

REFERENCE PAPERS

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No. 99

WOMEN IN CANADA

Since the Second World War, great changes have taken place in Canada. The population has been growing rapidly because of a high birth rate, the seventh highest in the world, and because of large-scale immigration. Each year, Canada has grown more industrialized and this has led to a steady movement of people to the cities. Although fewer people are engaged in agriculture, Canada's production of food, especially wheat, her main agricultural export, has increased because of improved mechanized methods of farming.

High employment and high wages, combined with a good supply of consumer goods, have produced a society in which the majority of the people have achieved a middle class status. Compulsory and free elementary education for boys and girls and such social security measures as family allowances, old age pensions and unemployment insurance have also had a levelling effect on Canadian society as a whole.

Canadian women have been particularly affected by this rapid evolution from a pioneer agricultural society into an urbanized middle class society. The pattern of their lives has also been changed by new factory techniques and by labour saving devices for the home.

On the Farm

Country life is not as lonely or as arduous for Canadian farm wives as it was in their mother's day. Rural electrification has brought light, running water and an automatic washing machine into most farm homes. The telephone, radio and television have brought farm women into touch with the outside world as never before. The improvement in roads and the greater use of snow plows in winter have enabled them to visit neighbors, go to church, attend meetings of the Women's Institutes and other social gatherings, as well as to do their shopping in what were once distant villages or towns. Nevertheless, many farm wives still buy the family clothing and household furnishings out of the illustrated catalogues issued by the mail order divisions of several large department stores.

The diversity of Canada's geography makes it impossible to generalize about the way farm women live. Although the country has a small population - between sixteen and seventeen millions - its territory is the second largest in the world. It stretches four thousand miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific and in the north it borders on the Arctic Ocean. This vast area includes high mountains, rocky wooded areas populated only by mining communities and trappers, large tracts of timber, small farms of the type familiar to Europeans, wide prairies where the growing of wheat and other cereal crops is big business, and rolling

foothill country given over to raising of cattle. In the east - Quebec, the Atlantic Provinces and Ontario - "mixed farming" on small holdings is usual and the farm wife still carries on the traditional chores of growing the vegetables, feeding the chickens and collecting the eggs. "Egg money", is one of her time-honoured sources of private income.

On the other hand, on the prairies of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, farms ranging from three hundred to several thousand acres are often entirely mechanized so that the farmer's wife need do little more out-of-door work than she would if she lived in the suburbs of an urban community. The same is true of the wife of a man operating a big cattle ranch in the foothill country of Alberta. When times are good, many western farmers and their wives travel during the winter months or move into town until it is time for the spring seeding.

Of course, the many women living in the far north or in sparsely populated parts of the country lead a restricted social life, especially in the winter, but because of the radio and the aeroplane they are no longer cut off as in the past.

City Housewives

An ever-increasing number of Canadian women now live in a town or city. Many young married couples occupy a small apartment in "centre town" during their first years of marriage until they have saved enough money for the down-payment on a house, usually in the suburbs. Home ownership is important to family security as well as to social prestige. Often when the family has grown up, older couples move back from the suburbs to a city apartment.

The average Canadian house has four or five rooms and is either detached or semi-detached. In a climate where heating is needed for eight out of the twelve months, the cost of fuel is an important item in the budget, so that most Canadian houses have small rooms and are only two storeys high. In recent years, "ranch style bungalows" and "split level" one-and-a-half storey houses have become popular, even though they cost more to heat.

In general, whether she lives in an apartment or a house, the Canadian housewife runs a highly mechanized household in which she moves a thermostat to turn on the furnace and pushes a button to make toast or the morning coffee. In 1957, 94 per cent of Canadian households had electricity; 66 per cent either a gas or an electric cooking stove; 57 per cent a furnace which burns either coal, gas or oil; 79 per cent an electric refrigerator; 81 per cent a power washing machine; 81 per cent water piped into the house; 68 per cent both hot and cold water; 74 per cent telephones, and 96 per cent a radio. Although only 54 per cent had television sets, the number is growing rapidly. Television, a comparatively new development in Canada, now reaches over seventy per cent of the settled parts of the country and is expanding its coverage rapidly.

Most Canadian women do their own housework and look after their own children. The cook-general and nurse maid have practically vanished from the scene and those few who do remain demand such high wages that few housewives can afford to employ them. As a result, even business girls living alone in apartments do their own domestic chores, perhaps with help of a weekly cleaning woman, as do the mothers of large

families in every walk of life. Visitors from other countries are often surprised to find that the wives of many cabinet ministers, top civil servants and highly paid executives do their own "housework". In some cases, women wishing to entertain rely on persons paid by the hour to cook and serve a meal or cater for a reception.

The "baby sitter" has taken the place of the nurse maid of the past. High school and college students of both sexes, older women, or housewives, who want to earn a few dollars a week without being tied down, will come to a house and stay with the children when the parents want to go out. Many "baby sitters" are only willing to sit in the living room reading, doing lessons or watching television. Others, for an extra wage, will wash dishes, mend, and sometimes cook and take over for a week-end. In most cities, a home-maker's service is available in case of illness and visiting nurses will also come to the house when necessary.

The housewife's job has also been made easier by the "shopping centre". Even quite new suburban communities are now being served by especially built centres which usually include a self-service food store, a bank, a hair-dresser, a dry cleaner, a druggist, and often a branch of a big department store. These centres usually have large parking lots which mean that many housewives rarely need to go into the heart of the city.

The shopping centre has become a social meeting place, rather like the village well in Asia or the back fence in small towns, at which busy women talk together for a few minutes. This is particularly true of the cash-and-carry chain store where the shoppers themselves select the merchandise they want to buy. A large variety of food is carefully packaged and displayed on convenient shelves in these large "super-markets". Wire express wagons, often with a seat for a baby, are supplied at the door. Women wheel them around helping themselves to cereals, canned goods, frozen fish and vegetables, milk, cheese, and a great variety of cake and biscuit mixes. Large meat counters hold all cuts of meat already weighed and wrapped in cellophane but butchers are also in attendance to supply special demands. Improved storage and transportation methods make it possible for Canadian housewives to have a supply of fresh vegetables and fruits throughout the year.

Education

Canadian women in increasing numbers are seeking a higher education. In the universities the number of women graduates has quadrupled since 1919, while the number of male graduates has increased only two and a half times. University women are still specializing in the subjects which have, in the past, been favoured by their sex. In 1954, 47 per cent of them graduated in arts and letters and 42 per cent took degrees in household science, social work, education or nursing. It is of interest to note, however, that women students were increasingly numerous in courses such as medicine, pharmacy, law and commerce, once considered the exclusive preserve of men.

At Work

Most Canadian women expect to work when they finish their formal education. During the past fifty years there has indeed been a dramatic increase in the number of Canadian women who hold paid jobs. In 1901, only one out of every

ten people in the labour force was a woman; today, every fourth worker is a woman, the increase being chiefly due to the fact that there are more job opportunities for women. The increasing complexity of production processes has meant that craftsmen have been replaced by machine operators, many of them women. Changed factory techniques have also enabled women to do work which was once too heavy for their physical strength. The growth of record keeping and other office jobs has also provided more openings. Perhaps most important of all, women so proved their worth during two world wars that prejudice against hiring them is rapidly disappearing.

Today, Canadian women are doing practically every job on the list at the National Employment Service. For example, women are now aviators, veterinarians, morticians, lumber "jills", trappers and welders. Furthermore, their main occupations have changed greatly over the years.

Fifty years ago, the majority of women workers were employed as seamstresses, milliners or domestic servants. Today, half of the women at work are concentrated in the following classifications: Typists and stenographers (96 per cent are women); nurses (98.2 per cent); office clerks (42 per cent); household workers (96 per cent); sales clerks (55.1 per cent).

Although women still predominate in their traditional professions of teaching and nursing, increasing numbers have established themselves during the past twenty-five years in professions that used to be mainly filled by men or have entered entirely new fields. For example, between 1931 and 1951, the proportion of women who were chemists and metallurgists increased from 1 to 2 per cent; physicians and surgeons from 2 to 5 per cent; professors and college presidents from 8 to 15 per cent. Women had also newly-established themselves as 38 per cent of the laboratory technicians, 100 per cent of the dietitians and 17 per cent of the statisticians.

Married Women at Work

The "average Canadian woman" marries when she is twenty-three years old to a man who is three years her senior. She will have an average of 3.8 children. Very often, particularly in towns and cities, the young wife continues to work "until the baby comes". Unless there is grave financial necessity, most Canadian women prefer not to take paid jobs outside the home while their children are of pre-school age. Every year, however, more and more married women are entering the labour force as the five-day week and mechanized households have helped to make it possible for them to work both inside and outside the home. In 1941, only one married woman in twenty was working outside the home; by 1951, more than one out of every ten had a job. By 1956, one-third of the women in the labour force were married. The greatest number of working wives are between the ages of forty-four and sixty-four; they are women whose children are at school or have grown up and left home.

Working Conditions

In general, both men and women are protected by the same laws on minimum wages, maximum hours, unemployment insurance, holidays, vacations, workmen's compensation and fair employment practices which forbid discrimination on grounds of race, colour, religion or national origin. There are, however, some health and safety welfare provisions

which apply particularly to women workers. For example, women working in factories are required to wear a suitable head covering to prevent their hair from catching in moving machinery. In all provinces, women are prohibited from working underground in mines. In the Province of Quebec, women are prohibited from working in abattoirs and in factories where there are poisonous fumes or where explosives are handled. In British Columbia and Manitoba, restrictions have been placed on the weights which women may lift.

There is considerable diversity in labour laws as, under the British North America Act, the written part of the Canadian constitution, most labour legislation comes under provincial jurisdiction.

By and large, although the working woman is now recognized as making a great economic contribution to Canadian society, women are still paid less than men, often even when they perform work of comparable value. This is partly the result of the tradition that women are found in the less well paid occupations, partly owing to the fact that they are less active in unions than men and partly because the majority of them are white collar workers who are not organized. This situation has been improving slowly in recent years as more unions demand equal pay clauses in their contracts. Public opinion against this discrimination is also making itself felt and five provinces and the federal government have passed equal pay laws. For years now, women have received equal pay for equal work in the Civil Service and in the Armed Services.

It is still true that women find it difficult to achieve executive positions and are often passed over when promotions take place. This can usually be accounted for by their own attitude toward their work: many women fail to obtain the training they need or perhaps do not work as hard at making a career for themselves as a man does because they expect to marry and look on a job as a temporary stop gap.

In 1954, the federal government set up a Women's Bureau under the Department of Labour. The Bureau is now engaged in research on the needs of women workers and the social implications involved in the increased number of married women working outside the home.

Voluntary Organizations

Canadian women are making a great contribution to the life of the country through membership in voluntary organizations. A high proportion of farm women belong to the Women's Institutes, which are affiliated with the Associated Country Women of the World. The Women's Institutes were started in Canada by Mrs. Adelaide Hoodless, of Stoney Creek, Ontario, who felt that farm women could help themselves to be more efficient wives and mothers by getting together to study nutrition, hygiene and home economics. For many months, she travelled around the country lecturing to small groups of women. The idea caught on and spread not only to every part of Canada but to twenty-seven other countries.

City housewives often belong to such organizations as church bodies, parent-teacher groups, reading clubs, or service clubs which require members to do voluntary work for the community every week. Many women who do not belong to a service club, register with a volunteer bureau run by the Council of Social Agencies; in due course, they are placed

where their particular skills can do the greatest good. Canadian volunteers are busy taking case histories in hospitals, driving crippled children to clinics, doing group work in the Y.W.C.A., assisting in Red Cross blood donors' clinics, helping with group work activities and a score of other projects. Women also earn money for worthwhile projects by putting on bazaars, running second-hand clothing stores and organizing charity balls and theatrical entertainments. Every year, an army of volunteers canvass for social and service agencies dependent on public subscriptions for support.

The National Council of Women, formed in 1893 by Lady Aberdeen, the wife of the then Governor General of Canada, has twenty-two affiliated organizations: The Canadian National Branch of the International Order of the Kings Daughters and Sons; The Canadian Dietetic Association; Canadian Dominion Council of the Mothers' Union; The Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs; Canadian Federation of University Women; Canadian Home Economics Association; The Canadian Nurses' Association; Canadian Woman's Christian Temperance Union; The Dominion Council of the Women's Association of the United Church of Canada; Canadian Council of the Girl Guides Association; The Hadassah Organization of Canada; The Health League of Canada; the Lyceum Club and Women's Art Association of Canada; National Council of Jewish Women; Queen's University Alumnae Association; The Salvation Army in Canada; Remembrance Association Silver Cross Women of Canada; Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada; The Ukrainian Women's Organization, C.E.; The Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada; The Women's Missionary Society of the United Church of Canada; The Young Women's Christian Association of Canada.

Organizations such as the National Council of Women, the Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the University Women's Clubs and the Canadian Association of Consumers are highly efficient pressure groups which can be credited with having persuaded the Federal, provincial and municipal governments to bring in many needed reforms.

Arts and Letters

Canadian women have made a considerable contribution to the arts. Three outstanding painters, now deceased, were Emily Carr, an imaginative landscape painter and exponent of the totem pole art of the west coast Indians; Pegi Nichol, a delightful colourist; and Prudence Heward, a painter with a strong feeling for form. The canvasses of a number of contemporary women painters hang in the National Gallery in Ottawa and in provincial art galleries. Liliias Newton, a popular portrait painter, has been commissioned to paint portraits of the Queen and Prince Philip. Marian Scott has painted murals as well as easel paintings of distinction. Molly Lamb Bobak, who paints with personal realism, was an official war artist with the rank of Lieutenant. Praskeva Clark, Lily Frieman, Jori Smith and Ghita Caiserman are in the first rank. Suzanne Bergeron and Marthe Rakine are young painters of promise.

Frances Loring, Florence Wyle, Elizabeth Wynne Wood, Sybil Kennedy and Anne Kahane are sculptors with international reputations.

There are at least three outstanding women poets: P.K. Page, author of As Ten as Twenty and The Metal and Flower; Anne Marriott, whose poem, The Wind Our Enemy, is an epic of the drought years on the prairies; and Anne Hebert, a sensitive lyrical poet. Widely-read female novelists are Mazo de la Roche, author of the famous Jalna series; Gabrielle Roy, whose first novel, The Tin Flute, won her international acclaim; and Ethel Wilson, a stylist of mature understanding. Adele Wiseman, winner of the Governor General's award in 1957, is a young novelist of talent.

There are at least two women who are composers of merit: Barbara Pentland and Jean Colthard Adams who, in 1957, received a coveted overseas scholarship from the government of Canada. Ellen Ballou, a pianist, and Lois Marshal, a soprano, are perhaps the best-known interpreters of music. Ethel Stark has for years led the celebrated Women's Orchestra in Montreal.

Canadian women are doing sound work in practically all branches of scientific research. For example, a woman scientist has done pioneer research on wheat rust, another is second in command of the textile section of the Department of Applied Chemistry at the National Research Council, and a third is one of the most respected aeronautical engineers in the country.

Status of Women

Citizenship

Canadian women have full citizenship rights. When a Canadian woman marries an alien, she retains her Canadian citizenship. An alien woman marrying a Canadian citizen and legally admitted to Canada is eligible for citizenship after one year's residence.

Legal Rights

Single women have the same legal rights as men in every part of Canada. That is not true of married women.

In nine out of the ten provinces, the civil law is based on the Common Law of England. There are small legal variations in each province but in all of them a married woman has full citizenship rights. She may enter into contract, administer her own property and keep her own earnings. She and her husband have equal rights and obligations for the care, custody and discipline of their children.

In the province of Quebec, the status of married women is different from that in the other nine provinces.

There is a historical reason for this. The Treaty of Paris, signed by Britain in 1774, guaranteed the French-speaking people living in what is now the Province of Quebec the right to keep the Civil Law under which they had been governed for over two hundred years when they were members of a colony of France. Later, in 1866, these laws were codified into the Civil Code of the Province of Quebec. In the following year, 1867, the British North America Act gave exclusive jurisdiction of property and civil rights to the provinces.

Under the Quebec Code, a woman married without a marriage contract is in "community of property" with her husband and has no legal rights to administer the joint property. The woman who has a marriage contract, which makes her separate as to property is a free agent in respect to the disposal and

acquiring of movable property, which includes stocks, bonds, money, furniture, jewelery and so on, but she cannot buy or sell real estate without her husband's permission. Today, "community of property" is the exception.

Furthermore, there are certain incapacities from which all wives living in the Province of Quebec suffer, no matter where they are married, or under what marital regime. They all need authorization to act in the following cases. 1. to appear in judicial proceedings; 2. to give, accept, sell or dispose of property during their lifetime (although they may dispose of it by will without authorization or consent); and 3. to enter into contracts or obligations.

The protective power given the husband over the persons of his wife and children also deprives the wife of the right to authorize medical or surgical treatment not only for her children, but even for herself. The husband alone is legally capable of giving this permission. Under the Quebec Code, the father also has puissance paternelle which gives him sole authority over the education, religious training and discipline of the children. Despite these legal limitations, however, the status of women in Quebec is not in practice greatly different from that of other Canadian women.

Political Women

Canadian women in every province have the right to vote and to hold public office. The federal franchise was granted to them in 1919. The provinces followed suit, although the Province of Quebec did not give women the right to vote until 1940.

Many Canadian women now serve on school boards and city councils. A number have been reeves and mayors: the best known is perhaps Miss Charlotte Whitton, formerly mayor of Ottawa, the national capital.

Mrs. Nancy Hodges, appointed to the Senate in 1953, made feminist history in the Commonwealth when she became Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. Since the 1921 election, when Agnes Macphail became the first woman member of Parliament, nine women have been elected to the House of Commons and six have been appointed to the Senate. Mrs. Ellen Fairclough became the first woman to hold a cabinet portfolio when she became Secretary of State after the Progressive-Conservative party came to power in 1957.

Canadian women have also distinguished themselves in government service, in the armed services, and as members of Canadian delegations to the United Nations General Assembly and to other international conferences.

Thus it may be seen that if housewife and business women and if women qualified for courses in the arts, science and government, Canada is a country in which they may pursue their liberal interests in complete freedom, enjoying equality of opportunity with men in every field of endeavour.