

## Domestic Immigrants: The Calgary Women's Colonization Board 1927–1930

Ineke J. Dijks  
943 Austin Avenue  
Coquitlam, British Columbia V3K 3N7

*Canada's immigration has always been a topic of much debate. Policies usually reflected contemporary prejudices and attitudes. Preferences for specific nationalities were revealed in various recruitment efforts. During the 1920s Canada sought mainly agricultural settlers. The only way women could enter the country, besides as a family member, was to agree to domestic work. In 1927, the Central Women's Colonization Board (CWCB) was formed in Calgary. This organization worked closely with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and was involved in the recruitment and placement of domestic workers. Its priority was to select "preferred" domestics, mostly British. This objective did not always coincide with the priorities of others, for example, those of the railways. Domestic work was unattractive and expectations of employers and employees alike were often unrealistic. During the short time of its existence, the CWCB went through a number of changes in order to accommodate more of the "non-preferred," and to satisfy all concerned. With the onset of the Depression, immigration numbers declined and the CWCB withered away.*

Much of the immigration debate in Canada has centered around the issue of the "preferred and non-preferred." To populate the west with agricultural settlers was a priority and recruitment efforts by the government and railway companies were primarily geared toward this group of immigrants. That Canada desired agriculturists was usually agreed upon, but their nationality was often disputed. Farmers and farm workers have been the focus of studies by Danysk (1995) and Cherwinski (1983). Domestic workers were also in great demand. Studies dealing with female immigrants have focused on

changes in women's work and the adjustment to western Canadian conditions, (see, for example, Barber 1991). This paper focuses on the recruitment, treatment and distribution as well as the aftercare domestics received from the Central Women's Colonization Board (CWCB). This Calgary based organization was affiliated with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). Women were, generally, accorded a better or more protected reception than men. This was perhaps due to the perceived inability of women to look after themselves. It was not proper for women to travel alone and, therefore, women coming to western Canada were usually met in Winnipeg by a representative of an immigration organization. Existing morals had to be upheld and those responsible for the travel and placement of domestics were eager to protect not only the women but also themselves from future problems and blame. The established community favoured British domestics, but it was difficult to recruit large numbers of these "preferred" women. Also, "preferred" immigrants generally were often difficult to recruit as well. This was a cause of concern to the railway companies who wished to increase their business through the promotion of an increasing population. They lobbied the government to increase the numbers of immigrants from a wider variety of countries, especially from countries where it was easier to recruit large numbers of agriculturists. The recruitment of women from eastern European countries, the "non-preferred," was often controversial. The correspondence and records of the relatively small CWCB, which operated for a few years during the late 1920s, demonstrates prejudices and attitudes towards immigrants, specifically women. It also shows that general opinion and corporate interests did not always coincide.

She arrives in our city clad in the picturesque garments of her native country but we see her in these perhaps once. In a day's time or at the most in a few weeks she is a perfect Canadian in habiliments and manner. By the end of three months she can talk our language sufficiently well to make herself understood. Often she sends money to support her folk in the homeland. If she has not this burden soon you are likely to find her living in a well-kept house of her own fully paid for, and bringing up little Canadian children while she continues to earn money by going out to work by the hour or the day.<sup>1</sup>

At various times, large waves of immigrants have entered Canada; the largest lasted from approximately the turn of the century until World War I, during which immigration virtually came to a standstill. Post-Confederation settlement came under the

*Dominion Lands Act* of 1872. Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905, was responsible for immigration. He streamlined policies and advertised "the Last Best West" focusing on agricultural settlers from the U.S. and northern European countries. His policies continued to have an impact in the years following. Between 1900 and 1914, almost three million immigrants came, more than 400,000 in 1913 alone (Hawkins, 1972). The next major wave of immigrants was from 1925 to 1930, although the numbers were not as dramatic as those of the earlier period. For example, during the inter-war years, the peak year was 1928 when 166,783 immigrants arrived. In the early years of immigration, efforts to attract settlers were not as organized as during the inter-war years when immigration policies became more focused and efficient. "The new immigration policy was to be in accord with new priorities of national development and in reaction to new ideological fears and nativist tensions. The new concerns were "selection," "absorption" and "assimilation"" (Osborne, 1990). In 1925, the Canadian government joined forces with the CPR and the Canadian National Railway (CNR) in order to promote and streamline immigration. This cooperative arrangement, known as the Railways Agreement (RA), was established initially for a period of two years. Under the terms of the agreement, the Federal Department of Immigration and Colonization (DIC) dealt exclusively with the "preferred," defined as British, Americans and northern Europeans. Hedges (1939) points out that British immigrants received "distinct preference and encouragement." People from central and eastern Europe, the "non-preferred," were delegated to the CPR and CNR. Others did not enter this hierarchy and were hardly ever mentioned. The "preferred/non-preferred" hierarchy changed at times. For example, although Germany and Austria were classified "non-preferred" after WWI, German speaking immigrants soon became very desirable. Through the RA, the government also wanted to avoid duplication in the colonization effort and, at the same time, wanted to distance themselves from the less popular "non-preferred" immigration activities.<sup>2</sup>

The "preferred" and "non-preferred" were further divided into three classes of immigrants as allowed under the RA. In addition to the homesteaders and farmers, who had financial resources to settle on land of their own, two other groups of workers were attracted. First, there were the farm labourers, who were always needed in great numbers. According to Danysk (1995), if the demand was great enough, prejudices could easily be suspended. Second, there were the domestic workers, who were also in great demand. A domestic worker was defined as a female with experience in housekeeping

duties in the country of origin and who was coming to Canada for the purpose of accepting employment as a domestic servant in a rural district.

Both the CPR and the CNR played a role in attracting agricultural workers and domestic servants. The focus of this paper, however, is the role of the CPR in the recruitment and placement of domestics. The CPR and CNR were considered qualified to select and settle immigrants. They had organizations in place that dealt with the recruitment and transportation of immigrants. Their own interest was to increase population numbers along their rail lines in order to increase business. Part of the agreement was the commitment by the railway companies to transport back to the country of origin all immigrants brought by them to Canada who refused to engage in agriculture, agricultural labour, or domestic service and who became public charges within a period of one year after admission. With the onset of the Depression, those who became public charges or participated in radical activities were deported in large numbers. Federal regulations for the immigration of domestics were rigid and dealing with women immigrants was complicated. At a Colonization Conference in Edmonton in 1928, Dr. W.J. Black stated, "the fact is recognized that there is less possibility of trouble arising from the immigration of wholesale male help than that of the opposite sex."<sup>3</sup> Limitations on the number of domestics were determined by demand and prevailing ethnic preferences. For domestics, the threat of deportation was used after repeated placement and replacement with a number of employers. Deportation was also considered for one domestic who came to Canada while pregnant, but her condition and the help of Ms. Wares, the secretary of the CWCB, prevented the authorities from proceeding with the deportation.

Domestic servants came to Canada through a variety of immigration schemes. A large number of organizations were active in bringing domestics to Canada. For example, the Catholic Women's League, the Scottish Immigrant Aid Society, the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire and the Young Women's Christian Association were active in recruiting domestics, mostly from Britain. These institutions also promoted assimilation into Canadian society by providing reading materials and the holding of educational meetings at which English and "proper" Canadian ways were taught. "Members of women's organizations were believed to have special knowledge of training requirements, as well as the ability to influence potential employers regarding working conditions" (Roach Pierson, 1986). Women, other than domestics, usually came with families. Families received most of the encouragement and assistance provided through immigration schemes, including reduced

fares. There was little opposition to female immigrants, but competing priorities in immigration and employment affected their numbers in several ways. The number of British women willing to come to Canada as domestic servants gradually decreased. Between 1904 and 1914, 54,396 English domestics came to Canada. The number declined to 27,556 between 1919 and 1930. For the same years, the number of central and eastern European domestics increased from 15,387 to 30,814 (Barber, 1991).<sup>4</sup> During the war, many women had left domestic service to work for the war effort and few were willing to return to it. Britain was also faced with a shortage of domestics and, despite travel incentives, it was difficult to attract women to Canada which also had to compete with other dominions, especially Australia, for British domestics (Barber, 1985). For potential employers in western Canada, it was difficult to obtain British or Scandinavian girls, most of whom preferred to stay in eastern Canada where wages were higher. However, it has been pointed out that some domestics preferred farm life where the work was often shared between the maid and the woman of the house and status within the household was higher (Leslie, 1974).

Notwithstanding these factors, for single British women, the only way to immigrate was by agreeing to domestic service, a kind of work some would never have considered at home. If domestic service was required as a way to obtain passage, especially assisted, so be it; perhaps better opportunities would come later. Assistance for occupations other than domestic work were nonexistent. Some hoped that over time and after a period of domestic work, other opportunities would arise. For many women, immigration was an opportunity to travel, and to meet new people, perhaps single men. In Britain, as a result of the war, women outnumbered men. In Canada, the opposite was the case. This imbalance, mostly of men in their prime working years, resulted from the larger numbers of immigrant men as compared to women. (Thompson with Seager, 1985; Ward, 1983). Demographics played an important role, and it can be asked to what extent policy making was influenced by this demographic discrepancy given such expressions as the following:

Here in Great Britain we have a disproportion between the sexes, which inevitably leads to difficulties both social and economic. There in Canada, they have not nearly enough women to go around: it is the men who are in excess . . . Canada does not want typist, nor teachers, nor nurses . . . nor does she want factory operatives . . . what she wants is what unfortunately, we want too—cheerful and efficient workers. We shall naturally complain . . . when the high

wages offered in Canadian cities tempt away our trained and all-too-few housemaids, cooks and parlourmaids, still that rarest of beings, the efficient 'housekeeper' (Fisher, 1925).

It was difficult to fill the many requests for household help. For example, in 1926 the Calgary office of the CPR's Department of Colonization and Development (DCD) received requests for more than 100 domestics, of which only 15 could be filled. In order to streamline efforts to attract domestic servants, the CPR set up an organization in cooperation with several women's groups. This organization, the Central Women's Colonization Board (CWCB), was made up of ladies who had been "active in practical social work" and were highly interested in colonization.<sup>5</sup> They were women of the social class that employed most of the domestics. Through their involvement, they were also able to influence numbers and nationalities and start the process of assimilation into Canadian society immediately. The CWCB was to look after the placement of women immigrants in southern Alberta while the existing Calgary Women's Hostel was to serve as a receiving station and resting place for women before they travelled on to their final destination. With the existence of such a facility, there was no need to establish additional homes. Although the Women's Hostel was an independent institution, the DIC had been using the facility on a regular basis, paying the hostel \$ 500.00 per year and an additional \$1.50 for each immigrant who came through the hostel which provided room and board for 48 hours. The CPR could not expect to provide different or less costly accommodation than that already provided by the Women's Hostel.

The Central Women's Colonization Board existed only for a few years despite the hopes of its sponsors that it would have a lasting impact on the settlement of women domestics in western Canada. The numbers of domestic immigrants, who came to Canada, through the efforts of the Board, were not dramatic, although activity increased during the years of its existence. In 1927, 38 women were placed by the CWCB, 192 in 1928 and 309 in 1929.<sup>6</sup> During the early 1930s, the organization faded away with the economic uncertainties of the Depression years.

During its first year, the CWCB looked forward to attracting about 200 domestic workers, or approximately 20 each month. The Board would receive orders from individual employers and other colonization boards. For the CPR, its cooperation with a group of well-placed women in Calgary represented favourable public relations. An official of CPR's DCD suggested that the organization

would be able to influence the Government to permit a greater number of women workers and be a valuable contribution to western Canada. Greater numbers were important to the CPR but had to be balanced with concerns about the "right kind" of immigrant, a priority for the CWCB. In order to get the most for their money, the Board could also be useful should placements not work out and domestics needed to be placed with another employer. It also relieved the DCD of much of its responsibility "in this important but delicate phase of colonization work."<sup>7</sup>

In early 1927, Miss Elsa Wares was hired as the secretary of the CWCB. Her wages were \$75.00 per month and were paid by the CPR to Miss Gertrude Markle, Vice President of the Board and Superintendent of the Women's Hostel, who, in turn, paid the secretary. Miss Markle and Miss Wares also received rail passes in order to travel freely around the area served by the CWCB's placement work. In order to be able to receive the passes, they were placed on the CPR payroll at a nominal \$1.00 per month.<sup>8</sup> In November of 1927, Mr. James Colley, Assistant Superintendent of Colonization in Calgary requested that Miss Wares be paid directly by the CPR because, at times, Miss Markle had been unavailable to endorse the cheque. The answer from Mr. C.A. Van Scoy, the Superintendent of Colonization, was that the CPR was contemplating some larger organizational changes and that the arrangements for the payment of Miss Wares would be part of that review. This changed method of pay also, apparently, changed Miss Wares status to that of a full-time employee of the CPR. In the Calgary Directory of 1929, she is listed as the secretary of the CWCB of the CPR. Through the secretary, the CPR tried to increase its influence in the decision-making of the Board.

### **Domestic Work**

Domesticity is a gender issue, but domestic work is divided along class lines. Domestic work has always been considered women's work, though some women would definitely not dirty their hands with this kind of activity. In western Canada, where domestic help under the best of circumstances was difficult to obtain, the lady of the house had to take on many tasks herself. There are anecdotes of women who would brag about the pioneering experience and the activities that they were required to do, however, many women did not have a choice in the matter. Finding any household help was difficult, and having more than one maid was usually impossible. Many households, especially in western Canada, were ru-

ral and agricultural; so-called "household tasks" often included farm chores as well. For example, the CWCB received one request for a clean and strong girl, able to milk a few cows. Another request was made for a bright woman who would be able to work in the office part of the afternoons "when her housework is done."<sup>9</sup> Clearly, both the female employer and the domestic servant performed work not always considered household duties.

Domestic work was unattractive. Wages were low and working conditions were often poor. Employer-employee relations were sometimes oppressive, partly because living conditions often made it difficult to keep a social distance between the employer and domestic. It was felt that a social distance had to be maintained as indicated by the following statement of an employer:

I spoilt her. She wanted everything I got if I got a white sweater coat she got one too, I got a green dress so did she and so on. Well you know how that goes down with the maid. I have not got a big head but well I like a little difference.<sup>10</sup>

Another major obstacle was "living in" because it involved supervision and control (Strong-Boag 1988). Therefore, on isolated farms, where the domestic was often the only other female with whom the lady of the house could converse, it was important to have a servant with whom one felt comfortable. This was usually the reason women wanted someone of their own background, or at least someone who could speak their language. The population of some of the rural communities in western Canada consisted of a variety of ethnic backgrounds and the British were not always favoured as agricultural or domestic workers. Domestic work was also, to some extent, seasonal. On farms, when everyone else was needed for seeding and harvesting, household work and other duties increased for the domestic. A larger number of farm workers meant more cooking and cleaning. Some employers wanted the arrival of domestics kept on hold until the busy spring season started, or to pay less when the amount of farm work was low, because as was often stated, "there is not much to do now." Sometimes domestics were asked to stay through the winter for lower pay or work without wages for room and board only. During the late 1920s, with the onset of the Depression when the economic situation deteriorated, it probably became more common for domestics to make concessions and to stay.

Everyone had his or her own ideas as to what constituted a work load, as the following letter explains: "I would prefere [sic] a girl that will do the housework and milk two easy milking cows. I have



a family of six although I havent [sic] so very much to do. But as the baby is only 4 weeks old I am not able to do the work myself and if suitable girl will keep girl till after threshing."<sup>11</sup> Domestics preferred city jobs - where the pay was higher - to rural positions and there were many complaints about them not staying at their (rural) jobs. Some domestics would marry and start their own households. As pointed out by Griswold (1988), "For young single women, this universally despised occupation undoubtedly helped propel them into marriage." In a country where men outnumbered women, domestics were not destined to last in their jobs. The secretary of the CWCB remarked that there were so many marriages, it balanced the number of arrivals.<sup>12</sup> Some employers would have liked to enter into contracts with the domestics, but the government did not allow a contract to be signed which would tie a domestic to a place for any length of time. However, some form of contract would have been beneficial to both parties, because employers and employees alike complained about the other not living up to expectations. Employers usually complained that the domestics were slow in learning the language, or that they were not clean. Domestics argued that employers did not live up to promises, usually regarding wages, or that they assigned more work and longer hours than expected.

Despite subsidized fares for British domestics, it was difficult for the CWCB to recruit from Britain, except on special nominations. These required the employer to fill out a special form and submit it to the immigration authorities. After approval, the form was passed on to the Women's Branch of the CPR's Department of Colonization in England, which was responsible for selection in that country. This procedure could take several weeks and, even then, the domestic might not be suitable to the nominator and would require replacement, which meant finding another employer or employee. Domestics coming on "blanket order" (a less time-consuming procedure used mostly for continental domestics) were required to go to the places assigned to them. The secretary of the Board, however, would point out to a prospective employer that continental girls were brought from Europe on almost every steamer. As many employers requested a girl almost immediately, there was strong incentive to take what was available. A declaration, in the domestic's own language, required that she agree to accept whatever position was provided for her by the CPR and both the employer and domestic were encouraged to provide a week's notice in the event of termination. Discussions concerning the domestic problem led to a variety of proposals, at times extreme. For example, Lettice Fisher wrote in 1925:

**CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY COMPANY**  
 DEPARTMENT OF COLONIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
 Western Division

To be Completed  
In Triplicate

**APPLICATION FOR IMMIGRANT DOMESTICS**

To the  
Division Commissioner of Immigration,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Forwarded through .....

Required by..... of..... Prov.....

Occupation ..... Street Address .....

If on farm give description..... Sec..... Tp..... Rge.....

Nearest railway station..... Married or single.....

Nationality ..... No. of persons in family.....

Length of residence in Canada..... Citizenship .....

Work required of domestic..... Ordinary house work Wages per month. (\$15.00 1st month  
 (\$20.00 2nd  
 { regular domestic  
 { wages afterwards

When required and length of engagement. At once -  
 Permanent if satisfactory

State nationality preferred. No preference Religion Protestant if possible

Any special requirements.....  
*About 30 years old if possible.*

What accommodation for domestic. Own private room.

Date March 6, 1930. Signed .....

References.

Name ..... Address .....

.....

.....

This application endorsed by.....

Occupation and address.....

For use of Division Commissioner of Immigration.

Date filled ..... File No. ....

Name of domestic.....

Ex S.S. .... Date of landing.....

An example of an application form for domestic immigrants.  
Glenbow Archives Calgary. CPR papers M2269.

We can scarcely in these sophisticated days adopt the simple expedient of sending over a shipload of wives, as was done some forty years ago . . . each of the new families . . . should be encouraged to take an unmarried sister. She would be of great comfort and help to the wife, and would dimin-

ish both her natural loneliness and her labours in the early days (Fisher, 1925).

It was, of course, difficult to implement such a proposal.

### **Preferred Versus Non-Preferred**

Soon after the establishment of the CWCB, the CPR pushed for a greater number of domestics and the inclusion of the “non-preferred” or continental women. Now that they were involved in a “very expensive organization” with a full-time secretary, the CPR’s colonization officials wanted to use it to the fullest, in order to expand the population base along their right-of-way. They preferred, however, to keep this motive out of the public eye. In early 1927, Miss Markle was encouraged by the CPR’s DCD head office in Montreal to write to Mr. Egan, the Deputy Minister of Immigration and Colonization, to outline the CPR’s plans. She was told not to mention the CPR’s involvement, however, but simply to state that the Board would be willing to receive, place and give aftercare to continental domestics. Through this arrangement, the CPR tried to recruit domestics from a larger area and to increase their numbers. They also wanted to speed up the process, so that continental women with CPR certificates would be granted papers and, in that way, bypass the nomination process. After a long discussion, the Board decided not to go along with this expansion, but rather to wait and see how the placement of the 200 British domestics would work out before committing themselves to an involvement with other nationalities. It was assumed that “girl immigrants from the continent” would need much personal supervision and assistance and therefore that more work would be involved. The following is an example of the anticipated problems:

Our hired hand is a Slav too and we feel that there are to many opportunities for them to be thrown together for short periods of time alone that we are afraid of the consequences.<sup>13</sup>

One may wonder if temptation would have been different if the hired hand had been of a different nationality. The women of the CWCB, along with other women’s organizations, strongly favoured British domestics. Women from different parts of the country joined in the effort to impress upon immigration department officials not only the need for domestic servants but also the advantages of British immigration (Palmer, 1982). Although the decision was initially made that 200 both British and continental domestics would be re-

cruited, it became evident that the Board was only willing to commit to bringing in British domestics. The women on the Board were not interested in the CPR's push to get more continental domestics. A change from this policy would require a change in the Board itself.

The image of a British Canada, which stands out in much of the Board's correspondence concerning immigration, tended to grow from the ideals of well-to-do urban women who were active in benevolent societies, many of British background themselves. But, in fact, British girls were not necessarily favoured by employers in small towns and rural areas. This fact was recognized by CPR immigration officials and was one of the reasons that they encouraged the involvement of Board members from places other than Calgary. Some employers preferred "foreign" girls, because they seemed more content and usually were willing to stay longer in one place. Employers also favoured the non-British for economic reasons that overrode ethnic bias as those who had arrived, despite the official bias, were also cheaper than Canadian and English-speaking domestics. Conversation was understandably difficult and often done with the help of dictionaries. Some domestics would bring their own, an indication that they were willing to learn English despite the occasional statement to the opposite in letters to the Board: "I have spent a lot of time on this girl, teaching her English . . . it is such an undertaking."<sup>14</sup> Language learning did work both ways "[ My wife] has picked up quite a little Polish so that would be the easiest language to take, but as long as you send their little book [dictionary] along with them we are able to make out in almost any language."<sup>15</sup> A request made to the Board for a dictionary stated: "I think our new maid will be satisfactory [and the] ... Hungarian-English book you sent us was a great help. Could you now send us one for Lithuanian-English? When the maid leaves, we keep the book we get from you so that it will do for another of the same nationality."<sup>16</sup> Often the slow learning process was used as an excuse for paying wages below the going rate. One employer complained that the domestic wanted to leave for another place where she would receive better pay. "Until she can speak and understand more English, I do not feel that I can possibly pay her more than I am now."<sup>17</sup>

"Preferred" domestics could expect wages to start at \$25.00 per month; for continental domestics wages ranged between \$15.00 and \$20.00 per month, although they generally could not expect more than \$15.00 per month to start. Increases were made according to their ability to learn "Canadian ways." Many employers clearly wanted value for their money, as stated in this request for a domes-

tic: "Will you please send me a girl this week if I have to pay 20 dollars would like an English-speaking one for that if not send a German if you can as they are better disposition than these dago."<sup>18</sup> Many employers also stated a preference for Scandinavian girls. However, Miss Wares was well aware of the sensitivities hidden in the requests. She pointed out that English-speaking employers would have as much difficulty conversing with Norwegian servants as with Poles, Ukrainians, and other continental Europeans. She wrote, "As far as suitability for domestic work, industry, intelligence and cleanliness are concerned, these qualities cannot be determined by nationality."<sup>19</sup> The distinction between "preferred" and "non-preferred" was clearly based on more than just language. Preferences were often complicated and arbitrary and those in charge had to balance requests and numbers against prejudices. The difficulty is evident in an exchange of telegrams between colonization officials, one requesting "four Czechs, three Jugos, and three Hungarian speaking Jugos. Cannot accept Lithuanians, Ukrainians or Poles." The answer was: "... you accept ten Lithuanian domestics as unable to divert at this late date."<sup>20</sup> Disagreement was growing between the CPR and the CWCB about the number of domestics and their geographic origin. The CPR wanted to be involved in the decision-making process and yet, at the same time, appear to be at arm's length. They were a corporation making business decisions and more immigrants meant more business, regardless of where they came from.

The CPR proposed a reorganization of the Board at the end of 1927. They suggested adding to the Board ladies who were connected with women's organizations in smaller towns and who would be favourable toward placing continental domestics in addition to British. It was argued that, in some areas of Alberta, most of the good farming territory was settled by people of "foreign nationality" who did not like to hire British help but preferred workers of their own nationality (Dijks, 1994). The intention was to extend the Board's geographical mandate to cover not only Alberta but all of western Canada. At the end of 1927, the old Board was dissolved by the Board members. The outgoing Board members felt that the work was not what they had anticipated—namely the placement of 200 British domestic servants—and, therefore, felt that they could not support the changes. The CPR bypassed Miss Markle, the president of the Women's Hostel, who opposed an increase of continental domestics and put Miss Wares, who was more accepting, in charge of obtaining orders and the placement of domestics throughout the area. She was free to arrange accommodations at the Hostel or at other suitable places.

Although the objectives of the new Board were essentially the same as those of the previous one, some of the members opposed to continental domestics no longer sat on the Board. The other difference was that Calgary Women's Hostel no longer had a monopoly on accommodations for newly-arrived domestics and its \$ 500.00 annual grant from the DIC was not renewed. Women were now welcomed at the YWCA and, later in the year, the facilities of the Catholic Women's League were also used. Miss Wares' salary, which the CPR considered a grant to the Board, increased from \$75.00 to \$100.00 per month plus expenses for travel involving colonization work. Miss Wares was to devote all her time to the placement and replacement of the domestics. She also became a Board member. The CPR wanted the work to focus mostly on continental domestics and expected numbers to increase along with the changed mandate. This more clearly reflected the CPR's own priorities: to increase population along its rail lines in order to increase business. The railways were not only indirectly involved in nation-building through the construction of the railways, but were also heavily involved in social engineering. The railways pushed for an open-door immigration policy, as did business generally, to keep the cost of labour down. The government, however, had different pressures, particularly in respect of "preferred" and "non-preferred" selection. Settlers of particular backgrounds were favoured, while others were not and these categories and groups changed with economic and political circumstances. Consequently, this made the "right approach" concerning immigration policies difficult to predict and made it impossible to please all interest groups. The government was willing to go along with everyone's wishes, but was afraid of a public backlash (Dijks, 1994).

### **Treatment of Immigrants**

Immigrant women were, in fact, accorded a better or, at least, a more protected reception than men, an indication of ideas and values at that time. This was perhaps due to a perceived inability of women to look after themselves. "Girls coming from the continent of Europe are being looked after in such a manner that it is impossible for them to get into trouble if they follow our instructions and keep in touch with us."<sup>21</sup> On the ships they were under the proper supervision of conductresses. From the port of landing they were escorted to Winnipeg and met by representatives of various organizations. The YWCA in Winnipeg reported that four workers met 7,825 trains in 1920 and assisted 10,644 women and children. In Winnipeg, the secretary of the CWCB would also meet girls moving

west and escort them to Calgary. A girl would not be placed in the home of a bachelor or widower, unless there were other women in the house.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the Board devoted a considerable amount of time to aftercare. The secretary encouraged the girls and employers to stay in touch with her so that confusion and misunderstanding could be avoided, especially with those domestics who could speak little English. Clubs were formed where girls could meet after working hours and on their days off to learn English and domestics were allowed holidays on Sunday and Thursday afternoon.<sup>23</sup> The events on these days were attended by large numbers of girls. Evidently, many were allowed these free afternoons. Existing morals had to be upheld and those responsible for the recruitment of domestics and the organization of their travel were eager to protect not only the women, but also themselves from future problems and blame. The Assistant Superintendent of Colonization remarked that "Having an organization to look after the placement and replacement of girls such as we have in Calgary is a great advantage in handling female immigrants. The girls are safeguarded as much as they possibly can be and responsibility either to our company or to the government is materially reduced."<sup>24</sup> Men, in contrast, were often cut adrift after arrival, as in the case of harvesters brought to Canada in 1928. Their arrival coincided with bad weather and many drifted into the cities, causing a public outcry (Dijks, 1993).

Differences in outlook are also apparent in the relationship between Miss Wares and Miss Markle. Miss Wares seemed to have enjoyed her work with the CPR. In cases where problems were developing, and authorities were looking for someone to blame for the situation, she would be resolute and try to deal with the problem. Her sincere concern for the domestics was evident and the CPR obviously preferred to have someone in charge who was inclined to support their views. Although the activities of the CWCB occupied a brief period of the interwar years, they serve as a clear indication of prejudices and attitudes in Canada's immigration history.

## **Conclusion**

Immigration and settlement have always been at centre stage in Canadian policy-making. Through their own immigration departments, the CPR and CNR were actively involved in shaping the ethnic pattern of western Canada. Their main concern was to increase the population and subsequently the economic base along their rail lines. The sensitive definitions of "preferred" and "non-preferred" shifted constantly with the tides of public opinion and policy-making responded accordingly. That a relatively small number of women

were accorded so much attention and care shows how the Calgary-based CWCB tried to accommodate the wishes of the CPR, the government and the public. It is interesting to note that it took more time, effort and paperwork to recruit a British domestic than one from continental Europe. Apparently, no mistakes were to be made with the more expensive "preferred" domestics who did not have to learn Canadian ways. Equally compelling is the fact that many Canadians were convinced that the extra effort was worthwhile in the name of ethnic purity. "Preferred" or not, the new arrivals certainly met with Canadians who held strong views as to the role of the female immigrants:

The office girl and the sales lady, still have their calling and always we will need them: but the immigrant girl, more often than the Canadian born, acts on the principle that the home comes first and that housekeeping and homemaking are the most fundamental essentials of a woman's education. Perhaps most of our own women realize this to be true. When they act on it, the home-helper will be more nearly on a level with her employer than any other worker can be.<sup>25</sup>

From our contemporary point of view, some of the language used during the 1920s can seem offensive. For example, in much of the correspondence between the Board and other officials, and with the employers and domestics, Board members were referred to as "ladies", and domestics as "girls", regardless of age. Nationalities were described in terms of evaluative stereotypes that are now recognized as inappropriate. Despite today's increased sensitivities, there remain parallels with today's immigration preferences, and while we might have cleaned up the language, attitudes are more difficult to change.

## Notes

1. From the Calgary Daily Herald, September 25, 1928. "Demand for House Generals." CWCB, file 732.
2. The terms "preferred and "non-preferred" were commonly used to define certain ethnic groups. It was not until 1929 that Dr. W.J. Black, the Director of the CNR's Department of Colonization and Agriculture, announced in a letter that these terms would be discontinued by the Department, "Northwestern Europe" would replace "preferred" and "Central Europe" to be used instead of "non-preferred." November 17, 1929. CNR, vol.



- 5625.
3. Dr. W.J. Black, in an address at the Colonization Conference in Edmonton, January 24, 1928. CNR, Vol. 5609.
  4. These numbers were compiled from Annual reports, Department of the Interior, 1904–1914 and the Department of Immigration and Colonization, 1919–1930.
  5. The term “ladies” is used to preserve the sense of the original documents and was often more selective than the term women. Various ethnic references, even if pejorative, are similarly retained.
  6. Annual Report. December 2, 1929. CPR, file 1872.
  7. Mr. J Colley, Assistant Superintendent of Colonization in a proposal to form the CWCB. no date. CPR, file 1007.
  8. Mr. C.A. Van Scoy, Superintendent of Colonization, in a memo. February 7, 1927. CPR, file 1461.
  9. Letter to the Department of Immigration, March 19, 1930. CPR, file 1476.
  10. In a letter from an employer to Miss Wares, April 29, 1930. CPR, file 1475.
  11. Letter to Miss Wares, June 25, 1928. CPR, file 1466.
  12. Miss. Elsa Wares, in a letter, January 28, 1930 or 1931. CPR, file 1867.
  13. Letter to Miss Wares, June 3, 1930. CPR, file 1475.
  14. *Ibid.* May 24, 1928. CPR, file 1462.
  15. *Ibid.* March 27, 1930. CPR, file 1476.
  16. *Ibid.* April 30, 1930. CPR, file 1475.
  17. *Ibid.* no date. CPR, file 1475.
  18. Letter from a prospective employer to Miss Wares. CPR, file 1478.
  19. Miss Wares in a letter, no date. CPR, file 732.
  20. Telegram from H.S. Kent district Superintendent of Colonization, Calgary to R.C. Bosworth, Superintendent of Colonization, Winnipeg. April 19, 1930. CPR, file 1459. And the answer to this message, April 20, 1930. CPR, file 1459.
  21. CWCB report, September, 1929. CPR, file 1480.

22. Report of the CWCB, September 1929. CPR, file 1480.
23. Ibid.
24. In a memo to Mr. Van Scoy, Superintendent of Colonization, from James Colley, Assistant Superintendent of Colonization for the CPR. July 18, 1928. CPR, file 732.
25. From the Calgary Daily Herald, September 25, 1928. "Demand for House Generals." CWCB, CPR, file 732.

## References

- CNR papers, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa. RG30. CPR papers, Glenbow Archives, Calgary. M2269
- Barber, Marilyn. (1985). The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domesticity for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930. In Alison Prentice and Susan Man Trofimenkoff (Eds.), *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History. Vol II.*
- Barber, Marilyn. (1991). *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada.* Ottawa: Published by the Canadian Historical Association.
- Danysk, Cecilia. (1995) *Hired Hands; Labour and the Development of Prairie Agriculture, 1880-1930.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc.
- Dijks, Ineke. (1993). The Canadian Farm Labour Recruitment Controversy of 1927-1928: A view from Alberta. *The Journal of Development Policy Studies.* No 51. Hokkai Gakuen University, Sapporo. Center of Development Policy Studies. pp 111-124.
- Dijks, Ineke J. (1994). *Rails to the "Great Inland Empire": The Canadian National Railway, Colonization and Settlement in Alberta 1925-1930, With Special Reference to the Peace River Region.* Unpublished MA thesis, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.
- Fisher, Lettice. (1925). Canada and British Immigration. *Contemporary Review,* Vol. CXXVIII. pp. 601-605.
- Griswold, Robert. (1988). Anglo Women and Domestic Ideology in the American West in the nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries. *Western Women, Their Land, Their Lives.* Lillian Schlissel, Vicky L. Ruiz and Janice Monk (Eds.). Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press. pp 15-33.

Hawkins, Freda. (1972). *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Hedges, James. (1939). *Building the Canadian West: The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Leslie, Genevieve. (1974). Domestic Service in Canada, 1880–1920. *Women at Work: Ontario 1850–1930*. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (Eds.). Toronto: The Canadian Women's Educational Press. pp. 71-126.

Osborne, B.S. (1990). "The Growth and Development of Our Dominion": *The Role of the Canadian National Railway in the Colonization, Settlement, and Economic Development of Canada, 1923-1964*. Research Monograph, CNR. Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

Palmer, H. (1982). *Patterns of Prejudice, A History in Nativism in Alberta*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Pierson, Ruth Roach. (1986). "They are Still Women After All" *The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Strong-Boag, Veronica. (1988). *The New Day Recalled: Lives of girls and Women in English Canada, 1919–1939*. Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd.

Thompson, John Herd with Allen Seager. (1985). *Canada 1922–1939: Decades of Discord*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Ward, Peter. (1983). Population Growth in Western Canada 1901-1971. In John E. Foster, (Ed.) *The Developing West, Essays in Canadian History in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press. pp. 156–177.