

**Hothouse Fundamentalism on the Prairies:
The Early Years of Prairie Bible Institute
Through the Private Eyes of Dorothy Ruth Miller**

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Pray on and labor on. Don't be afraid of the toil; don't be afraid of the cross; they will pay well . . . It is a great blessing when God gives one a hunger for souls . . . good many of our early workers had it. We get better people now in some ways, better educated and so on, but it is not often you find that real hunger for souls – people willing to live anywhere and endure anything if only souls may be saved. They are very often humble people. If they were to offer themselves to [the China Inland Mission] now, they might not be accepted . . . But nothing can take its place, or make up for the lack of it . . . It is so much more important than any ability.¹

The above passage is an excerpt from the journal of J. Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission (CIM), and one of the heroic figures for evangelical Protestant Christians who supported the faith-missions movement. Taylor's words are entered at the back of the 1934 diary of Dorothy Ruth Miller, who was at the time a teacher and women's dorm superintendent at a fledgling Bible school in the middle of the Alberta plains called Prairie Bible Institute (PBI). Miller's appropriation of Hudson Taylor's words provides a theological window through which to view the staff, students and general ethos of the school during its early years. Like her missionary forerunner, Miller saw the Christian life as a two-fold spiritual struggle: on the one hand there was the daily struggle of living the "crucified

life” of self-denial; on the other hand one was also engaged in the spiritual battle to save souls from a lost eternity. In both of these tasks the spiritual zeal of the individual believer was counted as more valuable than any skills and abilities he or she may have possessed, especially if those abilities had been nurtured in institutions of higher academic learning and stamped with the imprimatur of a scholarly degree. Taylor’s reflections on his missionary endeavor in China also expressed the ministry ideals and concerns Miller had for the students at her own school in the village of Three Hills, Alberta.

From her arrival in Three Hills, Alberta, in 1928 until her death sixteen years later, Dorothy Ruth Miller was a stalwart of the newly established Prairie Bible Institute. Next to PBI’s charismatic founder, L.E. Maxwell, Miller exercised the greatest influence in shaping the identity of the school. She did this not only through her teaching, but also in her capacity as a residence administrator, institute board member, and as a tireless advocate on behalf of her students for their placement in various missionary societies. In the midst of these many activities, often co-mingled with long bouts illness, she found time to keep a daily diary. These diaries have been maintained in the PBI’s archives, and provide a unique first-hand view of life in one of the many rural western Canadian Bible schools which sprang up on the prairies during the 1920s and 30s.² While Miller’s diaries do not give a fully detailed or evenly developed account of events at PBI, these documents do provide important insight into the theological and cultural worldview of the author, and the other members of a close-knit, fundamentalist, educational community.³ Diaries are intensely private and intimate documents, and in Miller’s case each day’s entry was limited to the space equivalent to half a sheet of loose-leaf paper. In these pages we are presented with brief observations about both the mundane tasks and the perceived spiritual climate at the school which were dominant in the author’s mind on any given day. Rather than a flowing narrative these diaries can more accurately be considered a series of snapshots recorded by the private gaze of the author – in this case, a single woman in her early sixties who was an evangelical Protestant. Their cumulative effect, despite gaps and selectivity, is a mosaic of school life, which captures the spiritual hothouse sub-culture of missionary-minded fundamentalism.⁴

Miller’s description of life at PBI fits comfortably within the common contours of such institutions outlined in work of Virginia Brereton and Ben Harder.⁵ Similarly, Miller’s identity as a single woman, a Bible teacher, and a fundamentalist in the holiness theology tradition, has also been broadly

mapped out by scholars such as Betty A. DeBerg, Janette Hassey, and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth.⁶ More particular to the Bible school movement in western Canada, the nature of PBI's role and identity in Canadian evangelical circles has also received no small amount of scholarly attention. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. and Robert Burkinshaw have focused on the influence of the school from the 1950s onward, and most recently Bruce Guenther in his macro analysis of western Canadian Bible schools has placed it on an educational spectrum vis a vis other similar institutions.⁷

The purpose of this brief study is not to challenge these helpful portrayals of PBI, or the generalized portrayals of fundamentalist women, but to respond positively to Guenther's call for "new ways forward." In his dissertation he states the need for "additional institutional biographies that might provide still more clarity to the variegated complexity found within the Bible school movement (and by extension within the nature of fundamentalism itself) in western Canada."⁸ This brief glimpse at PBI from 1928 to 1936 through the private eyes of Dorothy Ruth Miller is intended to give a more particular and nuanced understanding of one expression of fundamentalist Christianity on the Canadian prairies.⁹

From these diaries three dominant themes emerge about school life: firstly, there is the monastic-like commitment to prayer and devotional discipline; secondly, Miller draws frequent attention to the culture of scarcity most evident in the spartan living conditions and meagre personal finances of the author; thirdly, there is the over-riding concern for students to heed the call to missionary service. All three of these themes come through the interpretive grid of Miller's Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) holiness theology: the belief that living the "crucified life" was the true measure of one's faith.

Before tracing the development of these themes from the diaries some background on both PBI and Dorothy Ruth Miller are in order. In the fall of 1922, Leslie Earl (L.E.) Maxwell, a Bible school graduate from Kansas, arrived at a small farm town located about one hundred and thirty kilometres northeast of Calgary. He was met at the Three Hills train station by a local farmer of Ontario Presbyterian stock named Fergus Kirk. Through a family connection Kirk had heard that the C&MA school in Kansas might be able to supply a teacher for some of the local young people who were interested in furthering their biblical education. Maxwell responded to the invitation thinking he might stay for a couple of years before moving on to fulfilling his ambition to go overseas as a missionary.¹⁰ What began as an ad hoc

assignment grew into a permanent school. Over the next six years, through his charismatic teaching and summer preaching tours in western Canada, Maxwell saw the school grow from eight students, who met in an abandoned farm house, to forty-five students, who now occupied their own newly-constructed building in the town of Three Hills. The increase in students brought with it the need for additional teaching and residence staff. Maxwell had kept in touch with a couple of his former teachers from Kansas who had since moved on to another school in Seattle. One of these was Dorothy Ruth Miller. In the summer of 1928 Maxwell invited her to come and teach at PBI, an invitation she readily accepted.¹¹ When she arrived in Three Hills, Miller was fifty-five years old and had already taught at three other Bible schools, all under the administration of A.B. Simpson's C&MA organization. She would end up teaching at Prairie until her death in 1944 at age 71.

Due to the informal nature of PBI's early operations, as well as scant personnel records, little is known about Miller prior to her arrival in Three Hills. She held baccalaureate degrees from two eastern American universities: a degree in English from Columbia University and a history degree from New York University. She had been a school teacher for several years when she was urged by her local minister to attend Bible school in order to become a Bible teacher. Upon finishing her Bible training she was immediately offered a teaching position at the school from which she just graduated. At one point A.B. Simpson offered her the principalship of one of his C&MA schools, which she declined based on her views of women in leadership.¹² When Maxwell did announce her appointment to PBI's staff in the school's own periodical, he was quick to point out that "far more . . . than her scholastic attainments, is Miss Miller's devotion to the teaching of God's Word. Her twenty years of experience in Bible School work render her an invaluable asset to our teaching staff."¹³ Among her previous teaching appointments Miller had held positions at C&MA schools in Nyack, New York, Kansas City and Seattle.

When she arrived by train in Three Hills on 29 June 1928, she saw a village defined by seven towering grain elevators posted along a railway siding. Running west to east away from the elevators was a single unpaved road that functioned as the main commercial artery and in turn was intersected by six or seven avenues. Electricity became available in 1926, and by 1929 the population passed the five hundred mark, giving Three Hills official town status.¹⁴ The school itself consisted of a large multi-purpose building, which contained living quarters for students and staff, a dining

area, and classrooms. Next door was the chapel, or Tabernacle, which also doubled as a music classroom. Both of these buildings fronted onto the street which demarcated the northern limit of the town, and because the buildings lay on the north side of the street they were officially outside of town limits, thus reflecting a further degree of remoteness, or in good fundamentalist terminology, “separation from the world.”¹⁵ It was in this doubly isolated environment – rural and spiritual – that Miller faithfully recorded her perceptions of school life for the next eight years, and it is to these perceptions which we now turn.

As stated above, the interpretive lens through which Miller records events is the importance of living a holy life. Holiness was measured by how well one gave evidence of living the crucified life of self-denial and total abandonment to divine leading into some form of Christian ministry and service.¹⁶ While students were expected to have had a specific conversion experience this did not signal the final victory in one’s spiritual walk, rather it only marked the start of a new phase of spiritual warfare. This warfare usually took the form of a series of crises (or one major crisis) or tests of commitment, which usually involved a choice between following a more immediately desirable path of personal ambition, or the less desirable path of humility and self-sacrifice, usually culminating in some form of missionary service.¹⁷ Miller notes the progress, or lack thereof, in the lives of students and staff in the following ways. After attending one of the frequently held student testimony meetings in the fall of 1934 Miller observed: “This evening the testimonies seemed rather depressing than bright and inspiring. It seems to me evident that the enemy is making a strong attack upon us from many sides. When we are tried may we come forth as gold. I know that no strange thing has happened unto us.”¹⁸

Just under a month later Miller offered a much more hopeful account:

We had a wonderful testimony meeting this evening and it was easy to see that God had done a real work in many, many lives. Orvis testified that hitherto he had studied his Bible to learn doctrine, and he had memorized it but had not realized that he needed it for the life of his own soul.¹⁹

When the school hosted a wider supporting constituency during the annual cycle of missionary conferences, youth rallies and summer camp meetings,

Miller was keenly attuned to the spiritual climate of these occasions. After one such revivalist camp meeting she joyfully recorded that

the Spirit of the Lord has been present in the meetings in a wonderful way today. I feel that we are as a school and as individuals definitely entering upon a new and deeper ministry – a deeper embracing of the cross, a greater prayer ministry and a more intense evangelism. I pray that we may miss nothing of what the Lord has for us.²⁰

As the superintendent of the women’s residence, Miller acted as den mother and spiritual confidant to many of the female students. Here again she recorded both the spiritual victories and set backs of individual students. A Miss Walker, “who had been undergoing a great spiritual conflict came into a place of liberty and victory in the Lord,”²¹ while “Marge Dunn needs a breaking down and a cutting loose that will free her from the flesh. She is hanging on to Ralph Bradley in a most tenacious way. She cannot get any where with God until she cuts loose from this whole principle of seeking admiration.”²²

Living the crucified life was a serious undertaking, and as noted in the above case of Marge Dunn, one of the most prominent obstacles to achieving “victory in the Lord” was a preoccupation with members of the opposite sex. This is most clearly described by Miller as she tracked the spiritual growth of one of her former students from Seattle for whom she had developed a certain fondness, and who had become something of a protégé. He was a young man named Perry, who had joined the PBI staff as a teacher shortly after Miller arrived. When Perry began showing an interest in Laura, a single female staff member, Miller immediately began praying that God would break him and bring him to a point of yieldedness.²³ Two months later Perry still showed no signs of victory in his life as his infatuation with Laura continued.²⁴ The next year when Perry announced his engagement – this time to another young lady – Miller again was quick to measure this in spiritually negative terms. When the engagement was broken off three days later there was evident relief.²⁵ Six months later when this same relationship seems to have heated up once again, Miller recorded emphatically that “the Lord gave me a prayer for Perry and [his girl friend] Verna – that He would separate each utterly unto Himself. And that He will give Perry a mighty ministry of intercession – a eunuch for the kingdom of God’s sake [sic].”²⁶ While these words sound severe and one-sided, in Miller’s defense it must

be noted that she was not opposed to marriage, but deeply concerned that it be a result of following God's call to some form of Christian service and not an impediment to such a call.²⁷

Besides romantic relationships there were other things which Miller viewed as impediments to the serious task of the crucified life. She was ill disposed toward recreational pursuits, such as baseball and skating parties. Pre-occupation with "trifles," frivolity and petty pleasures were evidences of a falling away. These and other self-pleasing activities were usually summarized under the general category of "worldliness," and stood out in sharp contrast to a life "poured out" for God.²⁸

Miller was also conscious of applying these same tests to her own Christian walk. As she grew increasingly discontent with her position at the C&MA school in Seattle, she was still concerned about the legitimacy of her own motives in accepting Maxwell's invitation to move to PBI; she really wanted to go, but was uncertain as to whether the opportunity constituted divine leading.²⁹ A few years later she confessed that her newly-acquired enjoyment in learning Spanish might be taking her away from other responsibilities at school.³⁰ In Miller's eyes, PBI became the spiritual crucible in which students and staff together pursued the crucified life, and of the three earlier mentioned themes that characterized that life at PBI the most prominent one is the time and value given to prayer.

If nothing else, Miller's diaries are a record of a life devoted to prayer. There is a monastic-like commitment to both private and corporate periods of intense intercessory prayer. While there are intermittent references to her work in the classroom, an activity of school life that dominates Miller's daily observations was attendance at both mandatory and voluntary prayer sessions. The school day was structured to foster the discipline of prayer as students were required to have a personal devotional time before breakfast. Morning classes concluded at 11:15 a.m. after which everyone gathered for the mandatory Missionary Prayer Meeting which ran until noon.³¹ On Tuesday evenings there was another required prayer meeting, while attendance at prayer meetings on the other week days was considered optional. Week-ends were given over to evangelistic meetings and up to three worship services on Sunday.³² All this could be justified by the Keswick holiness teaching of the deeper life, and the on-going sense of spiritual crisis that threatened to undermine Christian growth. Miller summarized this concern as the 1931 school year was close to getting under way.

[I] have determined to put first things first. I am greatly burdened for spiritual conditions in our own house. We must have victory – love here or many will be defiled. This evening there seemed a brokenness in the meeting and there was something of confession but I am sure that a much deeper repentance and cleaning is needed.³³

Confession and revival leading to spiritual victory for staff and students were not the only matters for prayer. The constant material needs of the school, the welfare of alumni who were active in overseas missions, healing from disease, rain in the face of drought, and the ongoing out-reach ministries of the school all provided plenty of grist for intercessory prayer.³⁴ But the pace could be exhausting even for the most devout spiritual athletes. In the summer of 1931 it was decided to scale back the number of evening prayer meetings to four nights a week, yet a month later Miller notes: “These prayer meetings seem to me almost killing because they take almost every evening. Tonight I am very very tired.”³⁵ Even a hardy prayer warrior could get battle fatigue.

By the mid-1930s Miller shows an increasing appreciation for the contemplative life. The infrequent occasions when she is able to spend extended times of prayer being “shut in with God” in the privacy of her own room are recorded with special affection.³⁶ At times she sounds like a medieval mystic: “Last night it seemed to me that all night long I was praying even in my sleep and that my one great desire was to know the Lord Jesus more fully. I woke asking for this. This is the one real prayer of my heart.”³⁷

Miller’s understanding of prayer reflected one of the theological tensions in the holiness movement. On the one hand, there was the belief in God’s overarching sovereignty in directing human events to accomplish Divine purposes, yet at the same time there was also the belief that human appeals through prayer could move God to intervene or answer in specific ways. A positive answer was often connected to the amount of time the faithful were willing to spend in prayer. The act of prayer then took on a certain quantitative, persuasive nature – as if Christians had to spend much time convincing God to act in a particular way He knew to be good and benevolent, yet was somehow reluctant to go ahead with until a sufficient number of prayers had been offered. Thus Miller would chide herself that “I have not prayed enough for the healing of this cold. I must call upon God for a complete healing. I have been lax in this.”³⁸ Regarding her students she

worried at one point that “we are doing far less than we should do. Perhaps I have not prayed about it as I should have done . . . I must make it a subject of prayer.”³⁹ Later on she could report more hopefully, “I think we did better in our classes today. If I continue to pray I may expect yet more improvement.”⁴⁰ On the other hand, when Miller sensed she had been sufficiently faithful in committing a matter to prayer she also felt the freedom to chide the Almighty when desired answers were slow in forthcoming. Thus she could state that she was “reminding God that the new dormitory is for ‘his own household’ and that windows and siding, floors, heating plant, doors, plaster, etc. are needed. It is for Him to provide a shelter for those ‘of his own household.’”⁴¹ The next day she continued in the same vein:

I have this day reminded God that Minna A. is one of His household and that He as the King of Kings is responsible to provide her [a] . . . passport . . . I have reminded him also that these North American candidates for missionary service in China are His own and that He is responsible to provide for their passage and outfits. Praise God! Praise God!⁴²

At the same time Miller was not strictly formulaic, quantitative, or always this presumptuous in her prayers. The above entries are counter-balanced by other records which show a more nuanced theology. In response to the drought-like conditions on the prairies in the spring of 1931 she observed:

We had a good prayer meeting this evening. Several prayed very definitely for rain. I joined in this petition. I feel that God will answer. He must answer. We prayed in his name for His will, really desiring His will above all things. What we must look for now is the doing of His will. If it does not rain I, who have urged prayer for rain must believe that for some reason it is not His will. But how I must seek the Lord that if there is something in me or in others that makes it better that it should not rain, the hindrance will be removed and that God will be able to bless Three Hills with rain because we are in it.⁴³

In this earnest, self-reflective entry one can detect a confidence that God will act in positive way to her prayers mixed with a humility which acknowledged God’s purposes were beyond human comprehension. Overarching this tension was the desire to experience God’s blessing.

Besides missionary concerns, student needs, personal health, and the elements of nature, another frequent topic of prayer was the provision of necessary material and human resources for the yearly operation of the school. Despite the insatiable demands of keeping the school's facilities adequate for the growing numbers of students Dorothy Ruth Miller and her co-workers at PBI would confidently claim, "Prayer can accomplish everything and God is pleased that we should trust Him."⁴⁴

The theme of prayer was, in this way, linked directly to the second dominant theme of Miller's diaries: chronicling the culture of scarcity. There was no lack of opportunity to exercise trust in divine provision as PBI was often short of resources. The founders decided from the outset that the school would operate on the same principles as the faith missionary agencies it supported. Thus Maxwell would state each year in PBI's *Manual* that "the maintenance, and further enlargement of the school are dependent upon the free-will offerings of friends who believe in the work of this Institute."⁴⁵ Students were charged \$85 in annual fees, which covered living expenses. No tuition fees were charged and the staff simply lived off whatever money remained after operational costs and missionary support pledges had been covered.⁴⁶ At the same time, the school was generous in its financial support of various missionary societies. By 1944, the year of Miller's death and the twenty-second year of the school's operation, PBI had channeled over \$177,000 to nearly forty interdenominational faith mission agencies through its Missionary Treasury fund.⁴⁷

The culture of scarcity evident in Miller's diaries comes in two guises. The most obvious one was the chronic need for more building supplies to make the campus livable. On several occasions Miller noted that the building fund had been reduced to zero.⁴⁸ It was in these times – frequently during the summer months – that the daunting task of getting the school ready for the coming fall drove her to despair: "the financial situation seems so hopeless. I must pray more about these matters. God may be just waiting for me to come through on this."⁴⁹ Decisions about how to use very limited resources in building the campus were informed largely by theologically-based principles of living by faith and living frugally. Miller reports a conference in which Maxwell, Fergus Kirk and she prioritized construction needs:

We decided to propose abandoning the enlargement of the Tabernacle, [and] finishing the outside with shiplap or tongue and groove and painting the building. The siding of the dormitory in the same way.

Plans for the diningroom [sic] were also discussed. It was agreed to definitely ask God for money with which to go on with the building without any interruption. We will try not to go beyond His thought in any expense and will look to Him for full supply of needs. I feel great access to faith through these decisions.⁵⁰

The most sustained account of managing the school's physical needs, and the attendant stress caused by a lack of supplies, is recorded by Miller in the summer of 1932. During the previous year the school had experienced a dramatic increase in enrollment, going from 90 students to 152. The coming fall promised another dramatic increase (230 ended up coming) and the staff found themselves under considerable pressure to put up a new residence before students arrived in October. In July of that year PBI board chairman and co-founder of the school, Fergus Kirk, strongly advocated opening a credit account at the local lumber mill in order to continue construction on the newly-begun dormitory. Maxwell, however, was adamant that the school continue its standing policy of not going into debt for any aspect of operation. The issue raised strong feelings and polarized the board. Miller found herself caught in the middle as both sides sought her support for their position. Not surprisingly her recourse was prayer:

Today has been a day of much suffering of soul in behalf of this place. [Fergus Kirk's] proposal came to me as a terrible blow. It seemed to me like the beginning of the end of God's blessing upon the work if it were not in some way brought to naught. I have been praying with tears and strong crying that God would do something for us to prevent any such action being taken.⁵¹

For Miller this conflict was interpreted largely in spiritual, not economic, terms. As the stand off between Maxwell and Kirk continued she noted:

I have been inclined today to doubt God. But what time I am afraid, I will trust. This spring we had too easy a time entirely. We just thought that things were going to slide along easily. But God has far more to do in us than in the buildings. Oh may He accomplish that which pleases Him.⁵²

By the end of August, Kirk was still insisting on the credit account; a few days later Fergus' brother Roger, who was also backing the credit proposal gave Maxwell "a terrible talking to. He accused him of most everything . . ."⁵³ As the dispute continued, Miller hints that Kirk practiced some work-to-rule tactics in his role as construction foreman.⁵⁴ Finally, two months after the crisis began Miller wrote with no small relief that "this morning Mr. Fergus Kirk came in and had a talk with Mr. Maxwell . . . He admits that he was in the wrong . . . Mr. Maxwell thinks that God has done a great work in Fergus . . . Praise God! I believe that things will begin to move now."⁵⁵ Shortly afterward Miller noted that money to proceed began to come in, but it was the middle of November before the building was close to being usable.⁵⁶ A year later Miller was still lamenting the unfinished state of campus buildings.⁵⁷

Material scarcity was also evident in a second way, namely on a personal level. This is particularly noticeable from Miller's periodic references to her personal finances, or lack thereof. On at least two occasions she notes that for a period of several weeks her personal savings consisted of ten cents.⁵⁸ While food and accommodation were provided by the school such tight personal finances meant exercising thrift and ingenuity when it came to making one's wardrobe last, even if it became rather threadbare. When Miller did receive personal financial gifts from friends, she was quick to record her gratitude in her diary, but it was gratitude not because it would allow her some creature comforts, but because she could pass on a substantial amount, if not all of it, to support missionaries abroad. On one such occasion she wrote:

I praise God for His goodness and for His faithful provision for my needs. I have been looking to Him for money and this evening I received a letter from Lily Snyder and it was an order for \$5.00 . . . How glad I am to have this money to give to the [China Inland Mission] on my pledge . . . Now I need shoes and perhaps before the end of the year glasses, certainly work on my teeth. God never yet hated His own body but nourisheth and cherisheth it. I am glad that I can trust him for all.⁵⁹

If personal material resources were in short supply, so also was personal time. From the frequent descriptions of each day's activities it is a wonder that Miller had even enough time to herself for daily diary entries. In spite of the dramatic growth in student numbers during the first half of the 1930s,

neither official school manuals nor Miller's personal reflections note a corresponding increase in faculty and support staff. It meant that PBI's personnel had to be versatile and work long hours. Besides teaching and supervising the women's residence, Miller also served on PBI's Board of Directors, preached frequently in Sunday services – especially when Maxwell was away, and during the summer helped in the cleaning and general upkeep of the campus. In late summer she helped the school cook do up preserves in preparation for the coming year. The work was demanding and Miller frequently noted how exhausted she was from both the physical and emotional demands placed upon her. The task she found most daunting, however, was not the physical labor or preaching and teaching, but the great personal weight of responsibility she carried as the school's chief administrator when Maxwell was absent. In September of 1933 when Miller found out that Maxwell would be delayed in Edmonton before returning home from an extended preaching tour she confessed, "It seemed as if I could not stand it. I did not realize how tired and worn my nerves are or how much I was counting upon the relief that his coming would be."⁶⁰ This mental fatigue was compounded a few days later when the board chairman Fergus Kirk angrily confronted Miller over the hiring of several men who were carrying out construction work for the school. It is with some relief that she was able to note Maxwell's return several days later.⁶¹ But even in the midst of this culture of scarcity, Miller could see the theological bright side; in such times of need and crisis it was "good to be cast on Him. We have many and great things for which we must seek help from Him who alone can build [the school]."⁶²

The third prominent theme in Miller's diaries is her desire to further her students' missionary aspirations. While she does make periodic references to teaching concerns and the performance of her students in their classroom work, most of her observations about students are tied to their development as potential missionary candidates. Seen through this lens, PBI becomes less a school and more of a half-way house for students to separate themselves from this-worldly engagement and prepare to take the Gospel to "the regions beyond" where Christ has not yet been preached. Miller's own disengagement from cultural activity, such as politics and other events that would be reported in the popular media, is clearly evident. Reference to such events is conspicuously absent. Outside of noting the unexpected banks closures in the United States in 1933, and a few lines about William Aberhart's electoral victory in 1935, Miller devotes little space to these

things in her diaries. The fortunes and failings of students, alumni and staff members as they work through the process of missionary candidacy with various agencies is one of her chief concerns.

Even here Miller shows particular interest in people who chose to apply to the China Inland Mission. Dr. Robert H. Glover, who was the North American director for the CIM, was a frequent speaker at Prairie's annual spring missions conference; he used his visits to recruit candidates for overseas service. Miller noted with some pride that Dr. Glover had mentioned to another missionary that CIM's best candidates came from PBI.⁶³ Conversely, a few years later she noted with shock that the whole slate of CIM candidates from Prairie had been turned down.⁶⁴ But such setbacks were the exception. Each spring at graduation Miller noted with glowing pride the number of students who had committed themselves to missionary service and the ones who already had been accepted by mission boards.⁶⁵ Echoing one of Dr. Glover's spring conference sermons she wrote,

Missions is the greatest investment in the world. Never have I met a true missionary who has had any regret as to the investment of his life in the missionary cause . . . the one thing in the world in which God is most interested is its evangelization. The supreme task of the church is carrying out the great commission.⁶⁶

But missions was not just noted at graduation time. Throughout the year Miller counselled her students to consider missionary service and secretly anguish over them when they showed signs of opting for something, or someone else. She could rejoice when Laura "offered herself for China," but could only pray that Margaret would give up "all idea[s] of attracting men and set herself China-ward."⁶⁷ A fair amount of Miller's time was also devoted to writing references for students as they applied to mission boards, as well as carrying out an extensive correspondence by mail with graduates who were active in various mission fields. Some days she would write up to a dozen such letters a day.⁶⁸ Such a worldview leaves one with the understanding that for Miller, the culture that surrounded the school in its North American environment was a dim shadow land, not fully real. As such PBI functioned as porthole from that chimera to the true reality of the overseas mission field. For Miller the success of the school was measured by the number of students who responded to the call of missionary service upon completing their studies.

It is easy to conclude from the above description of prayer, scarcity and missions that Dorothy Ruth Miller and others like her who dedicated themselves to teaching in schools such as PBI, were rather grim ascetics who experienced little pleasure, and gave even less to those around them. In fairness to Miller she does make reference to other activities besides mission outreach and prayer. Even in the midst of a frontier environment exacerbated by the chronic shortages of the 1930s depression, Miller still found time to appreciate small pleasures. Each spring she notes in extensive detail the flowers she plants in various garden plots on the campus. Gardening seemed to be a kind of therapeutic hobby that gave her a break from the demands of teaching, sermon preparation and administration. She clearly enjoyed the outdoors but had few opportunities to travel. Her record of her one trip to Banff clearly shows a delight in the beauty of the mountains and the relaxation she gained from being able to hike around Lake Louise and Johnson Canyon.

Further evidence of a more three-dimensional character of institute life, and Miller in particular, comes in the occasional pointed observations she makes about her peers. As much as she respected Maxwell, she was also quick to point out perceived defects in his judgment. After hearing Maxwell give marital counsel to another young male staff member Miller indignantly commented: "I must say that on the subject of matrimony Mr. Maxwell tries me. He thinks that he know a lot about it but he knows nothing of women, even if he has a wife."⁶⁹ In recent interviews former students were asked to recall their impressions of Miss Miller. Invariably the first thing they mentioned was her sense of humor. In spite of her no nonsense enforcement of the school rules she was remembered for her infectious laugh and portly figure, which shook like Santa Claus. To some she was a holdover from the Victorian era: a women who could even carry her chamber pot with dignity as she made the daily morning trip from her second floor rooms down the hall and two flights of stairs to the outhouse. One student described her as mother figure not only to students, but also to L.E. Maxwell.⁷⁰

So while PBI was a hothouse of holiness faith it is significant to note that through the private eyes of Dorothy Ruth Miller it was also a place where devout, pious staff members, with all too human failings, sought to live out the convictions of their faith, and encourage their students to personal devotion of the crucified life and missionary service.

Endnotes

1. The back page of Dorothy Ruth Miller's 1934 Diary (hereafter DRMD); Box 31, Prairie Bible College Archives (PBCA).
2. See Bruce L. Guenther, "Training for Service: The Bible School Movement in Western Canada, 1909-1960" (Ph.D. Diss., McGill University, 2001), 8.
3. Defining the term "fundamentalist" and its counterpart, "evangelical" has provided no end of challenges to historians of Christianity. For a further clarification of these terms as they are used in this paper see Guenther, "Training for Service," 12-26; and James Enns, "Every Christian A Missionary: Fundamentalist Education at Prairie Bible Institute, 1922-1947 (MA Thesis, University of Calgary, 2000), 10-36; John G. Stackhouse Jr. *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 12-17; and Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 28-36.
4. I am indebted to Bruce Guenther ("Training for Service," 349) as well as one of my students, Bob Do, for the "hot house" metaphor; both used the phrase to describe their understanding of Bible school life.
5. Virginia Lieson Brereton, "The Bible Schools and Conservative Evangelical Higher Education, 1880-1940," in *Making Higher Education Christian: The History and Mission of Evangelical Colleges in America*, eds. Joel A. Carpenter and Kenneth W. Shippy (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press), 110-130; and Ben Harder "The Bible College Movement in Canada," in *Journal of the Canadian Church Historical Society* 19 (April 1980): 29-45.
6. See Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 76-86; Janette Hassey, *No Time For Silence: Evangelical Women in Public Ministry Around the Turn of the Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1986), 11-30; and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1993), 76-89.
7. Guenther, "Training for Service," 297-360; Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century*, 71-88, 131-137; and Robert K. Burkinshaw, "Evangelical Bible Colleges in Twentieth-Century Canada" in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, ed. George A. Rawlyk (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 369-384.
8. Guenther, "Training for Service," 359, 364.

9. Although Miller continued to be active on the staff of PBI until late into 1943 when she was diagnosed with cancer. She spent the last few months of her life with relatives in West Virginia, but was buried in Three Hills in February 1944. For unknown reasons the diaries in PBI's archives do not go past 1936. The increasing number of lengthy gaps in the 1936 book suggests she simply stopped keeping a diary after that year.
10. For a more detailed account of PBI's origins see Enns, "Every Christian A Missionary," 1-7, 37-63; and Stackhouse, 71-88.
11. From Miller's diary entries of 1928 we learn that things were not going well at the Seattle school. She took Maxwell's letter of invitation, as well as the failure of the Seattle school to renew her contract for the coming year, as providential guidance that Seattle was no longer the right place for her (see entries from 29 March, 17 April, and 15-16 May).
12. "On Women Speaking," *The Prairie Pastor* 12, No. 12 (December 1939): 7-8.
13. "The Coming School Year," *The Prairie Pastor* 1, No. 9 (September 1928): 3.
14. "Town Timeline," *Three Hills Capital* (29 July 1987).
15. For further discussion on the relationship between school and town see Enns, "Every Christian A Missionary," 65-69.
16. For further explanation of the particular form of holiness theology taught at PBI see L.E. Maxwell, *Born Crucified: The Cross in the Life of the Believer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1945).
17. For further explanations of this doctrine see Darrel R. Ried, "Towards a Fourfold Gospel: A.B. Simpson and the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada," in *Aspects of the Canadian Evangelical Experience*, 271-288; and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 78-79; and Enns, "Every Christian A Missionary," 40-46.
18. 15 October, 1934, DRMD.
19. 14 November 1934, DRMD.
20. 30 June 1932, DRMD.
21. 2 December 1933, DRMD.
22. 2 January 1935, DRMD.
23. 6 April 1930, DRMD.

24. 31 May 1930, DRMD.
25. 16, 19 December 1931, DRMD.
26. 28 July 1932, DRMD.
27. 26, 30 December 1934, DRMD.
28. 1 February, 1930; 30 June and 29 March, 1934; 16 January, and 4, 21 March 1928, DRMD.
29. 29 March, and 15-16 May 1928, DRMD.
30. 29 April 1930, DRMD.
31. Inside cover of 1934 Diary. Here Miller has a timetable of the school week laid out.
32. Miller makes frequent reference to a weekly street meeting held in Three Hills on Saturday evenings. On Sunday staff and students could attend two services at the local Presbyterian church, where some of the founding families worshiped, and where Maxwell and Dearing preached on occasion. In addition to that the school held its own afternoon service along with a Sunday School hour prior to that. As the school grew it seems that attendance at the local church was discouraged and PBI began to run a morning and evening service in its own Tabernacle (see Sunday entries between 1933 and 1936 for this trend, DRMD).
33. 9 September 1931, DRMD.
34. For examples see 6 February 1930; 26, 27 June 1928; 9 July 1932; 3 January and 9 June 1931; and 12 February 1932, DRMD.
35. 24 July, and 23 August 1931, DRMD.
36. 20 May 1934, DRMD.
37. 12 May 1931, DRMD.
38. 14 January 1930, DRMD.
39. 11 February 1931, DRMD.
40. 21 October 1931, DRMD.
41. 8 September 1932, DRMD.
42. 9 September 1932, DRMD.

43. 26 May 1931, DRMD.
44. 5 April 1932, DRMD.
45. *Bulletin of the Prairie Bible Institute: 1928-29*, 8; Registrar's Office Records, Prairie Bible College.
46. *Bulletin of the Prairie Bible Institute: 1928-29*, 14, 19-20.
47. *Manual of the Prairie Bible Institute*, 1944-45, 8.
48. 3 January 1931; 7 July 1932; 15 September 1933; and 10 July 1934, DRMD.
49. 31 July 1931, DRMD.
50. 26 April 1932, DRMD.
51. 25 July 1932, DRMD.
52. 29 July 1932, DRMD.
53. 2 September 1932, DRMD.
54. 15 September 1932, DRMD.
55. 26 September 1932, DRMD.
56. 19 November 1932, DRMD.
57. 4 November 1933, DRMD.
58. 16 October, and 14 December 1928, DRMD.
59. 1 December 1932, DRMD.
60. 16 September 1933, DRMD.
61. 20, 28 September 1933, DRMD.
62. 8 February 1931, DRMD.
63. 19 September 1931, DRMD. A few years later she also mentioned (perhaps a little smugly) that according to a visiting missionary conference speaker, PBI's candidates were considered superior to CIM's current slate of candidates from California schools (see 31 March 1936, DRMD).
64. 29 March 1935, DRMD.
65. For a typical example see 1 April 1934, DRMD.
66. 31 March 1934, DRMD.

67. 1 April 1931; and 30 December 1934, DRMD.
68. 31 August 1933. See also 10-11 April 1933; and 9 March 1936, DRMD.
69. 24 February 1930, DRMD.
70. Phone interviews with Ida McLean, Doug Kirk, and Jean Grasley, 16 May 2002, Three Hills, Alberta.