Agnes B. Culver (Winnipeg Local Council of Women), to Emily Cummings, 15 March 1897.

name given to its members and their "standing" within the professional nursing community in Canada.[32]

Drummond's view of nursing was shaped by Dr. Robert Craik, an obstetrical specialist at the Montreal General Hospital and a professor of medicine at McGill University, and by Annie Murray, the new lady superintendent of nurses at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. Although the name chosen for the new order was "beautiful," Drummond argued that it did not adequately define the function of its workers, which was to nurse. One could be a nurse and still perform domestic labour, Drummond stated, arguing that, like the true woman, "the true nurse" would "always be ready and willing for Home service of any kind, and the candidate for this Order would know that she must often have to combine nursing and domestic duties." Not all patients would require or want domestic help, and their needs would be more fully served by a worker with the designation nurse. But it was not possible to call members of the order nurses without first raising the standard of training required of them: "if this new Order, though recruited from the highest Order of women, is to be a lower Order of Nurses, must we not guard the interests of the highly qualified Hospital Nurse," she asked.

Drummond advised Lady Aberdeen of the concerns of nursing professionals who feared that an order of home helpers would lower the standard of nursing generally. Being less well-trained and less expensive, home helpers would eventually deflate the wages of all

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[32]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, Julia Drummond to Lady Aberdeen, 8 February 1897.

nurses, thus preventing the properly trained nurse from being adequately recompensed for the "arduous years of her training, the exhausting nature of her toil, and the expense of living." To overcome these difficulties, Drummond urged Lady Aberdeen to adopt a new set of training standards worked out by herself in tandem with Craik and Murray. The NCWC should aspire, she said, to create a nursing order founded on the ethic of disinterested service to others and to the Queen. This would give its members a high standing among trained nurses themselves and make membership in the order "the highest rank obtainable by the nursing-profession." Once a member of the order, a nurse would bear the title "Queen's Nurse" throughout her professional life as a measure of her superior dedication, experience, and responsibility. To qualify as a Queen's Nurse, candidates would complete a year-long hospital residency and a six-month course of training in district work among the urban poor as an "assistant nurse."[33] At the end of this period, the nurse would pledge herself for a three-year term of service in the frontier regions of the country. After meeting this obligation and returning to the cities, she would then complete a further six-month hospital training to qualify fully as a trained nurse.

This training course would ensure that the proposed order became a corps of "Lady-Nurses" whose social and moral credentials would be as highly elevated as their professional standing. Drummond doubted whether women of the servant class—women who might

[33]Drummond based her plan for "assistant nurses" on an organization at work in Brooklyn, New York since 1890, whose members offered the poor a service "between home and hospital." NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, Julia Drummond to Lady Aberdeen, 1 February 1897.

legitimately be called "home helpers"—could fully meet the ideal of disinterested "service" required of nurses. It was proverbial, she argued, "that powers of endurance and self-control are to be found united with a higher, rather than a lower measure of attainment in refinement and education." But, perhaps more importantly for an advocate of organized charity like Drummond,[34] her formulation of the scheme would enable the NCWC to satisfy the health care needs of Canada's "city districts" as well as those of its "country districts." "Can we not inaugurate an Order which will in time cover all ground," she asked Lady Aberdeen, "meeting the requirements of those in the scattered settlements of our wide Territories, or partially populated Provinces, of the less well-to-do, and of the actually 'poor' in our cities?"

Julia Drummond's views were very shortly corroborated by the polite but pointed criticisms of Nora G.E. Livingston, the lady superintendent of nurses at the Montreal General Hospital. Like Drummond, Livingston questioned the proposed training provisions of the order, and asked Lady Aberdeen to recruit only hospital trained nurses for her new philanthropic initiative. The term "trained" still had many different meanings when applied to the word nurse, she said, but only those women who had completed a prescribed course of instruction in a recognized hospital school could legitimately lay claim to the designation trained nurse. Echoing the views of British district nursing reformers, Livingston further argued that even greater

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[34]Julia Drummond outlined her ideas about organized or "associated" charity to the NCWC in, "Co-operation as Shown in Associated Charities," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 55-60.

qualifications should be required of trained district nurses like those employed by the Jubilee Institute in Great Britain. "It should not only be the *trained* applicant but the exceptional woman who should be chosen to serve in the highest of all service, that of God's poor. She must have breeding, tact, courage, self-control."[35] A hybrid worker like the home helper—who was neither a domestic nor a nurse—would be of little influence, she concluded, and certainly not suited to the kind of arduous, disinterested service that she associated with the work of district nurses.

Strategies

Until mid-March, the administration of the VOHH scheme was largely confined to a small group within the national executive of the NCWC, principally Lady Aberdeen, Emily Cummings of Toronto, and Julia Drummond of Montreal. In addition, Mrs. Edward Griffin of the Ottawa local council had served as the order's secretary-treasurer since mid-February.[36] A variety of individuals outside the NCWC had nevertheless been consulted. In early February, Lady Aberdeen sought the advice of a select group of Montreal medical men about training provisions for the proposed order. All four of these men—James Cameron, Robert Craik, James Stewart, and John Webster—were chosen for their social and medical prominence as specialist practitioners and educators, with Cameron and Craik being

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[35]NAC, Aberdeen Papers, MG 27, I B5, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, Nora G.E. Livingston to Lady Aberdeen, 20 February 1897.

[36]Ottawa *Citizen*, 11 February 1897.

obstetricians, Stewart a nerve specialist, and Webster a gynaecologist.[37] Their support was necessary for several reasons. As a scheme purporting to fill a medical need among pioneer settlers, doctors alone had the professional and institutional authority to evaluate and legitimate the training and, therefore, the "knowledge" or skill of VOHH candidates. This was a role that the medical profession already played in hospital nursing schools in Canada, the United States, and Great Britain. Moreover, as nursing leaders like Isabel Hampton recognized, much of the authority and professional prestige of trained nurses derived from their close association with the "science" of medicine and from their image as "the physician's lieutenant."[38] Lady Aberdeen also needed the co-operation of hospitals in order to train home helpers. Access to these institutions could only be secured through the support of those elite doctors whose growing professional prestige was transforming the late Victorian urban hospital from a degraded charitable institution into a scientific medical facility.[39]

In the earliest VOHH circulars, Lady Aberdeen used the support of this small group of elite practitioners to assert that the medical

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[37]Henry J. Morgan, ed. *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), pp. 143-144, 219-221, 970, 1066-1067. Craik, Stewart, and Cameron were Presbyterians. Given that Julia Drummond served as Lady Aberdeen's proxy in Montreal, this religious connection between all five individuals may have played some role in the choice of these still unofficial medical advisors.

[38]Isabel Hampton, "Educational Standards for Nurses," in John S. Billins and henry M. Hurd, eds., *Hospitals, Dispensaries, and Nursing* (Chicago, 1893), p. 33.

[39]David Gagan, "For 'Patients of Moderate Means': The Transformation of Ontario's Public General Hospitals, 1880-1950," *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 2 (1989), 151-79

men of Canada were well-disposed toward her scheme.[40] Their influence on her representation of the order's relationship to medical practitioners is evident in these early documents. Following the advice of Dr. Cameron, who urged her to help local medical men "identify themselves with the movement," Lady Aberdeen publicly solicited the co-operation of the nation's medical men as examiners of VOHH candidates. Furthermore, as Cameron also suggested, she assured the public that home helpers would not compete with the medical men already at work in the outlying districts.[41] "It will probably be desirable," the first VOHH statement said, "that HELPERS should not undertake midwifery cases in towns or villages where there are regular medical men except at their request, as every pains should be taken not to interfere with the legitimate work of the medical men of the neighbourhood."[42] Although an apparent concession to the feelings of local medical men, this comment underscores the extent to which Lady Aberdeen and her medical allies in Montreal were working at cross purposes even at this early stage, for it did not entirely

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[40]She had also discussed the VOHH scheme with Sir James Grant of Ottawa, another Presbyterian doctor who was the Aberdeen's family physician. Grant demonstrated his support for the scheme by attending the inaugeral public meeting of the VOHH on February 10th. See Ottawa *Citizen*, 11 February 1897.

[41]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, J.C. Cameron to Lady Aberdeen, 3 February 1897.

[42]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, typescript, "Victorian Order of Nurses' Scheme for Commemoration of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee Recommended by the National Council of Women of Canaada," n.d. , p. 5. Despite reference to the VON in the title, the scheme is referred to at all times in this seven-page statement as the Victorian Order of Home Helpers. Internal evidence suggests that it was prepared sometime between the last week of January and the first week of February, and that the copy in the VON Records may be a later transcription.

comply with Cameron's suggestion that home helpers should be under medical control.

In contrast to Annie Murray of the Royal Victoria Hospital, Nora Livingston of the Montreal General Hospital, and their lay champion on the NCWC executive, Julia Drummond—whose construction of the "Queen's Nurses" as ladies, as public servants, and as the cream of the nursing world reflected the views of Murray rather than those of her medical informant, Robert Craik—Cameron initially expressed no qualms about the name of the order or the truncated training required of its members. His chief concern was the relationship of home helpers to the doctors already at work in the sparsely settled rural districts that the order proposed to serve. His object was to protect medical prerogative, or at least, in the case of the country physicians, the perception of it. After meeting with Stewart and Craik, Cameron told Lady Aberdeen in early February, "I think we all feel that the movement will be successful if the 'Helpers' can be employed through or directed by the resident physicians of the District. If the local profession once conceive the idea that they are being slighted, or that a quasi-competition is intended or may arise, we will probably be met with halfhearted support if not direct opposition."[43]

Lady Aberdeen's public qualification that home helpers would not take midwifery cases in towns where doctors already resided was an attempt to negotiate a compromise between her own vision of home helpers as skilled, autonomous birthing attendants and

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[43]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, J.C. Cameron to Lady Aberdeen, 3 February 1897.

Cameron's representation of the home helper as the physician's adjunct. Cameron's attitude reflected the medical profession's view of trained nurses as the "helpers" of doctors. In 1896, for example, Robert Craik characterized the first class of graduate nurses of the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal as "loyal and true helpers to the physician and surgeons, of whose skill and responsibilities they are to be willing and efficient instruments." This representation of the trained nurse emphasized her ancilliary status and inferred that nurses themselves were not skilled workers. Instead, their chief virtue was their ability to follow instructions. Hence he commended the "cultivated minds and refined tastes" of the new generation of nurses, without whose "ready and willing obedience to those in authority," doctors would not have been able to transform the practice of medicine or the function of the hospital. These "gentlewomen" would therefore be "aided always by the advice of their allies and protectors, the doctors." Any temptation to assert their autonomy, he counseled graduate nurses, should be resisted, for they would "win easily by kindness and forbearance that which would be strenuously resisted if demanded as a right."[44]

Much to the surprise of Lady Aberdeen, by mid-March she found that the adoption of a similar attitude of patient forebearance would be required of *her* if the Victorian Order scheme was to be successfully launched. Along with her allies on the NCWC executive committee,

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[44]Dr. Robert Craik, "Address at First Graduation of Nurses, Royal Victoria Hospital, April 28th, 1896," in Robert Craik, *Papers and Addresses* (Montreal: The Gazette Printing Company, 1907), pp. 183-184; and "Address at Formal Inauguration of General Hospital Training School for Nurses [MGH], December 11th, 1890," in *ibid.*, p. 180. For Stewart's views on nursing, see "The Canadian Nurses' Association," *Montreal Medical Journal* 23, no. 10 (April 1895), 793-795.

she was perplexed and increasingly disconcerted by the apparent indifference of the Canadian populace to the VOHH. In some quarters—notably in Toronto—outright opposition to the scheme had been expressed. In early March, Emily Cummings of Toronto sent Lady Aberdeen news of the mounting opposition to the VOHH in that city. Clearly, for Lady Aberdeen, this was a case of the best laid plans going awry. "I am sorry," she said,

> that the Toronto people do not think that the authority of the Governor General, supported by that of the Premier of the Dominion, sufficient to endorse the scheme and make it national. Certainly it will be strange if a letter from the Queen's representative and his wife...is not considered by these gentlemen sufficient to go upon without receiving an appeal from Parliament.[45]

In large measure, as Lady Aberdeen and other Victorian Order supporters later speculated,[46] the querulous attitude of both the Toronto local council and the city's "gentlemen" toward the VOHH was not so much directed at the scheme itself as its vice-regal sponsors. Both the accession crisis of 1896 and the silent prayer debate of 1895, which had alienated a large proportion of Toronto's most elite and powerful women from the NCWC, had exacerbated Conservative Toronto's already hostile attitude toward the Aberdeens. This simmering Tory disaffection about Lord and Lady Aberdeen's apparent role in the downfall of the Conservative regime in 1896 accounts for much of the opposition that the Victorian Order encountered in

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[45]NAC, MG 28, I 25, NCWC Records, Vol. 67, file 11, Correspondence, Lady Aberdeen to Emily Cummings, 10 March 1897.

[46]NAC, MG 26, G, Laurier Papers, Mfm Reel C-760, frames 27,875-27,877, Senator George Cox to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, 8 November1898; and NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journals of Lady Aberdeen, 28 February 1898.

Toronto. Most of this animosity was directed toward Lady Aberdeen herself, with whom the scheme was personally identified across the country.[47] Her influence over Lord Aberdeen, and her ill-concealed regard for the new Liberal prime minister, was regarded, in Tory political circles at least, with distaste. This evidence of partisanship undermined her apolitical status as both a vice-regal chatelaine and as a woman.

Among Tory partisans in Orange Toronto the political neutrality of the Aberdeens had been viewed with scepticism since the beginning of their Canadian tour of duty in the autumn of 1893. Their fears were not without foundation. Shortly after his marriage to Ishbel Majoribanks, Lord Aberdeen crossed the floor of the House of Lords to sit as a Gladstonian Liberal. Lady Aberdeen, whose own family was Liberal, was widely regarded as the instigator of this defection. Moreover, she, too, was well-known as a Liberal partisan and hostess because of her involvement with the Women's Liberal Federations of England and Scotland. As a self-described "politician" her credentials as an apolitical vice-regal consort in Conservative Ottawa were perhaps not all that they could have been. Still worse, during their first vice-regal administration in Ireland, which had ended only a few years before their appointment to Canada, both of the Aberdeens had been vociferous and determined supporters of Gladstone's controversial Home Rule policy for Ireland. Lady Aberdeen in particular had identified herself with the cause of Irish nationalism, helping to found

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[47]See, for example, NAC, MG 27, I B5,, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. 26, Scrapbooks, newspaper clipping, editorial, St. John *Sun*, 16 October 1897.

an association to promote the products of Irish cottage industries abroad. The issue of Home Rule, which eventually cost Gladstone his government, followed the Aberdeens to Canada where anti-Catholicism was as an integral part of the Anglo-Protestant political landscape.

As the president of a council of women whose entire claim to power was based on religious pluralism and disavowal of a "political" purpose, Lady Aberdeen had successfully drawn together the wives and daughters of both Liberal and Conservative men. But significantly, after mid-March, her advocacy of the Victorian Order was largely divorced from this apolitical institutional power base. Although she had intended to wait until the fourth annual meeting of the NCWC before undertaking any definite organizational work on behalf of the order, the lethargic response of the Canadian public to the scheme, as well as the opposition of Tory partisans, convinced her that a more efficient fundraising mechanism should be organized immediately. Ironically, her decision to proceed without first securing the official sanction of the NCWC as a whole may have undermined its success in the long run. Relying now on her more limited personal authority as the vice-regal chatelaine, she lost many of the benefits that a closer association of the scheme with the NCWC might have given her. In particular, as the case of the Vernon local council demonstrates, she was unable to mobilize her own female network of support as effectively as she might otherwise have done. Instead, equating authority with position, with national or regional prominence, and most especially with access to male political networks, she proceeded to recruit an elite mixed-gender provisional committee to administer the collection of The Canadian Fund for the Commemoration of the Queen's Diamond

Jubilee. The composition of this committee warrants closer scrutiny, for of its twenty members fully thirteen were men.[48]

After first appointing herself president of the Fund, and Lord Aberdeen its patron, Lady Aberdeen recruited Professor James Robertson, the Dominion Agricultural Commissioner, to help her organize a provisional committee whose responsibility it would be to collect the Fund. Robertson was Scottish and an evangelical Presbyterian,[49] two qualities that facilitated his admittance and that of his wife Jennie—who was herself a member of the Ottawa local council[50]—into the Aberdeen's small circle of close friends and advisors in Canada. Robertson was an enthusiastic supporter of the VOHH and, like Lady Aberdeen, believed that the urgent need in the region for skilled nursing care far outweighed the professional prerogatives of either medical men or trained nurses.[51] Similarly, although pressure from within and without the NCWC had now

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[48]The membership of the provisional committee fluctuated. This analysis is based on the list provided by Lady Aberdeen in her brief history of the VON. See Lady Aberdeen, *What is the Use of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada* (Ottawa: Mortimer, 1900). The list is also reprinted in John Murray Gibbon, *The Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada: 50th Anniversary 1897-1947* (Montreal: Southam Press, 1947), p. 9. Including Lord and Lady Aberdeen there were 22 members on the Provisional Committee.

[49]NAC, MG 31, D11, Isbel Robertson Currier Papers, manuscript, "James Wilson Robertson," by Ishbel Currier, n.d. See also Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time*, 1898.

[50]Jennie Robertson was present at the January 15th meeting of the NCWC executive committee at which Lady Aberdeen introduced her jubilee plan. On that occasion, she served as the proxy representative of the West Algoma local council. Since she did not hold any position on the Ottawa local council executive, her presence at this meeting was likely due to her social rather than her institutional connection to Lady Aberdeen. See NAC, MG 28, I25, NCWC Records, Vol. 3, file 1, Minutes of the Executive Committee, 15 January 1897.

[51]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, "Report of an Address by Professor Robertson at the Annual Meeting of the Local Council of Women of Ottawa," 10 March 1897.

convinced Lady Aberdeen that the name of the Victorian Order would have to be changed to the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON), she continued to hold that what was needed in the outlying districts of Canada was a corps of practical women workers who could nurse and keep house. Robertson, with his expert knowledge of the district and the needs of its farming "class," was therefore an invaluable ally. To secure his status and power on the provisional committee—and thereby strengthen her own—Lady Aberdeen named him as the honourary secretary of the Fund.[52]

The remaining twelve male members of the provisional committee were selected with the same attention to regional, religious, and linguistic balance as a federal cabinet. With the notable exception of the Maritimes, all the regions of Canada were represented by these men. So, too, were each of the major Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church. Two of the thirteen men on the committee were francophones. Several of these men, including Robertson, were the spouses of Council women. In general, they were also active in a variety of charitable, evangelical, and civic endeavours. Occupationally, they divided into three main groups: clergymen, civil servants, and politicians, many of whom were also prominent in business and financial circles as well.[53] A provisional finance committee was also created in May. Its four members were all

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[52]Ottawa *Citizen*, 19 March 1897.

[53]See the entries for James Roberston; Rev. W.T. Herridge; Rev. Dr. Saunders; Rev. W. MacKintosh; Mr. Justice Burbidge; Sir John Bourinot; Sir Sanford Fleming; Dr. McCabe; Mr. A.E. Forget; Senator George Cox; Mr. Hewitt Bostock, M.P.; Hon. Sir Henri Lotbinière, M.P., Mr. McNeill, M.P., in Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time*, 1898. The thirteenth male member was the Anglican Bishop of Ottawa.

male, each of whom was prominent nationally. Sir Sanford Fleming of Ottawa, for example, was the well-known engineer of the Canadian Pacific Railroad; George Cox of Toronto was a banker and Liberal senator; George Drummond of Montreal was a prominent industrialist and a Conservative senator who was widely perceived as the financier of the Tory party; and finally, A.E. Forget was the federal Indian Commissioner.[54] The wives of both Drummond and Forget were prominent members of the Montreal and Regina local councils respectively and each had served on the NCWC executive's jubilee subcommittee in January.

Lady Aberdeen's decision to recruit a mixed-gender provisional committee and an all-male financial committtee reflected the NCWC's complementary construction of gender relations.[55] Like nation building, female institution building was a gendered enterprise. Even the NCWC, whose affairs were administered by a clique of female executive officers, had solicited the advice and assistance of male supporters. Lord Aberdeen, for example, had been a patron of the NCWC since its inception and, in its earliest days, Lady Aberdeen had relied heavily on the legal and constitutional guidance of Sir John Bourinot, the clerk of the House of Commons and Canada's foremost

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[54]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Meetings, Minutes, 14 May 1897, 28 May 1897.

[55]Veronica Strong-Boag has noted that "Female activists joined men in campaigns for technical education, clean government, sewage plants, patriotic funds, temperance, moral purity and school medical inspection." Sometimes the initiative was taken by women, as in the case of the playground movement, while at other times men took the lead. Moreover, she notes that many Council women were "the wives, mothers, daughters or sisters of progressively minded men...Family ties made it especially difficult for middle-class women to ignore the male organizational response to community problems." See Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women*, pp. 38, 5-6.

constitutional authority. Moreover, as we have seen, the NCWC's separatism did not preclude the participation of prominent male politicians and clergymen at its annual conventions. In contrast to the NCWC, however, which was never burdened by a large bank balance and did not incorporate until 1914, Lady Aberdeen indicated that an endowment fund of "at least one million dollars" would be needed to establish the work of the order on a lasting basis. She presumed, given the early and very public support of Laurier, that part of this sum would be secured through a parliamentary grant. The remainder would be collected through sizeable donations from the wealthy stratum of Canadian society, through post office subscription lists, and lastly, through door-to-door canvassing. The bulk of the Fund was therefore beyond the reach of traditional female fundraising tactics, which were generally small-scale and local in orientation.[56]

Lady Aberdeen believed that the Victorian Order could not be secured through the kind of five and ten cent women's fund originally suggested by Edith Archibald of Halifax. Although Lady Aberdeen confidently declared that every Canadian need only contribute one dollar to secure the million dollar Fund, in practice the provisional committee was carefully constituted to give her direct access to the male political and financial networks from whence she hoped most of the money would be obtained. In response to Canadian indifference and opposition, by mid-March Lady Aberdeen had already revised downward her public estimate of the sum needed to endow the order.

[56]See, for example, Lady Tilley's account of raising money through church bazaars and appeals to local businessmen for a golden jubilee hospital in Fredericton: Lady Tilley, *Victoria Cottage Hospital: A Short Account of a Little Work of Faith* (Saint John: J. & A. McMillan, 1888).

Nevertheless a sizeable sum was still needed. Lady Aberdeen courted the support of federal parliamentarians and provincial legislators through the elected politicians who served on the provisional committee. Their support and prior organizational work among their colleagues, for example, ensured the success of Lady Aberdeen's mid-May address to members and senators on Parliament Hill on behalf of the Victorian Order.[57] Similarly, the clergymen on the provisional committee, each of whom enjoyed some prominence within their respective denominations, gave Lady Aberdeen direct access to the national leadership of the major Protestant churches. This was another important male-dominated financial network. The provisional committee, through its clerical representatives, therefore prevailed upon church leaders to direct clergymen nationwide to preach a sermon for the Victorian Order fund on the 23rd day of May.[58]

The seven female members of the provisional committee were all drawn from the ranks of local council activists in Ottawa.[59] Their familial ties to members of Parliament and to other prominent male citizens helped to solidify the order's access to male networks. They also insured that the order would continue to be identified with the NCWC and, perhaps more importantly, that the NCWC would continue to identify with the Victorian Order. Despite the anticipated size of

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[57]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, April-May 1897; and Ottawa *Citizen*, 20 May 1897.

[58]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, May 1897.

[59]The female members of the provisional committee were Lady Grace Ritchie; Mrs. William McDougall, Mrs. R.R. Dobell, Mrs. Frank McDougall, and Mrs. Kirchhoffer of Ottawa; and Mrs. Rayter Reed of Montreal. Including Lady Aberdeen, there were eight women on the committee.

the Fund, female fundraising strategies and female fundraisers remained an integral part of the provisional committee's collection plans. At the first meeting of the NCWC national executive committee after the scheme was made public, James Robertson and A.E. Forget explained to Council leaders that local councils would be asked to mobilize on behalf of the order. They were urged to write personal letters to "people of importance" in their locality, inviting them to write letters to the press and to organize fundraising drives for the order. Robertson also indicated that collection books for door to door canvassing would also soon be distributed. Council women were not necessarily just the foot soldiers of the provisional committee, however. Lady Grace Ritchie of Ottawa, who served on the provisional committee, played an important role in gaining access to citizens of rank and substance in Ottawa. Her social authority as the widow of a former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada and her moral authority as the philanthropic doyen of Ottawa society made her an indispensible envoy for the Fund to the homes of the wealthy.[60]

The appointment of an all-male financial committee to manage the Fund itself reflected gendered assumptions about female fiscal and legal incompetence on the one hand and the convention of male trusteeship of female property and financial resources on the other. Although Mrs. Griffin retained her position as the honourary treasurer of the provisional committee, her duties were limited. Her appointment was nevertheless symbolic, for it underscored the

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[60]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, June 1897.

continued importance of Council women to the scheme and suggested the extent of their authority. But the administration of a one million dollar fund was outside the acknowledged boundaries of women's prescribed province of expertise and ability. As Lori Chambers has argued, women's financial incompetence was implied by the concept of trusteeship.[61] Although the reform of married women's property laws enabled late Victorian women to retain control of prenuptual property and to own real property after marriage, this was still a novelty. Even Lady Aberdeen, for all her wealth and social prestige, was not a property owner until she was forty-one years old, when Senator George Cox, one her most loyal VON supporters, purchased a house in her name to serve as the VON's first national headquarters in 1898.

The Victorian Order of Nurses

In early March, Lady Aberdeen formed another male committee, a more formal Medical Advisory Council composed of ten practitioners who were among the most socially prominent professional men of their time.[62] Equating prominence with professional influence, Lady

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[61]Lori Chambers, "'To Properly Protect her Property': Marriage Settlements in Upper Canada (paper presented to the Candian Historical Association, Carleton University, June 1993); Constance Backhouse, *Petticoats & Prejudice: Women and Law in Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1991); and Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women's Property Law in Nineteenth-Century England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

[62]Biographical information for each member of the Medical Advisory Committee, with the exception of Dr. Powell, was found in Henry J. Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898). The members of the committee were as follows: Henry Pulteney Wright, Sir James Alexander Grant, John Sweetland of Ottawa; James Thorburn of Toronto; Sir William Hales Hingston, Robert Craik, Emmanuel Persillier-Lachapelle, Thomas Roddick, James Stewart of Montreal.

Aberdeen expected that the endorsement of the "leading medical men" of the Dominion would assure the medical community's support of the Victorian Order. But in many respects, the medical men who aligned themselves with the Victorian Order had more in common with the group of well-to-do businessmen, politicians, and public servants of its administrative committees. They possessed position and wealth, and a number of them were also actively engaged in secondary political and financial careers. Like the order's provisional and financial committees, the medical advisory council was overwhelmingly Anglo-Protestant in character and dominated by residents of Montreal and Ottawa, most of whom, in common with their vice-regal patrons, were Presbyterians.[63] Members of the Victorian Order's medical committee, all of whom had received their initial medical degree from a Canadian university, including six from McGill alone, likewise occupied an elevated status within the medical community due to the scientific status which accrued from university affiliation and medical specialization. In addition to their private practices, six members of the committee had earned reputations as medical specialists, including two general surgeons, an ovariotomist, and a nerve specialist. Five were also affiliated with hospitals in a teaching or consulting capacity, and four held academic appointments

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[63]The only French Canadian committee member, Dr. Emmanuel Persillier-Lachapelle of Montreal, was president of the American Public Health Association in 1897. See Henry James Morgan, ed., *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898), pp. 548-49. See also Claudine Pierre-Deschênes, "Santé publique et organisation de la profession médicales au Québec, 1870-1918," *Revue d'histoire de l'amérique française* 35, no. 3 (décembre 1981), pp. 355-76.

at either McGill University or the University of Toronto.[64] Lady Aberdeen's repeated characterization of them as leaders in their profession was corroborated by at least one contemporary observer who described individual committee members variously as having "achieved marked success" or as the "doyens," "leaders," and "advanced members" of their profession. The prominence of six of its members within the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), including five past presidents, also distinguished them as a group.[65]

Thomas Roddick, the chair of the Medical Advisory Council, exhibited many of the personal and professional characteristics common to its members. A Presbyterian and a Montrealer, in 1897 he was in his mid-fifties and approaching the height of his professional career as a surgeon at the Montreal General and the Royal Victoria Hospitals and as a professor of surgery at McGill University. In 1896, he was one of the few Conservative candidates for Parliament spared in Laurier's sweep of Quebec. Promised a cabinet post, he went to Ottawa to lobby for the CMA's policy of Dominion registration of physicians, a stance which marked him as a foe of most provincially organised

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[64]Those affiliated with hospitals included Sir William Hingston (a clinical instructor at Hotel Dieu Hospital, Montreal), Emmanuel P. Lachapelle (superintendent and consulting physician at Notre Dame Hospital, Montreal), Henry P. Wright (a founder of St. Luke's Hospital, Ottawa), Thomas Roddick (consulting surgeon at Montreal General Hospital and the Victoria General Hospital), and James Stewart (physician at Royal Victoria Hospital, Montreal). Those with academic appointments were James Thorburn (chair of Pharmacology and Therapy at the University of Toronto), Robert Craik (Dean of Medicine at McGill), Roddick (professor of Surgery at McGill), and Stewart (chair of Medicine and Clinical Medicine at McGill). The specialists included Hingston (surgeon), Lachapelle (hygienist), Thorburn (pharmacologist), Craik (ovariotomist), Roddick (surgeon), Stewart (nervous diseases). See their respective entries in Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (1898), pp.

[65]*Ibid.* See also H.E. MacDermot, *History of the Canadian Medical Association, 1867 1921*, 2 vols. (Toronto, 1935-1958).

doctors.[66] Roddick had achieved some reknown in 1885 as the Deputy Surgeon General of the North-West Field Force and was widely regarded by contemporaries as one of the pioneers of aseptic surgical practices in Canada. His professional and public stature was further enhanced in 1897 when, as the first colonial president of the British Medical Association, he hosted that society's annual June meeting in Montreal.[67] In common with several of his colleagues on the Victorian Order's medical committee, his prominence also extended into the business world, where he held directorships of both the Montreal Gold and Silver Development Corporation and the Victoria Life Insurance Corporation.[68]

Although recruited initially to set the examination for home helpers, the influence of the medical advisory council, especially its Montreal members, extended well beyond this task. Neither they nor the laymen and Protestant ministers of the Victorian Order's provisional committee evinced the qualms about the charitable

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[66]Geoffrey Bilson, "Public Health and the Medical Profession in Nineteenth-Century Canada," in Roy MacLeod and Milton Lewis, eds., *Disease, Medicine, and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 156-75.

[67]Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (1898), pp. 875-76; H.E. MacDermot, *Sir Thomas Roddick: His Work in Medicine and Public Life* (Toronto, 1938). See also Charles G. Roland, "The Early Years of Antiseptic Surgery in Canada," in S.E.D. Shortt, ed., *Medicine in Canadian Society: Historical Perspectives* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1981), pp. 249-50.

[68]Other members of the committee were similarly well connected. James Grant of Ottawa, for example, in addition to his duties as personal physician to successive Governors General, was a former Conservative member of Parliament. Sir William Hingston of Montreal, a Conservative senator since 1896 and a former mayor of Montreal, was president of the City Passenger Railway Company. Similarly, Professor James Thorburn of Toronto was also medical director of the North American Life Insurance Company and president of the Imperial Loan and Investment Company of Canada. See their respective entries in Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* (1898).

connotations of district nursing that bothered the leaders of the NCWC. In this respect the professional concerns of doctors complimented the reform agendas of their elite lay counterparts who saw the creation of the Victorian Order as an urban public health measure that would augment the work of the voluntary hospitals that their medical colleagues staffed and that men like themselves administered.[69] As a preventive measure for checking the spread of the communicable diseases among the poor, it was hoped that a district nursing order would also help lessen the financial burden that periodic epidemics of contagious diseases represented for municipal governments.[70] While it would be unwise to over-estimate the power of the medical and administrative committees within the Victorian Order coalition, or conversely to under-estimate the influence that Lady Aberdeen and her allies continued to exert, these two groups were largely able to reshape the Victorian Order in their own images. Thus by the time the organization's first circular was published in late March of 1897, the "Victorian Order of Home Helpers" announced the previous month had become the "Victorian Order of Nurses" and its

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[69]Senators George Drummond of Montreal and William Sanford of Hamilton had each helped to endow hospitals, the Home for Incurables in Montreal in the case of Drummond and the Elsinore Convalescent Hospital in Hamilton in the case of Sanford. Senators Sanford and George Cox of Toronto were both active board members of the Dominion Sanitorium at Gravenshurst, as was Dr. John Sweetland of Ottawa. Three Montreal members of the Medical Advisory Council--Sir William Hingston, Emmanuelle Lachapelle, and Robert Craik--were also active members of either provincial or local boards of health. See their respective entries in Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Hand-book of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898).

[70]John C. Weaver argues that the civic activism of elite male urban 'reformers' was motivated by a desire to exert control over municipal politics, in "'Tomorrow's Metropolis' Revisited: A Critical Assessment of Urban Reform in Canada, 1890-1920," in Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.G. Artibise, eds., *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1984), pp. 456-76.

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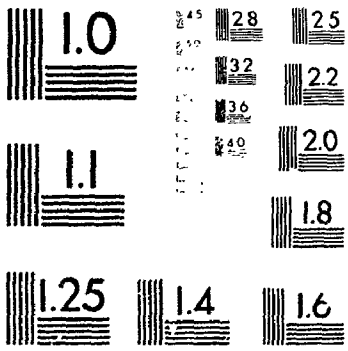

purpose changed from an expression of 'feminine' benevolence to one of 'masculine' social and medical control.

Lady Aberdeen's conception of the Victorian Order as response to a gendered medical problem was obscured under the collective stewardship of its male lay administrators and medical advisors. The principal object of the new Victorian Order of Nurses was to place "the aid of trained skilful nurses within the reaches of all classes of the population." Rather than a practical helper to pioneer women, the new Victorian Order nurse was to be an envoy of middle-class values among the urban poor, instructing them in the rules of "scientific cleanliness" needed to combat ill health in the home. Moreover, by demonstrating those quintessentially middle-class feminine qualities of gentleness, sympathy, and delicacy, the Victorian Order nurse would also "leave memories and aspirations in the minds of the women and girls whom they served, which would never be forgotten."[71] Thus just as the framers of the Home Helper scheme had hoped to provide prairie women with maternity care that approximated their own experience, the framers of the revised scheme hoped to offer the sick poor a rationalized version of the kind of nursing service normally available only to well-to-do urban patients like themselves. The intellectual thread uniting each scheme was the belief that only trained or educated health care workers, whether regular doctors or trained nurses, had sufficient 'expertise' to undertake the kind of physical

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[71]NAC, Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada Records, MG 28, I 171, vol. 1, file 2, "The Canadian Fund for the Commemoration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee," c. March 1897.

regeneration of the population that social and national stability clearly demanded.

The medical needs of the Canadian Northwest remained an integral component of the reformulated Victorian Order thanks in large measure to the alliance forged between Lady Aberdeen and Professor James Robertson, who during 1897 tirelessly promoted the deployment of nurses throughout the Northwest.[72] But, although the circular is littered with numerous references to skilled and thoroughly trained nurses, only one passage—itself a mere remnant of Lady Aberdeen's earlier plan—hints that Victorian Order nurses might be skilled in midwifery or function as birthing attendants.

> The ideals and spirit of the women in the homes of a new settlement in a new country affect the lives, the habits, the aspirations and the principles of the people there for several generations to follow. A despondent mother numbs the courage and energies of her boys and girls. The unspoken fear of approaching the gate that swings both ways—into new life or into death—without competent skilled help has clouded many a life and home. Nothing that can be done to lift that dull dread out of the lives of pioneers should be left undone when a National and Empire Jubilation is in prospect.[73]

As heirs to a century-long battle waged by regular physicians to redefine childbirth as a medical problem and midwifery as the medical science of obstetrics,[74] the specialists and academics of the medical

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[72]See NAC, Aberdeen Papers, MG 27, I B5, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, "Report of an Address by Professor Robertson at the Annual Meeting of the Local Council of Women of Ottawa," 10 March 1897.

[73]NAC, Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada Records, MG 28, I 171, vol. 1, file 2, "The Canadian Fund for the Commemoration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee," c. March 1897.

[74]Wendy Mitchinson, "Historical Attitudes toward Women and Childbirth," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 4, 2, pt. 2 (Spring 1979), 13-24. See also Leavitt, *Brought to Bed*, pp. 36-63.

advisory council were unlikely to sanction a scheme which implied that female nurses, or poorly trained 'home helpers', were adequate substitutes for male obstetrical expertise during childbirth. With childbirth now reconstructed as a condition needing the curative therapeutic knowledge of physicians, the practical caring skills of nurses were not just inadequate, but also inappropriate.[75]

Ideally, then, what was needed in the Northwest were physicians rather than nurses. But, because conventional wisdom dictated that young men, "ambitious to rise, anxious to be widely known, [and] desirous of becoming rich and influential" would seek their fortune in cities where they could most easily earn a living,[76] the outlying regions would have to rely on "skilled physicians who have forgotten the meaning of personal ease--Dr. Maclures in Canada--men who believe that the nobility of living is to help others, and not to roll up riches to be an embarrassment." Ironically, the implicit conclusion to be drawn from these statements was that only female nurses—for whom self-sacrifice rather than ambition was idealized as the key to personal fulfillment—were still urgently needed, although their role as birthing attendants would be circumscribed.

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[75]Jean Donnison provides a useful overview of the changing medical status of midwifery in England and France, see "Midwives Past and Present: Myth and Reality," in Teizo Ogawa, ed., *History of Obstetrics: Proceedings of the 7th International Symposium on the Comparative History of Medicine--East and West* (Osaka, 1983), pp. 75-118. See also Mitchinson, *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 4, 2, pt. 2 (Spring 1979).

[76]Margaret W. Andrews has suggested that doctors in turn of the century British Columbia tended to congregate in the cities, see "Medical Attendance in Vancouver, 1886-1920," *B.C. Studies* 40 (Winter 1978-79), 32-55.

It is not clear what hand members of the medical committee had in drafting these latter comments.[77] Their influence is more readily apparent in the pamphlet's assurance that Victorian Order nurses would not "in any sense or measure encroach upon, or interfere with, the professional work of physicians". This assertion reflected the medical profession's belief that trained nurses were the complements rather than the competitors of doctors. Historians of American nursing have recently argued that a gendered definition of cure and care underwrote the medical profession's attitude toward the development of professional nursing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nurses, as archetypal women, employed their feminine skills as care-givers, while doctors alone, as learned men, had the 'hard' knowledge and scientific expertise to cure or, as in the case of childbirth, to intervene in the mechanisms of the human body.[78]

Although medical practitioners exploited this gendered definition of skill and the ideology of separate spheres on which it was founded to effect the subordination of trained nursing to male medical authority, late nineteenth-century nursing reformers in England and North America embraced a rival construction of the nursing profession's relationship to doctors. While acknowledging the subordinate status of nurses, they nevertheless argued that the uniquely feminine caring skills of nurses gave them an equivalent,

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[77]Robertson was the principal author of the pamphlet.

[78]Reverby, *Ordered to Care*, pp. 1-10; Melosh, *"The Physician's Hand"*, chap. 1. See also Dianne Dodd and Deborah Gorham, eds., *Caring and Curing: Historical Perspectives on Women and Healing in Canada* (forthcoming, University of Ottawa Press).

albeit different, role to play in the amelioration of sickness and disease. Traces of this alternative construction of nursing are evident in the Victorian Order circular. The city, as well as the country, needed an order of trained district nurses, for it was "not enough that we have the services of physicians—even in Ottawa. In cases of serious illness their services must be supplemented and followed up by the ministrations of trained and skilful nurses. These give the natural forces of body and mind a fair chance to combat disease, and to bring about a state of good health. That chance is often the crucial one." As "co-labourers" in the fight against sickness and suffering, Victorian Order nurses would thus "furnish the means whereby the power of the physicians for doing good will be multiplied."

The potential value of Victorian Order nurses to doctors would be directly commensurate with their level of training, however. The Victorian Order's medical advisors, in concert with its male stewards, were anxious that only graduates of two- or three-year hospital nursing courses be considered for admission to the order. The initial proposition that the Victorian Order of Home Helpers would train its own members—and require only one year of preparation—was a source of some concern. The revised scheme allowed that the organization had a role to play in training more nurses, but only if it co-operated with existing training hospitals: "If means were provided for the training of more of these nurses, and the training course were kept quite as thorough and improved rather than weakened, we would have in Canada just so many more willing hands for ministration

to the sick."[79] The Victorian Order's contribution to training its members would thus be limited to affording hospitals the financial means to educate more nurses.

The specification that the Victorian Order was "not to supplant but to supplement" the work of existing health care institutions reflected the extent to which trained nursing underwrote the institutionalization of elite doctors' scientific aspirations within the hospital at the turn of the nineteenth century. By the late 1890s, a training programme for nurses was regarded as an essential component of a 'modern' hospital. The dramatic expansion after 1890 of the number of medically-superintended training programmes for nurses in Canada supplied the cheap pool of labour needed to transform the hospital from a charitable institution for the sick poor to one offering both acute health care for middle-class patients and scientific facilities for doctors.[80] By recasting the Victorian Order's training role and the professional training needed for admission, the medical committee insured that not only would the institution through which doctors asserted their authority over nurses remain intact, but the institution itself would be strengthened.

While the elite doctors of the medical advisory council clearly did not regard Victorian Order nurses as medical competitors, they were sensible of their impact on the graduates of hospital nursing

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[79]NAC, Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada Records, MG 28, I 171, vol. 1, file 2, "The Canadian Fund for the Commemoration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee," c. March 1897.

[80]See, for example, Colin D. Howell, *A Century of Care: A History of the Victoria General Hospital in Halifax 1887-1987* (Halifax, 1988), p. 42. See also Gagan, *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 2 (1989), 151-79; Charles E. Rosenberg, *The Care of Strangers: The Rise of America's Hospital System* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), chap. 9.

programmes. The framers of the new scheme hoped that their changes to the Victorian Order would make it an attractive alternative to private duty nursing for graduate nurses in the cities. The repeated references to the thorough training of Victorian Order nurses was an attempt to counteract the impression formed by the Home Helper scheme that Victorian Order nurses were to be rarefied upper housemaids.[81] The "modest, moderate salary" to be paid Victorian Order nurses, the authors of the pamphlet suggested, would "lift out of their lives the precarious element of 'waiting for a case' in one of the cities." The Victorian's Order's pledge to train more nurses for the Northwest and to redistribute graduate nurses to country districts would diminish the glut of private duty nurses in the cities. Thus, the Victorian Order would not only help those rural and urban Canadians who needed the assistance of "trained skilful nurses," but would also materially benefit hospital trained nurses themselves. But more importantly, in its revised form, the Victorian Order would not threaten the authority of male regular practitioners over trained nurses, the institutions that trained them, or the the delivery of health care in general and maternity cases in particular.

Despite the medical committee's evident ability to reshape the Victorian Order, James Robertson, the Victorian Order's honourary secretary and Lady Aberdeen's chief male ally, continued to question whether members of the order required more than one year of training. Addressing the Ottawa Local Council of Women in March, he

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[81]Lady Aberdeen noted that trained hospital nurses still regarded the Victorian Order with suspicion even after two years of work had demonstrated that it posed no threat to their livelihood or professional stature, see *What is the Use of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada?* (Ottawa: Mortimer, 1900), pp. 14-15.

argued that the urgent need for nurses in the Northwest outweighed the desirability of uniform training standards.

> An objection has been raised that it would be unfair and unfortunate to send out a nurse with only one year to compete with a trained nurse who had taken a course of three years, and perhaps to lower the grade of the profession. Doubtless those who have the management of the Order will see that the nurses are thoroughly trained, and have sufficient knowledge, practice and skill to fit them for their responsible work.[82]

Just as the qualifications of the teacher in a rural school could not be compared with those of the head master of an urban high school, the Victorian Order nurse, "although imperfectly equipped" was better than no nurse at all, Robertson asserted.[83] Members of the medical advisory council were discomforted by such views. In the *Montreal Medical Journal*, which was edited by two of its number, Thomas Roddick and James Stewart, they publicly censured the persistent claims of Lady Aberdeen and James Roberston that the urgent need in the Northwest for nursing care warranted a compromise of professional standards.

In April, this journal featured two editorials which concerned the Victorian Order. Without actually referring to the Victorian Order by name, the first editorial used it as foil for the ideal American model of 'visiting' nursing. While the editors applauded that "so much thought and energy should be expended to relieve the necessities of suffering humanity," they took issue with the training provisions of an unidentified scheme which, they argued, proposed to create two

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[82]NAC, Aberdeen Papers, MG 27, I B5, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, insert, "Victorian Order of Nurses. Report of the Address by Professor Robertson at the Annual Meeting of the Local Council of Women of Ottawa, on 10th March 1897" (Ottawa, 1897), p. 9.

[83]*Ibid.*, 837-38.

"classes" of nurses. One class of nurses, who had completed a three-year course of hospital training, would be for those well-to-do individuals who could afford to pay for such a "luxury"; the other class of nurses, whose course of training was significantly briefer and therefore less thorough, would serve the poor who could not afford the fees charged by the best trained nurses. Roddick and Stewart deemed this a "dangerous experiment."

> Much time and labour have been expended in bringing trained nursing to its present high state of efficiency and this proposed scheme seems like a retrograde step and we greatly fear will prove to be such. To a large portion of the laity a nurse is a nurse no matter how long or short a time she has spent acquiring her training, and the public mind would utterly fail in many instances to grasp the difference between the two classes of nurses.

Nurses with less than three years of training would not be sufficiently prepared to "enter upon private practice," they asserted; moreover, the acceptance of two classes of nurses would negate the efficiency of the best trained among them, for "if a nurse with one year's training is good enough to nurse some people she may be considered good enough for all people."[84] The professional competency of trained nurses, which derived from their extensive hospital apprenticeship under the supervision of doctors, would thereby be compromised. Despite their public reservations about this unnamed scheme, however, in the second editorial that followed, Roddick and Stewart enthused that the establishment of the Victorian Order of Nurses "cannot fail to afford gratification to Her Majesty."[85] That they could

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[84] *Ibid.*

[85] *Montreal Medical Journal* 25, no. 10 (April 1897), 836-38, 839.

still support the Victorian Order, and that their only quibble with its lay supporters was the duration of the training undertaken by Victorian Order nurses, points to the economic insularity of their position within the regular medical profession.

CHAPTER FIVE

"AN INTELLIGENT HANDMAID AND NOT AN INTERFERING INTERLOPER"

THE VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES FOR CANADA AND THE POLITICS OF INSTITUTION BUILDING

During the summer and autumn of 1897 the political skills of Lady Aberdeen were well tested. After her meeting with members and senators on Parliament Hill in mid-May, the prospect for a speedy endorsement of the Victorian Order of Nurses as Canada's national gift to the Queen seemed all but assured. Senior members from both sides of the House gathered to hear Lady Aberdeen describe the VON as a patriotic nation building scheme whose ultimate object was to secure for Canada "the most desirable class of people" from Great Britain by making conditions of settlement in the Northwest more amenable to women.[1] The meeting concluded by resolving itself into a bi-partisan committee to further the establishment of the VON. This meeting is important for several reasons. For Lady Aberdeen, it confirmed the effectiveness of her gendered institution-building strategy. Although as vice-regal chatelaine she could secure personal access to Laurier, she required the general support of parliamentarians to obtain a parliamentary grant for the order, and this could be achieved only through the intervention of male proxies drawn from among their

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[1]Ottawa *Citizen*, 20 May 1897.

ranks. The address delivered here by Lady Aberdeen also highlighted her equivocal attitude toward the changes institituted by the provisional committee at the request of local councils, the order's committee of medical advisors, and some of its lay and clerical members. In her mind, the scheme remained one specifically formulated to meet a need in the rural pioneer districts of the country for skilled maternity aid. And lastly, the meeting was the closest Lady Aberdeen ever came in 1897 to securing parliamentary sanction for the VON as Canada's national jubilee memorial.

The greatest and, from Lady Aberdeen's perspective at least, the most unexpected obstacle to obstruct the successful prosecution of the Victorian Order in the spring and summer of 1897 was not latent Tory disaffection. It was the pointed and often hostile attitude assumed by medical editorialists and locally organized medical men toward the scheme. In contrast to the *Montreal Medical Journal*'s polite censure of the VON's training provisions in April, the editors of Canada's other leading medical journals condemned the scheme, arguing that it was unnecessary, unsound, and unwelcome. The most damning public condemnation of the Victorian Order was delivered by the annual meeting of the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) in early June which resolved that the Victorian Order represented a positive danger to the well-being of the populace. The response of Victorian Order supporters to this new and unexpected source of opposition was mixed. The men of the provisional committee, aided by the advice of the order's medical supporters, directly confronted the OMA, issuing a public response to its accusations. These same men were equally anxious to establish the legal identity of the VON by framing a

provisional constitution that would definitively outline its terms of reference. From the point of view of its medical advisors, this was the best way to dissipate the cloud of medical opposition overhanging the scheme, for they were confident that control of the order, both at the national and the local levels, would be placed firmly in the hands of the medical profession.

The response of Lady Aberdeen to the repeated frustration of her attempts to embue the Victorian Order with the authority of successive male political institutions, whether electoral, spiritual, or professional, was very different. In June, after the OMA resolution was made public, she endeavoured to reinvigorate her alliance with the female institutional networks and reform constituencies that she had chosen to circumvent in March. In addition, she held fast to the evangelical ideal of the power of personal influence, believing that the Canadian public need only be better apprised of the Victorian Order scheme to appreciate its merit and offer their support. During the vice-regal couple's autumn tour in September and October, she therefore preached the gospel of the VON in small and large centres around the Maritime region and, finally, at the Tremont Temple in Boston. These gendered institution-building tactics were further augmented by Lady Aberdeen's rapid and complete assimilation of the vocational, domestic, and evangelical construction of district nursing taught at the Waltham Training School for District Nurses in Waltham, Massachusetts by its founder and medical superintendent, Dr. Alfred Worcester of Harvard University, who met with Lady Aberdeen during her visit to Boston. Here at last was an authority who could not only speak the language of her medical opponents, but that of her female

supporters in the NCWC as well. Now advocating a standard of district nursing education that met and exceeded current Canadian practices, in November Lady Aberdeen acceded with confidence to the urgent demands of her male allies that a provisional constitution outlining the relative powers of the order, its workers, and its medical advisors be drafted.

Part one of this chapter considers the nature and source of the medical opposition to the VON and examines the formal response of the VON's provisional committee to the charges levied against their scheme by the Ontario Medical Association. Part two examines the response of Lady Aberdeen to this setback, and sketches the process by which her understanding of the purpose and personnel of the VON was transformed by her last and most successful allies, Dr. Alfred Worcester and Charlotte Macleod, the Canadian-born lady superintendent of nurses at Waltham and the first chief lady superintendent of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada. And finally, part three begins by considering the last major power struggle within the VON's administrative and medical committees in November of 1897, and concludes by examining how a complementary construction of gender relations shaped the final efforts of the VON's elite administrators to establish the work of the order before May of 1898, when the provisional committee was disbanded and the order's first royally sanctioned Board of Governors was formed.

Medical Opposition

The changes instituted to the purpose and personnel of the VON by its medical advisory council were intended to consolidate the medical

profession's authority over the work of the Victorian Order of Nurses. They did not address the concerns of all medical men, however. As early as April of 1897, medical societies and journals across the country began to pronounce against the Victorian Order. Many provincially and locally organized doctors regarded the foundation of a national nursing corps under lay control as yet another form of "irregular" competition for income and place over which medical men needed to assert their authority as professionals and as men. The belief that the "half-trained nurses" proposed by Lady Aberdeen, with whom they personally identified the scheme, would also undermine their attempts to redefine midwifery as a medical skill just as the medical profession had almost rid itself of competition from female midwives merely compounded their sense of grievance.[2] While the elite medical supporters of the scheme were able to use their elevated social and professional standing to suppress the original provision that Victorian Order nurses be skilled in "midwifery," the fears of the medical societies and editorialists who opposed the Victorian Order were more fundamental than this. They worried that the very existence of such an organization would undermine the ability of many medical generalists to forge an adequate living, whether located in the city or in the country districts where Lady Aberdeen hoped to deploy most of the order's nurses.

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[2]C. Lesley Biggs, "The Case of the Missing Midwives': A History of Midwifery in Ontario from 1795-1900," and Hélène Laforce, "The Different Stages of the Elimination of Midwives in Quebec," in Katherine Arnup, Andrée Lévesque, and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds., *Delivering Motherhood: Maternal Ideologies and Practices in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 20-35 and 36-50.

The arguments marshalled against the Victorian Order by organized doctors reflected the central preoccupations of the medical profession at the end of the century.[3] In an age which valorized scientific expertise, the medical profession promoted its members as the only health care practitioners whose scientific knowledge was sufficient to accord them expert status. But unlike their specialist colleagues for whom the acquisition of knowledge was acknowledged with university and hospitals appointments, generalist practitioners and their representatives equated professional competence with the economic patronage of the public.[4] Members of the Ontario Medical Association, in concert with several medical editorialists, therefore condemned the Victorian Order's attack on the economic basis of their professionalism. The suggestion made in the VON circular that their motivation was mercenary rather missionary, that they sought to "roll up riches to be an embarrassment" rather than emulate the selfless service of a Dr. Maclure, was perceived as a grievous affront to their professional prestige and credibility. It was not merely offensive, however. It also attacked the central tenet of their professional creed that doctors should be rewarded financially by the public for their superior medical expertise. As one medical editor argued, the citizens of Canada owed physicians "the respect and courtesy due to 'laborers worthy of their hire'."[5]

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[3]For an interesting study of medical attitudes to female midwifery, see James Connor, "Minority Medicine in Ontario, 1795 to 1903: A Study in Medical Pluralism and Its Decline" (PhD. dissertation, University of Waterloo, 1989).

[4]Wendy Mitchinson, "A Medical Debate in Nineteenth-Century English Canada: Ovariotomies," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 17 (May 1984), 133-148.

[5]"The Victorian Order of Home Helpers," *Canadian Journal Of Medicine and Surgery* 1, no. 5 (May 1897), 224.

Like their colleagues on the VON's medical advisory council, medical opponents of the Victorian Order also strongly objected to the original suggestion of the NCWC that women trained in midwifery were a viable solution to the problem of maternal mortality. The character of each group's opposition to this aspect of the original Home Helper scheme differed in certain essential ways, however. For the elite medical specialists who supported the Victorian Order, the deployment of maternity nurses threatened to undermine the consolidation of obstetrics as a male medical speciality and a science. But so, too, did the continued practice of "midwifery" by general practitioners. Provincial and local medical associations, which endeavoured to protect the interests of general practitioners, regarded the elitism of obstetrical specialists with irritation. In the nineteenth century, childbirth was becoming increasingly important as a source of revenue for medical generalists.[6] Having recently survived a legislative challenge to their primacy in this area--a bill sponsored by the Patrons of Industry proposing to license female midwives was narrowly defeated in the Ontario legislature in 1895--the doctors of Ontario in particular were ill-disposed to accept with equanimity the deployment of "half-trained" nurses as maternity attendants, even after the revised Victorian Order of Nurses scheme had been announced and digested.[7]

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[6]Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

[7]Biggs, "The Case of the Missing Midwives," pp. 27-28.

Whether attacking members of the Victorian Order or traditional female midwives, doctors' principal line of defence was their superior scientific knowledge and the incompetence of their female competitors. [8] A particularly damning resolution was passed by the Ontario Medical Association at its annual meeting in June of 1897. Although the training of Victorian Order nurses in midwifery was now an implicit rather than an explicit component of the revised scheme, their possible training in midwifery and their consequent displacement of legitimate medical practitioners preoccupied OMA delegates. Members of the OMA viewed the nurses of the Victorian Order as little more than glorified midwives and used this charge to attack their credibility as skilled birthing attendants. Doctors at the meeting expressed their concern that, "owing to a want of proper training," the distribution of Victorian Order nurses throughout the country would "materially increase the death rate." This argument echoed the typical medical assertion that midwives were ignorant and consequently dangerous.[9] Indeed, one physician asserted that the "high death-rate in England was due in no small measure to the large number of midwives in that country." The meeting's initial resolution condemning the scheme as "unnecessary and impracticable" was replaced by a more strongly worded paragraph which intimated that the establishment of the Victorian Order would have potentially graver consequences:

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[8]Karen Buhler-Wilkinson, "False Dawn: The Rise and Decline of Pulic Health Nursing in America 1900-1930," in Lagemann, ed., *Nursing History*, pp. 89-106; and Janet Pacht Brickman, "Public Health, Midwives, and Nurses, 188-1930," in *ibid.*, pp. 65-88.

[9]Biggs, "The Case of the Missing Midwives," pp. 27-30.

> That after careful consideration of the scheme for the founding of a Victorian Order of Nurses, so far as its details have been made public, the Ontario Medical Association desires to express its full appreciation of the kindly motives that have prompted the movement, but feels that it would be neglecting a serious public duty if it failed to express its most unqualified disapproval of the scheme, on account of the dangers which must necessarily follow to the public should such an order be established.[10]

The VON's suggestion that a corps of female health care workers—however prepared—was an adequate maternal welfare measure constituted an implicit censure of general practitioners' expertise and their ability to meet the health care needs of the country. The framers of this resolution therefore reasserted their profession's exclusive authority to protect the public weal. By meddling in an area of expertise beyond their comprehension and prescribed area of responsibility, the OMA charged that Victorian Order nurses—and their well-intentioned but misguided lay sponsors—would only exacerbate rather than alleviate the suffering of the very people they proposed to help.

The establishment of the Victorian Order also threatened to compound several other problems faced by the medical profession at the end of the nineteenth century. Overcrowding within the medical profession, and the continued threat of competition from unlicensed or "irregular" practitioners, created a sense of professional unease among late nineteenth-century general practitioners, despite their leaders' successful legislative campaigns to extend the authority of

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[10]Reported in *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 1, no. 6 (June 1897), 269-71. See also *The Canada Lancet* 29, no. 11 (July 1897), 576, and *The Canadian Practitioner* 22, no. 6 (June 1897), 433-34 and 447-48. See also NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Minutes of the Provisional Committee, 16 October 1897.

university-trained doctors and to secure legal governance of their own profession.[11] Overcrowding in the profession was largely attributed to an overabundance of physicians of dubious qualification who had been trained in the United States. Their solution to this problem was to standardize educational qualifications needed for the licensed practice of medicine. Although the CMA's policy of Dominion registration of physicians—championed by the chair of the VON's medical advisory council, Dr. Thomas Roddick—advocated the implementation of nationally uniform educational standards, provincially organized physicians tended to regard this measure as an attempt to undermine their hard-won legislative control over medical practice in their respective provinces.[12] The development of new branches of health care, such as trained nursing, and the difficulty of regulating irregular competition in country districts, demonstrated that such controls were still necessary to assure the primacy of the medical profession in the delivery of health care.

Most medical journal in Canada condemned the foundation of the Victorian Order.[13] The two most vociferous critics of the scheme

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[11]Sheila M. Penny, "'Marked for Slaughter': The Halifax Medical College and the Wrong Kind of Reform, 1868-1910," *Acadiensis* 19, no. 1 (Fall 1989), 27-51; and Colin D. HOwell, "Elite Doctors and the Development of Scientific Medicine: The Halifax Medical Establishment and 19th Century Medical Professionalism," in Charles G. Roland, ed., *Health, Disease and Medicine: Essays in Canadian History* (Toronto: The Hannah Institute for the History of Medicine, 1984), pp. 105-122.

[12]Geoffrey Bilson, "Public Health and the Medical Profession in Nineteenth-Century Canada," in Roy MacLeod and Milton Lewis, eds., *Disease, Medicine, and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 156-75.

[13]A few journals, like the *Canada Lancet* and the *Dominion Medical Monthly*, remained aloof from the fray and did not editorialize about the nursing order. See also Charles G. Roland, "Ontario Medical Periodicals as a Mirror of Change," *Ontario History*, 72, no. 1 (March 1980).

were the *Canadian Practitioner* and the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* , both of which were published in Toronto. Between March of 1897 and January of 1898 these two journals featured a number of editorials condemning the Victorian Order, most of which argued that the scheme would adversely affect the profession of trained nursing. Their sudden impulse to champion the cause of trained nurses engaged in private practice was not entirely disinterested, however. While these medical editorialists did highlight some of the privately expressed misgivings of Annie Murray of the Royal Victoria and Nora Livingston of the Montreal General about the need for one educational standard for nurses, uppermost in their minds was the maintenance of medical control over nursing practice. The editors of these journals, like their counterparts on the Victorian Order's medical committee, felt that the training standards for nurses established by medical men should not be compromised. If they were, the authority that the medical profession as a whole exerted over professional nursing might be diminished. But this was not their chief concern. Their anxiety about the VON's economic impact on trained nurses in the cities bespoke their own fear that in practice the VON constituted yet another form of "irregular" and unregulated competition that would adversely affect the ability of medical professionals to earn an adequate living. They therefore used the language of medical professionalism to distinguish between "regular" nurses whose training and willing obedience to doctors met medically prescribed standards and their "irregular" competitors in the Victorian Order whose standard of training and overextended sphere of responsibility would not.

The editors of *The Canadian Practitioner* argued that "competent professional nurses should be encouraged and protected from the warfare of unqualified nurses just as regular physicians and lawyers are protected from the rivalry of the irregular in both professions."[14] There were already too many trained nurses in the cities, where there were "numbers of nurses, graduates of our best hospitals, who have spent their best time in careful preparation for their work, and who are unable to obtain enough to do to support themselves; *the supply is already much greater than the demand.*" The introduction of "half-trained 'helpers' entirely free of charge" would adversely affect the livelihood of professionally trained nurses by undercutting their fees. Because the preparation of trained nurses was superior to that proposed for the VON, these were necessarily higher than the "bargain day prices" that would be charged by Victorian Order "charity nurses." Although the editors of these journals wished to ensure that the fees charged by trained nurses remained "moderate," they defended the fees charged by hospital trained private duty nurses as adequate compensation for the extended course of disciplined training to which they had subjected themselves. And, just in case they had not adequately expressed their reservations, one editor charged that, far from removing the uncertainty of 'waiting for a case' as the Victorian Order circular had suggested, trained nurses themselves would be pauperized by membership in such an order. As the editor of the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* argued,

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[14]"The Victorian Order of Nurses in Canada," *The Canadian Practitioner* 22, no. 4 (April 1897), 280-81.

trained nurses had "too much respect for their calling to eat the bread of charity by joining this organisation."[15]

While the editors of the *Canadian Practitioner* left readers to draw their own conclusions from this characterization of the VON as a form of poor relief for nurses, the editor of the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* was loath to leave such an eventuality to chance. His repeated representation of Victorian Order nurses as unskilled competitors for the already overcrowded field of trained private duty nursing revealed less about the economic plight of trained nurses than it did about medical generalists' own fear of competition from professional nurses. At the root of such fears was the perception that Victorian Order nurses would act independently of medical practitioners and, because of their lower fees, that they would effectively supplant physicians in country districts. But it was the impact of the Victorian Order on health care in the cities, where the majority of doctors and trained nurses worked, that dominated the analysis of the editors of the *Canadian Practitioner* and the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery.* The regular medical profession's control of health care in the cities was more clearly defined than in country districts where irregular competition from alternative medical sects, American-trained doctors, and female midwives was able to flourish relatively unimpeded.[16] They feared that Victorian Order nurses would "flood the country" with cheap but substandard medical

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[15]"The Victorian Order of Home Helpers," *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 1, no. 5 (May 1897), 22-24. See also *The Canadian Practitioner* 22, no. 4 (April 1897), 280-81; *ibid.*, 22, no. 6 (June 1897), 433-34.

[16]Colin Howell, "Reform and the Monopolistic Impulse: The Professionalization of Medicine in the Maritimes,"*Acadiensis* 11, no. 1 (Autumn 1981), 13-22.

services and force country doctors, as well as midwives, into the cities. This migration would simply intensify the already too fierce competition among urban doctors for patients and further threaten their control of medical practice. "If such a scheme as this should prosper," the editor of the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* warned his readers, "it will not be long before the physicians will be crowded out also, and the chorus 'The Maple Leaf Forever' may end ere long in the sad song, 'We had to leave Canada because we were poor."[17]

The editors of the *Canadian Practitioner* felt that the Victorian Order's lay administrators were circumventing the legitimate authority of the medical profession over trained nursing by founding such an organisation. They attempted to counter this insurrectionary tendency among the laity, and to re-assert their authority as medical and nursing experts, by contrasting the Victorian Order—or at least their understanding of it—with an existing district nursing society, the Toronto Nursing-at-Home Mission, an evangelical missionary nursing service begun in the mid-1880s to nurse the "deserving poor" in their own homes. In contrast to the Victorian Order of Nurses, whose elite lay founders had advertised that a sum of no less than one million dollars was required to begin work, the *Canadian Practitioner* noted that the Nursing-at-Home Mission undertook its "noble work" in "a quiet and unostentatious way." The Mission employed a "band of noble women" whose principal role was "carrying out in the homes of the patients the orders of the physicians attending them." Moreover,

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[17] *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 1, no. 5 (May 1897), 223-24.

the editors argued that the nurses were well trained, and undertook "nothing beyond that for which their training qualified them."[18] This assertion suggests that they believed the principal object of nurse training was teaching obedience to doctors, rather than the acquisition of skill, for, as we have already seen, the training standards of the Mission did not meet those established by "recognized" hospital schools like that of the Toronto General Hospital, for example. Nevertheless, the journal implied that the Nursing-at-Home Mission was everything that the Victorian Order of Nurses should be, but was not. The existence of such an organization lent credence to these Toronto physicians' claim that the Victorian Order was simply not needed. As the members of the Winnipeg Medical Society stated, though Lady Aberdeen's object was to be commended, their "more necessarily perfect knowledge of the requirements of the country in attending the sick" led them to believe that the Victorian Order would "prove an entire failure."[19]

The resolution passed by the Ontario Medical Association in early June was the first widely circulated medical assault upon the VON. Having assumed that the public endorsement of her elite medical advisors would guarantee the support of the Canadian medical community as a whole, Lady Aberdeen later observed that the opposition of local medical societies and medical journalists to the

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[18]"The Nursing-at-Home Mission in Toronto," *The Canadian Practitioner* 22, no. 7 (July 1897), 532-33; *ibid.*, 22, no. 11 (November 1897), 831, and *ibid.*, 23, no. 1 (January 1898), 45-46. See also Stephen A. Speisman, "Munificent Parsons and Municipal Parsimony: Voluntary v. Public Poor Relief in Nineteenth-Century Toronto," *Ontario History*, 65 (1973), reprinted in Michael J. Piva, ed., *A History of Ontario: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman 1988), p. 63.

[19]Quoted in the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 1, no. 6 (June 1897), 271.

Victorian Order was "an unexpected obstacle."[20] The reaction of the VON's male and female stewards to this development differed markedly. Convinced that the meeting of the Ontario Medical Association was simply lacking the right information and could be persuaded to abandon its attack on the order, Lady Aberdeen sought permission to address its members. This tactic, which proved fruitless because the meeting had already disbanded, reflected Lady Aberdeen's belief in the power of her own personal and political authority as the vice-regal consort and, to a lesser extent, as the president of a national body of "representative" women.[21]

The VON's provisional committee immediately sought the advice of Sir James Grant, the most senior member of its medical advisory council in Ottawa. According to Lady Aberdeen's own recollection of this episode, Grant and his colleagues on the medical advisory council attributed the OMA's recalcitrance to the unfounded fears of the country physicians who dominated its ranks. Incredulously, Lady Aberdeen later recalled,

> It seems that this meeting was largely composed of doctors from country districts, who had the idea that partially-trained nurses were to be employed, and that, moreover, they were to act independently of doctors, and were thus likely to be called in in the place of medical men, because of their lower fees, and that thus the whole community would suffer.

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[20] Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, *What is the Use of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada?* (Ottawa: Mortimer, 1900), p. 7. A lively discussion of the Victorian Order's merits and faults, spawned in part by medical opposition to the scheme, took place in the editorial pages of Canadian newspapers as well. The lines of argument pursued by lay opponents differed considerably from those of their medical counterparts and will not be considered in any detail here. See Gibbon, *The Victorian Order of Nurses*, pp. 11-15.

[21] Aberdeen, *"We Two"*, vol. II, p. 119.

"It is scarcely necessary to say," Lady Aberdeen concluded, "that both these rumours were wholly without foundation."[22] In practice, however, these were "rumours" begun by Lady Aberdeen herself. From the beginning, she had represented the Victorian Order as a corps of "specially"—rather than "partially"—trained nurses whose express function was to fill a perceived gap in the provision of medical services in frontier districts. Moreover, the medical autonomy of home helpers had been implicit in the scheme's original provisions for their training and deployment. For Lady Aberdeen and James Robertson, this autonomous construction of the order's nurses continued to anchor their representation of the scheme as a pioneer nursing service. But, as the VON's first pamphlet indicated, the object of the order was now more diffuse and membership in it limited to fully qualified hospital trained nurses.

Believing that the order's original provision for training in midwifery had been excised from the scheme, Grant argued that the objections of the OMA must be based on a "misapprehension of the true nature of the Victorian Order of Nurses." He therefore counselled the provisional committee to arrange a meeting with the OMA's executive committee to clarify and address their concerns. A subcommittee composed of Robertson, Grant, Sir John Bourinot, and the Rev. Dr. Saunders was also formed to draft a response to the resolution.[23] The OMA ignored the VON's private overtures, and in

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[22] *Ibid.*

[23] NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Minutes of the Provisional Committee, 12 June 1897.

mid-October the provisional committee distributed copies of its official reply to Canadian newspapers. It is doubtful whether the minute did anything to assauge the concerns of organized doctors in Ontario. Instead, it illustrates the level of miscommunication between opponents and supporters of the scheme on the one hand, and, on the other, emphasizes the still indeterminate nature of the scheme itself. Rather than unequivocally stipulating the subordination of nurses to doctors, for example, the provisional committee began by repeating its earlier claim that doctors and nurses would be "co-labourers" in the care of the sick. It compounded this error by attributing life-saving powers to nurses and suggesting that their qualifications would be "the highest for the class of work for which they are expected to do." Far from laying to rest the OMA's fear that members of the VON would function as midwives, this rather ambiguous statement left room for a great deal of speculation about the real work of the order. And finally, the statement proposed that a committee of "representative" Canadians—rather than representatives of the medical profession—would determine the standard of examination and qualification to be demanded of prospective Victorian Order nurses.[24] As in the case of the pamphlet prepared by the provisional committe in the spring, it is likely that Robertson was the principal author of this rejoinder. As such, its ambiguity may have been intentional, thus leaving open the door to a version of the scheme that Grant and his colleagues on the medical advisory council wrongly believed to have been extinguished.

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[24]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Minutes of the Provisional Committee, 16 October 1897.

Transformations

The apparent powerlessness of her male advisors to secure either financial or medical support for the order seems only to have increased Lady Aberdeen's determination to succeed. While the male members of the provisional committee were increasingly anxious to forge a legal identity for the VON by drafting a constitution,[25] after the June jubilee deadline had past, Lady Aberdeen briefly attempted to ignore the public or masculine dimension of the project by appealing directly to the women and children of Canada to support her scheme. In mid-June, the provisional committee distributed through the school systems an open letter to the children of Canada composed by Lady Aberdeen. After cataloguing the various political and social advances associated with Victoria's reign, she told her young readers that as the children of such a loving and benevolent sovereign they too had reason to be thankful. To demonstrate their gratitude and love of Canada, she urged them to help Lord Aberdeen and herself found the Victorian Order of Nurses whose members would aid the poor in the cities, bring help to "our brave pioneers" on the prairies, and serve the country for years to come in the Queen's name. In contrast to the large sums that she had hoped to secure through the influence of her male stewards, Lady Aberdeen recognized that the amount to be realized from this campaign would be small. Although it is difficult to

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[25] *Ibid.*; and NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 9 November 1897.

gauge the financial success of this particular measure,[26] it did give Lady Aberdeen an opportunity to speak with her own voice and to assert her own authority as the "true" representative of the Queen's will in Canada.[27]

While the provisional committee was determining how best to respond to the OMA in Ottawa, in mid-June Lady Aberdeen was in Halifax to preside over the fourth annual meeting of the NCWC. It was therefore Lady Aberdeen, rather than the men of the provisional committee, who issued the first public rebuttal of the OMA's charges against the Victorian Order. "It will probably have been noticed," Lady Aberdeen said, "that some medical societies have pronounced against this scheme." Echoing the view expressed by Sir James Grant, Lady Aberdeen assured Council women that "this was done in consequence of a misunderstanding of our objects, as those leading medical men who have had the opportunity of examining into it have given it their most unqualified support."[28] At a public meeting held in Orpheus Hall, Lady Aberdeen endeavoured to clarify for the benefit of her immediate

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[26]The provisional committee recorded receipt of its first contribution through the Canadian Children's Tribute to Queen Victoria on 19 June 1897. See NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Minutes of the Provisional Committee, 19 June 1897.

[27]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, "A Letter from Her Excellency the Countess of Aberdeen to the Children of Canada," June 1897.

[28]"President's Memorandum of the Business Transacted at the National Council of Women of Canada at Halifax, 1897, and Referred to Local Councils and Federated National Societies," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, p. 258. In his public address to the NCWC, Lord Aberdeen likewise cited the support of the leading medical men for the Victorian Order scheme. In contrast to previous references like this, however, Lord Aberdeen actually referred by name to Doctors Craik and Stewart of Montreal. See "Public Meeting at Orpheus Hall," in *ibid.*, p. 101. Lady Aberdeen also mentions many members of the medical advisory council by name, including Craik, Kingston, Roddick, and Grant. See *ibid.*, p. 111.

audience and for the public press what the VON was and what was not. In particular, she addressed three basic points: the need for the order in Canada, the standard of attainment expected of its nurses, and its precise objects.

There could hardly be any dispute, Lady Aberdeen declared, that an order of nurses like the Victorian Order was needed in Canada. Though she had lived in Canada for only a short time, even she had seen the "crying need" for good nursing care in all parts of the country. Around the Aberdeen estate in British Columbia, for example, "we know that in the last two or three years there have been deaths which might have been avoided if there had been such a nurse as might have been supplied by the Victorian Order." But, she conceded, the need for nurses was also keenly felt in the cities where there were people who could not afford to engage a hospital trained private duty nurse. In order to fill this need, Lady Aberdeen asserted that the VON would endeavour to secure "*the very best*" nurses available. Contrary to the central message of the VON's March circular, however, this did not necessarily entail employing "fully trained hospital nurses," she said. This rarefied creature was "so accustomed to work with all the conveniences at hand and a doctor to appeal to that she would not be competent for the work we would require her to do in the scattered districts where we expect our nurses to be of most benefit." Instead, the principal object of the scheme was to provide "skilled nurses" to pioneer districts, to attend the sick poor in their own homes, to provide urban dwellers on small

incomes with less expensive nursing care, and to operate "small lying-in rooms or wards in cottage hospitals or homes."[29]

This explication of the Victorian Order of Nurses underscores the extent to which Lady Aberdeen still clung to her original formulation of the scheme as a maternal welfare measure employing workers whose special training would enable them to function as autonomous birthing attendants in remote areas of the country. It also suggests that her attempts to address the objections of her medical opponents were as unsuccessful as those of the provisional committee. Of singular importance to Lady Aberdeen was that members of the VON would be trained workers. "It should be understood very clearly that the Nurses who are to be sent out will be absolutely well trained—in fact, that they will probably be required to possess attainments which ordinary hospital nurses do not."[30] Indeed, after meeting the basic training standards prescribed by the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses, Victorian Order nurses in Canada would be required to obtain "extra qualification" in invalid cooking and in domestic science. As this comment suggests, Lady Aberdeen seems to have little appreciated the source and nature of the criticisms levied against the order. Her medical opponents questioned the need for an order of female birthing attendants, and Lady Aberdeen demonstrated that there was a need for this service. Doctors accused the order of trying to foist half-trained nurses on an unsuspecting public, and Lady Aberdeen assured Canadians that her

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[29]Lady Aberdeen, "Public Meeting at Orpheus Hall," in *ibid.*, pp. 100-111

[30]"President's Memorandum," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, p. 258.

nurses would be "trained." And so on. In each case, however, each participant was speaking a language that the other could not comprehend or did not want to hear. When medical men declined to acknowledge the "need" for the VON among parturient pioneer women, for example, what they really meant was that they alone were equipped to meet that need.

For those Council women who continued to advocate the creation of a national system of supervised female immigration, Lady Aberdeen's representation of the VON as a pioneer health care scheme still had great appeal. As one Montreal delegate observed, "a scheme like the Victorian Order of Nurses must greatly help and encourage immigration of the people most wanted here, because it will ameliorate the hardships of living in the most scantily settled parts of the Dominion."[31] Other constituents within the NCWC were likely less satisfied with the tenacious refusal of Lady Aberdeen to admit the necessity—and the desirability—of employing only hospital trained nurses in the Victorian Order. To some extent, Lady Aberdeen had adopted the nomenclature of professional district nursing—in her letter to Canada's school children, for instance, she referred to Victorian Order nurses as the Queen's Nurses. She did not, however, adopt the meaning attached to this designation by Julia Drummond of Montreal who authored the NCWC's message to the Queen.

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[31]Mrs. Ashley Carus-Wilson (Montreal), "Resolution IV.—Immigration," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, p. 156. Once again, the Women's Protective Immigration Society of Montreal was endeavouring to create a national woman-administered and state-sanctioned protective immigration system for women by urging each local council to reform itself as a distribution centre for female immigrants.

> Your Majesty's reign has been marked by a material and social progress unparalleled in any age of the world....Coincident with this movement and inherent in it is that single and momentous advance in thought and opinion which has so heightened the ideas and enlarged the possibilities for women. And in that wider sphere of usefulness and activity now happily opened to women no service is more honourable or more blessed in its results than that of the trained nurses—a calling which Your Majesty has done so much to elevate and promote....[32]

Members of the Victorian Order, according to this vantage point, were not simply to be the agents of middle-class women's nation building schemes in the Northwest or of their organized benevolence in the cities. Instead, they were now heroines and co-workers in their own right. In contrast to Lady Aberdeen, who advocated a modified British training standard for Victorian Order nurses, Julia Drummond, as we have seen, married the British idealization of trained district nurses as an elite department of professional nursing to the lengthier North American standard of training. In both versions Victorian Order nurses would be "trained" workers, but only in the latter case would they be recognized as "professionals" according to the standards set by the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses and adhered to by Canadian nursing educators like Annie Murray and Nora Livingston of Montreal.

Lady Aberdeen also used the annual spring meeting of the NCWC to remind Council women and the public at large of the VON's genesis in the NCWC. As an institution-building strategy this served at least two purposes. First, Lady Aberdeen hoped to reactivate her own institutional power base and the national network of local councils that made up the NCWC. Accordingly, delegates to the meeting resolved

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[32]"Public Meeting," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, pp. 102-103.

that, through its local councils and nationally affiliated societies, the National Council would endeavour to collect more funds for the Victorian Order and that each local council would establish a press committee. In this way, in every locality across the country where there was a local council "clear replies to current objections" could be made and new information about the progress of the scheme disseminated.[33] And second, by more closely associating the Victorian Order scheme with the NCWC in their public addresses, Lord and Lady Aberdeen hoped to counteract the now almost universal impression that Lady Aberdeen was its sole instigator and promoter. Lady Aberdeen in particular urged local councils to become the VON's chief supporters and to read its pamphlet, "so that you will *believe in* the benefits that the scheme can confer, and, believing in it, will go about and say that it is going to be a great success". These attempts to realign the VON with the NCWC—and vice versa— did not represent an abandonment of her gendered institution building strategies, however, for Lady Aberdeen likewise encouraged the "gentlemen" in her audience to help them obtain the support of the "various public bodies" who were empowered to grant the VON government monies.[34]

In a memorandum sent to the NCWC's local councils and federated national societies after the close of the Halifax meeting, Lady Aberdeen declared that she remained hopeful that the VON would be launched successfully. "I cannot leave this subject," she said,

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[33]"President's Memorandum," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, p. 257.

[34]Public Meeting," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, p. 114.

> without saying that we are by no means discouraged as to the ultimate success of this scheme, even if we are only able to raise a much smaller sum than we orginally desired, we shall be able to make a beginning, and we believe that it will be only necessary for the country to see the scheme at work for them to realize its great usefulness.[35]

For Lady Aberdeen, the VON had now become a matter of faith. But it was not simply faith in the viability of the scheme itself that motivated her after June. It was also a faith in her own vision, in her own authority to do her duty to the women of Canada, and, most importantly, in her own power to influence those with whom she came in contact. In part, this latter belief was a product of her privileged upbringing as a daughter of Britain's ruling political elite. She expected deference from her social inferiors—a category into which most Canadian colonials fell—to her own superior moral leadership and sense of duty to the country. But her faith in the power of personal influence was also shaped by her evangelical feminist beliefs. Evangelical Protestant women in the NCWC consistently attributed the power of individual moral suasion to women of their own faith and social station. As Mrs. S.G. Wood of the Girls' Friendly Society told delegates in 1894, "If women could only in the first place realize the great power which God has given us, and then humbly but actively use the power of personal influence in His service and for the good of the country" they would not "long for greater deeds." Using the "power of personal influence" to "regenerate the

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[35]President's Memorandum," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1897, p. 258.

individual" was woman's chief public duty, Julia Drummond argued. "It is ours," she said, "to teach, to strengthen, and to save."[36]

After passing much of the summer at their farm in British Columbia's Okanagon Valley, the Aberdeens embarked on an official tour of the Maritimes in September and October. Once again, Lady Aberdeen endeavoured to explain the objects of the VON at a succession of public meetings around the region.[37] The gospel message that actuated her crusade was largely what it had been at Halifax the previous June, with some notable variations.[38] Although at St. John, for example, Lady Aberdeen continued to assert that Victorian Order nurses would be "thoroughly trained and fitted specially for the work," at St. Stephen's she claimed that Victorian Order nurses "must have full hospital training and undergo a practical test laid down by a committee of Canadian medical men, so that a

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[36]Mrs. S.G. Wood (Toronto), "Preventive Work," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1894, pp. 125, 126; and Mrs. Drummond (Montreal), "The Aims and Work of the National Local Councils," in *ibid.*, p. 221.

[37]Lady Aberdeen later informed the provisional committee that she had given information about the VON to meetings in six Nova Scotia communities, including Halifax, Sydney, North Sydney, Baddeck, Amherst, Springhill; in Charlottetown, P.E.I.; and in ten New Brunswick centres, including St. John, St. Andrews, St. Stephens, Woodstock, Dorchester, Chatham, Newcastle, Bathurst, Dalhousie, and Campbell. At all of these places, with the exception of Baddeck in Cape Breton, committees were formed to promote the foundation of the VON. See NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, 2 November 1897.

[38]Lady Aberdeen's autumn message can be summarized as follows: The VON was not Lady Aberdeen's "pet scheme"; it had originated as the will of the women of Canada through the NCWC; it would be a Canadian version of that noble British organization known as the Jubilee Institute; as such, it would satisfy the expressed wish of the Queen that her reign be commemorated by helping the "sick and suffering." Nurses and cottage hospitals were needed in the Northwest to curb the incidence of maternal mortality; nurses were also needed in the cities where a class existed who were not poor enough to obtain nursing care in the hospitals and too poor to secure it through private means in their own homes. See NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Vol. 26, Scrapbook, newspapers clippings, St. John *Sun*, 16 Ocotber 1897, and St. Stephen *News*, 21 October 1897.

nurse entering the order may be considered to have gained the blue ribbon of professional nursing." Lady Aberdeen's tentative migration toward the professional idealization of nursing espoused by Julia Drummond of Montreal is further suggested by her new evocation of Florence Nightingale as an authority for the scheme and her description of Victorian Order workers as district nurses. "The district nurse under this scheme will become what Florence Nightingale calls a health missioner," she said, giving "help and instruction" in the homes that she visited. As for the relationship of Victorian Order nurses to the medical profession, she declared that they would "in no way interefere with the work of the doctors....These nurses would have a high enough idea of the honour of their profession not to trench upon the field of physicians."[39] That Lady Aberdeen could make such an assertion and still hold fast to her belief that nurses specially trained in midwifery were needed in the Northwest suggests that she still clung to a British construction of trained nursing which was expansive enough to include the practice of midwifery and points to her own lack of understanding about the depth of medical resistance to the idea of nurse-midwives in Canada.[40]

The vice-regal tour ended at Boston in late October, where Lady Aberdeen delivered an address about the VON to a packed house at the Tremont Temple. It was here, facing an audience that numbered in

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[39]*Ibid.*

[40]For a succinct discussion of the differences between British and American nursing professionalism in the 1890s, see Celia Davies, "Professionalizing Strategies as Time- and Culture-Bound: American and British Nurisng ,Circa 1893," in Lagemann, ed. *Nursing History*, pp. 47-64. Canadian hospitals schools by the 1890s largely conformed to American practices.

the hundreds—many of whom were identified as expatriate Canadians—that Lady Aberdeen gave full voice to the evangelical Christian construction of her mission to found the Victorian Order of Nurses. As before, she invoked a number of professional and political authorities to justify the need for the VON, but on this occasion, she represented the scheme as the expressed will of an even "higher" authority. Freed from the sectarian constraints of her position in Canada, and perhaps inspired by the setting of her address, she said,

> I have appealed to you in the name of your country of birth and by the sacred ties of your childhood's home. I have appealed to you in the name of the Queen, who bids us show our love and reverance to her by caring for the sick and the suffering, but I close by appealing to you on higher grounds still, and in asking you to join in forming a Christian memorial of a Christian Queen. I am appealing to you in the name of Christ himself. In his name let me say, "Inasmuch as ye did unto the least of these my breathren, ye did it unto to me."[41]

At a private reception following her address in Boston, Lady Aberdeen came face to face with the future of the Victorian Order of Nurses in the person of Miss Charlotte Macleod, the Canadian-born lady superintendent of nurses at the Waltham Training School for Nurses. Lady Aberdeen extended her stay in Boston by one day in order to visit the school, which was located about ten miles outside of the city. Here she was greeted by a special meeting of its trustees and by Dr. Alfred Worcester, its founder and chief medical officer.[42] It was here, too, that Lady Aberdeen found the evangelical, vocational, and domestic model of trained district nursing work that would sustain

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[41]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, newspaper clipping, Boston *Globe*, n.d.

[42]*Ibid.*, 30 October 1897.

her throughout the often fractious period of institution building that immediately followed her return to Canada.

In Alfred Worcester, Lady Aberdeen had found a *bone fide* district nursing expert; that he was also a physician made him an even more valuable ally. He had made a study of different district nursing methods throughout the world, including Kaiserwerth in Germany and the Jubilee Institute in England, and had applied his findings to the training programme for district nurses at Waltham, a school founded by him in 1885.[43] Worcester carefully distinguished between the work of hospital nursing and district nursing. Like district nursing reformers in Britain, Worcester believed that the majority of women trained only in hospital nursing failed as district nurses because they lacked the necessary "vocation" for the work. He believed district nursing was "nursing in its very highest form" and suggested that, when undertaken by an elite corps of specially trained nurses under medical supervision, it would "surely help forward that time when the kingdom of this world shall become the kingdom of God and of His Christ."[44] The Waltham programme, which combined practical training in housekeeping, hospital nursing, private nursing, and district nursing with lectures on elementary anatomy and physiology, was not recognized by the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses (ASSTSN), however.[45] Rather than a

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[43]See Alfred Worcester, *Nurses and Nursing* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927).

[44]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, Toronto newspaper clipping, ca. November/December 1897, "The Victorian Order: The Origin, Aims and Methods of the Order Explained by Dr. Albert [sic] Worcester."

[45]Members of the ASSTSN did not recognize housewifery as a suitable nursing subject. When Charlotte Macleod became Lady Superintendent in 1892, she corresponded with

period of professional incubation, Worcester believed that the role of the training school was to reveal and foster the "innate nursing powers" of its probationers and students. By varying their course of study, pupil nurses would be saved from the "mechanical hospitalism" he associated with the larger hospital nursing schools in Boston and taught to view their work as an act of loving service to others.[46]

After listening to Worcester explain the system of "special training" carried on at Waltham, Lady Aberdeen believed that she had found a standard of nurse education that would satisfy both her medical opponents and the NCWC's own advocates of professional nursing like Julia Drummond. In contrast to the year-long hospital training and six-month district nursing apprenticeship undertaken by Jubilee Nurses, Lady Aberdeen noted in her journal that Waltham students spent the first six months learning the "niceties of home-making," and then a further six-months each learning hospital and district nursing. They then spent a further eighteen months divided between hospital and district work. In total, their course of preparation lasted three years.[47] Although the nature of their training differed from that given in "recognized" hospital training schools, the

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all the training schools in the United States and Great Britain, asking whether they included a course of housekeeping in their programmes. Only one school, the Old Royal Infirmary in Glasgow, answered in the affirmative. See Boston University, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Records of the Waltham Training School for Nurses, N56, Box 1, file 2, printed article, "Pioneer of Public Health: Charlotte Macleod," *The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* (August 1926), p. 133.

[46]Boston University, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Records of the Waltham Training School for Nurses, N56, Box 1, file 1, printed brochure, "The Waltham Training School for Nurses. A Report of the Meeting in Boston, February 17, 1899," pp. 8-12, esp. 11.

[47]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 30 October 1897.

duration of the Waltham course at least accorded with the views of the AASTN, whose members urged North American nursing schools to adopt a three- rather than a two-year programme of training in the late 1890s. Although Lady Aberdeen clearly approved of the particular combination of training received by Waltham nurses, she was especially impressed by the vocational or missionary spirit that the school encouraged them to develop and apply to their work:

> the constant idea is to train the nurses as to a mission & to send them out with an inspiration & the faces of the girls in training were sufficient witness of the work being carried on, so full were they of a steadfast look of holy determination & devotion.

Lady Aberdeen immediately secured a commitment of help from Worcester, who agreed to explain the merits of district nursing to Canadian doctors on Lady Aberdeen's behalf. She also convinced Worcester to lend Charlotte Macleod to the Victorian Order of Nurses for a period of three months to help establish its work on practical basis. Much to Lady Aberdeen's evident surprise and delight, she discovered that the greatest proportion of Waltham nurses and students, including Macleod, were Canadians. "Here indeed," she enthused, was "a recruiting ground for the Victorian Order."[48]

Power

While Lady Aberdeen was still touring in the Maritimes, the provisional committee decided that without a definitive constitution the work of the order could not proceed any further. Male supporters of the VON in Montreal were particularly anxious to know how the funds raised by

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[48]*Ibid.*

the local committees would be apportioned. Accordingly, the provisional committee resolved that representatives from VON local committees, from well known hospitals and institutions for the training of nurses, and from the medical and nursing staffs of these institutions should be invited to a day-long conference in Ottawa to frame the order's constitution.[49] At the first meeting of the provisional committee after her return to Ottawa, Lady Aberdeen described her visit to the Waltham School for Trained Nurses and told her colleagues that Dr. Alfred Worcester would be addressing a public meeting of the Ottawa Local Council of Women later that week, to which the doctors of Ottawa would be specially invited. She also revealed that Lord Aberdeen would donate a sum of three thousand dollars to the Fund, two-thirds of which should be used to pay the salary of a lady superintendent for two years. Having thus cleared the only hurdle that might have blocked her as yet undeclared plan to employ Charlotte Macleod on a longterm basis, Lady Aberdeen now likewise agreed that a constitution must be drafted. Accordingly, a subcommittee, composed of Lady Aberdeen, James Robertson, and the VON's two legal advisors, Chief Justice Burbidge and Sir John Bourinot, was named to prepare a draft constitution. The proposed conference of representatives was scheduled for November 5th, the day after Worcester's address.[50]

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[49]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, 16 October 1897.

[50]*Ibid.*, 2 November 1897.

Two contemporary accounts of this conference exist, each of which reveals a different perspective on the constitution-building process. The provisional committee minutes read like a who's who of Victorian Order supporters. Along with members of the order's provisional committee and representatives from its medical advisory council, including Hingston, Grant, Stewart, Craik, Campbell, and Webster—all of whom with the exception of Grant were from Montreal—male and female representatives of the VON's local committees and Annie Murray of the Royal Victoria Hospital, the meeting's only nursing representative, were also present.[51] Although no direct reference is made to any discord or conflict in the minutes, the amendments made to the provisional committee's draft constitution[52] indicate that three issues in particular exercised delegates. The first of these was the duties of the chief lady superintendent. Her primary function was to carry out the directions of the Board of Governors, to recommend candidates to the Board for admission, to test their efficiency for the work of the order, and to supervise their behaviour and work once admitted. The next issue, the qualifications of the nurses themselves, was settled by requiring candidates to be certified graduates of hospitals approved by the Board of Governors and to take an additional six-month course in district nursing. Those candidates going to country districts would also train for at least three months in a maternity hospital and take an additional

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[51]A roll of those in attendance can be found in *ibid.*, 5 November 1897.

[52]The provisional committee used the text of the constitution of the Jubilee Institute in Great Britain as its model.

three-month course in infectious diseases. In each case, these provisions would be enforced "in such a manner as shall be directed by the by-laws."[53]

The third and perhaps most important issue was the relationship of Victorian Order nurses to physicians. At the meeting, three of the thirteen draft by-laws regulating the duties of nurses were significantly altered. In each case, a question of medical prerogative was at issue. The first of these regulations originally stipulated that the nurse would carry out her work under the direction of the attending medical practitioner and under the supervision of the local committee. In its amended form, the reference to direct lay authority over the work of the nurses—and, by inference, over the work of doctors—was removed. The other two objectionable regulations endeavoured to define under what circumstances a Victorian Order nurse could accept midwifery cases. In their original form they read as follows:

> 2. In towns the Nurse shall not undertake the duties of Mid-wife, but may attend cases after child birth when desired to do so by the Local Committee.
> 3. In country districts, the Nurse should only act as Mid-wife in the absence of a Medical man, and when express permission is given to her to do so by the Local Committee, and when all necessary qualifications for the office are possessed.[54]

Rather than being redrafted, these two regulations were struck through and removed from the amended draft constitution. Nowhere in the provisional constitution subsequently made public by the

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[53]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, 5 November 1897.

[54]*Ibid.*

provisional committee is there any reference to midwifery as the work of Victorian Order nurses.[55] Although the stipulation that VON candidates qualify themselves in "maternity work" and train in a maternity hospital for three months would seem to suggest a covert inclusion of the original spirit of the order, in practice, as we have seen, medically supervised training in maternity nursing qualified women to serve as the helpers of physicians, not as independent helpers of parturient women.

Lady Aberdeen's own version of the events is far more illuminating than that that found in the provisional committee minute book. Her account confirms what it could only suggest: that a sometimes acrimonious power struggle for control of the order and its nurses occurred. Although her greater candour is partly explained by the private nature of her journal, it also suggests the relative powerlessness of her position as a laywoman at a conference convened expressly to define the division of authority within "a body corporate and political" like the VON which, once incorporated, would become a "masculine" institution with many of the same legal prerogatives as an enfranchised male.[56] Lady Aberdeen emphasizes the coalitions that she was able to build with various constituent groups and individuals among the conference delegations. She gave particular recognition to the role played by Dr. Alfred Worcester who attended the meeting at her request to "explain" district nursing to VON supporters. There

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[55]NAC, Aberdeen Papers, MG 27, I B5, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, printed material, "Provisional Constitution of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada," c. November 1897.

[56]*Ibid.*

were limits to these supports, however. For example, Lady Aberdeen conceded that because medical opposition to Victorian Order nurses practising midwifery was "very general all over the continent, we have decided not to make this a specific object." This was a particularly disheartening defeat, for, as she wrote, "In my heart, I know there will [have] to be a modification of this out in the North West & in many country districts, but it must work itself out."[57]

Although finally forced to abandon the original home helper scheme to provide rural women with nurses skilled in midwifery, Lady Aberdeen's original conception of the scheme as an "order" was triumphant. Martha Vicinus has observed that the nursing sisterhood, or order, was one of the few feminine models of hierarchical organization available to elite women at the end of the nineteenth century.[58] Although the sisterhood was ultimately accountable to some superordinate male institution—a male-dominated Board of Governors in the case of the VON—within their own province of authority leaders of the sisterhood could exercise power over the women under their care. From the inception of the scheme, Lady Aberdeen implied that the Victorian Order would function in this way. As early as February, she had stated that it "would be necessary to appoint some inspectors or superiors of the Order who would go round the districts periodically on tours of inspection to see that the object of the ORDER

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[57]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 9 November 1897.

[58]Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 10-45.

was being carried out faithfully in all ways."[59] The concentration of authority in one central governing body was inherent in this gendered model of hierarchical organization. Only in this way would the VON's chief lady superintendent of nurses be able to maintain control of a corps of nurses whose isolation would remove them from her immediate supervision and whose subordinate status within a complementary medical hierarchy could only be countered by the management of nursing labour, not nursing practice.

Lady Aberdeen observed in her journal that some male members of the committee "failed to grasp the idea of an 'Order' & of the nurses all being under superior officers & one at the head being really ultimately responsible & able to move them about at will."[60] Opponents of this centralized and quasi-feminized institutional structure envisaged the Victorian Order as a series of decentralized, male-dominated voluntary institutions in which the influence a subscriber wielded was directly proportional to the amount of money *he* donated. Moreover, having paid for the privilege, these local boards of management would also have the power to hire and fire their own nursing personnel. But, under the terms of the provisional constitution the powers of the local boards were limited to identifying those individuals worthy of nursing assistance and to paying the salaries, room, and board of the nurses chosen by the chief lady superintendent and authorized by the VON's central Board of

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[59]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 30, Correspondence of Lady Aberdeen, typescript circular, "Scheme for Commemoration of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee Recommended by the National Council of Women of Candaa." c. 15 January-10 February 1897.

[60]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 9 November 1897.

Governors—work better suited to a female voluntary association. Lady Aberdeen feared that without the kind of centralized control that she and her allies sought, the standards of the order would be compromised, for, as she charged, most Victorian Order supporters still remained "ignorant" of the distinction between district and private duty nursing.[61]

Alfred Worcester's role in this victory was substantial, in Lady Aberdeen's estimation. "Again," she said, "Dr. Worcester was of the utmost assistance[,] for his actual knowledge of the system at work gave confidence & on several points helped us over the [stiles] splendidly."[62] Lady Aberdeen was well aware of the limits of her authority with medical men. While in St. John, for example, she had addressed a private meeting of medical men about the Victorian Order. She described the meeting as "formidable" and likened it to a cross-examination.[63] Her decision to recruit Alfred Worcester as her proxy among Canadian doctors suggests that, in exchanges with medical men at least, she fully realized the limits of her authority as a layperson and as a woman. As both a medical authority on nursing and a man, he had the kind of access to male networks that Lady Aberdeen, for all her strategem and elite social connections, lacked and could never have. Moreover, as Meryn Stuart has suggested,

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[61]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 9 November 1897. See also NAC, MG 28, I 171, VON Records, Vol. 1, file 3, "Provisional Constitution," p. 10. All members of the Victorian Order had to be approved by the Chief Lady Superintendent, *ibid.*, p. 11.

[62]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 9 November 1897.

[63]*Ibid.*, c. 15 October 1897.

Worcester "knew the 'language' and habits of his fellow physicians...It is unlikely they would have acquiesced to anyone but a male physician, given the prevailing attitudes toward female authority and the necessary subordination of nurses."[64]

Having herself only just assimilated an elitist idealization of district nursing, Lady Aberdeen was convinced that medical opponents of the VON simply did not understand what was meant by district nursing. During November and December, she therefore recruited Worcester to speak on her behalf with medical men in six different Canadian cities. Lady Aberdeen was particularly anxious to "convert" the doctors of Toronto who she believed were responsible for the OMA's sweeping condemnation of the Victorian Order in June. At a meeting with members of the Toronto medical community on December 1st, Worcester outlined the terms of the new constitution, and reassured his Canadian colleagues that Victorian Order nurses would be fully trained workers who would neither usurp male medical authority nor overstep the line separating nursing care from medical cure. On the contrary, he characterized them as the noble servants of God and medical men alike. Significantly, however, it was the question of medical versus lay control of the Victorian Order of Nurses that most preoccupied doctors at this meeting. One doctor, for example, warned his colleagues that the Board of Governors was to be dominated by the laity, while another suggested that the entire

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[64]Meryn Stuart, "'Half a Loaf is Better Than No Bread': Public Health Nurses and Physicians in Ontario, 1920-1925," *Nursing Research* (January/February 1992). See also Stuart, "Gender Conflict in Public Health, 1920-25," in Dianne Dodd and Deborah Gorham, eds., *Caring and Curing: Historical Perspectives on Women and Healing in Canada* (forthcoming, University of Ottawa Press).

constitution be abandoned and a committee of physicians and lady superintendents of training schools be convened to revise it.[65] Reporting on the meeting, one medical journal further suggested that, rather than relying on the "leading medical men," as Lady Aberdeen had consistently characterized her medical supporters, the Aberdeens should have sought "the advice of the 'leaders of the profession' appointed by the various medical associations."[66]

The publication of the Victorian Order's constitution did nothing to placate the editors of *The Canadian Practitioner* and the *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery*. Each journal continued to maintain that Victorian Order nurses were neither needed nor wanted.[67] If anything, Lady Aberdeen's importation of a medical authority from the United States only made their attacks more acrimonious.

> Like refractory children the medical men of Toronto have been patted on the back and told "You don't know what is good for you, my dears," and down their unwilling throats has been poured the nauseating medicine labelled "The Victorian Order of Nurses," several doses daily and a double spoonful at dinner.[68]

Even were they to concede that the VON was needed, the issue of control and the sexual division of labour between doctors and nurses remained unresolved in their minds. Ironically, the extended length

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[65]"The Victorian Order of Nurses Discussed," *Dominion Medical Monthly* 9, no. 6 (1897), 917-18.

[66]"Victorian District Nurses," *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 3, no. 1 (January 1898), 37-38.

[67]*The Canadian Practitioner* 22, no. 11 (November 1897), 830; *ibid.*, 22, no. 12 (December 1897), 904-8; *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 3, no. 1 (January 1898), 36-38, 42-43.

[68]"The Victorian Order of Nurses, Requiescat in Pace," *Canadian Journal of Medicine and Surgery* 3, no. 1 (January 1898), 42-43.

of training now required of Victorian Order nurses was a source of unease.

> Some think district nurses, who have first received a training of three years in a general hospital, and special training thereafter of six months, will know a little too much to be obedient nurses, and too little to be good doctors; and that they will do a good deal of work for a shilling an hour that ought to be done by physicians.[69]

Thus the revised training provisions of the Victorian Order increased rather than diminished the potential for professional rivalry. Not all doctors were threatened by Worcester's presence in Canada or immune to his persuasive powers. At a public meeting on the day following the one convened for doctors, several of Toronto's "leading" physicians publicly endorsed the Victorian Order and, as Lady Aberdeen put it, "generously confessed that they had not understood it before & that they blessed it altogether." Lady Aberdeen viewed the Toronto meeting at which Dr. Worcester spoke about the mission of district nurses as a the culmination of her evangelical crusade to found the VON. Worcester's address, she enthused, "was splendid & moved many to tears & there was no doubt after that that Toronto would be alright. It was a transformation scene & it was wonderful. And it all came from that providential meeting with Dr. W[orcester] & Miss Macleod in Boston."[70]

Charlotte Macleod likewise framed the work of district nursing and the Victorian Order of Nurses in evangelical terms. Macleod was

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[69]"The Victorian Order of Nurses," *The Canadian Practitioner* 22, no. 12 (December 1897), 907.

[70]NAC, MG 27, I B5, Aberdeen Papers, Journal of Lady Aberdeen, 28 February 1898. A Toronto newspaper account of the address can be found in *ibid.*

forty-five years old when she took over the work of the VON in the winter of 1898. Prior to enrolling at the Waltham School for Trained Nurses in the late 1880s, she had taught school for fifteen years. After graduating from Waltham in 1891 at the age of 38, she pursued a further course of training, first at the McLean Insane Hospital and then at the Long Island College Hospital in Brooklyn, New York. Within a year she returned to Waltham as the lady superintendent of nurses. Under her guidance, training in housekeeping was introduced into the curriculum and an additional probationary period added to the programme.[71] Macleod seems to have been motivated by the same evangelical desire to serve that actuated the social work of so many middle-class women in the NCWC. Embracing what Barbara Melosh calls a "traditional" nursing ethic,[72] like Worcester, Macleod clearly regarded womanliness or feminine character as the essential quality of a good nurse. The Victorian Order offered Macleod an opportunity to apply her ideas about district nursing to a wider field of service. During her superintendency at Waltham, she had made a pilgrimage to the bedside of Florence Nightingale and embarked on an ambitious study of different district nursing practices. The Jubilee Institute was of particular interest to her. Establishing a comparable organization in Canada would be difficult but, she implied, the rewards would be incalculable. "The greatness of our work is overwhelming," she

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[71]Boston University, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Records of the Waltham Training School for Nurses, N56, Box 1, file 2, printed article, "Pioneer of Public Health: Charlotte Macleod," *The Trained Nurse and Hospital Review* (August 1926), p. 133.

[72]Barbara Melosh, *"The Physician's Hand"*, pp. 10-11, 27.

confided to Florence Nightingale in December, "but I can only try it trusting for the blessing."[73]

The appointment of Charlotte Macleod to the chief superintendency of the Victorian Order of Nurses provided the provisional committee with access to another kind of network, that of trained district nurses. After winning the power—albeit provisionally until the VON's royal charter was secured—to shape the VON as a centralized institution, its members turned to Charlotte Macleod to staff the order. The greatest number of early Victorian Order nurses and district superintendents were Waltham graduates like herself. Nevertheless, nurses from other North American schools were also represented, including the Nicholl's Hospital in Peterborough, the Montreal General Hospital, St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago, the Victoria Hospital in Halifax, and the Toronto General Hospital. One nurse came directly from England. As Lady Aberdeen had hoped, Macleod and her small corps of nurses proved to be the greatest envoys for the order after March when the first "homes" were secured and the work of district nursing begun at Ottawa, Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and St. John. Macleod herself took up Lady Aberdeen's crusade, addressing meetings in St. John, Halifax, Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, and Hamilton, in January and February of 1898.[74]

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[73]Boston University, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Records of the Waltham Training School for Nurses, N56, typescript copy of British Library, Nightingale Collection, Add. Mss. 45,815, ff.48-50, Charlotte Macleod to Florence Nightingale, Dec. 10th, 1897. See also Charlotte Macleod, "Report of the Victorian Order of Nurses," in NCWC, *Verbatim Report*, 1899, p. 152.

[74]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, January-March 1898.

With the commencement of nursing work, a further division of responsibility between male and female members of the provisional committee occurred. The men of the provisional committee, which now met jointly with the local committee of the VON's Ottawa branch, concerned themselves primarily with corporate and governmental fundraising schemes and with the physical plant of the VON. In particular, they endeavoured to forge an alliance with the male trustees of the Lady Stanley Institute for Trained Nurses (LSI) in Ottawa, who hoped their institution could be strengthened through an amalgamation with the VON. The VON, in its turn, wanted to lease the LSI's specially built nursing home on Rideau Street to house the order's chief lady superintendent and its national headquarters.[75] When this alliance failed to materialize in May of 1898, a small group of male provisional committtee members purchased a more centrally located house in Lady Aberdeen's name to accommodate both the national and Ottawa branches of the order.[76] Male members of the provisional committee, especially Chief Justice Burbidge and Sir John Bourinot, continued to oversee the process by which the VON would secure its legal identity as a corporate body. Working in tandem with Sir Donald Smith, Canada's High Commissioner in London who later that year also served as Lady Aberdeen's personal envoy to the male governors of the Jubilee Institute regarding the vexed badge

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[75]Madge Macbeth, *The Lady Stanley Institute for Trained Nurses* (Ottawa: LSI Alumnae Asosciation, 1959).

[76]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, December 1897-May 1898.

question,[77] they shepherded the VON's application for a royal charter through the various stages demanded by the British authorities.

The work of the VON's female committee members were now equally well delineated. After introducing Charlotte Macleod to the provisional committee on January 18th, the meeting immediately resolved that "the lady members of the Committee be a sub-committee to confer with Miss Macleod and to submit to the local committee a plan for beginning the work of nursing in Ottawa as soon as practicable."[78] Although most of the women who dominated the VON's Ottawa committee were also members of its national provisional committee, this resolution effectively relegated their work for the order to a separate and secondary sphere of responsibility. The participation of women provisional committee members was henceforth limited to championing Charlotte Macleod's hiring recommendations. Through this procedure, male members of the provisional committee effectively divested themselves of responsibility for what was they clearly regarded as "woman's work." Overseeing the work and domestic arrangements of Victorian Order nurses was a housekeeping matter and, as such, within the province of the VON's elite laywomen. This reflected a broader pattern both within the VON and the voluntary sector generally. As Agnes Maule Machar observed

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[77]Lady Aberdeen wanted Victorian Order nurses to wear the same badge as the Jubilee Institute nurses. There was initially a great deal of resistance to this idea among its board of governors. See The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, London, England, Records of the Queen's Nursing Institute.

[78]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, 18 January 1898. The motion was forwarded by Rev. Herridge and seconded by Sir John Bourinot.

to the NCWC in 1895, there was a clear division of sexual responsibility in the administration of voluntary institutions. "I think," she said, "that we might expect the wisest man to administer wisely the domestic details of an institution—especially those in which the interests of women are concerned—as we might expect the average housekeeper, however able in her department, to direct the movements of the Channel Fleet."[79]

Lady Aberdeen's new vision of the VON as the elite standbearer of the Canadian nursing profession dominated the next annual meeting of the NCWC, held in early May. All references to home helpers and partially trained nurses were banished from the meeting. Council and platform speakers repeatedly characterized the Victorian Order as "a system of district nursing" and described its personnel only as "district nurses." As in 1897, the NCWC devoted its entire public meeting to the Victorian Order and the subject of nursing. Lady Aberdeen began by introducing Council women to Charlotte Macleod, who had now agreed to remain in Canada as the first chief superintendent of the Victorian Order of Nurses. Macleod, she said, was both "a very exceptional woman and a very exceptional nurse." The other nurses recruited into the Victorian Order were hardly less remarkable: "we take only nurses who have previously attained the highest possible degree of efficiency in hospital work, and who have full diplomas; they then have six month's training in district homes and are ready to be sent out to work in the country or wherever the

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[79]"Representation of Women on Boards of Philanthropic Institutions," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1895, pp. 171-173, esp. 172.

work may be." Victorian Order nurses, in other words, were more than simply good nurses; they were extraordinary women whose work was distinguished by "enthusiasm, devotion, and self-sacrifice".[80]

At the 1898 annual meeting, the expertise of trained nurses was acknowledged unequivocally by the NCWC for the first time when it invited the Victorian Order's district superintendent of nurses in St. John to speak. Lady Aberdeen told the public meeting that Elizabeth Robinson Scovil, an honourary member of the St. John Local Council of Women, was "a Canadian nurse who has highly distinguished herself and who is coming to tell us what district nursing means." Scovil described the district nurse as "a reformer" who married the traditional skills of domesticity with the modern principles of sanitary science. In contrast to the evangelical charity nursing undertaken by some Council affiliates, district nursing was not intuitive. The systematic acquistion and application of knowledge distinguished the district nurse from the untrained middle-class "amateur." "Of course," she observed, "the carelessness of the friends is sometimes exasperating but it is no more trying than the efforts of the amateur nurse in some of the highest walks of life." But district nurses shared organized women's concern for woman's welfare. In particular, the trained district nurse had "a special mission to the mothers" as a teacher of enlightened maternity and infant care. And, like the organized middle-class woman, the chief duty of the district nurse was to exert her "influence for good".

80"Public Meeting: Report on the Victorian Order of Nurses," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1898, pp. 114-118, esp. 116.

> No person is so degraded, so destitute, so sunk in the filth and wretchedness, as to be beyond the ministrations of the district nurse. It is part of her business to restore them to the decencies of life, and her training shows her how to do it in the easiest and best way.

It was not the job of the district nurse to dispense relief, however. Although Scovil identified the district nurse as a member of the alms-giving class, in cases where she judged relief warrantable, her only role was to notify those persons "whose duty it is to attend to it." Thus, the district nurse did not usurp organized women's moral obligation to care for the poor; instead, armed with specialized knowledge, she became the natural ally of the many philanthropic and evangelical women at work within the National Council of Women in the late 1890s.[81]

The institution building process came to a close in mid-May, when, on the advice of the Queen, the British Privy Council granted the VON a royal charter. The charter legally entrenched the relative division of power between the central and local boards of the order and, in doing so, confirmed the authority of the chief lady superintendent of nurses.[82] It did not, however, stipulate that Victorian Order nurses were to work under the authority of doctors. This provision was a by-law framed by the order itself and, as such, could be changed to suit the pleasure of the lay-dominated Board of Governors.[83] Within the same month, Lady Aberdeen received a

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[81]Miss Elizabeth Robinson Scovil, "District Nursing and the Work Before the Victorian Order of Nurses in Canada," in NCWC, *Women Workers of Canada*, 1898, pp. 118-125. See also, Miss Scovil, "Nursing as a Profession for Women," in NCWC, *Verbatim Report*, 1900, pp. 166-170; Dr. Mary McNeil, "Nursing as a Beneficent Influence," in *ibid.*, pp. 171-174.

[82]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 1, file 3, Charter of Incorporation, 1898.

letter from Florence Nightingale commending her upon the foundation of the VON. Nightingale's letter—which had been solicited by Lady Aberdeen in December[84]—began by confirming the importance of district nursing as a "blessing" to the sick poor. Nursing was now more than a calling, she said, it was "a genuine profession in which nurses can earn an honourable living." The trained district nurse in particular was a most valuable worker from whom more experience and more self-denial was required than the hospital nurse. Although Nightingale acknowledged that conditions differed from those in England, she was equally certain that any opposition the VON might encounter would soon be overcome by the example of the nurses themselves. "There is little fear that any dissentient medical men will quickly learn from actual experience to appreciate the value to them of the District Nurse as an intelligent handmaid and not an interfering interloper."[85] It is apt—and more than a little ironic—that at the end, the VON's two final and greatest authorities, at least on a symbolic level, were women.

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[83]The constitution allowed the Canadian Medical Association to appoint two members and invited provincial medical societies to nominate one member each to serve on the Board of Governors. The remaining members were either nominated by the Governor General who remained the patron of the order or were the representatives of subscribers.

[84]Boston University, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Records of the Waltham Training School for Nurses, N56, typescript copy of British Library, Nightingale Collection, Add. Mss. 45,815, ff.51-55, Lady Aberdeen to Florence Nightingale, Dec. 13th, 1897.

[85]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 5, file 29, Florence Nightingale to Lady Aberdeen, 5 May 1898. The letter was issued as a small pamphlet by the provisional committee and copies of it circulated to the press.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LIMITS OF FEMALE AUTHORITY

The impact of the medical profession on the Victorian Order of Nurses was extensive. So completely were the provisions of the original Home Helper scheme rejected by its medical supporters and opponents that, looking back on the origins of the scheme, Lady Aberdeen was loath to avow responsibility for it.[1] The confusion about the purpose of the Victorian Order and the qualifications of its personnel that reigned throughout most of 1897 may have worked to the benefit of its original and most steadfast promoter, however. The internal disputes which occasioned the drafting of the provisional constitution in November revealed the differing reform and professional agendas of the groups supporting the order. In this sense, misunderstanding may have been a factor in some medical men's support. But the persistent opposition of some medical journals, even after the balance of their concerns had been redressed, suggests that physicians who opposed the order were not so much concerned with the details of the scheme as they were with the very existence of such an organization.

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[1]In her history of the founding of the VON, Lady Aberdeen only refers to the Victorian Order of Home Helpers once as part of a quotation. See *What is the Use of the Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada?* (Ottawa: Mortimer, 1900), p. 2.

That some doctors were able to support and promote the Victorian Order, while representatives of their generalist brethren perceived it as a threat to their professional stature and economic well-being underscored the growing fissure between the interests of specialist and generalist practitioners at century's end. But, at the same time, the changes that each medical camp advocated to the scheme demonstrated a unanimity of opinion about the status of trained nurses and their proper relationship to the medical profession. Doctors believed that the trained nurse was the ideal helpmeet of the medical profession and, as such, she should occupy a subordinate position in the hierarchical ordering of health care professions and in the delivery of health services. In the case of the Victorian Order, then, medical and male gender authority functioned symbiotically. The pseudo-scientific musings of the medical profession about conventional gender relations legitimated both the social subordination of women and the professional subordination of trained nurses. Florence Nightingale's description of the trained district nurse therefore accurately depicts the medical profession's attitude toward the new profession of nursing at the end of the nineteenth century. While all doctors could embrace the ideal trained nurse as an "intelligent handmaid," the economic vulnerability of a majority of doctors, and their resentment of lay interference in what they regarded as the exclusive prerogative of their profession, obliged them to reject both the poorly trained Victorian Order nurse and the exceptionally trained Victorian Order nurse as "interfering interlopers." Only those few practitioners with the social and professional stature enjoyed by members of the Victorian Order's elite

medical advisory council could view the foundation of such an order with relative equanimity.

It is not yet clear how much of the medical opposition to the reformed VON after 1897 was political posturing and how much of it expressed genuine unease. The early VON records are full of references to doctors being won over by the work of individual Victorian Order nurses. In 1899, for example, Charlotte Macleod observed that "Hamilton was for a long time strongly opposed to having one of the Victorian nurses there. But this nurse has been there for only a few months and has already won over eleven doctors to the work and is reaping her reward." Similarly, Lady Aberdeen declared that the VON was "adding every month to our list of doctors who employ our district nurses. The superintendent in one city reported the other day 119 doctors on her list, so that we have applicants every day for nurses. Our only difficulty now is to supply the nurses for our stations as far as wanted." Evaluating the veracity of these claims is difficult, especially when one considers that both Macleod and Lady Aberdeen were addressing meetings of the Waltham Training School for Nurses. In each case, their immediate object, especially when describing the adventures and hardships of the four Victorian Order nurses sent north to the Klondike in May of 1898—two of whom were Waltham graduates—was evidently to inspire the many Canadian women at Waltham to fulfill their nursing vocation through membership in the VON. As Macleod declared, "To supply these places I must have more nurses, and if I can steal any more from

Waltham I mean to do so."[2] Nevertheless it would seem that a reformation of sorts did occur in the attitude of many doctors previously opposed to the scheme.

Opposition to the VON may have been significantly diminished by Lady Aberdeen's decision to open a separate Klondike Fund to send a VON contingent to nurse among the miners in the Yukon gold fields. This was endorsed by male and female members of the VON's provisional committee and actively supported by the federal ministers of the Interior and the Militia department. Although the VON's medical supporters in Montreal questioned the advisability of such a scheme,[3] the image of four "Lady-Nurses" trudging more than a hundred miles by foot through mosquito-infested forests and over snow-peaked mountain tops sparked the imagination of Canadians.[4] The response to the VON's Klondike Fund appeal was immediate. The

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[2]Boston University, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Records of the Waltham Training School for Nurses, N56, Box 1, file 1, printed pamphlet, "Waltham Training School for Nurses. Addresses in Park Theatre, October 31, 1899. And an Address of the Countess of Aberdeen in the New School, November 3, 1899," pp. 27-29, 31-33.

[3]"The Montreal Branch of the Victorian Order of Nurses," *Montreal Medical Journal* 27, no. 3 (March 1898), 234-235.

[4]In contrast to the many gold seekers who travelled to the Klondike at the end of the century, the Victorian Order nurses and their militia "escort" followed an all-Canadian route through the mountains to Fort Selkirk and then onto Dawson. After arriving by railroad in Vancouver on May 11, they spent 5 days on a steamer which landed the expedition, and its several tons of supplies, at Wrangell, in the Alaskan Panhandle. From there they faced a 400 mile journey first by river steamer and boat up the Stikine River to Telegraph Creek in northern British Columbia, and then by foot over the mountains to Telsin Lake. This rugged trail, which over 5,000 people had already travelled by the spring of 1898, was 150 miles long. To cross it the force was divided into 5 pack trains comprised of a total of 170 horses and mules. After the mountains had been overcome, the expedition travelled along the Yukon River to Fort Selkirk where it arrived on August 8. After a short stay here, the nurses proceeded onto Dawson where they worked in the community's hastily erected hospital. Like the Red River expedition of 1870, the trip had taken almost four months from start to finish—despite the availability of mechanized travel for part of the route.

Bank of Commerce, for example, undertook to guarantee a large portion of the nurses' expenses and the federal government agreed to provide them with transport and the "protection" of the Yukon Field Force. The response of one male correspondent suggests how these nurses were perceived by some of their contemporaries. "I have thought," J. Thorburn Ross wrote to Sir Sanford Flemining in March,

> of the the thousands of men who are passing into that region, of the utter ignorance they have of the dangers and hardships they must perforce endure and have thought, too, of how many will of a certainty be sick and there is "lack of Woman's nursing and lack of woman's care." I cannot forbear expressing my sense of the great need there will be for the services of such trained ministers of mercy.[5]

Even prior to the commencement of their "mission" in May of 1898, the trek of the Victorian Order nurses to the Klondike was framed by a heroic discourse of sacrifice and service. In March, for example, Lady Aberdeen assured Canadians that the women the VON proposed to send to the region were "fully aware of the hardships which they will have to face, but count the opportunity thus given to them of succouring suffering humanity under very adverse circumstances a joy, an honour."[6]

Writing from Telsin Lake after the overland part of the journey had been completed, Nurse Powell, the Waltham-trained leader of the Victorian Order nursing contingent, reported that

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[5]NAC, MG 28, I171, VON Records, Vol. 4, file 6, Provisional Committee Minutes, letter, J. Thorburn Ross to Sir Sanford Fleming, 20 March 1898.

[6]Lady Aberdeen to the Editor, Toronto *Globe*, 28 March 1898.

> I had started out with "Victory or Death" for my motto, and the farther on I came, the more appropriate I thought it. I wrote it on many of the guide posts along as an encouragement to those who may come after. We were fourteen days coming, making on average a fraction over eleven miles a day.[7]

The experience of the Victorian Order nurses in the Klondike was represented by Charlotte Macleod as an episode of "heroic nursing" without parallel that confirmed the superior training, responsibilities, and resources of district nurses. After "a toilsome journey" to Dawson City, Nurse Powell took charge of thirty patients in a makeshift hospital, nursing all of them herself. For the many other typhoid patients who crowded into the city, she did what she could. "With no clothes even, or utensils of any kind, with no shelter, with no suitable food for these patients Miss Powell slaved for them until she herself contracted the disease and nearly died." Lady Aberdeen captured the essence of the heroic narrative that surrounded the activities of the VON's Klondike nurses in 1899 when she declared that the "stories of their troubles were almost like the stories of adventure in a boy's story book."[8] A sense of triumph and victory pervades these early accounts of the VON's work, belying the extent to which the original intent of the scheme was suppressed or changed. But it also suggests that the actual heroines of the VON story were secondary to the central

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[7]Nurse Powell to Lady Aberdeen, 10 July 1898, quoted in John Murray Gibbon, *The Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada: 50th Anniversary 1897-1947* (Montreal: Southam Press, 1947), pp. 31-32. For other accounts of the "trek of '98," see Brereton Greenhous, ed., *Guarding the Goldfields: The Story of the Yukon Field Force* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1987).

[8]Boston University, Special Collections, Mugar Memorial Library, Records of the Waltham Training School for Nurses, N56, Box 1, file 1, printed pamphlet, "Waltham Training School for Nurses. Addresses in Park Theatre, October 31, 1893. And an Address of the Countess of Aberdeen in the New School, November 3, 1899," pp. 27-29, 31-33.

gendered narrative of nation building that had originally actuated Lady Aberdeen and the NCWC. Although now prevented from empowering prairie mothers as heroic nation builders, the Klondike initiative of the reformed VON enabled its female leadership to recast trained district nurses in this role.

What does this particular institution building experience reveal about the nature and scope of female authority in late Victorian Canada? The persistence of this nation building theme would seem to suggest the triumph of Lady Aberdeen's vision for Canadian women and for the VON. But, in practice, the process of founding the VON demonstrated that the power of women to effect change was limited when their interests conflicted with the perceived prerogatives of male-dominated political institutions like the organized medical profession.[9] Even a socially elite and politically influential woman like Lady Aberdeen could not entirely circumvent the obstacles that organized medical men placed in the path of the Victorian Order. In many respects, Florence Nightingale's prescription for the ideal nurse applied equally to Lady Aberdeen whose entire line of defence in 1897 and for much of 1898 was to assert that she too was "an intelligent

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[9]The views of medical women toward the VON is as yet unknown. Drs. Emily Stowe and Augusta Stowe Gullen of Toronto were among Lady Aberdeen's most vigorous supporters and sympathizers, and Lady Aberdeen returned this support in kind by lending her social influence to the Ontario Medical College for Women in Toronto. The work of Regina Markell Morantz and Sue Zschoche on the gendered application of medical therapeutics at two nineteenth-century Boston hospitals suggests that the gender identity of women doctors was subsumed within their professional identity; see Morantz and Zschoche, "Professionalism, Feminism, and Gender Roles: A Comparative Study of Nineteenth-Century Medical Therapeutics," in Judith Walzer Leavitt, eds., *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), pp. 406-421. See also Lykke de la Cour and Rose Sheinin, "The Ontario Medical College for Women, 1883 to 1906: Lessons from Gender-Separatism in Medical Education," *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme* 7, no. 3 (Fall 1986), 73-77.

handmaid and not an interfering interloper." Believing that gender relations were predicated on an equitable and complementary distribution of responsibility between women and men, Lady Aberdeen mistakenly inferred from this that women and men exercised a comparable level of authority as well. But, as Ellen Boris has argued of American female reformers in the Progressive era, their assimilation of separate spheres ideology ultimately undermined their own construction of female authority.

> Their dependence on cultural ideas that associated women with 'female' traits of nurturance, altruism, piety, and domesticity grounded women reformers in a discourse similar to the one that called upon such traits to argue for female inferiority and subordination rather than gender equality. Although these cultural ideals could support a public policy that protected women from men, they reinforced the dependent status of women in the economy and the polity.[10]

Council women's representation of the NCWC's relationship to the government as a companionate marriage saddled the NCWC with the same formal and customary legal liabilities of a married woman, and therefore with the same circuitous and limited access to real power. As the VON experience demonstrated, their power to influence was directly commensurate with relative strength of their opposition.[11]

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[10]Ellen Boris, "Reconstructing the 'Family': Women, Progressive Reform, and the Problem of Social Control," in Noralle Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), pp. 73-86, esp. 73-74.

[11]For a campaign with similar difficulties, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Barbara Roberts provides a very interesting case study of the conflicting reform and political agendas of two competing 'protective' homes for female immigrants in turn-of-the century Montreal, one administered by elite Anglican men to house both men and women and the other a non-sectarian woman-administered institution exclusively for women; see Roberts, "Sex, Politics, and Religion: Controversies in Female Immigration Reform Work in Montreal, 1881-1919," *Atlantis: A Women's Studies Journal* 6, no. 1 (Fall 1980), 25-38.

Council women were ill-equipped to join the "battle of life" when their opponents were the very men they sought to help.

Although Council women's belief in the equality of spheres proved groundless, one cannot argue that Lady Aberdeen or the women whom she led lacked agency. It would be wrong to view the inability of Lady Aberdeen to realize the terms and purpose of the original VOHH scheme simply as an example of female powerlessness or female victimization. The dynamics of gender and class were far more complex than this kind of simplistic analysis would allow.[12] Although her attempts to send maternity attendants to pioneer mothers were thwarted, Lady Aberdeen was able to forge within the VON a limited power base for the chief lady superintendent of the VON, acting in conjunction with the male-dominated Board of Governors. In this way, she insured that a middle-class professional woman, rather than local boards of management controlled by medical and lay men (as most of them were), would retain authority to direct the work, conduct, and deployment of Victorian nurses nationwide. And, as we have seen, the male governors of the VON were sufficiently eager to divest themselves of responsibility for the management of the nurses that the authority of VON's chief nurse would be unencumbered. Thus, while Lady Aberdeen's original conceptualization of the scheme was subverted, the centralization of power within the VON in the hands of the Board of Governors and the chief lady superintendent,

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[12] Elizabeth Janeway, "On the Power of the Weak," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1975), 103-109.

represented a real victory for Lady Aberdeen, for it was won in spite of rather than because of her gender.

In conclusion, then, how should we assess the impact of the VON debate on the NCWC and on the larger questions concerning female institution building that are central to this thesis? The immediate impact of the VON debate on the work of the local councils was not very great. Most local councils manifested only lukewarm support for the scheme, although some did their best to promote the VON among municipal and other local officials in 1897 and 1898. They were too preoccupied with local or regional efforts to help Lady Aberdeen realize her vision of the NCWC as a national force. Those Council women who actively embraced the VON did so largely as individuals. The VON was first and foremost an initiative of the NCWC's executive branch. In practice, it was Lady Aberdeen's scheme. Her repeated attempts to reassociate the Victorian Order with the NCWC were only marginally successful for that reason. At first glance, this may seem perplexing, given that the initial impulse to help prairie mothers came from within the local council structure. But even in 1896, the more ambitious institution building agenda of the NCWC's small group of leaders was apparent. They reshaped the 1896 resolution favouring greater medical aid for the Northwest into a tool with which to assert the NCWC's responsibility for woman's sphere. Although the full impact of the VON debate on local council women awaits further study,[13] it would seem that the nation building impulse

[13]Sharon Anne Cook has argued that to understand national women's societies we must first examine the activities of their local branches. See Sharon Anne Cook, "'Continued and Persevering Combat': The Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism and Social Reform, 1874-1916" (PhD dissertation, Carleton

of the Council as a whole and the institution building aspirations of its national leadership were not necessarily linked in practice.

The VON debate did alter the NCWC's formal relationship to trained nurses, however. When the VON affiliated with the NCWC in 1898 it brought into the federation a group of trained district nurses whose character Lady Aberdeen represented as womanly and whose work she described as Christian service. Although this construction of district nursing accorded with the NCWC's domestic and evangelical definition of woman's work, the extended debate over the prerogatives of professional nurses in 1897 compelled Council women to re-evaluate their own attitudes toward remunerative employment for women of their own class. The most immediate manifestation of this altered outlook was the Council women's decision to accord trained nurses expert status at their annual meetings. Although Lady Aberdeen's hand was behind presentation of district nurses as experts in 1898, Council women returned to the subject of their own volition in 1900 and in the decades that followed.[14] These discussions clarified the relationship of trained nurses and organized middle-class women. Nurses were no longer only the helpers or adjuncts of

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University, 1990), pp. 67-110, 231-292. For another regional study that compares the strategies of the Alberta and Saskatchewan WCTU organizations at the turn of the century, see Nancy M. Sheehan, "The WCTU on the Prairies, 1886-1930: An Alberta-Saskatchewan Comparison," *Prairie Forum* 6 (1981), 17-33.

[14]There are not many studies of the interaction of nursing professionals and organized middle-class women. For an illuminating study of the wartime interaction of these two groups in the United States, see Susan Armeny, "Organized Nurses, Women Philanthropists, and the Intellectual Bases for Co-operation Among Women, 1898-1920," in Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, ed., *Nursing History: New Perspectives, New Possibilities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1983), pp. 13-46. See also Jane E. Schultz, "The Inhospitable Hospital: Gender and Professionalization in Civil War Medicine," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992), 363-392.

middle-class women's organized benevolence. Instead, as Miss Scovil of the St. John VON suggested, organized women were now the allies and helpers of trained district nurses.

One member of the NCWC worried in 1900 that so "remunerative, honorable and even fashionable has nursing become that there is some danger of the restless and dissatisfied seeking in it a refuge from themselves rather than opportunities for service."[15] As this statement suggests, at the turn of the century, the NCWC continued to reject a male professional standard to validate the work of middle-class women. Instead of paid work and self-fulfilment, its members articulated a gendered ethic of service grounded in a vocational construction of women's traditional domestic, familial, and community responsibilities to care for the needs of others. To embrace the kind of "masculine" professional identity advocated by North American nursing elites during the 1890s would have denied the domestic and evangelical foundations upon which Council members had constructed their public authority as women. The trained district nurses whose expertise and opinions were so anxiously sought in the wake of the Victorian Order controversy, reaffirmed these basic tenets of the NCWC's construction of "woman's work" with one important exception: only women committed enough to obtain a systematic training as nurses were qualified to nurse.

But, while being a woman was no longer an adequate preparation to nurse, even among the sick poor, an ideal of 'feminine' self-sacrifice

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[15]Carrie M. Derick, "Professions Open to Women," in National Council of Women of Canada, *Women of Canada: Their Life and Work* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1900), pp. 58-59.

and self-forgetfulness still underwrote the NCWC's construction of nursing as one of the "female" professions. Thus, despite the changed status of trained nurses within the NCWC at decade's end, its members were not forced to abandon the domestic and religious bases of their collective identity as women workers entirely. Instead, they opened their ranks to include a new kind of middle-class woman worker, the efficiently trained district nurse, whose social class, training, and womanly desire to serve made her a heroic confederate of that "splendid army of organized womanhood," the National Council of Women of Canada.

It was appropriate that a national women's "parliament" whose power was predicated on a complementary construction of gender relations should turn to another group of middle-class women whose professional identity was grounded in what Susan Reverby has called the duty to care. The alliance forged by the NCWC with the "fully" trained nurse through the VON highlighted the limited nature of middle-class women's authority both within and without the nursing profession. At the outset of the Victorian Order campaign, Lady Aberdeen had attempted to create a worker with "special" training in fields conventionally regarded as woman's work. Although medical men might set the examination for home helpers, they would not necessarily direct her work. The home helper scheme can therefore be seen as an expression of the NCWC's belief in the equality of spheres on the one hand and the power of elite women to superintend the public and private interests of their own sphere on the other. Ironically, then, the process by which Council women became the allies of trained nurses—a group of women whose work identity was

defined by their subordination to a superordinate male professional culture—was therefore also the process by which the circumscribed nature of their authority was revealed.

Through the practice of female institution building middle-class women sought to establish a separate "women's sphere" in the public world, believing that women's authority to intervene on behalf of the "home" derived from their unique social contribution—whether experential or metaphorical—as wives and mothers. But, as this work suggests, women's actual power to influence was circumscribed by the dominant culture's hierarchical construction of gender relations. Thus, whereas both organized middle-class women and the new profession of middle-class nurses endeavoured to forge a distinct sphere of female influence within the public sphere, each ultimately failed to achieve this end because of the systematic inequality of women and men. Women did create "parallel" voluntary and professional networks, but their sphere vis-à-vis that of men was only separate, not equal. This is not to say that organized middle-class women and nurses were entirely without power. As the preceeding discussion shows, women were able to exercise a kind of power when the interests of their political sphere complemented those of the dominant male political culture. It was when these interests did not coincide, and when women's demands for change threatened male prerogative that the limits of a "female moral authority" grounded exclusively in women's domestic and religious identities, and justified by the ideology of separate spheres, are most starkly revealed.

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