

**The Calgary Local Council of Women:
Traditional Female Christianity in Action
(1895-1897 and 1912-1933)**

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In 1938, Alice Grevett delivered the Presidential address before the Calgary Local Council of Women (hereafter CLCW). Grevett reminisced over the Council's past 26 years of social activism. She stated,

Look back in imagination over the years and see the Council as a part of the Woman's Movement by women for women; see it as part of an expression of the community's needs, attempting to bring the need for remedial legislation to the attention of the provincial authorities, to serve women and children of all creeds; see it as a manifestation of democracy in a country whose people have come from differing traditions, from all nations and races.

Identifying and expressing the religious sentiments of the CLCW, Grevett continued,

. . . 26 years of organized service to the community. We were organized to be of mutual helpfulness and understanding . . . to help build a Christian order; to try to educate public opinion by our own experiences what the needs of others are, and as to conditions of today which must be changed if we are to give women that fullest kind of life.¹

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These statements embody two clearly identifiable themes: female social activism and Christian religious conviction, which within the historical time frame from 1912 to 1933, presents an intriguing picture of a powerful, politically-motivated female lobby group. It was during this period, as at no other time during the CLCW's history, that the presence of a strong evangelical influence was so obviously linked with social activism.² Also to be noted is the fact that the strongest, most assertive leadership came from women in whose denominations revivalism was an accepted vehicle for social and religious renewal.³ Further, there is also strong evidence of an ecumenical and progressive outlook, with groups from the Catholic and Jewish communities participating on the Council.⁴ Corroboration of these facts is to be found within the unbroken records of the CLCW from 1920 to 1933.⁵ Unfortunately records from 1911 to 1919 are sparse and most of them are acknowledged to have been mislaid.⁶

Confessions of Faith and Identity of Purpose

Upon becoming an affiliate of the powerful National Council of Women, the CLCW adopted as its primary creed the official "Confession of Faith" composed in 1894 by the Federation of Women for the inaugural meeting of the National Council. One of the major tenets of this Creed expressed resolve to "further the application of the Golden Rule to society, custom and law."⁷ The full National Council Creed read,

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.⁸

In addition to this, for Local Council affiliates there was a further statement of intent which was issued by the National Council as a guide and explanation of purpose and identify. It read,

Believing that the more intimate knowledge of one another's work will result in larger mutual sympathy and greater unity of thought, and therefore in more effective action, certain Associations of Women

interested in Philanthropy, Religion, Education, Literature, Art and Social Reform, have determined to organize Local Councils.⁹

It is within these declarations that the key to the strength and motivation of this formidable Albertan movement may be found.

Calgarian Distinctions as a Local Council

In Calgary alone, the re-constituted Local Council of 1912 was the first Albertan organization of women to present an Albertan petition for the provincial franchise in 1914.¹⁰ In addition to this, among its other accomplishments, the CLCW was the first Albertan women's group to achieve political gains and representation for women with the election of various female candidates to influential appointments. One of its members, the evangelical Christian, Annie Foote, was the first female Calgarian Public School Trustee.¹¹ Another CLCW member, also an evangelical Christian, Annie Gale, became Canada's first City Alderwoman. There was also the appointment of CLCW President Alice Jamieson as the first female magistrate of a juvenile court in the British Empire. Jamieson too also a devout Christian.¹² Further, the CLCW record attests to the successful campaigns for education, rights, equality, health care, and protection for women and children.

Traditionally, the women of the CLCW had little legal voice within their own conventional Christian denominations and until 1916 possessed no provincial voting rights of their own. However, these women were able to circumvent subtly the rigid religious and societal controls to establish a formidable, well-organized political vehicle. The CLCW created a separate, autonomous group, which enabled them to express their considerable expertise and knowledge of social issues, to effect positive change in their community, Alberta, and the Dominion of Canada.¹³

Composition, Constitution and Earlier History of the CLCW

The composition of the reconstituted Council reflected an impressive representation of Calgarian women's societies and service clubs. These organizations had themselves been established much earlier in Calgary's history. In itself, this comprehensive selection of societies was in accordance with a directive from the National Council of Women which advised

those wishing to form a Local Council to obtain copies of the “Constitution and Rules and papers bearing on the aims and workings of the Council” and to “distribute these papers to ladies representing the different churches, societies and institutions in the district who would be likely to take an interest in the formation of such an organization.”¹⁴ This directive was first issued circa 1894 when the National Council was first formed.

Historically, the first formal attempt to form a Local Council in Calgary was undertaken approximately one year after the publication of this directive, in November 1895.¹⁵ This attempt was launched by Lady Ishbel, Countess of Aberdeen, first President of Canada’s National Council of Women, upon her arrival in Calgary that year.

Lady Aberdeen was herself a devout, conservative, Presbyterian, evangelical Christian and she emphasized in her addresses the “feminine” quality of nurturing as the high calling of the Local Council. This high calling revolved around an expanded concept of the “mothering” influence within the community.¹⁶ According to the *Alberta Tribune*, Lady Aberdeen called on the women of Canada, “. . . to carry that spirit of love, which they already recognize as the principle governing home life, into this higher life, and thus from one end of Canada to the other we shall find ourselves bound in a golden link of sisterhood.”¹⁷ The *Alberta Tribune* also reported Lady Aberdeen’s call “to love, to understand and serve one another.”¹⁸ In response to her leadership a small Local Council was formed.

Rudimentary analysis of the early Council indicates that eleven affiliate groups joined and that six of these were clearly identifiable as Christian organizations. Out of the eleven groups in 1896 there were three Methodist, two Anglican and one Catholic society.¹⁹

Church leaders and politicians from these denominations were quick to endorse an organization espousing the lofty sentiments of a “mothering” mission.²⁰ Nevertheless, the CLCW was short-lived as division soon arose surrounding the traditional subservient role of women in relation to the authoritative participation of male patrons endorsing and directing the Council.²¹ This caused concern from amongst the more independent female members of the Council who believed that the organization should function as an autonomous women’s movement.²² Another contentious issue was the subject of suffrage which many of these women were eager to address in an early campaign for the provincial franchise.²³ For these primary reasons, coupled with internal manoeuvring for political influence, the first CLCW was disbanded in 1898.

Henrietta Muir Edwards Organizes the New CLCW

By 1912, however, a new era appears to have arrived, one in which a Local Council presented as a viable independent entity. This is evidenced by the response to the visit of Henrietta Muir Edwards to Calgary in the fall of 1912. The renowned Muir Edwards was Vice President of the National Council of Women.

When Muir Edwards arrived in Calgary to create a new Local Council she was almost 63 years-old and came with the reputation of a prominent social activist with deep religious convictions. She possessed an extensive record of Christian service in Montreal, Saskatchewan and Alberta, and held credentials in the women's movement dating back more than twenty years.²⁴

In 1893 Muir Edwards had espoused the suffrage movement as a member of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association. The Association later changed its name to become the Canadian Suffrage Association (CSA). Seventeen years later, in 1910, Muir Edwards' commitment to the cause was rewarded when, through her influence, the National Council of Women endorsed the women's suffrage resolution tabled by the CSA.

Muir Edwards further distinguished herself as a founding member of the Alberta and Saskatchewan WCTU in 1905, as well as becoming its Superintendent of Equal Franchise and Citizenship. Further to this she also became recognized as a leading authority on Canadian/Dominion law as it pertained to women and children. Ten years after her successful campaign to establish the Calgary Local Council of Women, Muir Edwards published a work entitled *Legal Status of Women of Alberta*. This text was authorized by the Attorney General of Alberta and served as a legal reference for many years.²⁵

Muir Edwards was a charismatic, seasoned campaigner, tough yet remarkably kind and sensitive. She had been raised as a Baptist and had been exposed to revivals and the evangelical emphasis on the new birth. During the 1860s and 1870s the transatlantic evangelical revival had inspired many young women to work for God including Muir Edwards. She espoused many evangelical causes but it was her lifelong commitment to women's issues that promoted her to leadership in the campaigns for female enfranchisement, equality, legal rights and status.²⁶

By 1912 Henrietta Muir Edwards held the position of Vice-President with the National Council of Women for Alberta, with the responsibility for organizing its Local Councils. Her expertise and organizational abilities, together with the ability to inspire others, were credentials by which she was recognized and respected in many women's groups throughout Canada.

When Mrs. Muir Edwards arrived in Calgary in 1912 it was with the intent to re-establish the Calgary Local Council of Women. It would appear from an analysis of the original Calgary affiliate groups that the women whom she attracted to the first meeting and subsequently drew into membership, were sympathetic to her objectives. These women formed the new, aggressive, organized and committed Local Council in 1912, and among its membership lay some of the most talented and articulate women in the Calgarian community.

On 26 October 1912, at the inaugural meeting of the CLCW, only 50 women were present to hear Muir Edwards' address. Fortunately, those 50 women served as representatives for the majority of important women's groups in Calgary. Due to the diversity of the organizations and their demonstrated commitment to the Calgarian community, these groups were amenable to Muir Edwards' advice that the Local Council abstain from religious and political factions. In order to pursue their goals of social reform the women accepted the reality that religious and political points of difference would have to be set aside.²⁷

Composition of the Re-constituted CLCW

An interim executive was elected on 26 October to function until the Annual Meeting was held on January 1913. Mrs. R.R. Jamieson (Alice) was elected President and seven other executive members were appointed. Each acting executive member was officially appointed at the Annual Meeting in 1913.

The aggregate membership of the executive alone reflected the involvement of the Protestant and Catholic churches in the Calgarian community. Those groups represented included the Ladies Aid Society, the Mothers Union, the Methodist Women's Missionary Society, the WCTU, the YWCA, the Victorian Order of Nurses, the Independent Order of the Daughters of the Empire, the Hospital Aid Society, Children's Aid Society, the Alberta Women's Association, the Woman's Canadian Club,

the Calgary Women's Literary Society, the Calgary Woman's Press Club and the Business Women's Club of Calgary.²⁸ With the inclusion of the affiliate groups represented within the general membership of the CLCW, it soon became a movement dominated by a Christian majority.²⁹

Reflected within these women's societies and clubs was the drive, expertise, commitment and social awareness of groups already well attuned to the political, social and religious issues of the day. Each group had previously from its own endeavours established itself within the Calgarian community and had already created a network with other groups in the city.

In addition to this, within the context of traditional links within the Christian community in Calgary, there was close communication between women's groups. For example, denominationally affiliated organizations such as the Mothers Union, Methodist Women's Missionary Society, and the Ladies Aid Society, shared multiple interests and membership within wider inter-denominational groups such as the WCTU, the YWCA and the Children's Aid Society. All groups shared common ideologies based on evangelical or social gospel belief systems. These included the improvement of society and morals, temperance issues, law reforms regarding custodial rights for mothers, and rights and protection for women, children and the destitute. Later, from 1914 to 1918, the shared ideologies would expand to include the goals of obtaining the provincial and federal franchise. As a consequence, there was an identifiable overlapping of interests and an overlapping of memberships within the groups.³⁰

The CLCW and the Women's Forum

This complex composition of group interests united in a common front can be identified from the inception of the re-instituted Calgary Local Council of Women in 1912. Historically, the first demonstration of this complex group ideology and choreographed program of action can be identified in early December, 1912.

After its formation on 26 October, 1912, the CLCW lost no time in establishing its credibility and its power to involve Calgarian women in political campaigning. A municipal election was scheduled for 9 December 1912. Voter participation in the past, especially on the part of women, had traditionally been low. Since women in Calgary had been afforded the municipal vote in 1894 the CLCW decided it was time to create female

voter awareness.

The Civic Committee of the CLCW sent a letter to Calgary's female voters notifying them of a public forum to be held on 6 December 1912. The letter informed the women that at this forum the 40 candidates for the offices of mayor, alderman and commissioner, would be invited to address the women's concerns and questions. This would give the women an opportunity to assess who would be "the most moral and progressive" candidates.³¹

On 6 December 1912, history was made and the Women's Forum proved a noted success. The Forum was chaired by Mrs. Emily Kerb, Vice-President of the CLCW, and the list of prepared questions was read out by Miss Annie Foote, secretary of the Local Council's Civic Committee.

The questions presented by Miss Foote covered various bylaw issues. Some questions concerning the provision of sanitary, safe and comfortable accommodation for those of modest means were raised. This especially addressed the needs of young women employed in offices and stores, who needed warm, safe and affordable lodging. These questions reflected the perceived threat to young women and the concern that the Council felt for the young women's moral safety. The women of the Council believed there to be a connection between insufficient wages, poverty, poor accommodation and ensuing immorality to provide for the necessities of life.³²

Other questions concerned such issues as: the preservation of Sunday as a day of rest for all Calgarians; the enforcement of the bylaw forbidding boxing matches or "contests" within the city limits,³³ and the enforcement of equal justice and punishment to be "meted out to the men and women found in houses of ill fame."³⁴

Within the press reports of the Forum certain interesting points emerge: (1) the candidates did not anticipate the level of awareness, discernment and ruthlessness of their female inquisitors; (2) the sins of omission and commission on a political and public level were clearly identified by the women; and (3), condescension on the part of the male politicians was promptly and aggressively confronted. The Calgary press was quick to pick up on these factors and the headlines the next morning in *The Morning Albertan* read, "Candidates Raked by Merciless Fire of Cross Questioning by Women."³⁵

Voter attendance for the 9 December 1912 civic election was the largest in the history of Calgary. Arising out of this renewed civic interest

the *Calgary News Telegram* stated that a year of reform lay ahead for Calgary and that this hopefully would lead to the improvement of municipal conditions.³⁶

Historically, the Forum is also interesting in that it appears to showcase the CLCW's enduring approach to female involvement in political and moral issues. In the public arena, a mayoralty candidate, R.A. Brocklebank, was relentlessly questioned by Mrs. M.S. Russell, representative of the Calgary Women's Hostel. Mrs. Russell, ignoring the social convention of female delicacy, confronted Mr. Brocklebank as to his real estate interests in the thriving red-light district of Calgary's South Coulee. Mrs. Russell drew the audience's attention to the fact that Mr. Brocklebank had financial connections to bordellos in that area and that he had been present in a notorious cafeteria at the time of a police raid. She noted that his name had been omitted from the police charge sheet. Mr. Brocklebank denied knowledge of both the bordello connection and his fortuitous omission from the charge sheet.³⁷

Membership and Philosophy

As previously observed, the Women's Forum acted as the springboard for the CLCW to display its concern for morality and justice. It was a platform to which it remained committed over the years. Analysis of the Council in 1912, and then from 1920 to 1933 when there are more comprehensive records, presents a consistently religious identity. The societies in membership ranged from 41 to 48 in number, and even when not overtly linked by religious affiliation, the majority of these societies still reflected a religious orientation. In addition to this, each President of the Council from 1912 to 1933 was identified by her denominational affiliation and some link to religious work within that denomination.³⁸

The CLCW's social activist stance was a successful one. On a municipal level during the years 1912 to 1933, the Calgary Local Council was instrumental in the establishment of: (1) the inclusion of women on local boards and government committees; (2) legal aid to women including immigrant domestics and unwed mothers; (3) a Housekeepers' Association with protection for domestic workers; (4) a local Consumers League and Humane (charities) Society; (5) safeguards to protect babies against venereal disease; (6) a police matron to aid female prisoners and, (7) a town planning commission with the resulting appointment of a woman to

the commission.³⁹

Provincially, the influential CLCW also participated actively in the successful campaigns for: (1) the franchise for Albertan women (gained in 1916); (2) the Mother's Pension; (3) the Woman's Home Protection Act; (4) the Devolution of Estates Act; (5) the age of consent raised to 18 years of age; (6) marriage licences to be obtained through a regulated, legal procedure; (7) a woman's right to the custody of her own child, and (8) the marriage age raised to 16.⁴⁰

Federally, the CLCW as an affiliate of the National Council of Women, participated in the campaign for the legal recognition of women as persons under the BNA Act and their appointment as senators within the parliamentary system. At the National Convention of the NCW, held in Calgary in 1921, it is recorded that Mrs. Arthur (Emily) Murphy urged that "the time to act is now when vacancies (in the senate) are open." There was one dissenting voice – Charlotte Whitton representing Kingston, ON. The motion was still proposed by Mrs. Jean MacIvor of Toronto and seconded by Mrs. G.W. (Emily) Kerb of Calgary.⁴¹ The motion was carried.

The CLCW – "Mental Hygiene" and the "Menace of Mental"

At the same National Convention, among the many positive aspects and gains recorded, there is also a report noted which presents an aspect of Canadian, North American and European history which cannot be overlooked. This report addressed the problems associated with mental illness regarded as the "menace of mental disease" and the need for "mental hygiene"⁴² This approach or theoretical remedy was known as *eugenics* and it presented itself as a popular "scientific" answer to the problems of "mental disease." The idea itself had found popularity in western Canada in the early 1900s and "instilled in the public a belief that scientific knowledge was a means to improve existing social conditions."⁴³ Eugenics argued that defective genetics, manifested in insanity, vice and criminal activities – mostly demonstrated within the characters of the poor and the foreign immigrant – could gradually be culled from the population by effective birth control measures. These measures were believed to be most efficiently implemented through sterilization. This sterilization process would be imposed upon those identified as "defective."

This belief in a scientific solution, however chilling to the modern

reader, was regarded as a “logical” answer by many during this period. This is clearly reflected in Mrs. J.J. Hall’s NCW Mental Hygiene report presented at the National Convention held in Calgary, in June 1921. The report clearly demonstrated that within society at that time “. . . there was a pre-occupation with the ‘mental illness menace’ and its cause.”⁴⁴ As an outcome of these concerns remedy was actively sought in an endeavour to control the perceived sources of social problems.

Listed in Hall’s report were five principles which were “universally acknowledged to be true”: (1) insanity is a disease which may be cured by proper remedial measures; (2) feeble-mindedness is an inherited condition and is incurable; (3) manual labour has been proven an invaluable remedial measure in the treatment of insanity; (4) segregation is essential in preventing the increase of feeble-mindedness; (5) the insane and the feeble-minded should not be housed together and treated in the same manner.

During the National Convention a further recommendation was proposed by the Citizenship Committee which requested that mental examinations and subsequent registration of all subnormal cases within Canada be conducted. In addition to this it was proposed that mentally deficient women of child-bearing age be “supervised” which basically meant that they would be segregated from males and general society. By being segregated in this way the women would not have opportunity to reproduce.⁴⁵

As part of the perceived threat to a well-ordered society attention was also given to the massive numbers of immigrants pouring into Canada. Two studies were discussed during the NCW convention which illustrated the concerns of the NCW. These were studies conducted on immigrant populations in the Montreal and Toronto areas and ultimately the studies drew the conclusions that “criminality and vice had a direct relation to insanity,” especially among the foreign populations. On the basis of these studies, together with other information, the Emigration Committee forwarded to “the meeting of the premiers through the secretary of state for the colonies,” a petition asking that a uniform medical standard for immigrants be set.⁴⁶ The intent of this petition was to restrict or block the number of defective or undesirable immigrants entering Canada.

There is no doubt that the NCW, CLCW and the other Local Councils who participated in the 1921 National Convention were deeply concerned and involved with these issues. By 1922 the problem of “mental

hygiene” and the perceived need for effective remedial measures in answer to the presence of vice, criminality and the spread of mental illness, had crystallized into an official movement within Alberta.

The CLCW, the Provincial Council and the Delegation of 1922

On 12 January 1922, the *Morning Albertan* reported that a “delegation of outstanding women of (the) Province” met with Premier Greenfield in Edmonton. The deputation of women presented Greenfield with a proposed plan for social improvement and change.⁴⁷ The delegation of outstanding women was led by Mrs. P.S. Woodhall. Woodhall was a prominent Calgarian and a spokeswoman for the Provincial Council of Women. The Local Councils within Alberta were affiliates of the Provincial Council of Women and the Calgary Local Council of Women also consequently held membership within it.⁴⁸ By 1922 the CLCW had gained a prominent position within the Provincial Council as Mrs. P. S. Woodhall was a leading women within the organization. Woodhall had been President of the Calgary Council from 1920 to 1921.

From the *Morning Albertan* report it is clear that the representatives from the Provincial Council met with Premier Greenfield and a Cabinet delegation. The women of the Council placed before Greenfield certain social and religious concerns. It was reported that those concerns met with a sympathetic hearing from the government, whose members at the same time urged caution and time for deliberation.

In true newspaper style, the *Morning Albertan* listed in order of importance the main targets for social change raised by the Provincial Council of Women. There were eight main topics: (1) custodial care and sterilization of the mentally deficient; (2) equality within the divorce laws; (3) a detention home for prostitutes; (4) an industrial school for delinquent boys; (5) amendments to the dower law for widows; (6) request for the compulsory reading of the Lord’s Prayer and a portion of Scripture “without comment” in the public schools; (7) the appointment of women as board members on any provincial “boards named to deal with laws or matters where women were concerned,” and (8) the training and appointment of female nurses to assist in rural areas as community nurses in hospitals and to provide home care nursing support in isolated areas.

Upon examination, seven of the eight points present the familiar platform held by these women. It goes without argument that it is the first

point – the care of the “mentally deficient” – that raises discomfort and consternation. The *Morning Albertan* reported that, “The outstanding feature of the hearing was the discussion on the care and treatment of the mentally deficient, and the great need of some radical measures to prevent reproduction by mentally deficient men and women.”⁴⁹

It is clear that the Provincial Council was lobbying on behalf of the Local Councils for legislation to implement compulsory sterilization of these unfortunate people. It is also apparent, no matter how utterly incomprehensible to the modern reader, that during this era sterilization was regarded as a modern, progressive, “humane answer to the menace” and to the growing problems in dealing with the “insane and the feeble minded”!⁵⁰

That the eugenics movement was popular can be seen in ensuing developments that same year and again in 1928. The United Farm Women of Alberta adopted a eugenics program in 1922 and in 1928, the United Farmers of Alberta enacted Canada’s first legislation concerning compulsory sterilization of the mentally defective.⁵¹ From the perspective of the late-twentieth century the whole concept of eugenics is utterly revolting. Nevertheless historically, in the context of the Provincial Council and the Local Councils, it must be submitted that the full and horrible ramifications of the theory of eugenics had not yet been fully experienced or comprehended.

Indeed this defence of ignorance is clearly supported by the naive approach the Calgary Local Council still retained in 1933 and which it expounded in its *Year Book Souvenir* dated that same year. In its list of achievements the CLCW recorded, alongside its many praiseworthy accomplishments, the “custodial care of mentally defective – also sterilization of same.”⁵² A question must be raised at this point – no matter how controversial. One must ask, did these women in the 1920s and early 1930s fully comprehend the pain and suffering that would later become apparent in the 1940s, 1950s, through to the 1990s?

Another factor overlooked in this context is that the Local Councils were trying to create safe environments for many mentally ill people as many of these unfortunate people had been abandoned, physically abused and/or sexually exploited by others within society. That the women of the Local Councils failed to understand the full logical outcome of their actions, and the depth of sensitivity that many mentally challenged people were capable of, does not negate all of the Local Councils’ sincere

concerns and actions for the welfare of this disadvantaged group.

This explanation does not seek to dismiss the dreadful lobbying and ultimate outcome of legislation but it does offer a historical setting in which to view these actions and the part played by the Calgary Local Council. In defence of the Local Councils and the Provincial Council, a comparison must be made between the repugnant eugenics viewpoint and the rest of the women's record. Speaking to the Local Councils of Women, including the CLCW, the 1933 *Year Book Souvenir* lists the following achievements:

Provincial Franchise brought in by the WCTU and the Local Councils.
 Equal Parental Rights.
 Married Women's Relief Act.
 Women's Home Protection Act.
 Dower Act and Devolution of Estates.
 Home for Mental Defectives.
 Mother's Allowance Act.
 Old Age Pensions.
 Non-publication of names of juvenile offenders.
 Issuing of marriage licences at court house only by responsible parties.
 Care of indigent poor – each municipality required to provide for its own.
 Custodial care of mentally defective – also sterilization of same.
 Appointment of women to all boards and commissions dealing with questions appertaining to women and children.
 . . . That divorce in Alberta be granted to a wife on the same grounds as
 to the husband.
 . . . Establishment of eligibility of women to the Canadian Senate through five petitioners – the late Mrs. O.C. Edwards, the late Mrs. Louise McKinney, the Hon. Irene Parlby, Judge Emily Murphy, and Mrs. Nelly McClung, each one at some time a delegate to the Provincial Executive of the National Council of women.⁵³

The question to be raised at this point is, should the reader completely reject or despise all of the achievements of the Local Councils based on one, albeit tremendous mistake? From the perspective of the successful social reforms implemented by the Calgary Local Council of

Women, should all their achievements, including their powerful lobbying for protection of all women and children, despite race or creed, be dismissed?

In order to understand the Calgary Local Council, and reach an objective conclusion, it is essential to again examine the profile of the group within its religious-socio-historical context. Distressing as it may be, the hard historical fact is that many people within Canadian, American, British and European society considered eugenics to be a “scientific” answer to many societal woes. In rebuttal to this and to their credit, there were others who adamantly opposed the theory.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, however, history attests to the fact that eugenics was a popular, powerful if controversial, totally incorrect “answer.”

Profile of the Second CLCW

Upon returning to the enlightened and progressive aspects of the CLCW it is still fair to state that the well-being of women and children was paramount to the group. By definition of the creeds to which the CLCW adhered, together with their other campaigns for reform, it is clear that they perceived themselves to be activists for, and on behalf of, many disadvantaged within society. In addition to this, it is also clear that there were very strong religious overtones which, when analysed, are distinctly Christian in outlook. It would be reasonable, therefore, from this analysis to conclude that social reform, the Golden Rule and the Christianization of society were all inextricably linked together and integrated within the Council’s philosophy.

Further to this, and proceeding from examination of the CLCW’s composition, additional information is adduced as to the complexity of the group. The women of the CLCW were clearly successful, aggressive and politically astute members of Calgarian society. They also considered their female perspective to be a great asset and strength, and were very clear about their roles both as nurturers and reformers in the community. There appears to have been no conflict between the two identities as they apparently derived strength from both. This definition can easily lend itself to a simple categorization of the group as social activist and/or maternal feminist.

Additional historical analysis, however, presents greater complexity. Research indicates that in the West, during the period 1912 to 1933, there

existed another popular ideology. This ideology was the social gospel and the movement exerted a powerful influence particularly in western Canada.⁵⁵ The denominations which were the most prominently affiliated with the social gospel in the west were the Methodists, Presbyterians and Anglicans. Again, the majority of the societies affiliated with the CLCW reflect this denominational composition. At this juncture another query might be raised as to whether these women were just part of the social gospel movement and merely a political adjunct of it instead of a manifestation of original, independent female religious spirit.

To complicate analysis further, another factor for consideration is the presence of a strong evangelical identity within the Council, which offsets the argument for a straightforward social gospel philosophy. As previously mentioned, Alice Jamieson, the CLCW's first President (1912-1915), was an evangelical Presbyterian. Emily Kerb was a strong Methodist and a one-time leader within the Women's Missionary Society. Mrs. Kerb was clear about the centrality of Christ in her life. Annie Gale and Annie Foot were also evangelicals. In addition to this, the consistent presence of the Presbyterian Women's Missionary Society, the WCTU and even the Mothers Union, embody, albeit to varying degrees, traditional evangelical belief systems. Interestingly, these evangelical patterns appear not to be in conflict with the independent female ideology of the CLCW; indeed these belief systems appear to uphold and support the Council in its social reform campaigns.

The clue to the resolution of these contradictions is an innovative, yet logical explanation, found in Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau's work, *A Full Orbed Christianity*.⁵⁶ These writers argue that in Canada, the institutional church permitted a blending rather than a severing of evangelical and social gospel traditions.⁵⁷ From the preceding analysis of the CLCW, and Christie and Gauvreau's observations, it would appear that that is exactly what women within the CLCW did on an inter-denominational level.

Arising out of the foregoing analysis of the CLCW it is believed that the evidence supports the claim that all these ideological and religious factors were part of the Council's early identity. From the successful cohesion of the group and its adherence to the Creeds, it seems evident that some dynamic process of blending occurred early within the Council's history. If, as urged by Muir Edwards, the spirit of ecumenicism and toleration was fostered to enhance the women's cause, it is reasonable to

conclude that early in its organization the CLCW developed a unique religious synthesis which accommodated and embodied both the religious and secular convictions of its female community.

The reasons for the CLCW's social and religious identity are varied. They are additionally complicated by the interaction of one ideology with another. Nevertheless, when viewed as a complete entity, the group presents an intriguing example of a women's organization, empowered by religious beliefs and committed to a social goal. Historically the record attests to the Council's powerful influence in the shaping of Calgary, the Province of Alberta and the Dominion of Canada, during the First World War, labour and social unrest, religious change, and the beginning of the Great Depression. The CLCW's contribution to Canada was that in one small part of the Dominion it achieved rights, freedoms and a level of equality for women and protection for children. In accordance with the Council's credo these women followed the Golden Rule to the best of their ability. That they had feet of clay does not detract from their tremendous contribution to society and their political achievements on behalf of women and children of all classes.

Endnotes

1. Alice L. Grevett, "President's Address," Glenbow-Alberta Institute (hereafter GAI), CLCW, M5841, Box 1, F8 1-9.
2. Marjorie Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies: A History of The Calgary Local Council of Women* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1995), 71.
3. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 71.
4. "Calgary Local Council of Women," *Annual Report, 1913*, from the personal archives of Marjorie Norris. See also "Roll Call: Calgary Local Council of Women, 1920," for the earliest record of Jewish affiliation through the Hebrew Church [sic] Ladies' Aid and the Jewish Benevolent Society.
5. Earliest existing CLCW records at the Glenbow Archives date only from 1919.
6. In examining the early years 1896-1911 extensive use has been made of the Norris' work, *A Leaven of Ladies*. Norris was President of the CLCW in 1972-73, and possesses in her own personal files a collection of earlier documents. It is from these sources that Norris has drawn for early details, and this writer, simply due to scarcity of other material, has extracted these

details from *A Leaven of Ladies*. The writer has also conducted interviews with Mrs. Norris concerning these facts.

7. *Women Workers of Canada, Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting and Conference of the National Council of Women of Canada*, Ottawa, April 1894, 22. The Golden Rule is the commandment of Jesus Christ, which states, "Therefore, whatever you want others to do for you, do so for them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12, NASB).
8. *Hand-Book of the National Council of Women of Canada*, November 1899.
9. *Constitution Recommended by the National Council for Local Councils in Federation with the National Council of Women of Canada*, Toronto, ca. 1890.
10. *The Morning Albertan*, 10 October 1914.
11. By definition "evangelical" describes a crucicentric emphasis. This emphasis stresses the atoning work of Jesus Christ, his sacrificial death, and personal salvation gained through an individual relationship with him. It is the evangelical emphasis on personal regeneration – being "born again."
12. Interview with Marjorie Norris. See also *A Leaven of Ladies*, 135, 163, 148.
13. The independence of each Local Council was guaranteed within the National Council's constitution. By virtue of that autonomy each Local Council possessed the flexibility to deal with local issues, both political and social. At the same time, any matters brought before a provincial legislature had to be endorsed first by the executive committee of the NCWC (see Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 52).
14. *Hand-book of the National Council of Women of Canada*, November 1899, 52.
15. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 29.
16. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 26.
17. "A Royal Reception," *Alberta Tribune*, 30 November 1895, 4.
18. "A Royal Reception," *Alberta Tribune*, 30 November 1895, 4.
19. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 71.
20. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 13.
21. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 13.

22. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 14.
23. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 14.
24. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 51.
25. Henrietta Muir Edwards, *Legal Status of Women of Alberta as Show by Extracts from Dominion and Provincial Laws*, 1921.
26. Patricia Roome presents a thorough examination of Henrietta Muir Edwards' religious and social convictions in her dissertation, "Henrietta Muir Edwards: The Journey of a Canadian Feminist," Ph.D. diss., Simon Fraser University, 1996. For a religious perspective consult especially Chapters II and IX.
27. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 53.
28. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 53.
29. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 69.
30. Marilyn Whiteley, "The Methodist Woman's Missionary Society and Social Christianity: Towards 'A Broader Culture, A Wider Experience,'" unpublished mss., 5. Whiteley indicates a common overlapping motif which is evidenced in missionary and WCTU groups. This observation is corroborated within the Calgary community during 1911-1933, when there was extensive communication and correspondence pertaining to shared ideas and goals.
31. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 56.
32. This was a prevalent view and is regularly alluded to in the work of the CLCW (see Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 71). This was also a common view held by the National Council of Women (see "Poverty and Social Conditions," *Woman's Century*, October 1915, 4).
33. This question addressed concerns regarding unregulated fighting matches. At these fights it was believed that there was gambling, liquor, and also easy access to prostitutes who frequented these large, unruly male gatherings.
34. "Candidates Raked by Merciless Fire of Cross Questioning by Women," *The Morning Albertan*, 7 December 1912, 1-3.
35. "Candidates Raked by Merciless Fire of Cross Questioning by Women," *The Morning Albertan*, 7 December 1912, 1-3.
36. "Reform Laws Projected in Calgary," *Calgary News-Telegram*, 13 December 1912, 4.
37. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, pp 57-58.

38. "The Local Council of Women – Calgary, Alberta, Inaugurated – 1912," GAI, CLCW, M5841, Box 1, F8 1-9.
39. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, chapters 5 and 6.
40. Constance Lynd, "Women and the Ministry," *The Outlook*, 7 November 1928.
41. "Appointment of Women Senators Approved of by National Council," *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 17 June 1921, 26. See also Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 115.
42. "The Menace of Mental Disease," *Woman's Century*, February 1916, 3.
43. Terry L. Chapman, "Early Eugenics Movement in Western Canada," *Globe and Mail*, October 1997.
44. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 107.
45. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 107.
46. "Uniform Medical Standard Asked For Immigrants," *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 18 June 1921, 18.
47. "Greenfield Government Shows Strong Sympathy With Aims of Women's Council," *The Morning Albertan*, 12 January 1922.
48. Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies*, 78.
49. "Greenfield Government Shows Strong Sympathy with Aims of Women's Council," *The Morning Albertan*, 12 January 1922.
50. "The Menace of Mental Disease," *Woman's Century*, February 1916, 3.
51. Chapman, "Early Eugenics Movement," 9.
52. *Local Council of Women Year Book Souvenir 1933*, 30.
53. *Local Council of Women Year Book Souvenir 1933*, 30.
54. J.B.S. Haldane, FRS, Weldon Professor of Biometry at University of London, presented a rebuttal in his work, *Heredity and Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938). Haldane was one of many opponents of eugenics in the late 1930s. By 1936 it had become blatantly evident that there was a direct correlation between eugenics and Adolf Hitler's implementation of horrific measures in Germany.

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55. Richard Allen, "The Social Gospel and the Reform Tradition in Canada, 1890-1928," in *Prophecy and Protest: Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Canada*, eds. Samuel D. Clarke, J. Paul Grayson and Linda Grayson (Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing Limited, 1975), 46.
 56. Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 42.
 57. Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, 42.

