

Rural Prairie Education:
Women's Activism Towards Educating Farm Children

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In going up and down the land it has seemed to me that one of the great lacks in country life is a definite standard of education. John or Jennie go to school until they are fifteen, or until they are in the fifth grade and then they quit school. No particular standard of efficiency is demanded of them. They pass no strictly prescribed examinations. Not that examinations are a final test of excellence, far from it, but they are the only system we have at present, whereby one can obtain a definite standing in educational circles. And it is my belief that every normal boy and girl should be obliged to attain to a certain definite educational standard before leaving school. Canada's great burning question today is not the navy, or the tariff, or social evils, or even women's suffrage, it is education. Give us real, effective education for a generation or two and all these other reforms will be added unto us.¹

Truer words have never been spoken. Through them, Francis Marion Beynon, the editor of the Women's section of *The Grain Growers' Guide*, "The Country Homemakers," demonstrates her strong belief in the need for a better education system for the prairie population. Throughout the early twentieth century, the population of the three prairie provinces, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, grew, as immigration policies encouraged immigrants to settle these sparsely populated areas.² Several factors, such as a difficult climate and a sparse population, caused education on the prairies to fall by the way side. However, it is thanks to women such as Francis Marion Beynon, who spent years advocating the importance of providing and improving education for the younger generations of the prairies, that rural education vastly improved. Francis Marion Beynon was not alone in her struggle toward educational reform, however through the "Country Homemakers" section of the *Grain Growers' Guide*, she did provide a necessary outlet for women to address problems, become educated on the issues at hand, and organize to initiate reforms.

The purposes of this paper are to examine the education system, more specifically the rural education system, of the three prairie provinces between 1912 and 1916; address

and examine the issues rural farming families, women, mothers and teachers experienced; observe the advocacy of women towards improving the educational side of rural life; and finally, the successes of women's advocacy. These goals will be achieved through examining *The Grain Growers' Guide* between the years 1912 and 1916. 1912 marks the year in which Francis Beynon first began conducting the women's section of *The Grain Growers' Guide*, "The Country Homemakers." Through these five years, one issue per week will be thoroughly inspected to gain an understanding of women's organizing towards improving educational standards in the prairies. While Beynon's section will be of most importance due to its women-specific content, other sections of the paper will also be observed in order to gain a complete understanding of the rural school system during this time. The inspection will conclude at the end of 1916 as it is the year in which compulsory education in Manitoba was achieved and nearing the end of Beynon's employment with *The Grain Growers' Guide*.

Upon examination of over 200 issues of *The Grain Grower's Guide*, it is easy to conclude that women in the rural prairies were heavily involved in improving the quality of life for rural residents. The accessibility of education for rural children was a major issue for prairie families and women made huge efforts to improve the quality and accessibility of education to all farm families. They worked to provide more schools in rural areas, improve the quality and number of teachers, aid in shaping the curriculum in order to educate children on issues outside of farming, and educate other parents on the importance of their children gaining a respectable education.

Francis Marion Beynon and *The Grain Growers' Guide*

In order to appreciate Beynon and her advocacy work, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of her life, views and work through *The Guide*. Francis Marion Beynon (1884-1951) was raised in a family of social activists and so her advocacy through writing seemed natural.³ She was raised in a strict Methodist household among her four brothers and two sisters, some of whom also devoted their lives to women's rights.⁴ The Beynon children were raised to support and advocate for temperance and Francis Marion Beynon and her sister, Lillian Beynon Thomas, became well-schooled social gospellers. After the family moved to a rural town in Manitoba, Beynon initially began her career as a teacher. Following a move to the city of Winnipeg, Beynon landed a job as one of the first women to work in advertising at Eaton's department store.⁵ Finally, in 1912, Beynon became the editor of "The Country Homemakers," the women's section of *The Grain Growers' Guide*, which she used as a base for herself and other women to discuss and organize to improve the rural lives of farming families. The two sisters were instrumental in the advancement of the women's movement across the prairies. As Freeman (2011) writes, Francis and her sister, Lillian, "helped weave a web of interrelated and mutually sustaining social reform groups across the prairies" and additionally, "were key initial organizers of women's sections of the grain growers' associations, Women's Institutes and Homemakers' Clubs, all intent on helping farm women cope with their difficult lives."⁶ Beynon, an experienced social activist and feminist, would further her repertoire through her employment within *The Grain Growers' Guide*. This marked the beginning of her participation in the agrarian women's movement and aided in the movement's success towards education reforms.

The Grain Growers' Guide, established in 1908, was a tightly controlled populist newspaper, published weekly by the grain growers' and farmers' associations and their companies, which widely supported the economic and political goals of the agrarian movement.⁷ *The Guide* represented all three provinces' farmers' groups: the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA), and the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association (MGGA).⁸ Until the employment of Beynon, *The Guide* focused largely on the economics and politics behind the agrarian movement and only covered feminist issues, such as the suffrage movement, if it deemed them useful for broader issues. Francis Marion Beynon insisted from the start of her employment that she would retain her "editorial autonomy" and she wrote: "In supporting the woman's cause I am only expressing one of the deepest convictions of my own mind. If it were not so, I would find another position, for I am afraid I have not much patience with those people who cut their opinions to suit their occupations."⁹ Therefore, for Beynon's tenure at *The Grain Growers' Guide*, *The Guide* would become her feminist platform and in return, she would be loyal to the paper's broader goals.¹⁰

Background of Rural Prairie Education Systems

The historical education system of Canada "as a federal state is marked by the unique education, social and cultural history of each province as they joined confederation"¹¹ and is therefore difficult to write broadly about individual prairie provinces' systems. While each province has its own historical identity, in examining the history of the Saskatchewan rural education system during the time frame dedicated to this paper, one can gain idea of education systems across the prairies. As Hay and Gurcharn state, when Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, there were

approximately 900 school districts with each district containing only one school; and only one room schools for the smaller districts.¹²

According to M. Hall-Jones, Inspector of Schools in early 20th century Manitoba, Manitoba rural tax-payers were paying large sums of money for education for very little return; the conditions of the rural education were unsatisfactory and unacceptable.¹³ As he stated in 1912,

It is well known by those who have been in touch with rural education that Manitoba is not alone as regards this unsatisfactory conditions of educational affairs, for all the provinces of our Dominion and the various states of the Union to the south of us have the same complaint to make...the educational side of it in particular is calling for radical remedial measures.¹⁴

The conditions of the schools themselves were shocking. The buildings were shoddily built, lacking appropriate heating, lighting ventilation, cleanliness and with insufficient learning tools.¹⁵ For many children, schools were such a great distance that attendance was often difficult. As Hall-Jones argued, sparse settlements and large districts creates distances much too far to travel by foot, adding to the expense and hardship for rural families.¹⁶ One great issue was the lack of quality and qualified teachers and the curriculum. This was because the supply of teachers was far less compared to the demand and it was often necessary to put men and women in charge who lack any training or certificates.¹⁷ Likewise, the curriculum, many felt, did not focus enough on worldly issues. It became of great debate between increasing agriculture education in schools and focusing on subjects that would broaden the child's mind.

Women's Domain

While Inspector Hall-Jones accurately described the situation of rural schools, his findings were nothing new for prairie women. Problems with rural education had been a

topic of great discussion for women prior to Inspector Hall-Jones' published article in 1912. Francis Marion Beynon presents a letter "From a Country School Ma'am" in "The Country Homemakers'" section in which the terrible conditions of the school are discussed: "it is so cold outside that the local thermometers have stopped registering and not so much warmer indoors."¹⁸ She describes the little country school as consisting of ill-fitting windows that let all the prairie elements in and the poor heating apparatus consisting only of box stove for wood that takes "at least three hours to thaw out a the building."¹⁹ The building was so poorly insulated, if the fire had not been started prior to arrival by the school caretaker, if there is one, the teachers and children had to go outside in order to get warm.²⁰ If anyone has lived in the prairies, it is a well-known fact that staying outside for warmth is simply not possible. Sympathy for the poor students is clear in the author's letter; "it was too cold for the poor little things to sit at their desks, so the front seats had to be arranged around the stove and as the class grew in size they were sitting three in a seat in a proximity that made concentration on their work practically impossible."²¹ Secondly, the cleanliness of the building was appalling. The last time the school was scrubbed was well over a year ago, contributing to its barn-like feel and appearance.²² When the author suggested that someone be hired to regularly maintain the cleanliness and upkeep of the school, perhaps once a month, "they were simply aghast. Though all the women I have visited in the district are splendidly clean housewives, who scrub their own floors not less frequently than twice a week."²³

Not only were the schools poorly built, lacking proper heating and uncleanly, their decorative schemes were uninspiring and the lack of equipment for learning was shocking. The walls were half painted in a dismal grey colour and the blackboard, "once

a white plaster is soiled and soot-marked”²⁴ and except for “two rather tawdry pictures of King Edward and Queen Alexandra and a group of antiqued out-of-date maps, the room is guiltless of decoration.”²⁵ More importantly, the learning utilities available to students were far less than acceptable. As the author confirms:

Not a scrap of play work for the little tikes. They are supposed to take their education adult fashion and like it that way. The only library is small collection of Sunday school books, relating impossible and insipid tales of preternaturally good and uninteresting youngsters. Not a single biographical historical work among them...there is not one feature of this school to appeal to children. It is the source of wonder to me that they attend as well as they do.²⁶

Francis Marion Beynon scolds the members of the Women’s Society for not tending to such problems and demands community participation to alleviate the “cold and miserable place they are sending their children to spend a big proportion of their waking hours.”²⁷

Beynon puts the onus on the women of the prairies because as she had already experienced, the fathers of prairie children exert most of their attention to farm economics and politics. As an avid reader of *The Guide* confirms, “the organized farmers in their work of improving conditions have not given sufficient attention to the development of the rural school. Other strenuous problems have engaged their attention to such an extent that the necessity of developing the school has been overlooked.”²⁸

Addressing the Issues

The main educational concerns women expressed in *The Guide* were the lack of attendance, educating girls, the curriculum, quality and qualifications of the rural teacher, compulsory education, and finally, the importance of education. The first step in addressing the issue of the faulty educational systems of the rural prairies is examining the importance of education for the future of the children as well as the nation. Francis Beynon and her readers, throughout their work towards better education, continually

stress the importance of education and make it their priority to educate parents of this importance.

In the May 20, 1914 issue of *The Guide*, Beynon dedicates the majority of “The Country Homemakers” section to education. After discussing the faulty education system, Beynon, declares that despite a faulty system, “education is nevertheless power” and “the more a man knows about, the more effective he is in the community.”²⁹ She urges parents to always remember that they are responsible for providing this power to their children. She insists that it is the parent’s duty, from the time the child is of a very young age, to instill “into his mind the idea that he is going to get a good education, whatever else he attains in life. Make this the very atmosphere of the home.”³⁰ In an issue dedicated to the new school term, Francis Marion Beynon feels it is fitting to impress upon parents the “calamity they are brining upon their children if they cheat them out of an education,”³¹ and is quick to scold the attitude that “it doesn’t add to the weight of the harvest in the field.”³² Beynon lays the guilt on parents by pointing out that they do not want their child to be the only child incapable of writing even the simplest sentence or having troubles spelling the simplest words.³³

Further that year, Beynon continues her work towards instilling the importance of education in the parents and even presents a book titled “How to Teach the Truth to Children,” a home education book instructing parents on the importance of creating an atmosphere that encourages children’s learning.³⁴ Beynon received an enormous amount of positive feedback from her readers. Beynon published several letters written by mothers who included money for postage for Beynon to post the book for their families and they declare the success of the book; “in the growth of their own minds as they seek

for information, they aid the child. The mothers find that the child is growing through them, perceptibly advancing upward every day.”³⁵ In 1914, another of Beynon’s readers, in response to Beynon’s article on education, reinforces the need for parents to realize and endorse the importance of children’s education. As an ex-school teacher, this reader questions if parents realize the injustice they are doing to their children by not providing a decent education to not only their children but the community as a whole.³⁶ It is concluded that women’s advocacy towards better education began by educating the parents that it is their duty of the parents to encourage, promote and reinforce the importance of education. In enforcing the importance of education, it also the parents duty to ensure the child regularly attends school.

As Beynon discusses, another major problem of rural schools stems from low attendance records, which makes rural education harder for both teachers and students. Likewise, when a child shows little interest for learning, it frequently stems from the child’s irregular attendance at school, making learning more difficult and less appealing.³⁷ Regular attendance needs to be encouraged and monitored by parents, as it stands, irregular attendance is a byproduct of parents efforts. The great distances required for travelling to school and the foul weather the prairies regularly experience contribute to the attendance problem of prairie schools, but as Beynon expresses, a child’s education should be of utmost importance, regardless of the associated hardships and sacrifices.³⁸ As Beynon exemplifies, there are two families within a rural school district, both brothers, who have their children at school, on time, everyday.³⁹ Beynon praises these brothers, who travel some distance each day in rain or shine, to provide their children with an education. She discusses how the brothers alternative travelling days

and there are no excuses for the children to be absent, “one morning, the youngest, a little dot about seven, froze her cheek very badly. Did they keep her home for the rest of the winter on that account? Not a bit of it. She was back the next morning, with the cheek carefully dressed, and very much bundled up, but as ready as ever for work.”⁴⁰

This example was expressed in order for other parents to realize it is their duty to disallow any excuse for their child to stay home from school. Beynon warned parents that each day a child is absent from school, the loss of instruction is a great evil and “it implies that school is a rather unimportant thing to be set lightly aside.”⁴¹ Not only does it portray school as an unimportant thing, as a concerned parent wrote, studying is not like plowing, it cannot be picked up where one left off, while the children are away from school, the class continues and he misses the continuity of lessons, the teacher often has to repeat past lessons, hindering the entire classes’ learning.⁴²

While it is the parent’s duty to ensure their child is regularly attending school, a major issue of rural schools is also the great distance many must travel to reach their schools. Due to the sparsely populated prairies and large school districts, each district generally supports only one school. In the heat of the desert prairie and the cold of the harsh winters, children as young as six and seven are having to walk over three miles if parents are not fortunate enough to own a care or horse and carriage.⁴³ Women, through *The Guide*, suggest the school board should aid children, who live a fair distance from the school, in getting to school.⁴⁴ The point is raised that all families in the district pay the same taxes and fees as other families who live near the school and this is unfair and if it is unreasonable for schools to be erected closer to families, aid should be provided by the

school district.⁴⁵ The success of women's work towards this goal is unknown but the effort was clear.

Another issue women of *The Grain Growers' Guide* held dear to their hearts was the education of girls. In the Article "Mrs. Pankhurst's Address," Mrs. Pankhurst addresses the issue of young girls and women not having access to the same educational opportunities as boys. She declares that women will be in control of their destiny once they are educated as the men are, "we want to give our girls a good education and instruction."⁴⁶ In pushing the issue further, in an article of Alberta Women's Parliament, it was stressed at the opening session of the U.F.A women's convention the importance of girls' education in school as well as on the farm. In discussing the education at agricultural schools, it was noted that they held "just a short course for girls...and that the education of girls on the farms was equally as important as that of the boys, if not more so."⁴⁷ Unfortunately, in an article, "Education of the Farm Girl," one would expect to be filled with discussion of the importance of sending daughters to school. However, the article, written by W.A. McIntyre, Principal Manitoba Normal School, focuses on schools needing to teach girls "homemakers' work."⁴⁸ The topic of curriculum, clearly not a suitable job for some men, caused much debate among both rural women and men.

The topic of great debate revolved around teaching agriculture in rural schools. This debate was clearly divided in light of the agrarian movement. One side advocating for it and the other side against, with the women involved in the women's agrarian movement, generally against. As demonstrated by G.A. Hutton, Superintendent of Experimental Farm, in "Why Teach Agriculture in Rural Schools," felt education had two purposes. The first purpose is to "prepare for citizenship and make men intelligent and

happy, second to fit them for service – work.”⁴⁹ There are two problems with this statement. Firstly, education is not solely for men and boys, and there was a distinct absence of girls and women gaining an education. Secondly, the scope of education goes beyond learning practical skills. Both of these problems are addressed by women of opposition. Firstly, it is necessary to further exemplify the desire for agriculture to be taught in rural schools. Hutton (1914) continues his justification of agriculture being a main subject in rural schools by declaring it is the pupil’s right to be educated to succeed in their destiny.⁵⁰ While this would certainly be extremely beneficial to some, Hutton does not consider that a child’s desire may not be to run the family farm. In stating agriculture should be taught strictly in rural schools is denying the pupil the right to expand his or her horizons and experience all that life has to offer.

Participants in the women’s agrarian movement were quick rise against the notion of agriculture being taught in school. As one reader of *The Guide* publishes, the argument being put forth in a Winnipeg farmers’ paper says the “Drop ‘High-brow’ books in Rural Schools Plan” is absurd.⁵¹ What is also absurd, according the this advocate, is that teachers are to be given five acres to teach farm boys how to harvest and girls how to garden; five acres, “that’s what they call a farm in Europe!”⁵² The advocate, who calls herself Wolf Willow, describes the intended plan, which involves one-hour daily dedicated to agricultural studies, in addition to gardening.⁵³ This, according to Wolf Willow, “is where I rise right up and protest against any such nonsense. The rural school is an elementary school, and it there needs to be taught reading, writing, arithmetic and allied subjects.”⁵⁴ Willow uses Francis Marion Beynon and a fellow feminist Lillian Laurie as examples; had these two ladies been educated in rural schools they would not

have taken the path of advocacy through journalism. They would have been farmers' wives. The way the educational system is skewing towards agriculture is denying women the opportunity to become great advocates for future women.⁵⁵ Additionally, rural communities have an identity greater than agriculture, as Willow (1916) discusses, "rural communities are the nurseries of all sorts of trades and professions as well as agriculture."⁵⁶ What about those who are not destined for or are not physically capable of farming? As Willow (1916) points out that the poor boy with a crippled left hand will never be capable of farming and would be better suited to a proper education, not one based on agriculture.⁵⁷ Or the two boys who have great artistic talent? Their destiny is art, "no doubt they will stay with it and will want a literary education to interpret their art."⁵⁸ Finally, Willow warns the farmers of the west, "look well to the rural school. Let it be what it has ever been in both Canada and the United States – the place for learning those things required in any walk of life; the place where literary master-pieces are committed to memory, and as many peeps at higher education given as possible, so that he who wishes may go on and open."⁵⁹

The feeling Willow passionately portrays in her publication in "The Country Homemakers" is replicated by Beynon's other readers. As W.E. Keefer (1916) concurs, Wolf Willow "hit the nail on the head good and hard at every lick in regards to rural schools."⁶⁰ Keefer (1916) suggests it is the state's way of keeping the population ignorant and therefore, easily manageable. However, it is the state's duty to educate children on worldly issues and expand their minds.⁶¹ Therefore, the divide was clearly set between those pushing agriculture and the women wanting to give rural children the same opportunities as urban children; that is, the best opportunities possible.

In order to provide the best education possible, the quality and qualifications of rural teachers became of utmost importance to women working towards better education. However, the women also respect the issues rural teachers face and aid in addressing such issues. A highlight of “The Country Homemakers” section is that Francis Marion Beynon successfully provides a welcomed platform for community discussion among women. This is clearly demonstrated in the section’s August 2, 1916 issue in which a teacher addresses issues such as curriculum, language barriers, challenges to one-room schools as well as the quality and quantity of rural teachers. This particular rural teacher begins her short note addressing language barriers. Her one-roomed school, in a district that was recently settled, consists of English, Canadian, American, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish and German pupils.⁶² Aside from the English, Canadian and American students, the others speak and understand little to no English, which makes teaching a difficult task and slows the children from English backgrounds. Secondly, the irregularity of attendance, as discussed above, is confirmed by this rural teacher who says, “due to children being kept at home during busy seasons to herd cattle, plant potatoes, do stoking, etc., it is a great hindrance to progress.”⁶³

In regards to the curriculum, in the opinion of rural teachers, children spend enough time at home learning about agriculture. In this case, all of the pupils of this rural teacher’s school are under the age of fourteen and according to her, “it seems...that up to that age our limited time will be spent profitably in giving as good a foundation as possible in reading, writing, arithmetic and composition with a little grammar, geography and history.”⁶⁴ The problem with incorporating agriculture is that it not only creates a difficulty in fitting in the regular school work but also, “planning of work is rendered

almost impossible, and after all we must remember that childrens' capacities are limited, that they assimilate knowledge slowly, and that comparatively little can be done in seven months."⁶⁵ From the view of a rural teacher, the education of the younger generation is extremely important and sacrificing that to incorporate agricultural studies is a mistake. Rural teachers must not accept and endorse this notion. In supporting such an idea, the rural teacher is depriving students of their opportunity to expand their horizons outside the farm and rural community.

However, in her opinion, the greatest hindrance of rural schools is not the curriculum, or the language barrier but indeed the teacher.⁶⁶ As she discusses, "good, permanent work is utterly impossible so long as these schools are under the care of young, inexperienced teachers, and so long as there is such a constant changing of teacher."⁶⁷ The rural teacher's opinion is matched by the readers of "The Country Homemakers" as well as the school inspectors.

Lastly, but certainly not least, together, rural women, fought for compulsory education. In 1910, Alberta, ahead of the other two prairie provinces, Alberta successfully obtained an act that included compulsory school attendance.⁶⁸ In regards to compulsory school attendance, the act requires a child to attend the full school term when they have reached proper school age, which is considered to be from age eight to thirteen.⁶⁹ The act is under the provisions that children of school age are not to work during school hours unless there is valid reason.⁷⁰ If the child fails to attend school, the parents are liable to face fines of up to ten dollars. This act demonstrates the progressiveness of Alberta at the time and was a goal many women in Saskatchewan and Manitoba worked towards. As one thankful reader notes, it is necessary to give thanks in

regards to compulsory education as children now have a chance to obtain the best education possible and should other provinces be so lucky to enforce such an act, their children would have the same opportunities as well.⁷¹ Another reader is adamant that compulsory education will address the increase in criminal activity, especially in Manitoba. While she admits that compulsory education will not completely fix the crime problems of the nation, she does believe, “if there is any province in Canada which needs compulsory education more than another, it is that province which contains Winnipeg.”⁷² While women in Beynon’s section expressed their desires for compulsory education, some expressed the problems associated with such laws. In one woman’s case, compulsory education posed to be an extreme problem when schools were being closed and the poor conditions of roads made it impossible to travel distances to reach rural schools. As she discusses, “my husband is trustee of a school that does not exist”⁷³ and the school board declares “after all kinds of formalities had been gone through, the clerk of the municipality advised the trustees to not build, as other schools are were closed, unable to keep up, and this one would likely be the same.”⁷⁴ The question this concern parent presents is, “now what do you know about that?... Give me a school without compulsory education in preference to compulsory education and no school.”⁷⁵

While the problems of compulsory education were discussed, it was still of great importance to communities that education became mandatory for children of school age. Finally in 1916 after years of discussion and organizing, education in Manitoba became compulsory. It was a triumphant year for women as a recent session of the Manitoba legislature over a period of three months, as *The Guide* confirms, “a record program of momentous legislation was carried out. The women were enfranchised. The Macdonald

Temperance Act was passed... and a compulsory education act became law.”⁷⁶ It was through this legislation that the act entitled “An Act Respecting School Attendance” was passed and it was made mandatory for children between the ages of seven and fourteen to attend public school or receive an education equivalent to that obtained at a public school.⁷⁷ Compulsory education was not only inroads made for education in Manitoba, in fact, it was decided that government loans would be given to districts in need to improve the standards of rural education and the department of education was empowered to make whatever decisions necessary in order to improve the education of Manitoba’s children.⁷⁸

It was through such a platform that change was made possible. Francis Marion Beynon, through “The Country Homemakers” section of *The Guide* provided a space and encouragement for women to reach out and discuss problems with rural life, such as education. As a result, inroads such as compulsory education and additional funding for rural schools were achieved. Through *The Guide*, women found their voice and discovered their ability to organize under the adverse conditions of rural life.

Organizing

Through *The Grain Growers’ Guide*, Francis Marion Beynon was able to reach out to women and create a forum to facilitate discussions of issues associated with living in rural Canadian prairies. In doing so, women were able to find like-minded women, create clubs and organize conferences in which they advocated for enfranchisement with hopes of participating in politics to improve the lives of rural families. As already discussed, of upmost importance was improving the rural educational systems. Women viewed the struggle for optimal education for their children as motivation in the suffrage movement, for winning the vote would aid their advocacy work in areas such as

education and the temperance movement.⁷⁹ As Violet McNaughtan (1915) confirms in a “Farm Women’s Clubs” article, it is through such club meetings that topics such as the moral, social and economic problems of the day will be discussed, and in regards to education “let us, this coming year, thru our organization, show the world what we women of the West stand for.”⁸⁰

Another topic discussed in “Farm Women’s Clubs” is women participating on school boards. It is seen by Mrs. Archibald M. Heustis, president of the national Council of Women, that the participation of women on School Boards are “an absolute necessity if we are to consider the many needs of the child in his school environment,”⁸¹ because “almost any woman entering a school-room will see matters for commendation and for correction that a man will over-look.”⁸² Therefore, through conferences, club meetings and the suffrage movement, women worked towards improving the rural education system of the Canadian prairies in order to better educate their children. As demonstrated, success was achieved in 1916 when women in Manitoba won the vote and additionally, won compulsory education and more control within the department of education. It was a fight well fought and never would have been achieved without women’s voices as well as their co-operation and organization.

Conclusion

In the early twentieth century, the sparsely populated Canadian prairie provinces were the definition of hardship for rural families. In attempting to set-up homesteads and survive the harsh climate the prairies are known for, women became the advocates for improving the lives of rural families. It was through medium such as *The Grain Growers’ Guide* in which women found their voices and found women with similar

goals. Between the years 1912 and 1916, Francis Marion Beynon became a key facilitator of women's organizing through her section of *The Guide*, "The Country Homemakers." While a variety of issues were discussed, such as women's enfranchisement, the lack of health care and lightening the workload of farmer's wives, none other appeared more important to Beynon than education. As she confirms in discussion of rural children, "you want them to be sure of themselves and to be able to enter into any enterprise confidently. You want them to have the boundaries of their thoughts and interests extended by reading and study, so that their lives won't be lived in a narrow little circle of drudgery."⁸³ For Beynon and mothers alike, education would provide just that and so, women would employ *The Guide* as a tool to meet and discuss the issues associated with rural education.

Women focused on issues such as the poor conditions of rural and one-roomed schools, the hardships of travelling to far-away schools, the necessity of a worldly literature and arithmetic-based curriculum, the importance of regular attendance and the quality and quantity of rural school teachers. Beynon would often begin discussions of the importance of education and encouraged parents to create atmospheres that would encourage and promote education in the home and this advocacy for improving education grew. Through conferences and clubs organized through the newspaper, women met and pushed for improved educational conditions for their children. After years of advocacy, in 1916, their hard work paid off as women's enfranchisement and compulsory education were legislated. The improvements that would ensue were in thanks to the advocacy of rural women.

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- ¹ Francis Marion Beynon, "The Country Homemakers," In *The Grain Growers' Guide*, May 20, 1914, pg. 8.
- ² David A. Hay, Gurcharn Basran S., *Rural Sociology In Canada*, Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 1992: 101-102.
- ³ Barbara M. Freeman, *Media Workers and Women's Rights in Canada*, Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011: 70.
- ⁴ Ibid., 70.
- ⁵ Ibid., 70.
- ⁶ Ibid., 71.
- ⁷ Ibid., 72.
- ⁸ Ibid., 72.
- ⁹ Ibid., 74.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 72.
- ¹¹ David A. Hay, Gurcharn Basran S., *Rural Sociology In Canada*, Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press Canada, 1992: 101.
- ¹² Ibid., 101.
- ¹³ M. Hall-Jones, "Consolidated Schools in Manitoba," In *Grain Growers' Guide*, May 8, 1912, pg. 7.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 7.
- ¹⁸ Francis Marion Beynon, "The Country Homemakers," In *The Grain Growers' Guide*, December 2, 1914, pg. 10.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 10.
- ²¹ Ibid., 10.
- ²² Ibid., 10.
- ²³ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 10.
- ²⁸ "The One Room School," In *The Grain Growers' Guide*, January 13, 1915, pg. 6.
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