

Lillian Beynon Thomas, Woman's Suffrage and the Return of Dower to Manitoba

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I. INTRODUCTION: PRAIRIE PRESSWOMAN

ON 5 MARCH 1910, THE *MANITOBA FREE PRESS* ran a reprint of a feature article that had appeared two weeks earlier in the *New York Herald* under the headline, "Winnipeg, Grainspout of the World's Granary—The Magic City of the Great Northwest, which Expects to Wrest Commercial Supremacy from Buffalo and Duluth and Even Chicago Itself."¹ Manitoba historian W.L. Morton called the 1900–1912 period in the province's history "The Great Boom."² It was a boom built on four pillars: immigration—the population of Winnipeg quadrupled, swelling from 42,300 inhabitants in 1901 to 166,553 in 1912;³

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I would like to thank Marianne Welch, Reference Librarian, Faculty of Law, University of Western Ontario, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba (P.A.M.), Josephine 'Beynon' Boos of Barrie, Ontario, and Dr. and Mrs. M.J. Snidal of Winnipeg, Manitoba, for all their research assistance. Dr. Margaret Ann Wilkinson, Faculty of Law, University of Western Ontario, who first introduced me to Manitoba dower history. Dean Peter Neary, Faculty of Social Science, University of Western Ontario, Dr. Rande Kostal, Faculty of Law, University of Western Ontario, and Dr. DeLloyd Guth, Faculty of Law, University of Manitoba, all of who provided helpful comments.

¹ *Manitoba Free Press* (5 March 1910) 21–22 [hereinafter *Free Press*].

² W.L. Morton, *Manitoba A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967) at c. 12, 13.

³ *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (Supplement) (Toronto: The Annual Review Publishing Company Limited, 1912) at 81 [hereinafter *C.A.R.P.A.*]. To acknowledge the boom in progress, the *Review* published a special chapter entitled, "Winnipeg: The Gateway of the Canadian West." This supplement, filled with statistics, began by noting that Winnipeg

grain—over 400 million bushels were shipped through Winnipeg in 1912, making it the greatest grain centre on the continent;⁴ railways—the Canadian Pacific yards in Winnipeg were the largest owned by any single corporation in the world with 135 miles of sidings accommodating 12,000 cars, employing 4,000 men, none of which included the new yards of the Canadian National Railway at the other end of Main Street;⁵ and, industry—over the first decade of the century manufactured output grew by 600 percent surpassed in Canada only by Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton.⁶ The *New York Herald's* chronicler summarised it in a sentence:

Though Winnipeg's past growth and future expansion probably rest primarily on the fact that it is the focal point of Western Canada, at which centres each of the three great transcontinental railroad systems of the Dominion, that it is the mouth of the gigantic funnel into which and through which must pass the boundless Canadian harvests on their journey down to the tidewater and the great lakes, there has been material progress made here also in industrial manufactures, a progress which is likely to be appreciably stimulated by the new power plant.⁷

1912, the last and biggest year of the boom, was a very good year for Sir Redmond Roblin.⁸ The 1912 edition of the *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* began its report on the province by stating that Roblin had managed the government “with aggressive force, with assured convictions, and with success.”⁹ That year he negotiated expansion of the provincial boundaries, increasing the province's size three and one-half times to its current configuration, announced plans for a new legislative building and was knighted. No one could have forecast that the next year Manitoba would plunge into depression as the disintegrating peace in Europe caused British investment to dry up and

had “become the greatest grain market on the continent, the chief distributing, industrial, and financial city of the Canadian West” (at 70).

⁴ C.A.R.P.A., *supra* note 3 at 73 & 79. See also Morton, *supra* note 2 at 297, where the historian notes that in 1911, Manitoba reached a record wheat production of 60,275,000 bushels from 2,979, 734 acres.

⁵ *Ibid.* at 74.

⁶ *Ibid.* at 79.

⁷ *Free Press* (5 March 1910) 21–22. The power plant reference was to the new, municipally owned hydro-electric generating facility being built at Pointe du Bois, Manitoba, that was to bring cheap power to the province several years later. The *New York Herald* report also mentioned that Rudyard Kipling addressed the Winnipeg Canadian Club in the summer of 1908. After referring to Winnipeg as a “metropolis,” he described the development since his last visit 15 years earlier as “a record of unsurpassed achievement.” He went on to say that his “admiration for it is as keen as my envy” (at 21).

⁸ Roblin had been Premier since 1900 and was the leader of the Conservative Party that had won four consecutive elections since December, 1899.

⁹ C.A.R.P.A., *supra* note 3 at 490.

immigration to be choked off. Nor could one have foreseen the kick-back scandal that was to emerge in connection with the construction of the new legislative building, a scandal that would, in 1915, force Roblin's resignation and sweep the Liberals, led by Tobias Norris, into office on a reform platform.

Boom times produce stark contrasts. Nowhere was that more evident than in early twentieth century Winnipeg. Wealthy and powerful families of British stock dealt at the Grain Exchange, played at the Manitoba Club and lived on exclusive south-end streets along the Assiniboine River. East European immigrants, the "Strangers within the Gates,"¹⁰ worked in the sweatshops so memorably described in Nellie McClung's autobiography,¹¹ ate at the Methodist All People's Mission, and lived in the cramped North end where they fought off bad sanitation, endemic tuberculosis and outbreaks of typhoid fever and smallpox.

Explosive growth and deep social division proved fertile ground for political activism. Historian Ramsay Cook has written:

It would be surprising if a city, in the midst of a pulsating economic boom and experiencing social and economic frictions of growing intensity, should not produce an intellectual and political life of at least modest substance.¹²

Winnipeg certainly did that. On Sundays in the open-air Market Square behind City Hall, and from 1910 as part of the adult education sessions sponsored by the "People's Forum," various reformers and radicals lectured to anyone who would listen. Topics included taxing the speculative gains from rising land prices, the role of women in society, temperance, public utility ownership, direct legislation and the power of recall, compulsory education, better working conditions, unionisation and socialism.

¹⁰ This description was used by J.S. Woodsworth, Methodist minister, social reformer and future founder of the C.C.F. socialist party, and his co-author A.R. Ford, as the title of their 1909 book that pleaded both for toleration and assimilation of new immigrants. At that time, Woodsworth was the superintendent of the All People's Mission on Stella Avenue in North End Winnipeg.

¹¹ N.L. McClung, *The Stream Runs Fast: My Own Story* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Limited, 1946) at 103–104. McClung invited the Premier on a factory tour. She reported as follows:

We conducted the Premier down dark, slippery stairs to an airless basement where light in mid-day came from gaunt light bulbs, hanging from smoky ceilings. The floor was littered with refuse from apple peelings and discarded clothing. There was no ventilation and no heat. The room was full of untidy women, operating sewing machines and equally unattractive men cutting out garments on long tables ... He [Sir Redmond] was shocked at the filth ... He had to shout to drown the sound of the machines ...

¹² R. Cook, "Francis Marion Beynon and the Crisis of Christian Reformism," in C. Berger & R. Cook, eds., *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W.L. Morton* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976) at 188–89.

The law's unequal treatment of women fuelled some of that political debate. Women did not have the right to vote. They were not permitted to homestead unless they were widowed or had dependants to support. Fathers were the sole guardians of their infant children and had control and custody of them even though mothers were equally responsible for child support. Since the inception of the 1875 *Rights of Property of Married Women Act*,¹³ all Manitoba women had the power to hold and dispose of real and personal property, by will or otherwise. However, despite married women's contributions to their families, they had no claim to the property that their husbands accumulated during marriage. A husband could sell the family home without his wife's consent, or entirely cut her out of his will unimpeded by any form of dower law.

Common law dower, as it existed in England prior to 1833, gave a surviving wife a life interest in one-third of all of the land of which her husband had been seized at any time during their marriage.¹⁴ This had two practical consequences. First, it meant that there would be some provision for the widow after her husband's death. Second, it meant that the husband was required to obtain his wife's signature on a waiver of her interest, known as a "bar" of dower, anytime that he proposed to sell or mortgage his land during his marriage. Realistically, no purchaser would buy the land if, on the death of the seller, the seller's wife might potentially receive a life interest in some part of it.

In 1833, this English common law dower was replaced by a more limited statutory form of dower. Under the statute, a surviving wife received a life interest in one-third of the lands of which the husband was seized, not during his marriage, but only at the time of his death. Moreover, this applied only if the husband's will did not otherwise dispose of the lands or expressly deny his wife's right to dower. This statutory change restricted the scope of dower by eliminating the need to obtain a wife's bar of dower for land dealings that took place during the marriage and by substantially reducing the scope of the wife's entitlement on her husband's death.

In Ontario, the expansive common law form of dower had been received from England and was still in effect at the time of the prairie dower agitation in the early 1900s. In Manitoba, the Legislature abolished dower altogether in 1885. In the Northwest Territories, the Canadian Parliament abolished dower in 1886. Over 20 years later, many correspondents to the women's pages of prairie newspapers opined that dower had been abolished, "to prevent the property

¹³ S.M. 38 Vict. C. 25, 1875.

¹⁴ The explanation of dower that follows, and of its abolition on the prairies, is a brief summary of an earlier article: R.E. Hawkins, "Dower Abolition in Western Canada: How Law Reform Failed" (1997) Man. L.J. 635.

of white men reverting to squaws."¹⁵ There was no evidence to support this theory. The legislative debates suggested that dower, being an unregistered interest in land, was abolished because it was perceived to conflict with the Torrens system of land registration—a system that required all claims against a specific parcel of land be recorded on the land registration. Further, at a time when speculation ran high and land changed hands frequently, the requirement of obtaining a wife's dower bar, particularly when many wives were still in the east, was seen as a hindrance for landowners wishing to sell.¹⁶

Early twentieth century reformers advocating the reinstatement of dower on the prairies were not concerned with the legal technicalities of how such a law might work. They were concerned that a wife should not be economically dependent on her husband lest he abscond having sold the family home, or go bankrupt having mortgaged the property in order to finance speculative purchases, or die having left his wife nothing in his will. They sought to prevent such a sale or mortgage by requiring the wife's signature to the transaction. They sought to deal with disinheritance by guaranteeing that the wife would receive a minimum part of her husband's estate, even if his will should provide otherwise. These two demands sufficiently resembled the dower law as it operated in Ontario and some American jurisdictions as to attract the dower label.

Lillian Beynon Thomas¹⁷ was one of those reformers. She was born Lilly Kate Beynon on 4 September 1874, in King Township, north of Toronto, the

¹⁵ "Merle" *Prairie Farmer* (26 August 1908) 14. Reprinted in the *Free Press* (5 September 1908) 16. Other letters to the same effect: "Uncle Sam" *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14; "Women in British Columbia" *Free Press* (23 November 1911) 16; "Tugaske, Sask." *Prairie Farmer* (25 November 1908) 14. Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy, a leader in the Alberta campaign for dower rights, also appeared to think that dower was abolished to prevent land passing to Indian women: see N.L. McClung, *Clearing in the West: My Own Story* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1935) at 305; City of Edmonton Archives, "Murphy Papers," Box 2 (1932).

¹⁶ Several correspondents to the women's pages made this point: "Pioneer" *Prairie Farmer* (30 September 1908) 16; "Justice of the Peace" *Family Herald and Weekly Star* (18 August 1909) 9. E. Cora Hind made the most perceptive analysis:

Some men found the dower law rather a hamper when they wanted to deal extensively in real estate and turn it over rapidly and they immediately proceeded to rid themselves of the hampering dower law. As there were no women in Parliament and no men keenly interested in women's rights these selfish mortals got they way.

Western Home Monthly (March 1910) at 60–61. See especially Hawkins, *supra* note 14.

¹⁷ There are a number of brief biographical sketches of Beynon Thomas' life. These include: "The Woman About Town" *Prairie Farmer* (30 September 1908); "Winnipeg Women" C-O-A-C-H (December 1932); V. McNaughton, "Jottings by the Way" *The Western Producer* (11 December 1952) 14; B. Ellinthorpe, "From Teaching to Writing" *Country Guide Magazine* (February 1953) 68; "Obituary—Lillian Beynon Thomas" *Winnipeg Free Press* (4 Sep-

second of seven children. Two years after her birth,¹⁸ her family moved to Streetsville, Ontario. There, at the age of five, Lillian fell seriously ill. She was left with a tubercular hip which caused her walking difficulty for the rest of her life.¹⁹ In 1889, the family moved to a rented farm near Hartney, Manitoba but Lillian, unable to walk the distance to school, returned east to attend Harbord Collegiate Institute in Toronto. She rejoined her family in 1895, obtained a non-Professional Second Class Teaching Certificate in 1896, and began to instruct pupils in southern Manitoba schools. According to Cora Hind, agricultural editor of the *Manitoba Free Press*, this rural background gave Thomas, "her knowledge of the conditions of the farm woman,"²⁰ and, "of deprivation on prairie farms."²¹

Following her father's death in 1902, Beynon Thomas moved with the family to Winnipeg. In 1905, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Wesley College, The University of Manitoba²² and her Professional Second Class Teaching Certificate. She then taught for a year in the southern Manitoba town of Morden. Although she enjoyed teaching, Beynon Thomas was too interested in writing, and too intellectually ambitious, not to take the next step. She engineered a "chance" meeting with J.W. Dafoe during a visit the editor of the *Manitoba Free Press* made to Morden. He offered her a job as a journalist with the city *Free Press* and its rural counterpart, *The Weekly Free Press and Prairie Farmer*. She began as woman's page editor in the summer of 1906, writing under the nom de plume "Lillian Laurie."

Her page was called "Home Loving Hearts." Lillian Laurie invited women to send in recipes, home-making hints and patterns. She published their letters below a sketch of a fountain pen on which was engraved "M.B.A.," meaning "Mutual Benefit Association." Anyone who wrote to the editor could join the

tember 1961) 19; "She Won the Vote for Women" *Winnipeg Tribune* (5 September 1961); Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation-Historic Resources Branch, "Lillian Beynon Thomas" (1986). For further information about Thomas' family see Cook, *supra* note 11 at 187; A. Hicks, "Francis Beynon and *The Guide*" in M. Kinnear, ed., *First Days, Fighting Days—Women in Manitoba History* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1987) at 41.

¹⁸ Although her birth and wedding certificates read "Lilly," Thomas always went by the first name "Lillian."

¹⁹ Some writers attribute her limp to an early childhood accident but Thomas herself, in a 17 June 1939 letter to Robert Macham, indicates that illness was the origin of the problem (P.A.M., Beynon Papers). The biographical sketch in C-O-A-C-H, *supra* note 17, is correct on this point.

²⁰ "Woman about Town," *supra* note 17.

²¹ E. Cora Hind, "The Women's Quiet Hour" *Western Home Monthly* (November 1911) 56.

²² At the time, only 11 percent of all graduates were women. See Manitoba, Culture, Heritage and Recreation, *supra* note 17 at 1.

association: members with \$5 could purchase a pin. The idea was that women would exchange practical information and opinions on subjects of general interest. Lillian Laurie began each column with several paragraphs of her own chat, often skilfully "educating public opinion" on topics such as dower that were close to her heart.

By Christmas 1907, Lillian Laurie proudly reported that over 300 letters had been published, "from women engaged in the active struggle of life."²³ Of these writers, 90 "of as fine women as were ever banded together for any good cause," became M.B.A. members. Lillian Laurie did not tell her readers until years later that she had primed the pump by writing the first two letters herself.²⁴ In 1952, Violet McNaughton, who had become the first president of the Saskatchewan Women Grain Growers' Association in 1914, remembered the "Home Loving Hearts" page:

How many of us from down east or overseas, new to prairie isolation and hardship, watched for Lillian Laurie's weekly message? How many of us shared our joys and sorrows with her, through her page or by personal letters?²⁵

Earlier, Cora Hind expressed similar affection:

Among the many women who have written for women's pages in the daily, weekly and monthly publications in Western Canada, I do not think that anyone has come quite so close to the hearts of the women of the west as Lillian Laurie.²⁶

Loneliness haunted prairie women. "If only we had had phones in those early days," reminisced one pioneer.²⁷ The letters to the M.B.A. column were the settlers' equivalent of phone calls to today's radio talk shows. Almost all writers adopted a nom de plume. Lillian Laurie acted as the friendly, but always in control, hostess. The page seemed, "to bind us together."²⁸ "I lie down for a few minutes rest," "Hawk Eye" wrote to Lillian Laurie, "I read the letters and it seems as if I were talking to you and I have my say in between the lines."²⁹ For "Aberdeen," reading the letters seemed like having conversations with the other correspondents.³⁰

²³ *The Weekly Free Press and Prairie Farmer (Prairie Farmer)* (25 December 1907) 14.

²⁴ "The page is now yours—use it" *Free Press Weekly Prairie Farmer* (date unknown) 10.

²⁵ McNaughton, *supra* note 17.

²⁶ *Western Home Monthly* (November 1911) 56.

²⁷ *Supra* note 23.

²⁸ "English Tea Rose" *Prairie Farmer* (27 January 1909) 14.

²⁹ "Hawk Eye" *Prairie Farmer* (25 November 1908) 14.

³⁰ "Aberdeen" *Prairie Farmer* (10 March 1909) 14. For similar comments see "Lee" *Prairie Farmer* (2 December 1908) 14; "Heather Bell" *Prairie Farmer* (3 March 1909) 14.

Between June 1908 and September 1909, Lillian Laurie printed 442 letters that dealt with dower. This included every letter that she received except those whose authors evidently did not understand the concept.³¹ Most were reproduced in full apart from those published during the eight weeks from 10 March 1909 to 28 April 1909 when the volume of correspondence was so great that each letter had to be summarised. From 3 March 1909 forward, Lillian Laurie suggested that as the dower law had been fully discussed, and the legislature was closed, it was time to move on to other topics. She asked correspondents to write on how the home could be improved, made more sanitary, easier to work in, more comfortable, etc.³² After September 1909, only occasional dower letters appeared in the "Home Loving Hearts" page. The final ones were published on 19 April 1911.³³

Up until her September 1911 marriage to A.V. Thomas, himself a *Manitoba Free Press* journalist, Lillian Laurie edited the women's page in both the city and country papers.³⁴ Often she would reprint letters or articles from one publication in the other. In general, the city paper contained fewer letters and more information articles than its rural counterpart, giving the city page a less intimate feel. After her marriage, Lillian Laurie concentrated her editing energies on the rural paper although her articles still appeared in the city paper. From January 1913, Kenneth Haig, writing as "Alison Craig," authored a regular women's column, "Over the Tea Cups," in the city paper. When Lillian Laurie left Winnipeg in 1917, Craig succeeded her as editor of the country paper's "Home Loving Hearts" page.

In her last column, on 2 May 1917, Lillian Laurie linked the evolution in the content of the "Home Loving Hearts" page to the gradual emancipation of women. In the beginning, space was devoted to recipes, home remedies and suggestions for making furniture out of boxes. Then the M.B.A. took up questions of the rights of women and, in particular, a dower law. By 1917, it had become a page where taxes, trade, land laws and sociology were intelligently discussed. "Four walls no longer bind the minds of our women," wrote Beynon

³¹ *Prairie Farmer* (21 April 1909) 14.

³² *Prairie Farmer* (3 March 1909) 14. See also *supra* note 31; *Prairie Farmer* (28 April 1909) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (5 May 1909) 14.

³³ *Prairie Farmer* (19 April 1911) 2 at "Magazine."

³⁴ The circulation of the city daily was 36,048 homes in 1908, rising to 77,327 homes by 1917. The circulation of the rural weekly was 27,425 homes in 1908, rising to 32,068 homes in 1917. *Free Press* advertising boasted that no one home got both daily and weekly publications. See *The Canadian Newspaper Directory*, 6th ed. (Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and London, Eng.: A. McKim, Limited, 1909) at 174; *The Canadian Newspaper Directory*, 11th ed. (Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and London, Eng.: A. McKim, Limited, 1918) at 186.

Thomas, “[t]hey have reached out to the district, then to the nation and now, it is with the great international problems they are wrestling.”³⁵

Beynon Thomas was part of a wider circle of Winnipeg women journalists. “I am sure that it is no exaggeration,” Cora Hind wrote in 1914, “to say that there are twenty columns in newspapers devoted to women’s work and problems compared to one five years ago.”³⁶ Rural farms often subscribed to several newspapers as a way of breaking the isolation.³⁷ The most important of these had women’s sections and each dealt with the dower question in one degree or another.

The Grain Growers’ Guide served as the official newspaper of the Manitoba Grain Growers’ Company, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association and the United Farmers of Alberta.³⁸ From its start in June 1908 until November, 1911, Isabelle Beaton Graham (“Isobel”) edited a page entitled “The Woman’s Sphere in Life and Labor.” On 29 December 1909, she invited readers to submit letters on dower to her “Around the Fireside” column.³⁹ She followed this up on 6 July 1910, with an editorial entitled “Unearned Increments and Woman’s Dower.”⁴⁰ It argued that women were not being rewarded for the value that their contribution added to the farm. Before she left to devote herself to the homesteads for women cause, “Isobel” had published 36 dower letters in *The Guide*.

After a brief hiatus during which Mary Ford served as the *Guide*’s women’s page editor, Beynon Thomas’ younger sister, Francis Marion Beynon, took over in June 1912.⁴¹ Despite the rather banal name she gave her page, “The Country Homemakers,” Francis wrote from a passionate, almost utopian perspective that contrasted with the more practical, level-headed arguments made by her sister.

³⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (2 May 1917) 7.

³⁶ *Western Home Monthly* (March 1914) 45. It was some exaggeration. Even in 1909, there were several women’s columns.

³⁷ “East Lynne” wrote that her household took eight weeklies and four monthlies [*Prairie Farmer* (31 March 1909) 14]. Will Channon wrote that he subscribed to five different papers [*The Grain Growers’ Guide* (16 February 1910)]. Many letters-to-the-editor referred to opinions expressed in letters printed in other papers.

³⁸ In 1917, the *Grain Growers’ Guide* had a circulation of 35,235 [*Supra* note 34 at 187].

³⁹ *Grain Growers’ Guide* (29 December 1909) 28.

⁴⁰ *Grain Growers’ Guide* (6 July 1910) 22–3.

⁴¹ Francis Marion Beynon’s life has been well documented: see Cook, *supra* note 12 and Hicks, *supra* note 17. See also a play about Beynon’s life: W. Lill, *Fighting Days* (Vancouver: Playwrights, 1985). It is a little curious that Francis has received more study than her older sister. Perhaps this is due to her more colourful and ideological writing style. Perhaps it is also due to the fact that the *Grain Growers’ Guide* is a more widely used historical source than the *Prairie Farmer*.

Still, their positions on the issues of dower, homesteads, working conditions for women, and suffrage were the same. By the time Francis left the paper in June 1917, she had published twenty-nine letters on dower, many in the 1914 to 1916 period of the suffrage campaign.

The women's page in *The Farmers' Advocate and Home Journal*, printed in Winnipeg and sent to subscribers across the prairies, was edited by Florence Lediard. She wrote under the nom de plume "Dame Durden" and called her letters column "The Ingle Nook." In 1907, she was the first to publish a dower letter.⁴² She then wrote three editorials explaining that a man might sell or mortgage the family home without his wife's consent under the law as it then stood on the prairies.⁴³ Despite inviting a response, she got none until a letter arrived and was published on 30 September 1908. Referring to the lack of a dower law as a "dishonest evil," the correspondent wrote: "I see our neighbours of the *Free Press* in the women's column are taking up in earnest the subject of women's dower."⁴⁴ Dame Durden seemed a little miffed that the writer did not acknowledge her own efforts:

I had hoped that the editorials appearing from time to time on our Home Journal front page would have led to others expressing their opinions, but perhaps they do not read that page.⁴⁵

Dame Durden published five dower letters between September 1908 and July 1909. On 1 March 1911, the paper again published a favourable editorial on dower.⁴⁶ Florence Lediard moved to Ontario in November 1911. She married but within a year suddenly became ill and died. Her place as "hostess" of "The Ingle Nook" was taken by Mae Clendennan who styled herself Dame Dibbins. She was also a strong supporter of women's rights, including dower.

The Nor'-West Farmer, a semi-monthly publication started in Winnipeg in 1882, was Canada's oldest farming newspaper.⁴⁷ Mary S. Mantle used the name "Margaret Freeston" when writing her column, "From A Woman's Standpoint." On 5 May 1911, she endorsed the dower cause as a reasonable request and just protection:

The married women are not anxious to complicate business matters in any way but they do ask for some kind of law which will protect their interests, which will prevent a

⁴² *Farmer's Advocate* (24 April 1907) 615.

⁴³ *Farmer's Advocate* (24 April 1907) 615; *Farmer's Advocate* (12 June 12 1907) 897; *Farmer's Advocate* (8 July 1908) 960.

⁴⁴ "H.M. Neville" *Farmer's Advocate* (30 September 1908) 304.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Farmer's Advocate*. (1 March 1911) at "Editorial."

⁴⁷ In 1917, *The Nor'-West Farmer* had a circulation of 35,365 [*Supra* note 34 at 189].

man from doing what he pleases with his property without regard to the wishes or rights of his wife or children.⁴⁸

Between December 1908 and May 1909, *The Nor'-West Farmer* published 13 dower letters.

The Family Herald and Weekly Star, a national farm newspaper published in Montreal, printed 27 dower letters in its "Prim Rose at Home" column between December 1908 and May 1910.⁴⁹ Finally, between 1909 and 1915, E. Cora Hind wrote seven editorials advocating a dower law in her column, "The Women's Quiet Hour," for *The Western Home Monthly* magazine.⁵⁰ Like the correspondent in the *Farmer's Advocate*, she recognised Lillian Laurie's initiative at the *Prairie Farmer*:

Hitherto I have refrained from taking this matter up, not for lack of interest but simply because I thought it being very ably handled through the *Weekly Free Press* and I did not want to butt in.⁵¹

This group of "self-aware journalists"⁵² were closely allied. They shared a common profession at a time when few women had a profession; a common credo favouring the economic and political independence of women; a common and genuine empathy for their sisters on the farm; and a common network of women's clubs. Two professional organisations stood out. On 14 November 1908, Lillian Beynon invited some of her journalist friends to her home. They decided to form the "Quill Club," a "group of persons interested in forming a society for the purpose of 'talking shop'."⁵³ Present were Lillian, her sister Francis, Cora Hind, Florence Lediard, George F. Chipman—future *Grain Growers' Guide* editor—and A.V. Thomas—Lillian's future husband. One candidate for admission was Frank Mantle, likely related to Mary Mantle.

Members of the Quill Club took their writing seriously and meetings were held bi-weekly. Candidates for admission had to write and read a 1,000 word original composition. A majority vote of the members present could stop the reading and block the applicant's admission at any time. Noted author, Nellie McClung, visited from her home in Manitou, Manitoba, on 6 March 1909. Two

⁴⁸ *Farmer's Advocate* (5 May 1911) 583.

⁴⁹ *The Family Herald and Weekly Star* had a mail circulation of 130,000 per issue [*Supra* note 34 at 2].

⁵⁰ *The Western Home Monthly* had a circulation of 35,884 in 1908, "the largest home circulation of any publication printed west of the Great Lakes in Canada." [*Supra* note 34 at 127].

⁵¹ *Western Home Monthly* (February 1909).

⁵² H. Gutken & M. Gutken, *Profiles in Dissent* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1997) at 218. The biographical sketches in this book provide a particularly fine description of working-class Winnipeg at the time Lillian Beynon Thomas, herself a middle class woman, was fighting for farm women and universal suffrage.

⁵³ P.A.M., MG 10 C3, Quill Club, Minute Book.

weeks later she wrote a thank-you note wishing members, "kindly editors and fat cheques."⁵⁴ On 20 March 1909, A.V. Thomas presented an impromptu one-man skit showing what he predicted for each club member, circa 1939. He imagined Lillian Beynon leading the women's suffrage list. Perhaps he was already courting her.

The Quill Club held its last meeting in October 1909. A number of members were late. The early arrivals spent their waiting time "most profitably in a discussion of Women's Suffrage."⁵⁵ The Club had lasted just over a year, the same year that its female journalist members were welcoming letters on the subject of dower to their newspaper columns.

The second organisation to which these journalists belonged was the Winnipeg Branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club (C.W.P.C.). It was founded in October 1907.⁵⁶ E. Cora Hind became the first president while Beynon Thomas was the first secretary. Isabelle Beaton Graham, Francis Marion Beynon, Florence Lediard, Mae Clendennan, Mary Mantle and Nellie McClung were all, at one time or another, members. Harriet Walker, press agent for, and co-owner with her husband of Winnipeg's Walker Theatre, hosted meetings in her home during the first years.⁵⁷ On 11 May 1911, Florence Lediard gave a talk at a Winnipeg Press Club luncheon describing the things that she had learned in letters from prairie women to *The Farmer's Advocate*. The press report stated that she spoke of the terrible loneliness of farm life and of the great help it was to most women to be able to confide in someone the many things so small and so important to the people concerned.⁵⁸

The Winnipeg Branch of the C.W.P.C. developed an ongoing interest in the dower issue. On 9 February 1911, Emily Murphy, Edmonton author and dower activist, spoke to the Club about the progress of the dower campaign in Alberta.⁵⁹ For three consecutive years, on 9 December 1909, 16 January 1911 and 29 March 1912, representatives of the Winnipeg Branch of the C.W.P.C.

⁵⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (6 March 1909); *Prairie Farmer* (20 March 1909).

⁵⁵ *Western Home Monthly* (October 1909).

⁵⁶ A useful historical source is Canadian Women's Press Club, "Newspacket Golden Jubilee 1904-1954." A copy can be found in the P.A.M., CWPC: Winnipeg Branch papers, P. 3586.

⁵⁷ In January 1914, the Walker Theatre became the site of the mock "Women's Parliament" that galvanised the then ongoing suffrage campaign. Harriet Walker and her husband constructed the theatre in 1908. According to W.L. Morton, the Walkers offered Manitobans "year after year the best that London and New York could be persuaded to send travelling." See Morton, *supra* note 2 at 322.

⁵⁸ Unidentified press clipping found in the papers of the C.W.P.C.: Winnipeg Branch, *ibid*.

⁵⁹ P.A.M., CWPC: Winnipeg Branch papers, P. 3586.

attended the Winnipeg Branch meetings of the National Council of Women in order to obtain its support for a dower law.⁶⁰

What follows is the story of how Beynon Thomas, and her fellow women's page editors, created an agitation for dower reform among rural women. With the support of leading city club women, they then translated that agitation into a sustained lobbying effort. When their requests for dower were rebuffed by a government reliant solely on the votes of men, the women launched a second campaign aimed at changing the structure of democracy itself in order to achieve their goal.

II. THE FIRST CAMPAIGN

A. Arousing the Public: 1908–1910

1. A band of women

In 1959, 51 years after Beynon Thomas started her dower movement, she was asked by the Manitoba Historical Society how it was that Manitoba women were the first in Canada to vote.⁶² She answered that it was a letter from a woman in Alberta to the "Home Loving Hearts" page of the *Prairie Farmer* that made women rise up and organise. She recalled that the correspondent and her husband had built up a prosperous homestead. Then the husband, an alcoholic, sold the family farm while drunk. The family was put out immediately. A lawyer told them that they had no claim to anything. Beynon Thomas remembered the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, File 4–Minute Book #2, 23 November 1899–1 May 1925.

⁶¹ Although all three prairie provinces reinstated a form of dower at approximately the same time, the circumstances varied considerably from province to province. Only in Manitoba was the government overtly hostile to such a reform. This perhaps explains why it was only in Manitoba that dower reform had to wait until the government changed and women's enfranchisement was achieved. For the Alberta history see C. Cavanaugh, "The Limitations on the Pioneering Partnership: The Alberta Campaign for Homestead Dower, 1909–25," (1993) LXXIV *Can. Historical Rev.* 198; and W.F. Bowker, "Reform of the Law of Dower in Alberta" (1960) 1 *Alta. L. Rev.* 501. For the Saskatchewan history see J. Williams, "The Homesteads Act: Reflections on its Purpose and Operation in Saskatchewan" (1983–84) 48 *Sask. L. Rev.* 57. There is no complete history for Manitoba. Margaret McCallum has written an excellent unpublished paper that focuses on the *Grain Growers' Guide* as a principle source: see M. McCallum, "Prairie Women and the Struggle for a Dower Law, 1905–1920" (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Canadian Legal History Project Working Paper Series, 1991). It does not deal with the *Prairie Farmer* or with Lillian Beynon Thomas' role, but does mention her sister Francis (at 9). The legal aspects of the question are explored in A.D. Hughes, "Reform of the Dower Act Rights of Widows" (1979) 9 *Man. L.J.* 393. There is also useful historical information in Manitoba Law Reform Commission, *Report on Examination of The Dower Act* (Winnipeg: Queen's Printer, 1984).

⁶² Manitoba Historical Society, *Manitoba Pageant* (September 1959) 10.

letter ending with the words, "You can't help me, but you can help others who are in a similar position."⁶³

In 1944, historian Catherine Cleverdon, then a doctoral student researching the thesis that would eventually become a classic book on woman suffrage,⁶⁴ wrote Beynon Thomas to inquire how the suffrage movement began. After disclaiming that she only had "the foggiest mind for dates and details," Beynon Thomas again linked the origins of the movement to letters to the *Prairie Farmer* women's page that expressed dissatisfaction with laws affecting women, including property laws. She continued:

I started a correspondence column and the stories coming to me were so heartbreaking I called a number of women together and after we had tried to interest our government in the matter and failed, we organized The Political Equality League.⁶⁵

After half a century, Beynon Thomas' memory might have been a little fuzzy on the details but she conveyed the big picture. There was a "smoking gun" letter that caused her to begin the dower agitation and, when that failed, to organise the suffrage campaign. A correspondent who signed herself "An Old Woman," from British Columbia not Alberta, had her letter published by Lillian Laurie in the "Home Loving Hearts" column on 17 June 1908. After expressing "consternation" on learning that the western provinces had no dower law comparable to that in the east, she told a story whose theme was repeated in hundreds of letters published in women's pages over the next year. It went as follows:⁶⁶

... But it is not of myself I wish to write, but to state what I have seen done since I have been here. A man and his wife came here several years ago and took up a homestead in the bush far away from any settlers. Both worked hard to get a clearing and a family began to grow up, and all went well with them. Soon the boys were able to help, but by this time the country round was getting settled up and very soon a town sprung up pretty close to their home, and first and foremost a saloon opened there, which the husband began to visit and pretty soon to spend the most of his time at, leaving the wife and boys to do all the work on the farm while he loafed and spent all they made. Still they worked early and late, and cleared more land and planted an orchard, and

⁶³ McCallum, *supra* note 62 at 10.

⁶⁴ C.L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950).

⁶⁵ National Archives of Canada—Cleverdon Papers, *Letter from Lillian B. Thomas to Cleverdon* (21 April 1944).

⁶⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (17 June 1908) 14. The letter did not end with the plea to help others as Beynon Thomas recalled in 1959. That comment, and it was more a lament than a plea, was contained in a letter that arrived several months later. On 20 June 1909, the *Prairie Farmer* published a letter from "Prudie" (at 14). It ended: "I trust we will get the dower law passed not that it will benefit me. My case is hopeless. With all good wishes for a happy Christmas to Miss Laurie." Lillian Laurie reprinted the letter: *Free Press* (21 February 1910) 9.

raised stock. Their next neighbor, seeing what a nice farm it was wished to get it for his son and took the meanest way to get it. He took, or rather pretended to take great interest in the drunken husband, and would lure him in to spend the evenings and treat him to oyster suppers with lots of drink, and when too drunk to go home would put him in the best bedroom. Pretty soon the poor drunk thought he had the best friend in the world. Finally the friend asked him to sell the farm and promised him a good figure for it, and being partly drunk he promised to sell. So they went to a lawyer and agreement was made and part of the money paid before the wife heard anything about it. She would not believe a word of it at first because she thought as I did, that he could not sell without her signing off, but to her cost she found it too true, and not only the farm, but the stock, live and dead and even the furniture was included in the sale. This poor woman found she could do nothing but take her children and walk out, which she did and they are now scattered all over, while the husband still hangs around the hotel spending the money as he gets it by instalments, but the poor wife got nothing ...

"Old Woman" wrote again on 28 October 1908,⁶⁷ and 31 March 1909.⁶⁸ She expressed pleasure at the sincerity with which M.B.A. members had taken up the dower cause and urged them to talk to their visitors, especially the men, about the issue. She also indicated that she had written her B.C. Legislature member. Lillian Laurie noted that "Old Woman" "certainly did start a big discussion, but not before it was needed."⁶⁹

Lillian Laurie used "Old Woman's" letter as motivational propaganda throughout the dower agitation. She often republished letters containing "sad case" stories of women who had been left destitute by uncaring husbands and unfair property laws. On 15 February 1910, she republished "Old Woman's" *Prairie Farmer* letter, this time in the *Free Press*.⁷⁰ The next year, on 25 February 1911, she began a summary of the progress made by the dower agitation as follows:

It is now over three years since a letter from a woman in the West was published in these columns and excited so much interest that hundreds of women at once wrote begging the women in the cities, the women at the centre, to work for improved laws for women, especially laws to prevent a man selling the home without the consent of the wife and willing all of his property away from his wife.⁷¹

She continued with a detailed synopsis of the story that "Old Woman" had told of the building of the farm, the coming of the town, the husband's drunkenness and the sale of the farm home without the wife's consent.⁷²

⁶⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14.

⁶⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (31 March 1909) 14.

⁶⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14.

⁷⁰ *Free Press* (15 February 1910) 9.

⁷¹ *Free Press* (25 February 1911) 44.

⁷² There are many other examples of "sad case" letters that Lillian Laurie published in one paper and then later reprinted in the other: "Amicus" *Prairie Farmer* (9 September 1908)

"Old Woman's" letter resonated with *Prairie Farmer* readers. In the first three months after it was published, seven other correspondents referred to it with approval.⁷³ Dame Durden, writing in the *Farmer's Advocate* on 8 July 1908, cited a case of a wife left homeless after her husband sold the farm. The example sounded identical to one given by "Old Woman."⁷⁴ Two years later, on 11 May 1910, "Equal Rights" wrote a letter to the *Family Herald and Weekly Star* that used the incident of the drunken husband described by "Old Woman" to rebut anti-dower letters that had appeared in that paper.⁷⁵

The "Old Woman" letter kicked-off Lillian Laurie's dower agitation: "It has been my object to get together a band of women interested in their sister women and ready to work for them."⁷⁶ The correspondents to the "Home Loving Hearts" page were to be that band. Their job was to, "work up public feeling" in favour of dower reform;⁷⁷ they were instructed that, "public opinion, the greatest force of all ages, must be educated."⁷⁸ This would take time and effort⁷⁹ but in the end no government would be able to "stand against public opinion."⁸⁰ Reason, not passion, was to be the campaign strategy.⁸¹ "... [T]he time to bear in silence is past,"⁸² exhorted Lillian Laurie, "[l]et us agitate until we have won success."⁸³

In addition to writing the "Home Loving Hearts" page and talking to other women in their districts, M.B.A. members were to send letters to their local papers giving a "plain statement" of the injustice of the dower situation.⁸⁴ Once

14; *Free Press* (12 September 1908) 16; "Merle" *Prairie Farmer* (26 August 1908) 14; *Free Press* (5 September 1908) 16; "Prudie" *supra* note 65.

⁷³ For example, on 22 July 1908, "Fair Play" wrote: "Old Woman, I would like to shake hands with you."

⁷⁴ *Farmer's Advocate* (8 July 1908) 960.

⁷⁵ *Family Herald and Weekly Star* (date unknown) 11.

⁷⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (19 August 1908) 14.

⁷⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (2 September 1908) 14.

⁷⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14.

⁷⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (9 September 1908) 14.

⁸⁰ *Supra* note 78 at 14.

⁸¹ In her last "Home Loving Hearts" column, written 2 May 1917, Lillian Laurie, ever the rationalist, declared the reliance on reason a success. After noting that the men of Saskatchewan and Alberta had put up no strenuous opposition to the passage of a dower law, she concluded: "So does education change people when taken in small doses with plenty of time for it to assimilate" [*Prairie Farmer* (2 May 1917) 7].

⁸² *Prairie Farmer* (26 August 1908) 14.

⁸³ *Prairie Farmer* (30 September 1908) 14.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

the local paper published the letter, the press clipping was to be sent to Lillian Laurie, presumably so that she could use it at the appropriate time to pressure the government by demonstrating the state of public opinion with respect to dower.⁸⁵ No member should refrain from writing to the local paper because a neighbour had. It would take three or four letters before people would be compelled to take notice.⁸⁶ If a husband was not willing to have his wife write, "the sooner the wives of such men insist on their rights to use their own judgment in this matter, the better."⁸⁷ No bitterness nor strong expressions should creep into the letters. This was not a case of women struggling against men or of slaves struggling to be free.⁸⁸ Lillian Laurie was far too astute to risk alienating the very men whose votes would be necessary to achieve dower reform. The "band of women" was told not to be concerned about criticism: "It shows that people are taking notice."⁸⁹

Throughout the movement, Lillian Laurie was careful to give the dower campaign a sense of momentum. She gave optimistic updates on the progress of the campaign in each of the Western provinces,⁹⁰ wondering aloud which province would be first to pass a dower law and predicting that it would be Saskatchewan.⁹¹ She told her Manitoba audience that she would be interviewing some of the leading women in women's associations.⁹² She later reported that she had succeeded in interesting the Winnipeg Branch of the National Council of Women, "or at least some of them," and that a meeting would be held soon to discuss the matter.⁹³ In December 1908, she commented on the large number of clippings she was receiving of letters published in local newspapers.⁹⁴ In July 1908, she expressed pleasure, "that women throughout the West are taking an active interest in the matter."⁹⁵ In October 1908, she was predicting a victory,

⁸⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; and *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14.

⁸⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (4 November 1908) 14.

⁸⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (18 November 1908) 14.

⁸⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (30 December 1908) 14. Reprinted from the *Free Press* (26 December 1908) 16. See also *Prairie Farmer* (16 January 1909) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (27 January 1909) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (4 August 1909) 14.

⁹¹ *Prairie Farmer* (30 September 1908) 14.

⁹² *Prairie Farmer* (12 August 1908) 14.

⁹³ *Prairie Farmer* (13 January 1909) 14.

⁹⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (23 December 1908) 14.

⁹⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (29 July 1908) 14.

hopefully within a few months.⁹⁶ The next April, she told "Old Fashioned," "Yes, I am sure we will win in time."⁹⁷

2. The Dialogue

Security and fairness were the two arguments advanced by M.B.A. correspondents in support of a dower law. The security argument was powerfully illustrated by the "sad case" example. Letter writers would describe a situation in which a husband, afflicted with any one or several of a catalogue of character failings, would end up selling the farm out from under his wife and family. "Amicus" wrote of a case in which a husband, far past middle age, developed a vice and created a scandal with another woman, bruised his wife with knocks and, finally, kicked her out of the house. "Nothing belonged to her," concluded "Amicus," "even though she had made three parts of it."⁹⁸ "Warm Heart" knew of a case, "where the man sold most everything and mortgaged his farm unknown to his wife and family and went off with a young girl."⁹⁹ "Elmwood" knew

one woman who worked hard for years, took in washing and went out house cleaning, and gave her husband the earnings to build a house and buy a lot and they had a nice home.¹⁰⁰

However, the husband, unknown to his wife, mortgaged the home and in the end the sheriff seized it. "Louise W." knew of a great many cases

where a man and wife have worked together to make a home and after the hard struggle was past ... lose everything to drink or running in debt and mortgaging the farm or something else just as foolish, and the wife powerless to save anything.¹⁰¹

One sad story stood out. A letter from "East Lynne" of Morden, Manitoba, was published on 29 July 1908. "East Lynne" became a type of martyr to the dower cause. Her letter was cited, with sympathy, by 29 other correspondents between 9 September 1908 ("Crushed Ambition") and 19 May 1909 ("Across the Prairie"). Not even "Old Woman's" letter attracted as much attention. "East Lynne's" story went as follows:¹⁰²

⁹⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14.

⁹⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (14 April 1909) 14.

⁹⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (9 September 1908) 14.

⁹⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (1 September 1909) 14.

¹⁰⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14.

¹⁰¹ *Supra* note 95. There were many other stories of women put out without a cent. See e.g. "Maplehurst" *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14; "Breadwinner" *Prairie Farmer* (24 November 1908) 14; "Buckeye" *Prairie Farmer* (23 December 1908) 14; "Young Mother" *Prairie Farmer* (10 February 1909) 14; "Mrs. E.S." *Prairie Farmer* (9 March 1909) 14.

¹⁰² *Supra* note 95. As did many correspondents, "East Lynne" wrote the "Home Loving Hearts" page on several occasions. In a letter published on 31 March 1909, she told readers that her husband ultimately decided not to sell the farm because of the depressed state of land prices

... and in my own case I am having my share of trouble. I have been married nearly twenty-one years and have a large family of nine children, the eldest seventeen and the youngest one and a half years old, and I have always worked hard and do work still as hard as ever, as I was married very young. I am able to do my share of hard work yet, but the last two years my husband has been much dissatisfied and has treated us all very mean, even went so far as to strike and abuse me, and this winter he was in British Columbia all winter. Now he is home again, and is even harder to live with than ever. Now he says this fall he intends to sell our farm and stock and force us all to go with him and I do not know what to do. He is so bad to me here where I have some relatives and friends, even went so far yesterday as to say that if it was not for the law he would soon get rid of me just because I do not want to go with him. If he would only leave us alone here on the farm I and the two eldest boys could run it. They are seventeen and fourteen years old, so with the help of a hired man we could get along. We are called well to do, as we own a half section two miles from the town and have nearly 46 head of cattle and enough horses to work three teams, so he is easily worth fifteen thousand and everything is clear, but he is just like the man in the letter by "an old woman," he wants to waste all we have worked hard for in speculation. It would be all right if he treated me all right, not wanting to get rid of me. So if you can at all, do everything in your power to have the law changed, so that I can have a chance to raise my family, as he intends to do something this fall ...

57 letters were published in which the author expressed support for a dower law, convinced by a "sad case" that had been described by a previous correspondent. These were consoling and sympathetic voices. "Sister of the Oppressed" wrote that "Old Woman's" views were hers also.¹⁰³ "Daughter of Devon" wrote that she felt "so sorry" for "Norfolk Lassie" and asked "West Lynn" "[h]ow are you getting along?"¹⁰⁴ "My heart goes out to you Amethyst," wrote "Hawk-eye,"¹⁰⁵ a sentiment shared by "Dora" who was "very sorry for Amethyst and others who had suffered from this unjust law."¹⁰⁶ "Simcoe" wrote, "Breadwinner, your story is indeed a sad one. I could hardly keep the tears back when I read it."¹⁰⁷ The dialogue of support, intimate despite the newsprint barrier, went on and on.

in Manitoba in 1908–09. Her husband predicted that a dower law would never pass in Manitoba as women never succeed at anything.

¹⁰³ *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14.

¹⁰⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (25 November 1908) 14.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14. Many women wrote referring to an unjust dower law when what they meant was the absence of any dower law. "Amythyst," a 37 year old Scottish mother of ten children, expecting her eleventh, had earlier written that she worried every time she asked for a dollar that "the boss" would throw her out of her home: See, *Prairie Farmer* (21 October 1908) 14.

¹⁰⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (6 January 1909) 14. "Beula" [*Prairie Farmer* (20 January 1909) 14] and "Gusty" [*Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14] both wrote that their hearts went out to "Breadwinner." Breadwinner's husband had moved another woman into the farm home

There were also angry voices. 20 letters used the words “shame” or disgrace” to describe the lack of a dower law. Often the words were modified—“burning shame,”¹⁰⁸ “downright shame,”¹⁰⁹ “lasting disgrace,”¹¹⁰ “terrible disgrace”¹¹¹—to bring home the depth of the writer’s feeling.

Despite the expression of sympathy and anger, there is an ambivalence in the “sad case” letters. On the one hand, they were full of examples where drunken, adulterous or speculative behaviour by husbands had cost the family its home. On the other hand, many letter writers were quick, almost urgently quick, to point out that their own husbands were good men who would never leave them without proper support.¹¹² Some added that their husbands favoured a dower law.¹¹³ “Fanny Alta,” thinking of poor women like “East Lynne,” denounced the lack of a dower law as a shame and then added, “not that it makes any difference in our home (as hubby and I are life partners in every respect).”¹¹⁴ “Merle” wrote that she personally had nothing to fear: “My husband takes no steps whatever regarding our property without my willing consent, but I am ready and anxious to do all I can to help those less fortunate.”¹¹⁵

These expressions of desire to help the less fortunate were encouraged by Lillian Laurie. She understood that most women, “were secure and happy in the love and confidence of their husbands, and the lack of a dower law was not felt by them.”¹¹⁶ The agitation would go nowhere without the altruistic support of comfortable women for whom dower would always remain an abstract issue. Lillian Laurie dealt with this problem by appealing for help from “broad minded

while “Breadwinner” was away at her parent’s giving birth to twins [See *Prairie Farmer* (25 November 1908) 14].

¹⁰⁸ “West Lynn” *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; “Louise W.” *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14; “October Chick” *Prairie Farmer* (21 October 1908) 14.

¹⁰⁹ “Rose” *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14.

¹¹⁰ “Uncle Sam” *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14.

¹¹¹ “Pansy” *Prairie Farmer* (4 November 1908) 14.

¹¹² Over 60 letters made this point.

¹¹³ See “Bella” *Prairie Farmer* (22 July 1908) 14; “Dora” *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14; “Evening Star” *Prairie Farmer* (23 December 1908) 14; “Vashti” *Prairie Farmer* (6 January 1909) 14.

¹¹⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (19 August 1908) 14. Correspondents used the partnership analogy fairly often. “Sunbeam” prefaced her support for the dower cause as follows: “While the matter is not a personal one with me as I am a partner in our “Home Firm” in the fullest sense ...” [*Prairie Farmer* (17 March 1909) 14].

¹¹⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (26 August 1908) 14.

¹¹⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14.

women” who were interested in the suffering of their sisters.¹¹⁷ She reminded one correspondent that, “abiding joy can only be found in a boundless sympathy for others.”¹¹⁸ She told another of her pleasure that “those who have no cause to fear are willing to do all they can for the less fortunate.”¹¹⁹

Other writers brought the security issue closer to home. Reminding those who said that a dower law would make no difference to them, “Grandma” asked, “How about your daughters and granddaughters, or in case you have neither, what of your sisters and nieces, if neither again, how about your neighbour’s daughters?”¹²⁰ “Hawk Eye” provided a more ominous reason why women with good husbands should take an interest:

Now, I have one of the best men that ever walked in shoe leather and he often tells me that if it weren’t for me he wouldn’t have a thing, and I deserve it all, not only half; but you know one evil thing can do much mischief, and he might do like others and change his mind.¹²¹

Or simply, as “Robin Red Breast” said, “It could all be taken from us without the least bit of warning.”¹²²

Fairness was the second reason advanced in support of a dower law. There were three different fairness arguments. The first was based on contribution. The wife had earned a share of the farm by the work she did on it, as pioneer and homesteader, indoors and out, under extreme conditions of weather, isolation and poverty. 64 letters to the “Home Loving Hearts” page made this point. “Black Berry Lilly” wrote:

I think it is nothing more than honest that the wife should have a right to a share of what she has helped her husband to accumulate in making a home and other things.¹²³

¹¹⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (29 July 1908) 14. See also “Agitation for a Dower Law” *Free Press* (26 December 1908) 16. Reprinted in *Prairie Farmer* (30 December 1908) 14.

¹¹⁸ Reply to “Ivey or Joy” *Prairie Farmer* (19 May 1909) 14.

¹¹⁹ Reply to “Endymion” *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14. See also reply to “Highlander” *Prairie Farmer* (19 May 1909) 14. “Isobel” Graham made a similar reply to a correspondent, “Observer,” who had written in to the *Grain Grower’s Guide* [(23 March 1910) 28–9].

¹²⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14. See also “Isobel” *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14 and “North Hastings” *Prairie Farmer* (4 November 1908) 14.

¹²⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (26 August 1908) 14. The business of “shoes” showed up again in a letter published in *Prairie Farmer* [(26 March 1909) 14]. “Mrs. E.M.B.” wrote that she was in favor of the dower even though she was not afraid of her position as she had “one of the best men who ever put feet in shoes.”

¹²² *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14.

¹²³ *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14. To the same effect see “A Transplanted Canuck” *Prairie Farmer* (7 October 1908) 14; “Miss Lou” *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14.

“Evening Star” agreed: “It must be most heartbreaking to many a weary, hard-working wife to find she has no legal right to anything.”¹²⁴ Mrs. Robert Bond was more angry:

Why are they [women] willing to suffer all those hardships if not for a home in their old age and then to think some of them are liable to be turned out of doors after they have earned their home two or three times over; it just makes my blood boil to read some of those pitiful letters in *Home Loving Hearts*.¹²⁵

At a time when the American civil war was still within living memory, 19 correspondents, beginning with “Old Woman” herself, compared the position of a farm wife to that of a slave.¹²⁶ In return for her work, she was entitled to neither recompense nor a claim on the farm that her labour had helped established. There is bitterness in these letters despite Lillian Laurie’s warning that none should be allowed to creep in. Green Isle’s denunciation is entirely typical:

I say some of them [farm women] are treated no better than slaves, work early and late week days, also Sunday has its allotted share of work, having all the trials, trouble, and care necessary to bring up children and then when my Lord of the creation chooses, can be turned out of doors without a moment’s notice and told ‘there’s nothing here yours.’ Away with such laws, I say that makes a woman a slave.¹²⁷

Correspondents discussed whether wives should have a legal claim to one-third or one-half of the property owned by their husbands.¹²⁸ The former position, that in Ontario, was favoured by only four correspondents; the latter, that adopted by Lillian Laurie, was favoured by 21. She summed up the argument for one-half as follows:

They base this claim on the fact that the woman works just as hard, or harder, than the man, that when she marries although she may not take any money into the partnership, she has given up all of the opportunity she might have had to earn a living for

¹²⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (23 December 1908) 14.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (17 June 1908) 14.

¹²⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (19 August 1908) 14. See also “Fair Play” *Prairie Farmer* (27 July 1908) 14. Although Lillian Laurie did not compare the farm wife to a slave, she did note that there would be an outcry if foreigners coming into the country were subjected to some of the indignities and injustice faced by the nation’s mothers [*Prairie Farmer* (26 August 1908) 14]. After commenting that farm women had no voice in the disposal of what they had helped earn, one correspondent compared the treatment accorded them with that given to “lower animals” [*Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14].

¹²⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (12 August 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (11 November 1908) 14. At this stage in the debate Lillian Laurie did not clarify whether the legal claim to the husband’s property would arise at the time of his marriage or on his death, likely because she was unsure in her own mind exactly how a new dower law would work.

herself, and also that if she is cast on her own resources she has not the same opportunity to make her way in the world as a man.¹²⁹

The second fairness argument was based on a promise. "Justice" put it this way:

Then how can a man say or think he is doing right by his wife (the one he has pledged himself to do right by with the most sacred ties) and has also solemnly said 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow,' when he sells the home over her head and that of his children, thinking they have no right to one dollar of it, after she has worked with him through years of poverty and helped him get what he now calls his?¹³⁰

E. Cora Hind was more blunt about the significance of the marriage vow: "When husband and wife get married the minister does not say anything about the husband getting all the property and then skipping out after a few years."¹³¹

The third fairness argument was based on reasonable expectation. 47 women wrote to say that they had come to the prairies without knowing that the dower situation was different from that in the east, in the mother country or in states such as North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma or Iowa.¹³² When they learned from the discussion in the Home Loving Hearts page that there was no dower law in Western Canada,¹³³ many said that they would never have come had they known then what they knew now.¹³⁴ A "Forlorn Wife" stated:

I certainly never would have agreed to sell in the States and put the money that I had worked hard for into property here and now not have a say in leaving one cent to my children.¹³⁵

"Uncle Sam's Wanderer," a man, confirmed the expectation of the existence of a dower law.

¹²⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14.

¹³⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (7 September 1908) 14.

¹³¹ *Prairie Farmer* (18 November 1908) 14.

¹³² See e.g. "Inez" *Prairie Farmer* (20 January 1909) 14; d "Sussex Lass" *Prairie Farmer* (27 January 1909) 14.

¹³³ "Hazel Nut" *Prairie Farmer* (11 November 1908) 14. Dower opponents wrote to say that Lillian Laurie's education of public opinion in the matter of the dower was sowing seeds of discontent in the home ["Justice Equal" *Prairie Farmer* (9 December 1909) 14]. Characteristically, Lillian Laurie replied to Mrs. J.J.H. that she was the enemy of ignorance in any form ["Mrs. J.J.H." *Prairie Farmer* (27 January 1909) 14].

¹³⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (14 April 1909) 14. See also "Louise W." *Prairie Farmer* (29 July 1908) 14; "West Lynn" *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; "Pansy" *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14; "North Hastings" *Prairie Farmer* (4 November 1908) 14; "Lover of Home" *Prairie Farmer* (21 April 1909) 14.

¹³⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (10 March 1909) 14.

I think it is safe to say that the majority of voters in Manitoba came from where the dower law is in force and not one came here with the thought of evading the law but supposing that the law existed here as well as where they came from.¹³⁶

He was of the opinion, that if dower was put to a general vote it would go through with a big majority.

Throughout the fall of 1908, the "Home Loving Hearts" dialogue went on almost entirely between women who supported the cause. On 28 October 1908, Lillian Laurie invited men to join.¹³⁷ Two weeks later, after publishing a favourable dower letter from "A Home Loving Husband," she expressed the wish that more men would write.¹³⁸ They did. On 24 March 1909, she reported that, "men had recently taken a deep interest in our page,"¹³⁹ and on 7 April 1909, she devoted an entire page to summaries of their letters.¹⁴⁰ By 5 May 1909, however, she had had enough of "our gentlemen friends." She bid the men a not too subtle adieu with the words, "perhaps at a later date we may again invite them in to visit us."¹⁴¹

In all, Lillian Laurie published 65 letters from men. They ran 2:1 in favour of dower. The letters from men opposed to dower seemed to attract an approximately equal number of letters from women who agreed with their opposition. The opposing letters from men energised the debate. Several male opponents gained a certain notoriety with other correspondents. They served as a useful foil: it was possible for women to attack them without attacking men in general.

The most prominent villain male was "Justice Equal." His letter appeared in the *Prairie Farmer* on 9 December 1908.¹⁴² He understood that a dower law would give a wife one half of her husband's possessions during the marriage. He was opposed. He did not accept that a wife earned a share through her work contribution. He knew of no farm wife who rode a binder, mower or rake, or who did field work, and few milked cows.¹⁴³ On his farm, because of his illness, his son did all the outside work. "Justice Equal" argued that most farmers owned

¹³⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14. The voters were all male.

¹³⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14.

¹³⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (11 November 1908) 14.

¹³⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (24 March 1909) 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (7 April 1909) 14.

¹⁴¹ *Prairie Farmer* (5 May 1909) 14.

¹⁴² *Prairie Farmer* (9 December 1908) 14. "Justice Equal" wrote again on 10 February 1909, and on 14 April 1909.

¹⁴³ "Maple Leaf" disputed this pointing out cases where farm women did outside work. She asked "what in the name of common sense" was "Justice Equal's" reason for opposing the dower [*Prairie Farmer* (6 January 1909) 14].

land, horses, implements and furniture before they married: "A big start is made before she comes on the scene, yet your writers claim half, saying wife makes half there is" ¹⁴⁴

Four days before "Justice Equal's" letter was published in the *Prairie Farmer*, a letter very similar in wording and tone appeared in the *Nor'-West Farmer*. ¹⁴⁵ It was written by "Saskatchewan Farmer." The arguments about farm wives not doing outdoor chores and most farmers being "fairly fixed up before taking a wife" were the same. "Saskatchewan Farmer" made two additional points. First, he wanted to know why farmers were being singled out by the "slur" of a dower law: "Why should not the doctor, the merchant, lawyer, mechanic be made also to hand over half to his wife?" Then he pointed out that a dower law would imperil a man's freedom, his wife being reluctant to engage in investment speculation. It would damage a husband's credit, by which he meant his ability to obtain a mortgage, for nothing could be sold without his wife's permission, thus hindering his ability to use his land as security.

A month later, in January 1909, a letter appeared in the *Grain Grower's Guide* signed "A Saskatchewan Farmer." ¹⁴⁶ The same points were made: farmers brought their wealth to the marriage; farmers were singled out from townsmen as though farmers alone could not be trusted to be generous to their wives; and a dower law would fetter a farmer's liberty and affect his standing to get credit.

This was all more than "Lord Ullin's Daughter" could take. She had been an early member of Lillian Laurie's M.B.A. In her first letter to the "Home Loving Hearts" page she suggested that wives go on strike by getting no more meals ready until they got their half. ¹⁴⁷ Now, writing to the *Grain Grower's Guide* in February 1909, she rebutted "A Saskatchewan Farmer" point for point. Then she told the readers a secret: ¹⁴⁸

Let me whisper something to you. This same man ["A Saskatchewan Farmer"] wrote to the Women's Page of the *Free Press*, which allows men's letters while the Dower is discussed, and signed himself "Justice Equal" ... and another thing, he has been told so often through the *Free Press*, the opinion the women have of him that I guess he is feeling rather sore. Ah 'Justice Equal' I recognise you right straight. ¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (9 December 1908) 14. "A Moderate View" rebutted this by pointing out that the cases where the wife comes at the start of the homestead were more numerous than those where the husband started alone [*Prairie Farmer* (6 January 1909) 14].

¹⁴⁵ *Nor'-West Farmer* (5 December 1908) 1069.

¹⁴⁶ *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 January 1909) 37.

¹⁴⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14.

¹⁴⁸ *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 February 1909) 25-6.

¹⁴⁹ *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 February 1909) 25-6. When "Lord Ullin's Daughter" refers to the *Free Press*, she is not referring to the daily city *Free Press*, but rather to the weekly country edition of that paper, *Prairie Farmer*.

On 14 April 1909, "Justice Equal" replied to the "Home Loving Hearts" page expressing, "indignation at the insinuations of Lord Ullin's Daughter, in which she accuses him of writing in the *Grain Grower's Guide*, under another name ...".¹⁵⁰ He went on to describe how the farmers proposed forming an organisation to combat the dower agitation, one that would circulate pamphlets showing how a dower law would affect a farmer's rights.

Perhaps Lillian Laurie had the last word on whether "Justice Equal" of the *Prairie Farmer* was "A Saskatchewan Farmer" of the *Grain Grower's Guide* and the *Nor'-West Farmer*. In her final 1917 *Prairie Farmer* column, she wrote:

Did you ever know that an anti-dower league was formed by some men in Saskatchewan to combat our influence, and they wrote to the editor asking him to allow them to conduct the women's page? At the same time, in another part of the same province, a man was writing most abusive letters, signing different names and posting them at different places.¹⁵¹

The second male villain letter to become a lightning rod for criticism was published by Lillian Laurie on 3 February 1909.¹⁵² "Young Bach" had been homesteading for three years and was about to take up a pre-emption grant which would mean three more years of homesteading. He wondered whether it would be just if the law were to give his future wife half of his land, worth he thought \$20,000, when she had never lifted a hand towards earning it. The result of a dower law would be "very few marriages at all;" the population "would soon be all old maids and bachelors;" and all the bachelors "would find their pleasures in the bar, gambling and even worse places."¹⁵³ In a dismissive comment at the end of "Young Bach's" letter, Lillian Laurie advised that after three more years of homesteading he would likely be willing to endow a woman with "all your worldly goods."

"Young Bach" must have regretted offering his opinion. "Somerset and Devon" wrote that when some of the boys in her neighbourhood read his letter they said that he must be suffering badly from "swelled head."¹⁵⁴ "Old Farmer" advised him that if he married for love his three-quarters section or \$20,000 would become a secondary consideration.¹⁵⁵ "Henpecked Husband" told him that it was the mothers and sisters who did most to build the country and advised him to get married.¹⁵⁶ "Only Me" wrote that he would have a long wait

¹⁵⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (14 April 1909) 14.

¹⁵¹ *Prairie Farmer* (2 May 1917) 7.

¹⁵² *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (31 March 1909) 14.

¹⁵⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (3 March 1909) 14.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

finding a wife.¹⁵⁷ "Alta Jack" felt that any man who was not willing to share all his property with his wife was not fit to have a wife.¹⁵⁸

Other men who opposed the dower made new arguments and reiterated old ones. "Old Bach" wanted to be sure that a wife who left her husband and ran off "with some old sweetheart" would get nothing.¹⁵⁹ "Downtrodden Husband" suggested that a dower law would menace a farmer's credit, financial standing and success in life.¹⁶⁰ "A Lover of a Good Wife" felt that if a woman was entitled to one-half of her husband's property, any household tiff, "which in the present time is made up after a few days sulking," would cause the wife to take her money and leave.¹⁶¹ "A Farmer's Son" pointed out that as townsmen owned little real estate a dower law would not "hit" them to the same extent as the farmer. He went on to say that his future wife would not be able to claim in truth that she had earned one-half or one-third of his property, that his own mother had done no milking, farm chores or field work, and that a woman's marriage vow "to honour and obey" was never expected to be carried out.¹⁶² Lillian Laurie replied that she had never before had a letter in which a man spoke so slightly of his mother. For her, his letter was proof of the need for a dower law.

Lillian Laurie grew increasingly impatient with the dower opponents. "Now please read and inwardly digest," she scolded.¹⁶³

Let me shout from the housetop, and from the top of this page, what I have said over and over again, but what I seem to be unable to make some people understand¹⁶⁴ ... [A dower law] does not give the wife control of any of the property during the husband's life, nor can she claim one cent while the husband lives. The law applies to all married men who own land. The farmer is no exception.¹⁶⁵

She announced in exasperation that she would no longer publish letters "written by those who evidently did not understand the law (although it had been explained over and over on this page)."¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (17 March 1909) 14.

¹⁵⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (7 April 1909) 14.

¹⁵⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14. "Arvika" agreed. His wife had poured carbolic acid into his coffee and left to live with another man [*Prairie Farmer* (13 January 1909) 14].

¹⁶⁰ *Supra* note 158.

¹⁶¹ *Prairie Farmer* (13 January 1909) 14.

¹⁶² *Supra* note 155.

¹⁶³ *Prairie Farmer* (27 January 1909) 14.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14.

¹⁶⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (21 April 1909) 14. *Supra* note 155.

By being so categorical, Lillian Laurie overstated her case. While true that dower would not provide a wife with money during her husband's lifetime, it did provide her with a measure of control over his property. Such a law would have prevented her husband from selling or mortgaging his property without his wife's consent and would have limited his freedom of testamentary disposition in order to insure that his wife would have adequate provision following his death. Also, while it was true that a dower law would apply equally to townsmen and farmers, the impact of such a law would, as "A Farmer's Son" had observed, be greater on rural men whose principal possession was land than on townsmen who often held the bulk of their assets in other forms.

The male opponents fought back. They complained that Lillian Laurie had asked one of her masculine correspondents who favoured dower to answer opposition letters in other newspapers.¹⁶⁷ In fact, she had asked two of them to write to the *Nor'-West Farmer*.¹⁶⁸ One took up the invitation and in a letter to that paper rebutted the argument that farmers were being singled out for disadvantageous treatment.¹⁶⁹ Lillian Laurie indicated that she might do this again as those who read the letter would have benefited from it. Lillian Laurie's opponents also complained that her practice of tacking-on a rebuttal at the end of their letters made the letters of no-effect and made the dower discussion unfair. Lillian Laurie was unrepentant:

As to adding a little note, it is not my intention by so doing to spoil any argument, but that is my plan of conducting this page, and those who write to it must be prepared to bear with it.¹⁷⁰

Positions were hardening and the time for dialogue was drawing to an end.

3. Kindred Rights

The dower dialogue did not take place in a vacuum. Dower was one of several "kindred rights" claimed by women as a way of achieving economic independence and family security.¹⁷¹

The "Homesteads for Women" movement sought to make homesteading privileges—a free grant of a half section of land to those who had lived on and farmed it for three years—available to women on the same terms as men. As federal law stood, women, except for widows with dependent children, were in-

¹⁶⁷ *Supra* note 166.

¹⁶⁸ For the requests see "A Saskatchewan Farmer" *Prairie Farmer* (27 January 1909) 14. This is not the same writer as mentioned in the text. See also "Uncle Sam's Wanderer" *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14.

¹⁶⁹ *Nor'-West Farmer* (5 March 1909) 286.

¹⁷⁰ *Supra* note 166.

¹⁷¹ The phrase was used by E. Cora Hind [*Western Home Monthly* (October 1910) 38; *Western Home Monthly* (February 1912) 57].

eligible to homestead. Isabelle Beaton Graham, women's page editor of the *Grain Grower's Guide*, captained the movement. She began with a lengthy editorial on 17 November 1909, followed by the publication of many letters from women supporting the cause.¹⁷² In 1911, Graham, supported by the Winnipeg Branches of the Women's Canadian Club, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.), the National Council of Women (N.C.W.) and the Women's Labour League (W.L.L.), circulated a petition. When presented to the Honourable W.J. Roche, Minister of the Interior, in February 1913, it had 11,000 constituent signatures.¹⁷³ In 1910–11, Lillian Laurie found space in the *Free Press* and in the *Prairie Farmer* for reports, letters and editorials that supported the homestead petition campaign.¹⁷⁴ "Isobel" Graham returned the kindness by writing editorials and publishing letters in support of Lillian Laurie's dower agitation.¹⁷⁵ "Margaret Freestone" (Mary Mantle) was also writing supportive editorials and publishing letters on both causes in the *Nor'-West Farmer*.¹⁷⁶

The dower and homestead issues were related. If a wife's name appeared on the homestead title, her husband would have been stopped from unilaterally selling or mortgaging the property as effectively as if a dower law had been in place. E. Cora Hind noted that homestead patents, put in the husband's name only, could be sold or mortgaged by him as soon as the patent was issued. The wife, "who had half killed herself to get the land," did not even have a dower right with which to block the sale or mortgage.¹⁷⁷ The National Council of Women suggested that if the Torrens Land Title System prevented the provinces from passing dower laws, women should at least be given the right to acquire homesteads.¹⁷⁸ As one *Free Press* correspondent put it, "Leaving the [homestead] title in the woman's name would at least partly make up for the lack of a dower law in Western Canada."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² *Grain Grower's Guide* (17 November 1909) 24.

¹⁷³ *Grain Grower's Guide* (24 May 1911) 25; *Free Press* (15 February 1913) 11.

¹⁷⁴ *Free Press* (30 May 1911) 9; *Free Press* (6 September 1911) 9.

¹⁷⁵ *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 April 1911) 28.

¹⁷⁶ "Dower" *Nor'-West Farmer* (5 May 1911) 583; "Homestead Rights" *Nor'-West Farmer* (20 June 1911) 775–7.

¹⁷⁷ *Western Home Monthly* (October 1910) 38.

¹⁷⁸ National Council of Women, "Report of the Committee on Laws for the Better Protection of Women and Children" in *National Council of Women Yearbook* (1910) at 62.

¹⁷⁹ *Free Press* (11 June 1910) 26. For similar letters see "F.B. Sulman" *Grain Grower's Guide* (13 December 1911) 9–10; "A Woman of Experience" *Grain Grower's Guide* (13 December 1911) 9–10.

The link between the dower and temperance movements was even closer. That link was made in the initial "Old Woman" letter: "... very soon a town sprung up pretty close to their home, and first and foremost a saloon opened there, which the husband began to visit ...".¹⁸⁰ The W.C.T.U., anxious to protect the family home from husbands and fathers who drank, became an early dower advocate. In 1911, at its Brandon Convention, a resolution was unanimously passed to work for a dower law for Manitoba women and for an amendment to the *Homestead Act* making women eligible to homestead.¹⁸¹

A deserting husband's obligation to pay alimony was another kindred matter. On 30 December 1908, a male writer to the "Home Loving Hearts" page argued that a dower law should be passed in order to provide for a wife and family in the event that the husband left them.¹⁸² Lillian Laurie, sensing confusion, explained in her introductory column the difference between an alimony law, which required an absconding husband to make provision for the immediate support of his family, and a dower law, which provided a wife with resources out of her husband's estate only after his death.¹⁸³ She noted that Alberta had adopted an alimony law early in 1908, but, as yet, Manitoba and Saskatchewan had none. She indicated that she would do her best to get an alimony law later: "We must do one thing at a time and now we are aiming to get a dower law."¹⁸⁴

Several weeks later another male correspondent tauntingly argued that the adoption of a dower law would mean that alimony laws would "have to be wiped off the blue books."¹⁸⁵ Lillian Laurie chided him for failing to understand that alimony and dower laws were different and that the former had never been put on the "blue books." She wrote that she wished for the passage of an alimony law and that a dower law would not stop her from getting one.¹⁸⁶ Lillian Laurie thus approved when Saskatchewan passed an alimony law—*The Deserted Wives Maintenance Act*—in early 1911.¹⁸⁷ In 1912, Manitoba adopted a similar alimony law—*The Wives and Children's Maintenance Act*—but rejected the

¹⁸⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (17 June 1908) 14. See also "Black Berry Lilly" *Prairie Farmer* (30 September 1908) 14; "Onion Tops" *Prairie Farmer* (4 November 1908) 14; "Oliver King" *Grain Grower's Guide* (21 December 1910) 17.

¹⁸¹ "W.C.T.U. Convention" *Grain Grower's Guide* (17 May 1911) 25.

¹⁸² "Justice" *Prairie Farmer* (30 December 1908) 14.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ "A Lover of a Good Wife" *Prairie Farmer* (13 January 1909) 14.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Free Press* (15 March 1911) 9.

dower type provisions contained in a companion bill—*The Widows' and Children's Relief Act*.¹⁸⁸

There was one other overarching kindred matter. In the 1908–1910 period, a few voices suggested that laws protecting women's economic independence would only be passed once women had gained their political independence. One of these voices was that of E. Cora Hind. After describing a case in which a wife had done more than her share to establish a homestead even though the law gave her no title or dower, Hind concluded as follows:

It is just as well for my readers to remember when they are agitating for dower law and kindred rights that the easiest way to get them is to get ballots for women and the other reforms will follow without the slightest trouble.¹⁸⁹

Whatever her still private view on votes for women, Lillian Laurie thought it best to pursue dower legislation on its own. Together with the other women's page editors, she had built a committed band of women out of lonely prairie correspondents and educated public opinion through a newsprint dialogue. If the ballot was not yet part of her plan for achieving dower reform, how was she to get it? What was the next move?

B. Asking the Government: 1910–1912

1. Petitioning

Lillian Laurie was confident that Redmond Roblin's Conservative government would introduce dower reform in Manitoba if it could be shown that public opinion supported such a measure. The issue for her was how to bring the pressure of the public opinion that she had mobilised to bear on the government. The tried and true method used by turn of the century Manitoba suffragettes, and more recently by the temperance and homestead movements, was to circulate a petition. Four times Lillian Laurie promised her readers that she would publish a form of petition so that they could collect signatures.¹⁹⁰ Some members volunteered to take petitions around but Lillian Laurie discouraged these local efforts.¹⁹¹ "Maple Leaf" actually started her own petition¹⁹² and submitted the names to Lillian Laurie on 17 March 1909. Lillian Laurie advised that if

¹⁸⁸ *Free Press* (29 March 1912) 9; *Free Press* (9 April 1912) 4; *Free Press* (30 December 1912) 9.

¹⁸⁹ *Western Home Monthly* (October 1910) 38.

¹⁹⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (2 September 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (18 November 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (2 December 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (23 December 1908) 14.

¹⁹¹ "Fair Play" *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; "Ridgeford" *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14; "Olga" *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 1-r; "Mrs. J.P.S." *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14; "Rose Poppy" *Prairie Farmer* (10 February 1909) 14.

¹⁹² *Prairie Farmer* (11 November 1908) 14.

there were any other petitions going around they should be submitted to the President of the Winnipeg Branch of the National Council of Women.¹⁹³ She would use them to persuade members of the legislature to bring in a bill.

When she failed for a fourth time to publish a form of petition, Lillian Laurie offered the following explanation: "Now my reason for delaying is that I wish to have this matter threshed out through the press, and at public meetings before a petition is taken around."¹⁹⁴ There was more to it than that. Lillian Laurie knew that petitions rarely had much impact. She told her correspondents that she did not think that a petition would help the dower question much.¹⁹⁵ More revealing, her journalistic colleagues shared this view.¹⁹⁶ E. Cora Hind wrote that dower petitions would be a waste of time. She had done a rudimentary study of the effect of petitions:

Some fifteen years ago [approx. 1895] I had occasion to test the views of the members of the Manitoba legislature on the subject of petitions from non-voters. At that time there were some forty members in the house and I had replies in writing from, I think, thirty-five or thirty-six of them, and the verdict, reduced to one sentence, was 'not worth the paper they are written on.'¹⁹⁷

Nellie McClung was of the same opinion. In 1912, she told one of the first suffrage rallies that "[p]etitions signed by women are usually treated as a joke by the electors."¹⁹⁸

Rather than petitioning collectively, Lillian Laurie encouraged her band of women to petition individually by writing their members of the legislature a personal letter.¹⁹⁹ As with letters to the local newspapers, the writer should make a "plain statement" of what she wanted and why. A few illustrations of the injustice that resulted from there being no dower law would help.²⁰⁰ Women were to get their husbands, the voters, to sign if possible. Letters were to be sent to the provincial, not the Dominion, government as dower was a provincial matter.²⁰¹ Copies of the letters, along with the member's reply, were to be sent to Lillian Laurie, presumably so she could use them to remind members of their commit-

¹⁹³ *Prairie Farmer* (17 March 1909) 14.

¹⁹⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (6 January 1909) 14.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.* See Lillian Laurie's replies to: "Mrs. J.P.S." *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14; "Rose Poppy" *Prairie Farmer* (10 February 1909) 14.

¹⁹⁶ See Mary Ford's comments: *Grain Grower's Guide* (27 February 1912) 23.

¹⁹⁷ *Western Home Monthly* (February 1909).

¹⁹⁸ "Why Women Should Vote" *Grain Grower's Guide* (22 May 1912) 27.

¹⁹⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14.

²⁰⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14.

²⁰¹ *Prairie Farmer* (21 October 1908) 14. Reply to "Gleaner" *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (4 November 1908) 14.

ments before a legislative vote on any future dower bill.²⁰² On the home front, Lillian Laurie advised her unmarried readers to use their influence with bachelors to get them to vote for members who supported a dower law.²⁰³

Prairie Farmer correspondents continued to ask for a petition but Lillian Laurie resolutely told them that letters to their member of the legislature and to their local paper would do more good.²⁰⁴ When "Gleaner" suggested that a form letter be drawn up to be posted by women on the same day, Lillian Laurie rejected the idea: "The members would likely regard it merely as a circular and drop it in the waste paper basket, whereas they would always read a personal letter."²⁰⁵ Lillian Laurie was an astute political tactician.

There is every indication that women did write their members. Some mentioned having done so in their letters to the "Home Loving Hearts" page. Lillian Laurie told her readers that "Fair Play," "Justice," "Gleaner," "Maple Leaf," and others had sent her copies of letters addressed to the local member as well as to local papers.²⁰⁶ When "Maple Leaf" got a reply from her member stating that the women of Manitoba were satisfied with the way things were, Lillian Laurie advised that if the member got enough letters he would come to realise the contrary.²⁰⁷ Other women reported that they had talked to their members about a dower law. "East Lynne's" member, while supportive, was concerned about opposition from loan companies whose business would decline if a wife's consent was needed before mortgaging the farm.²⁰⁸

2. Networking

From the start of the dower agitation, Lillian Laurie worked hard to get the support of the Winnipeg Branch of the National Council of Women.²⁰⁹ It was an umbrella organisation that brought together representatives of mainstream

²⁰² During the suffrage campaign from 1912–16, Lillian Laurie also encouraged women to write their legislative members. She asked for copies of these letters so that she could later use them to remind members who were thinking of not supporting suffrage of the state of public opinion. See *Prairie Farmer* (25 February 1914) 2 at "Home."

²⁰³ Lillian Laurie's replies to: "A Farmer's Daughter" *Prairie Farmer* (18 November 1908) 14; "Margaret" *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14.

²⁰⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14. See also reply to "Mrs. J.P.S." *Prairie Farmer* (3 February 1909) 14.

²⁰⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (16 December 1908) 14.

²⁰⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (28 October 1908) 14.

²⁰⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (4 November 1908) 14.

²⁰⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (31 March 1909) 14.

²⁰⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (12 August 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (30 December 1908) 14; *Prairie Farmer* (6 January 1908) 14. [Winnipeg Branch of the National Council of Women hereinafter Women's Council].

women's organisations both at the national and the local levels. On 13 January 1909, Lillian Laurie told her readers that she had, "succeeded in interesting the local branch of the Women's Council, or at least some of them, and a meeting is to be held soon to discuss the matter fully."²¹⁰ That meeting was held in March 1909, where Lillian Laurie read "Old Woman's" letter, as well as others.²¹¹ Those at the meeting decided to take up the dower cause.²¹² Although it was too late to do anything for the 1909 spring session of the Manitoba legislature, Lillian Laurie hoped that the Women's Council would be able to get a government member to draw up a dower bill for the 1910 sitting.²¹³

Council's support was somewhat tepid. On 3 August 1909, Lillian Laurie told her *Free Press* readers that the Women's Council had been too deeply interested in other projects to give the dower matter the attention that it needed.²¹⁴ The next day she told her *Prairie Farmer* readers that she was going to "start again" to get the Council to take up the matter.²¹⁵ This effort seems to have paid off. The Council's annual meeting held on 9 December 1909, noted the interest being taken in a dower law and suggested that a meeting be held on the subject in the new year.²¹⁶ That meeting was scheduled for 5 February 1910, in the new Y.W.C.A. library and assembly parlour. Lillian Laurie read a paper on dower and, as usual, several letters from her collection.²¹⁷ The meeting passed a resolution to have a committee appointed to see the member of the

²¹⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (13 January 1909) 14.

²¹¹ *Ibid.* See also Lillian Laurie's reply to "Old Woman" *Prairie Farmer* (31 March 1909) 14; "Aunt Corrella" *Prairie Farmer* (10 March 1909) 14. Lillian Laurie also read these same letters at a meeting of the Brandon Branch of the Women's Council at the end of March 1909.

²¹² *Prairie Farmer* (17 March 1909) 14.

²¹³ Lillian Laurie's dower agitation was also being noted at the national level of the Women's Council. The 1908 *National Council of Women Yearbook*, which appeared in March 1909, reported that, "an agitation for dower for married women has been carried on by the Free Press, of Winnipeg" (at 104). The same *Yearbook* noted that Mrs. Henrietta Muir Edwards, Convener of the Committee on the Laws for the Better Protection of Women and Children, had just issued a pamphlet on the legal status of Canadian Women that included a discussion of dower rights. Lillian Laurie discussed the *Yearbook*, including these two entries, in the *Free Press* [(6 March 1909) 18].

²¹⁴ *Free Press* (3 August 1909) 9.

²¹⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (4 August 1909) 14.

²¹⁶ P.A.M. Council of Women of Winnipeg, P3586, File 4, Minute Book #2, 23 November 1899-1925.

²¹⁷ *Grain Grower's Guide* (29 February 1910) 29.

local legislature and, if possible, persuade him to bring in a dower law at the current session.²¹⁸

Lillian Laurie was clearly pleased. In her *Free Press* report on the meeting she applauded the Council for the “practical business-like way” they were going about not only discussing but attempting to solve women’s issues.²¹⁹ A week later, she gave her *Free Press* readers a brief summary of the dower agitation. A reprint of “Old Woman’s” initial letter accompanied it. Lillian Laurie’s determined optimism was evident in her conclusion:

Many women’s organisations have favoured the dower law and now the Winnipeg branch of the National Council of Women have taken the matter up, and knowing they have the sympathy of the women in the cities and the country, and not only the women but the support of the majority of the men, they are going to push the matter vigorously until the brave, hard-working women of western Canada receive the recognition to which they are entitled.²²⁰

The other women’s organisations referred to in the article included the University Women’s Club,²²¹ which Lillian Laurie helped to found at this time, the W.C.T.U., which endorsed a dower law at its annual conventions,²²² and the Women’s Labour League. The W.L.L., organised in 1910, was an auxiliary of the Trades and Labour Council. It was dedicated to fostering closer ties between Winnipeg trade union families, providing assistance in times of need and educating women in the advantages of the trade union movement.²²³ After a lengthy discussion at a meeting on 23 November 1910, the W.L.L. decided to ask the provincial government to pass a dower law.²²⁴ In all, Lillian Laurie was pleased with the support she had garnered from organised women. “In this campaign for the betterment of conditions for women there has been nothing but a great, broad feeling of sisterhood.” She wrote in 1911: “All the above men-

²¹⁸ *Free Press* (8 February 1910) 9. Interestingly, the women attending the meeting decided to discuss “Homesteads for Women” at their next gathering.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (15 February 1910) 9. The Winnipeg Branch of the National Council of Women renewed its support for the dower cause on 16 January 1911, at the request of the Canadian Women’s Press Club represented at the N.C.W. meeting by Lillian Beynon Thomas. It again renewed its support on 29 March 1912, this time at the request of J. Kenneth Haig—“Alison Craig” of the *Free Press*. Of note, Lillian Beynon Thomas was elected 1st Vice-President of the Winnipeg Branch of the N.C.W. on 28 April 1914. P.A.M., Minute Book #2, *supra* note 215.

²²¹ *Prairie Farmer* (15 February 1910) 44.

²²² *Prairie Farmer* (11 March 1911) 5 at “Women’s Section.” See also: *Grain Grower’s Guide* (17 May 1911) 25; *Grain Grower’s Guide* (16 August 1911) 20.

²²³ *Free Press* (8 March 1910) 9–10. See also Gutken, *supra* note 52 at 217–18.

²²⁴ *Free Press* (23 November 1910) 10.

tioned associations have worked hand in hand, each anxious only for the good of womankind ... ”²²⁵

Lillian Laurie spent a great deal of time helping rural women form clubs to combat loneliness, share homemaking knowledge and discuss broader issues that affected women beyond the confines of their homes. In the fall of 1910, she wrote a four article series in the *Free Press* designed to teach women how to organise local clubs. Topics in the series included a description of Women’s Institutes in Ontario,²²⁶ procedure for a club meeting,²²⁷ how to start a club,²²⁸ and subjects for club meetings.²²⁹ In the winter of 1910–11, she travelled throughout Saskatchewan organising Homemakers’ Clubs at the invitation of the Dean of Agriculture of the University of Saskatchewan.²³⁰ When she was not organising, Lillian Laurie and her journalistic colleagues, E. Cora Hind, Nellie McClung, Alison Craig, Mary Mantle and Francis Marion Beynon, were on the speakers’ circuit addressing annual meetings of women’s organisations in the dead of the prairie winter. These included the annual meetings of the Homemakers’ Clubs and the provincial Home Economics Societies, the women’s meetings held in conjunction with the provincial Grain Grower’s Conventions, and the women’s gatherings held at the time of the Agricultural Society meetings organised by the Manitoba and Saskatchewan Colleges of Agriculture.

Except for the Grain Growers’ Associations, which were independent of government, the Homemaker’s Institutes, Home Economic Societies and Agricultural Colleges were all subsidised with public money. For that reason, they asked organisers and speakers to stay away from political topics such as dower or women’s suffrage.²³¹ Lillian Laurie stressed that local clubs had to remain “strictly non-partisan.”²³² It may not have mattered. The meetings created a chance for informal networking. Lillian Laurie was synonymous with the dower

²²⁵ *Prairie Farmer* (25 February 1911) 44.

²²⁶ *Prairie Farmer* (17 September 1910) 29.

²²⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (1 October 1910) 31.

²²⁸ *Prairie Farmer* (8 October 1910) 31.

²²⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (15 October 1910) 46.

²³⁰ *Western Home Monthly* (November 1911) 56.

²³¹ In connection with the 1912 meetings, E. Cora Hind wrote that she regretted that the

Manitoba Agricultural College, after suggesting to Mrs. McClung that she choose her own subject, in the end objected to her speaking to us on ‘Women’s Questions,’ that is the question of the extension of the franchise to women, the amending of the dower laws, the right to homestead.

[*Western Home Monthly* (February 1912) 57].

²³² *Free Press* (17 September 1910) 29.

agitation. Her presence alone, not to mention the unofficial conversations and questions in the hallways, must have raised the dower issue in the minds of participating women.

The meetings also generated publicity. Farm women wrote to prairie newspapers to say that they had seen or heard Lillian Laurie. After the 1911 Saskatchewan Women Homemakers' Convention, one participant wrote to Dame Durden of the *Farmer's Advocate* full of admiration for Lillian Laurie: "She was so alert, so tactful, so businesslike, so self-possessed and so 'well-groomed'."²³³ The Convention also generated coverage for the dower cause even though the topic was never officially discussed. Two newspapers, with a tendency towards "yellow journalism," reported that Lillian Laurie had given up on dower. Dame Durden set the record straight. At the end of her Convention coverage in the *Farmer's Advocate* she wrote:

In case you have seen these [reports], I will merely say that ... the dower question was NOT shelved by Miss Beynon, who has done more to interest people in the question than any other dozen women in the prairie provinces. Enough said.²³⁴

Even if some meetings discouraged specific political comment, they provided a platform for the articulation of the basic principles that underlie "women's question" issues like the dower. At the March 1913 meeting of the Home Economics Section at the Brandon Winter Fair, Lillian Laurie spoke on "The New Old Woman": "... she will claim financial independence; she will insist on preserving her own individuality ... she will be equal with men in every walk of life."²³⁵

3. Lobbying

Conservative party leader Redmond Roblin was first elected Premier of Manitoba in 1900. By 1910, with the arrival of what would be the first of three dower lobbies in three successive years, his once reform government was already showing signs of arterial sclerosis.²³⁶ As mentioned, a committee of the Winnipeg Branch of the National Council of Women had been appointed after the 5 February 1910 meeting with Lillian Laurie. The committee then mandated one of its members to approach the government and ask that a dower law be passed giving the women of Manitoba the same property rights as the women of eastern Canada. The representative was kindly received and a promise was made to

²³³ *Farmer's Advocate* (15 March 1911) 338.

²³⁴ *Prairie Farmer* (15 February 1911) 233 (emphasis in original). Lillian Laurie also referred to this coverage. She wrote that many women had asked her if she had dropped the work for dower legislation. Her reply, "I should say we have not" [*Prairie Farmer* (15 March 1911) 2 at "Magazine"].

²³⁵ *Farmer's Advocate* (19 March 1913) 433.

²³⁶ Morton, *supra* note 2 at c. 13 & 14.

bring in a bill at the current legislative session. The government expressed sympathy with, and agreed to support, the measure.²³⁷

Lillian Laurie wrote that such a law would recognise the wife's legal claim to the products of her labour, would make her a financial partner in the home, and would give her dignity and independence. She felt it fitting that the oldest prairie province should lead in the matter.²³⁸ Although she cautioned against being too hopeful, she wrote that there was every reason to expect that the measure would become law that year.²³⁹ Her caution proved to be well taken. The government did not keep its promise.

The next year, on 20 February 1911, a deputation of nine women, representing the National Council of Women, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Icelandic Women's Suffrage Association and the Women's Labour League, met with Premier Roblin.²⁴⁰ Ada Muir, secretary of the W.L.L., made the request on behalf of the delegation. She sought a law that would automatically prevent a man selling out all of his possessions leaving his wife and family destitute; that would provide the wife with immediate possession of all of her husband's worldly goods immediately upon his death; and that would secure the safe inheritance of a child's fair portion.²⁴¹ She "made her plea like a competent lawyer,"²⁴² citing five specific cases where the absence of such a law had created, "the most glaring injustice."²⁴³

Roblin claimed that, "if there were any attempt to introduce a full dower law here there would be 1,000 indignant men here in less than an hour to protest against it."²⁴⁴ He could not support such a law. The necessity of the seller's wife's consent would militate against the province's material prosperity by impeding the transfer of property. Any legal interference with a man's testamentary freedom could disrupt families, for example where a second wife was given a claim that defeated the inheritance of children from a first marriage.²⁴⁵ Roblin

²³⁷ *Free Press* (24 February 1910) 9.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (7 March 1910) 14.

²⁴⁰ The 1911 lobby is surprisingly well documented, itself a measure of women's interest. See *Free Press* (21 February 1911) 3; *Free Press* (25 February 1911) 44; *Free Press* (1 April 1911) 1 at "Women's Section"; *Prairie Farmer* (12 April 1911) 2 at "Magazine"; *Grain Grower's Guide* (1 March 1911) 36; *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 April 1911) 28; *Nor'-West Farmer* (5 May 1911) 583; *Western Home Monthly* (April 1911) 54; *Winnipeg Telegram* (21 February 1911); *Winnipeg Telegram* (14 March 1911).

²⁴¹ *Free Press* (21 February 1911) 3.

²⁴² *Winnipeg Telegram* (21 February 1911).

²⁴³ *Free Press* (21 February 1911) 3.

²⁴⁴ *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 April 1911) 28.

²⁴⁵ *Supra* note 242.

acknowledged that the current law was not entirely fair with respect to a woman's share of her husband's property and that some better protection was possible. To that end, he advised that Harvey Simpson, a Conservative member of the Legislature, would be introducing a bill in the current 1911 session. He promised to advise the women when the bill would be discussed by the Law Amendments Committee and to invite them to appear.²⁴⁶

From the outset of the dower agitation, objectors told Lillian Laurie that the requirement of a wife's consent was incompatible with the Torrens Land Titles System and would hinder land sales.²⁴⁷ She, and her fellow journalists at the *Free Press*, thought it was just a question of finding a sympathetic lawyer to draw up a bill that would provide a measure of protection for women without seriously hampering the transfer of land. Where there was a will, there would be a way around any legal technicality.²⁴⁸ Short of that, however, Lillian Laurie appeared ready to accept "half a loaf."²⁴⁹ She was prepared to drop the demand that a wife's consent be required for land transfers during her husband's lifetime so long as the wife was guaranteed part of his estate after his death. This type of compromise was also acceptable to the delegation that had met with Roblin. In a discussion in the corridor after the interview they concluded that they could not expect a dower clause, but would be satisfied, for a while at least, with better protection of their claim against the estate.²⁵⁰ Lillian Laurie warned her readers that although something was likely to be done, "it [was] not likely that a dower law as it [was] in the East would be passed because it would hamper the transfer of land."²⁵¹

In the past, Harvey Simpson had supported measures for the better protection of women. The bill he now proposed, to be called *The Married Women's Relief Act*, provided that a widow who received less under her husband's will than she would have received had he died intestate—one-third of the estate in Manitoba—could apply to a court for relief. The judge, in his discretion, could order whatever payment to her out of the estate he deemed just and equitable in the circumstances.²⁵² The bill was copied from recently adopted legislation in Alberta with the sole difference being that an Albertan widow received one-half

²⁴⁶ *Free Press* (21 February 1911) 3.

²⁴⁷ *Prairie Farmer* (25 November 1908) 14.

²⁴⁸ See A. Craig, *Free Press* (6 April 1912) 1 at "Women's Section"; E. Cora Hind, *Western Home Monthly* (April 1912) 51; *Nor'-West Farmer* (20 April 1912) 572.

²⁴⁹ *Free Press* (1 April 1911) 1 at "Women's Section." The characterisation is hers.

²⁵⁰ *Supra* note 242.

²⁵¹ *Free Press* (25 February 1911) 44.

²⁵² The entire text of the bill was published: *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 April 1911) 28.

of her husband's estate upon intestacy.²⁵³ Saskatchewan, where a widow was entitled to one-third if her husband died intestate, was in the process of adopting similar legislation.²⁵⁴ Simpson's bill contained no clause requiring a husband to obtain his wife's consent to a land transfer during his lifetime, which is probably why Premier Roblin allowed it to go forward.

After their meeting with Roblin, the women delegates heard nothing for several weeks. They wrote twice for the Simpson bill but received no answer. Then, on 24 hours notice, they were invited to attend at the Law Amendments Committee. Only on their arrival were they given copies of the bill. Without any proper opportunity to read it they were asked to comment. Ada Muir, of the W.L.L., replied that destitute widows would not have the money to make court applications in cases where their husbands had disinherited them. She noted that there were no guidelines governing how a judge should exercise his discretion to grant relief in particular cases. Further, she asked whether a law could be framed that would give a wife some right of ownership in the property that she had helped to accumulate and that now could be disposed of entirely by her husband. Attorney-General Colin H. Campbell, a man E. Cora Hind later described as "violently opposed to granting any protection to women,"²⁵⁵ replied that a dower law was "impracticable," that judging by the stories he had heard it was "the women who were bad not the men," and that if a husband left his wife penniless it must have been for a good reason. Another male committee member asked the delegation if they wanted the bill to say what wages a man should pay his wife.²⁵⁶

"Isobel" Graham reported on her women's page that the Law Amendments Committee had been, "in a trifling furtive and contemptuous mood and not disposed to consider so important a measure with manly faith."²⁵⁷ E. Cora Hind was told by the women delegates that the Committee members had been "frivolous."²⁵⁸ "A sneer and a jest, was all that was attained by the work and sacrifice of some of the best women in Winnipeg," wrote Lillian Laurie, "[a]nd when they filed out, I am told that the 'gentlemen' present classified them something like this: Women with husbands, women without, and those still hoping ..."²⁵⁹

²⁵³ *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 April 1911) 28.

²⁵⁴ *Free Press* (11 March 1911) 5 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (1 April 1911) 1 at "Women's Section."

²⁵⁵ *Western Home Monthly* (April 1912) 51.

²⁵⁶ Remarkably, at a time when *Hansard* was still decades away in Manitoba, "Isobel" Beaton Graham printed a transcript of this meeting in her "Around the Fireside" column [*Grain Grower's Guide* (19 April 1911) 28].

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Western Home Monthly* (April 1911) 54.

²⁵⁹ *Supra* note 254.

Not surprisingly, the Committee killed the bill. Lillian Laurie must have felt that Roblin had double-crossed the women's delegation by permitting a bill to be introduced and then allowing his members to defeat it. She titled her final report on the 1911 lobby "Women as Idols" after a phrase used by Roblin. The account drips with disdain:

It has been said that a civilisation of a country is expressed in the status of its women. If this is the case, and we have history to prove that it is, the civilisation of Manitoba is not far from the barbarian state.²⁶⁰

Early in 1912, there were signs that the dower cause was not dead. The Women's Canadian Club petitioned for improved legislation for the better protection of married women.²⁶¹ S. Hart Green, a liberal member of the Legislature, argued for a dower law in the Debate in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. He cited several cases of men selling the family property and running off with the cash.²⁶² Later in the session Harvey Simpson introduced a bill that was somewhat different from the previous year's measure. It again restricted a husband's testamentary freedom by permitting his widow to apply to a judge if her husband's will left her less than she would have received had he been intestate. This time, however, a dower clause was included that would make it impossible for a man to sell or mortgage real property without his wife's consent. There was another new clause that allowed a widow whose husband died intestate to operate the farm for the benefit of herself and her children. On her husband's death, the family would no longer face immediate eviction so that the property could be sold and children's proceeds placed in trust for when they became adults. This "possession on intestacy" provision contained a number of restrictions. The wife was only left in possession at the discretion of the estate's administrator and then only for so long as he might deem it advisable. She had to turn over to the estate any profits from running the farm after deducting a reasonable allowance for her services and the cost of maintaining and educating the children. She was responsible to the estate out of her own inheritance for any losses that the farm incurred while under her supervision.²⁶³

Lillian Laurie described the bill's passage as follows:

A simple bill entitled *The Widows' and Children's Relief Act*, has had a rough time in the Manitoba Legislature. It lost its head at one full sweep; its arms went next, then its body was gradually hacked away until when it emerged it could not be recognised as it hobbled out on one crippled foot.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ *Free Press* (1 April 1911) 1 at "Women's Section."

²⁶¹ *Free Press* (9 April 1912) 4.

²⁶² *Free Press* (29 February 1912) 11.

²⁶³ *Supra* note 261.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

The women agreed to drop the dower clause—the head—almost immediately when the usual impediment to land transfer and Torrens Title arguments were raised. The restriction on testamentary freedom clause—the arms—was abandoned when members of the legislature objected that “it would curtail men’s liberty”²⁶⁵ and that it would enable a wife to set aside a will “wherever his wife did not happen to be satisfied with it.”²⁶⁶ These arguments were made despite the fact that similar legislation had been passed in Saskatchewan the previous year and despite the fact that this left Manitoba men free to leave wills that entirely dispossessed their wives. What survived of the bill—the one crippled foot “possession on intestacy” clause—had more to do with protecting estate administrators than it did with protecting farm widows.²⁶⁷

As a result of the failure of this third lobbying effort, a wife could be left homeless in Manitoba anytime her husband chose to sell or will away his property. In the same week that Simpson’s bill failed to pass, two more cases of desertion were reported in the press. In one, a husband skipped out with the \$900 that he received from the sale of the family home worth \$1,800. As the report observed: “a penniless woman with 3 little children to provide for is not in a very good position to follow up a runaway husband” for support. In the second case, a woman with one of her seven children, visited her husband’s lawyer after receiving a notice to vacate. After the lawyer advised her that her husband had sold the property, she was reported to have said:

It was our home, you see. He’s gone. The agent told me to get out. There’s more children at home. I must do something. I can’t let them go ... I can scrub and there’s lots of washing and cleaning to do, isn’t there?²⁶⁸

There was a bittersweet moment for the dower advocates a month after Simpson’s bill failed. On 27 April 1912, before the Winnipeg Branch of the Women’s Canadian Club, the same club that had initiated the now failed third approach to government, A.J. Andrews, K.C., challenged the two principal arguments that for years had been used against a dower clause.²⁶⁹ In a “splendid address” entitled “The Property Laws of Manitoba as they Effect Women and Children,” he declared that there was no impediment to business or commercial

²⁶⁵ *Free Press* (6 April 1912) 1 at “Women’s Section.”

²⁶⁶ *Western Home Monthly* (May 1912) 63.

²⁶⁷ Two other bills of interest to women were passed in the 1912 session of the Manitoba Legislature. One made fathers of illegitimate children responsible to provide maintenance support. The other altered the definition of the word “person” so as to allow women to practice law in the province for the first time.

²⁶⁸ Both stories were reported: *Western Home Monthly* (May 1912) 63; *Free Press* (6 April 1912) 1 at “Women’s Section.”

²⁶⁹ *Free Press* (29 April 1912) 18; *Free Press* (4 May 1912) 1 at “Women’s Section”; *Nor’-West Farmer* (20 May 1912) 723–4.

land transactions that would prevent the law from being amended to protect a wife's interest in property acquired though the joint effort of herself and her husband. Dealing with the second argument, he laid the "goblin"²⁷⁰ to rest with these words:

I can see no valid reason why there should not be a dower in Manitoba. The Torrens title system is in operation in Ontario as well as here. The existence of this splendid system of registering land would not be hampered by the dower law.²⁷¹

Several years later, "Alison Craig" passed her own verdict on the strategy of requesting legislation to protect a wife's interest in property that she had helped to accumulate. "Someway or other that amendment business doesn't seem to work," she concluded.²⁷² E. Cora Hind knew where the problem lay:

There is not a single member of the Government of Manitoba who has not, either in public or in private, expressed his opposition to giving protection of this kind to married women ... So far as Manitoba is concerned, the women have little to hope for as to better conditions so long as the present government remains in power.²⁷³

Lillian Laurie had seen enough to know that this was true. She also knew what it would take to put the present government out of power. Within a month of Simpson's failure, Beynon Thomas had abandoned the "amendment business" in favour of a new course.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ This is Alison Craig's description: *Free Press* (4 May 1912) 1 at "Women's Section."

²⁷¹ Andrew's speech prompted a letter of denunciation from "Lex" to the *Free Press* [(9 May 1912) 12]. He opened by suggesting that, "Mr. Andrews was evidently speaking to please the ladies and allowed his surroundings to get the better of his legal judgment." After repeating the usual objections to a dower clause and any restriction on testamentary freedom, he concluded that, "Mr. Roblin had very wisely declined to place a dower law on the statute book."

²⁷² *Free Press* (14 February 1914) 1 at "Women's Section."

²⁷³ *Western Home Monthly* (October 1912) 38–9.

²⁷⁴ See W. Newbigging, "A Few Observations on the History of Successful Lobbying," Spring 1999, *OCUFA* (*Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Association Forum*) at 26. Newbigging argues that historically successful lobbying efforts have been characterised by clearly-defined goals, strong central and local organisations and the use of every available means in order to persuade. The dower lobby exhibited these characteristics and, while not initially successful, was ultimately so.

III. THE SECOND CAMPAIGN

A. Winning the Vote: 1912–1916

1. *The Dower Impetus*

Even as Lillian Laurie began the 1908 dower agitation, her actual persona, Lillian Beynon Thomas, almost certainly favoured women's suffrage. She was a university educated, financially independent, professional woman. She told correspondents who supported the extension of the franchise that she was glad that they wished "full rights" for women.²⁷⁵ In an editorial on "Why I Fight for Women," she wrote that, "no just power ever expected women to be kept in such a position of dependence and servitude."²⁷⁶ Why then did she first go as a supplicant to a government of men rather than immediately seeking dower reform through an extension of democracy?

The answer came in an editorial that Beynon Thomas wrote in November 1909, just a few months before the first dower request to the Roblin government.²⁷⁷ Based on her large correspondence from rural areas, Beynon Thomas concluded that only a small portion of the farm women of Western Canada wished the vote.²⁷⁸ "Robin Red Breast" was typical: "We don't want to cast our votes at the polls but we have surely earned our rights in regard to our hard earned homes."²⁷⁹ Many dower supporters did not want to be "mannish" and vote at elections:²⁸⁰ they felt that their place was "in the home bringing up the children right."²⁸¹ Beynon Thomas judged that public opinion would support

²⁷⁵ Reply to "Forest Daisy" *Prairie Farmer* (25 November 1908) 14. See also Reply to "Chas. Stiebritz" *Prairie Farmer* (10 March 1909) 14, where Beynon Thomas wished that all women could see their way to universal suffrage.

²⁷⁶ *Free Press* (16 September 1910) 9.

²⁷⁷ "Do You Want a Vote?" *Free Press* (11 November 1909) 10. See also *Free Press* (3 April 1909) 21; *Free Press* (22 April 1910) 10.

²⁷⁸ She was not prepared to hazard a guess on the attitudes of city women who received the daily paper.

²⁷⁹ *Prairie Farmer* (29 July 1908) 14. See also "Lord Ullin's Daughter" *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; "West Lynn" *Prairie Farmer* (16 September 1908) 14; "Louise W." *Prairie Farmer* (23 September 1908) 14; "Grandma" *Prairie Farmer* (14 October 1908) 14. Correspondents to other women's pages agreed: "Snowflake" *Farmer's Advocate* (21 April 1909) 594–5; "Mrs. C.A. Johnson" *Grain Grower's Guide* (9 February 1910) 28.

²⁸⁰ "Bess" *Prairie Farmer* (19 August 1908) 14.

²⁸¹ "Trilby" *Prairie Farmer* (26 August 1908) 14. See also "Lover of Justice" *Free Press* (7 March 1910) 9; "Oliver King" *Free Press* (24 September 1910) 9.

the passage of a dower law but that more education was required before there would be sufficient support to seek universal suffrage.²⁸²

Through 1910–11, there was a slow increase in public support for votes for women. In March, and again in October 1910, E. Cora Hind editorialised that women had “begun at the wrong end.”²⁸³ The way for women to get a dower law, the right to homestead, and guardianship rights over their children was to secure the basic reform ballots for women. The other reforms would follow “without the slightest trouble.”²⁸⁴ In a letter to the *Nor'-West Farmer* published on 5 May 1910, Mrs. J.R. Long wrote:

Women do not want votes if they can receive justice, but we are not receiving justice, and we are going to continue to demand votes and use most stringent measures to obtain them if we do not get justice.²⁸⁵

By January 1911, the Winnipeg branches of the National Council of Women, the W.C.T.U. and the Women's Labour League, all allies in the dower cause, had declared themselves in favour of suffrage.²⁸⁶ At the end of that year, the visit of British Suffragettes Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst and Mrs. Barbara Wiley had made a “profound impression” on women journalists in Winnipeg.²⁸⁷ At the beginning of 1912, Vice-President J.S. Wood convinced the Manitoba Grain Grower's Convention to back suffrage by quoting a distinguished Saskatchewan farm leader: “Give the vote to women, and if they don't make better use of it than men do, for God's sake, take it away from them.”²⁸⁸

In May 1910, Beynon Thomas signalled a change in her thinking:

The more study and thought I give to the subject of 'laws for women' and the progress women are making all over the world, the more strongly I feel that there is no use in any half way measures, and that instead of asking for a dower law, an alimony law or any other kind of law, women should come out clearly and ask for their full right: 'the franchise.'²⁸⁹

Several weeks later she was asked what gain there would be if women had the vote. She replied that women would pass a dower law, or some other law just as

²⁸² Earlier, the editor of the woman's page of the *Farmer's Advocate* had come to the same conclusion. Dame Durden wrote that while all might not agree on suffrage, there was ample room for good legislation for the protection of women in their homes [(24 April 1907) 615; (12 June 1907) 897].

²⁸³ *Western Home Monthly* (March 1910) 60–1; *Western Home Monthly* (October 1910) 38.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Nor'-West Farmer* (5 May 1910) 588.

²⁸⁶ *Free Press* (14 January 1911) 20. See also *Free Press* (22 April 1910) 10; (9 May 1910) 9.

²⁸⁷ McClung, *supra* note 11 at 101.

²⁸⁸ *Free Press* (27 January 1912) 31.

²⁸⁹ *Free Press* (9 May 1910) 9.

good or perhaps better, to protect themselves from "thrifless, speculating or unkind" husbands.²⁹⁰ In October 1911, referring to the late nineteenth century Winnipeg Suffrage Society organised by Icelandic women, Beynon Thomas noted that there had been no other organisational effort to promote this issue since. She concluded: "That will come in time."²⁹¹ In fact, she already knew that the time had come.

Sometime in 1911, Beynon Thomas started to call together small groups of those interested in starting a suffrage association. In March 1912, just as the third dower lobby was failing, a few friends gathered at her house to discuss forming an organisation with the sole purpose of obtaining the franchise for the women of Manitoba. They agreed that an organisational meeting would be held 12 April 1912, at the home of Mrs. A.G. Hample, a prominent Winnipeg philanthropist and the first woman elected to the Winnipeg School Board. Approximately 15 people attended. These included many of the reform journalists who had supported the dower cause: Lillian Beynon Thomas; her husband, A.V. Thomas; her sister, Francis Marion Beynon; her *Free Press* colleagues E. Cora Hind and Kenneth Haig ("Alison Craig"); Mae Clendennan ("Dame Dibbins"); Nellie McClung; and George Chipman, the editor of the *Grain Grower's Guide* who had hired Francis Beynon. They founded the Political Equality League (P.E.L.). Its objective was "the education of public opinion along the line of demanding political equality for women."²⁹² Beynon Thomas was elected the first president.²⁹³

The turn of the century suffrage movement in Winnipeg had been supported principally by Icelandic women and the W.C.T.U.. Nellie McClung's future mother-in-law was Vice-President of the W.C.T.U. at the time; E. Cora Hind was a young and enthusiastic supporter. With the passage of its founders, however, the movement died for lack of leaders.²⁹⁴ It was the emergence of new

²⁹⁰ *Prairie Farmer* (25 May 1910) 14.

²⁹¹ *Free Press* (19 October 1911) 10.

²⁹² *Free Press* (15 April 1912) 28.

²⁹³ There are many accounts of the formation of the P.E.L. The classic account is given by Nellie McClung in *Stream Runs Fast*, *supra* note 11 at 101-110. That account is verified and expanded by Cleverdon, *supra* note 53 at 55. Historical accounts treat the meeting at Mrs. Hample's house as the first organisational meeting without mentioning the small preparatory gatherings held by Beynon Thomas prior to the founding meeting in April 1912. For information on the preparatory gatherings see: "Manitoba First" *Farmer's Advocate* (9 February 1916) 207; *Grain Grower's Guide* (9 February 1916) 10(198); A.A. Perry, "Winnipeg the Franchise" *Grain Grower's Guide* (17 July 1920) 9(1503); "Obituary—Lillian Beynon Thomas" *Free Press* (4 September 1961) 19; "Obituary—Lillian Beynon Thomas" *Winnipeg Tribune* (5 September 1961).

²⁹⁴ Perry, *ibid.*

organisational leadership, delivered by the dower agitation in the person of Beynon Thomas, that again got "the suffrage ball a-rolling."²⁹⁵

In her autobiography, Nellie McClung gave three reasons why suffrage supporters decided to organise in 1912.²⁹⁶ First, she pointed out that the seeds for such an organisation could be traced back to discussions held at the weekly meetings of the Winnipeg Branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club. Beynon Thomas was a founding member in 1907, and later the branch president. McClung joined in 1910, when she moved from the village of Manitou to Winnipeg. Second, McClung mentioned the refusal of the Winnipeg Branch of the National Council of Women to become "associated with any controversial subject" lest the "political octopus" imperil their husbands' jobs. This observation rings true in light of the persistence required from Beynon Thomas in 1909–10 to get the Council to move on the dower cause. Finally, McClung gave as "the immediate cause of our desire to organise" the plight of women factory workers who faced low pay, long hours and appalling working conditions. She described how she and a friend took Premier Roblin on an impromptu tour of the sweatshops where women worked. The Premier was shocked but did nothing.²⁹⁷

Beynon Thomas, responding to a 1944 inquiry from historian Catherine Cleverdon, gave a different reason for deciding to organise the P.E.L. It related directly to the dower agitation. She wrote:

Our Political Equality League was organised by me because the laws regarding women were so terrible. No woman had any claim on the property not even her own clothes. I was editor of a woman's page in a weekly paper, the Free Press and Prairie Farmer. I started a correspondence column and the stories coming to me were so heartbreaking I called a number of women together and after we had tried to interest our government in the matter and failed, we organised the Political Equality League.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ "Manitoba First," *supra* note 293.

²⁹⁶ McClung, *supra*, note 11 at 101–106.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.* at 102–106.

²⁹⁸ N.A.C., *supra* note 65. 15 years later, Beynon Thomas gave a similar account in a brief historical sketch that she wrote for the Manitoba Historical Association:

A letter to the "Home Loving Hearts" page from a woman in Alberta was the final straw which made women in Manitoba rise up and organize the Political Equality League, with a determination to change such conditions.

[L. Beynon Thomas, "Reminiscences of a Manitoba Suffragette," *Manitoba Pageant* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Historical Association, 1959) as quoted in McClung, *supra* note 11 at 10.] The letter referred to was "Old Woman's" letter that began the dower agitation.

Beynon Thomas' sister, Francis Marion Beynon, had a similar recollection of the reason for organising the P.E.L. She remembered that participants at the first P.E.L. meeting decided,

2. *The Dower Leader*

Drawing on experience gained in the dower agitation, Beynon Thomas played a leading role organising, publicising and lobbying for suffrage during the 1912–16 campaign. In terms of organising, she was instrumental in helping the P.E.L. grow from a single Winnipeg Branch to a province-wide organisation.²⁹⁰ In her capacity as president,³⁰⁰ she invited representatives of four prominent lobby groups to come to one of the first P.E.L. meetings and explain their organisational techniques. Beynon Thomas opened with a speech on the importance of educating the public. The W.C.T.U. representative described the use of leaflets and petitions. George F. Chipman of the Grain Growers spoke on the value of strong local clubs in rural areas. The Direct Legislation League raised the possibility of lobbying government and the Royal Templars urged focusing on the unfairness of dower and inheritance laws as a way of building support for suffrage. The meeting ended with a discussion on whether it would be possible to have a dower law in Manitoba.

As she had done in the dower agitation, Beynon Thomas wrote a detailed column in the *Prairie Farmer* giving instructions on how to organise rural districts for the suffrage campaign.³⁰¹ There should be one Political Equality League in each legislative constituency. Start with a small meeting in your own home. Elect officers. Send to the Winnipeg branch for literature. Have a larger meeting at a different member's home. Give a talk "about what women have done where they have a vote; point out the great need for the sake of the children that women should help form the laws."³⁰² Hold a public debate to raise awareness and a social to raise funds, canvass or invite a member of the legislature to the next meeting. Get supporters to write the member urging suffrage. Send Beynon Thomas the names of members who say that they will vote for

not to fight men and women who were opposed to votes for women but to explain to them what it meant to women and children who were in the power of weak, coarse, unfair, sick or brutal men.

["Manitoba women Canada's model" *Free Press* (28 January 1976) 52. The article was published on the 60th anniversary of the grant of woman's suffrage.]

²⁹⁰ This transformation took place at the first annual Woman Suffrage Convention of Manitoba held in Winnipeg, 18–20 February 1915. See *Free Press* (19 February 1915) 16; *Free Press* (20 February 1915) 4; *Farmer's Advocate* (24 February 1915) 230; *Grain Grower's Guide* (24 February 1915) 22(458); *Grain Grower's Guide* (17 July 1920) 9(1503).

³⁰⁰ Beynon Thomas remained P.E.L. president for one year. After the reorganisation in February 1915, she became 2nd Vice-President of the provincial organisation and president of the Laura Secord Branch in Winnipeg. See *Free Press* (6 March 1915) 1 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (15 September 1915) 3; *Free Press* (15 November 1915) 7.

³⁰¹ *Prairie Farmer* (25 February 1914) 2 at "Home Section."

³⁰² *Ibid.*

suffrage so that she can publish a list and remind them when the matter comes up in the legislature. Once your district is organised, help the neighbouring district to organise. "Whatever you do," she instructed, "Work! Work! Work!"³⁰³

From the start, Beynon Thomas was in charge of publicity for the P.E.L. During 1912, she headed a publicity committee that included journalists Kenethe Haig, E. Cora Hind, Mae Clendennan, Nellie McClung, Anne Perry and George Chipman. The next year she was appointed to convene a Speaker's Committee.³⁰⁴ Volumes of literature went out. In 1913, all schoolteachers in Manitoba towns received two pamphlets, "The Legal Status of Women in Manitoba" and "Why Manitoba Women Want to Vote."³⁰⁵ In 1914, prior to the election in which the Liberals came close to defeating Premier Roblin, 120,000 leaflets were prepared, enough for all of Manitoba's voters. One of the pamphlets, "The Homeless and Childless Women of Manitoba," written by Beynon Thomas, dealt with unfair property and guardianship laws.³⁰⁶

Speakers went out. As the P.E.L. was having trouble keeping up with requests from rural areas,³⁰⁷ the Speaker's Committee began to train women who could be sent to meetings.³⁰⁸ They carried the message to summer fairs, church basements, public debates, adult education gatherings, rural Grain Grower's meetings, and, during the 1914 election, to Liberal, Labour and Independent candidates' rallies.³⁰⁹ They travelled long distances, in bad weather, and without pay, "just for the love of the cause."³¹⁰ The itinerant female voices trained by Beynon Thomas were credited with achieving immediate and far-reaching results.³¹¹

³⁰³ *Prairie Farmer* (25 February 1914) 2 at "Home Section."

³⁰⁴ P.A.M., P.E.L. Minute Book, 31 March 1913.

³⁰⁵ P.A.M., P.E.L. Minute Book, 26 April 1913.

³⁰⁶ *Free Press* (9 July 1914) 4.

³⁰⁷ *Free Press* (25 January 1913) 1 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (22 February 1913) 1 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (1 April 1913) 28.

³⁰⁸ *Grain Grower's Guide* (7 July 1920) 9(1503); and, *Grain Grower's Guide* (8 January 1913) 10(42). See also McClung, *supra* note 11 at 106.

³⁰⁹ Some reports of these events are as follows: "Public Meeting" *Free Press* (15 May 1912) 2; P.A.M., P.E.L. Minutes, 6 November 1913 (public debate); "Reception for home nursing course students from out of town" *Free Press* (16 February 1914) 9; "Sectional suffrage tea" *Free Press* (16 March 1914) 9; "People's Forum adult education" *Free Press* (25 January 1915) 16; "Home Economics Section of Brandon Winter Fair" *Farmer's Advocate* (19 March 1913) 433; "Woman's Section of the Brandon Winter Fair" *Western Home Monthly* (April 1914) 50.

³¹⁰ *Free Press* (5 February 1916) 21. Beynon Thomas later said, "There was something heroic about it" [N.A.C., *supra* note 65].

³¹¹ *Grain Grower's Guide* (7 July 1920) 9(1503).

Beynon Thomas, with the style of a cool-headed analyst, and McClung, with that of a passionate "actress,"³¹² were the star speakers. Both addressed meetings of various Methodist Church Epworth Leagues. They told their audiences that the vote was needed to prevent a husband from selling the home without his wife's consent even though she had been instrumental in keeping it together.³¹³ At one suffrage tea, McClung quipped, "If woman's place is in her home and the care of her children her most sacred duty, it is indeed strange that the state does not recognise her claim to either."³¹⁴ After Beynon Thomas' speech to the 1913 Grain Grower's Convention, the assembly reaffirmed its previous year's endorsement of suffrage and many men told her that they had been converted.³¹⁵ The most important speeches of all, however, were given by Beynon Thomas and McClung on 26 March 1914, to the 1,000 delegates attending the pre-election Manitoba Liberal Party Convention. This was the first time in Canadian history that women had been invited to address a political convention. The two speakers outlined the reasons why women should vote stressing the interest of women in their homes and children. Both were thanked with "thunderous applause, shouts of approval and cheers."³¹⁶ The convention immediately resolved that a Liberal government would enact equal suffrage

upon it being established by petition that this is desired by adult women to a number equivalent to 15% of the vote cast at the preceding general election in this province.³¹⁷

Special events were staged to gain publicity. The erection of a "suffrage tent" on the grounds of the Winnipeg Stampede in the summer of 1913, changed the "votes for women" cause from a mere academic question to a live issue in Manitoba.³¹⁸ Beynon Thomas, who was subject to endless insults as she handed out literature, described the experience as "decidedly unpleasant."³¹⁹ She was embarrassed by the white "Votes for Women" sash that she wore.³²⁰ "Of course we were laughed at, pointed out as freaks," she recalled, "but we re-

³¹² N.A.C., *supra* note 65.

³¹³ *Free Press* (20 May 1913) 9; *Free Press* (14 October 1913) 9; P.A.M., P.E.L. Minutes, 18 November 1913.

³¹⁴ *Free Press* (16 March 1914) 9.

³¹⁵ *Western Home Monthly* (February 1913) 40.

³¹⁶ *Free Press* (28 March 1914) 12.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Free Press* (5 February 1916) 21; *Grain Grower's Guide* (9 February 1916) 10(198).

³¹⁹ *Free Press*, *ibid.*

³²⁰ Ellinthorpe, *supra* note 17 at 68.

membered the woman in Alberta.”³²¹ The dower cause that had brought her to the suffrage campaign sustained her through it.

On 28 January 1914, the members of the P.E.L. staged a satirical play at the Walker Theatre in Winnipeg.³²² “The Woman’s Parliament” was a parliament that reversed the political role of the sexes. The voters were women, the elected members were women and the disenfranchised supplicants were men whose roles were played by women. It was a “one-eyed Parliament”—a government of half the people, by half the people, for all the people.³²³ Nellie McClung played the role of Premier Roblin. To great effect, she dismissed a delegation of men seeking the vote by parodying the words that Premier Roblin had used the day before in refusing the plea of a woman’s suffrage delegation. Beynon Thomas, in her role as opposition member for North Winnipeg, unsuccessfully petitioned the government to confer guardianship rights over children upon fathers equal to those enjoyed by mothers.³²⁴ Mrs. A.A. Perry, the Leader of the Opposition, asked for a dower law that would prevent women from selling the family home and turning their husbands out penniless. In reply, the Attorney General, Miss Kennethe Haig, did not know of anyone who had a greater affection and admiration for men than she had. Still, she felt it outrageous that there would be a request for legislation favourable to a section of the population that had no votes to offer in exchange for it.³²⁵

The play was an outstanding success. It was repeated in April in Winnipeg and a month later in Brandon. Enough money was made to finance the entire suffrage campaign. The whole idea had been Beynon Thomas’. She had been inspired by a skit that she had seen in Vancouver put on by that city’s University Women’s Club.³²⁶ Two members of the club gave speeches as if the political position of the sexes was reversed. Beynon Thomas may also have known about a Mock Parliament staged on 10 February 1893, by the early suffragettes of the

³²¹ Beynon Thomas, *supra* note 298 at 11. The “Woman in Alberta” was a reference to “Old Woman’s” letter. She was actually from British Columbia.

³²² This account is taken from the following sources: *Free Press* (29 January 1914); *Free Press* (5 February 1916) 21 (Beynon Thomas’ account); *Winnipeg Telegram* (29 January 1914); *Prairie Farmer* (29 April 1914) 14; *Farmer’s Advocate* (11 February 1914) 192; *Grain Grower’s Guide* (11 February 1914) 62; *Grain Grower’s Guide* (9 February 1916) 9(1503) (Perry’s account); McClung, *supra* note 11 at 113 [the *Free Press* and *Winnipeg Telegram* articles are reprinted at 118–122].

³²³ This phrase was used by A.A. Perry, Attorney-General in the play. *Grain Grower’s Guide* (11 February 1914) 62; *Farmer’s Advocate* (11 February 1914) 192.

³²⁴ The *Free Press* referred to Beynon Thomas generally as a “speaker of well known earnestness and power” when describing her role in the Parliament.

³²⁵ *Grain Grower’s Guide*, *supra* note 323.

³²⁶ N.A.C., *supra* note 65 at 2; *Free Press* (5 February 1916) 21.

Winnipeg Suffrage Society.³²⁷ Nellie McClung, describing the Women's Parliament in her autobiography, wrote: "To Lillian Beynon Thomas belongs the honour of bringing in the idea, which really swept us to victory."³²⁸

In addition to her activities as an organiser and publicist, Beynon Thomas lobbied the provincial government in favour of woman's suffrage. It was another activity for which she was prepared by her experience in the dower agitation. The P.E.L. sent two delegations to Premier Roblin. The first, on 27 January 1914, was the occasion of the speech by Roblin that was parodied the next day by Nellie McClung playing his alter ego in the Woman's Parliament.³²⁹ The second, a year later on 20 February 1915, saw a Premier Roblin, chastened by his near election defeat eight months earlier, acknowledge the merit of the women's claim but question whether the time was right to extend the franchise.³³⁰ Beynon Thomas attended with both delegations but only spoke to ask one question of the Premier on the latter visit.

The final public event of the suffrage campaign was the petition drive that began shortly after the Liberal government of Premier Norris was confirmed in the provincial election of 6 August 1915. In populated areas there was a door to door canvass.³³¹ The P.E.L. distributed over 6,000 petition blanks in four languages, each with room for thirty signatures, as well as a small accompanying sheet of instructions and 55,000 suffrage leaflets.³³² Canvassers were told to tell the unconvinced that women wanted a voice in making laws that would not leave fathers as the sole guardians of their children and that would prevent a man from selling or willing away family property accumulated by the combined labour of himself and his wife.³³³ One canvasser, 94 year old Mrs. Amelia Burritt, succeeded in collecting 4,250 signatures. She argued in a long article in the *Free Press* that the vote was needed in order to obtain laws to deal with situations in which the husband drinks, sells his home and casts his wife and the

³²⁷ *Grain Grower's Guide* (9 February 1916) 9(1503).

³²⁸ McClung, *supra* note 11 at 113.

³²⁹ *Free Press* (28 January 1914) 5; *Free Press* (31 January 1914) 1 at "Women's Section."

³³⁰ *Free Press* (20 February 1915) 4; *Free Press* (27 February 1915) 1 at "Women's Section."

³³¹ *Free Press* (11 September 1915) 2 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (18 September 1915) 1 at "Women's Section."

³³² *Free Press* (15 June 1915) 2 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (9 October 1915) 20. The P.E.L. petition blanks requesting the franchise replaced earlier petitions that were circulated by some Grain Grower's Associations and that appear to have requested both women's suffrage and a dower law. See *Grain Grower's Guide* (14 July 1915) 11(1071); *Grain Grower's Guide* (27 September 1915) 13(1345); *Grain Grower's Guide* (20 October 1915) 13(1465); *Free Press* (11 September 1915) 2 at "Women's Section."

³³³ *Grain Grower's Guide* (8 September 1915) 10(1286).

family on the mercy of an unsympathetic world.³³⁴ Beynon Thomas played her part as a canvass captain in her Winnipeg district.³³⁵

Initially at least, there appears to have been a problem in rural areas with some Grain Grower's Associations refusing to take part or, even worse, actually trying to obstruct the petition effort. Beynon Thomas, writing in the *Free Press*, asked, "Are the Grain Growers failing us?"³³⁶ Her sister, Francis Beynon, mentioned in the *Grain Grower's Guide* that there were repeated complaints of grain growers doing nothing in their areas, something that she attributed, perhaps charitably, to harvesting and threshing.³³⁷ Wives of grain growers who could not get their Grain Grower's Association to respond were encouraged to write directly to the P.E.L. for petition blanks. The plea did not fall on deaf ears. Looking back almost a half century later, Beynon Thomas described the effort of rural women: "Some walked. Some rode on horseback. Some drove in a buggy or a buckboard or in a lumber wagon, and I heard of one even riding on a stone-boat."³³⁸

Beynon Thomas played one other role in the petition drive. She wrote a series of columns in the *Free Press* that instructed women on how to get signatures, that reported on progress to date and, as she had done in the dower agitation, that created a sense of urgency, momentum, and destiny.³³⁹

The women of Manitoba who are working to get the petition are dreaming new and greater dreams than ever before ... who can tell all the dreams that lighten the long walks and drives of our canvassers; dreams that may make of Manitoba, when dreamed by men and women together, a province to which other provinces will look to for inspiration to make better conditions of life, not for the few but for all.³⁴⁰

The campaign worked. On 23 December 1915, Beynon Thomas, together with Mary E. Crawford, Provincial P.E.L. President, Fiona Dixon, Provincial P.E.L. Secretary in charge of distributing and collecting petitions, and 94 year old Amelia Burritt, met with Premier Norris and the cabinet. The main petition that they carried with them contained 39,584 signatures, the largest ever pre-

³³⁴ *Free Press* (13 November 1915) 20.

³³⁵ *Free Press* (18 September 1915) 1.

³³⁶ *Free Press* (11 September 1915) 2 at "Women's Section."

³³⁷ "Editorial" *Grain Grower's Guide* (15 September 1915).

³³⁸ N.A.C., *supra* note 65 at 11; *Free Press* (14 September 1915) 2 at "Women's Section."

³³⁹ *Free Press* (15 June 1915) 2 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (11 September 1915) 2 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (18 September 1915) 1; *Free Press* (18 September 1915) 1 at "Women's Section"; *Free Press* (9 October 1915) 20; *Free Press* (18 December 1915) 5.

³⁴⁰ *Free Press*, *ibid.*

sented until that time to any legislature in Canada.³⁴¹ Only 17,000 signatures were required. The Burritt petition was also presented. In her brief remarks, Beynon Thomas praised the work of farm women in gathering names. Dixon acknowledged the support of the Grain Grower's Association.

Beynon Thomas had to make one other critical lobbying intervention just before the suffrage amendment was introduced in the Legislature in January 1916.³⁴² She was told by a member of that body that the bill gave women the vote but did not give them the right to run in provincial elections. Attorney-General Hudson let her see the bill on condition that she not tell anyone what was in it. She kept her word and did not reveal the bill's contents. However, she telephoned other P.E.L. members and asked them to ask their legislative assembly members whether women were to get the right to be candidates at elections. On learning of the omission from the bill, Francis Beynon told her sister to tell the Attorney-General that if women were not given the right to sit in the legislature she would bring the matter up with women attending the annual Grain Grower's Convention scheduled to start in Brandon the next day. Beynon Thomas phoned the Attorney General. He agreed to amend the bill just before Francis Beynon left for the Convention in Brandon. The Legislature passed the amended bill extending the vote to women and allowing them to run in elections on 27 January 1916.

3. *The Dower Theme*

At the victory banquet held several days after the suffrage legislation was passed, E. Cora Hind offered a toast to the press that included the following observation: "[G]overnment did what public opinion told them to, and public opinion was, to the extent of at least 75 percent, moulded by the press of the country."³⁴³ If she was right, and she was in a position to know, then it was significant that women's editors continued to publish editorials, letters and news stories about dower throughout the suffrage campaign. The connection between the two causes was obvious to the presswomen: "It [universal suffrage] spells

³⁴¹ *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (Toronto: The Annual Review Publishing Company Limited, 1916) at 658.

³⁴² This incident was originally recounted by C. Cleverdon, *supra* note 64 at 63. She bases her account on a letter to herself from Beynon Thomas dated 21 April 1944. Cleverdon points out that there is no account of this incident in the contemporary press. However, there is a brief account in *Grain Grower's Guide* [(29 March 1916) 7(515)]. Francis Beynon may have supplied the details to her paper. There is also an account in Beynon Thomas' personal papers in P.A.M. entitled, "Odds and Ends of the Suffrage Campaign."

³⁴³ *Free Press* (2 February 1916) 3. Much later, Beynon Thomas expressed gratitude that the *Free Press*, "the most influential paper in the West," gave her a free hand to educate people on suffrage by allowing her to write what she wished [N.A.C., *supra* note 65].

doom to the liquor traffic and to exclusive privilege for men in property matters."³⁴⁴

In the *Western Home Monthly*, E. Cora Hind told women that if they concentrated their energies on securing the franchise other reforms would follow. She used an actual case to suggest that one of the reforms was an adequate dower law. "It was such a real farm, such a genuine home ... a model of the profit of small areas well titled," as Hind recounted. Without his wife's approval, the husband suddenly subdivided and sold off the farm the family had worked together to build.³⁴⁵ In the *Free Press*, Alison Craig dealt with Premier Roblin's claim that women did not need the vote because their place was in the home. She retorted:

If a woman's place is the home, why not give her some shadow of a claim on the home. As it is in this province a man can give away, sell, or will away his property—property that in ninety-nine cases out of every hundredth is earned and saved for and slaved for quite as much by the wife as the husband—entirely as he pleases without reference to his wife, and she has no redress.³⁴⁶

In the *Grain Grower's Guide*, Francis Beynon published a cartoon strip in the midst of the suffrage campaign showing Johnny Tightwad pounding his fist and scowling over Jeannie, mother of his six children. The description under the cartoon read: "He made it very clear to her that the money, and the house and the family were all his, even tho she had grown horny-handed in working for them."³⁴⁷

As Beynon Thomas started to publish fewer dower letters in the *Prairie Farmer*, her sister started to publish more in the *Grain Grower's Guide*.³⁴⁸ These ran throughout the suffrage campaign, increasing from June 1912, when Francis Beynon took over as Women's Page editor, until the vote was won in January, 1916. The letter writers linked the dower and suffrage issues.³⁴⁹ Typical was a

³⁴⁴ *Nor'-West Farmer* (6 March 1916) 264.

³⁴⁵ *Western Home Monthly* (August 1913) 24.

³⁴⁶ *Free Press* (31 January 1914) 1 at "Women's Section."

³⁴⁷ *Grain Grower's Guide* (4 November 1914) 10(1234).

³⁴⁸ The *Grain Grower's Guide* published many fewer letters on dower than the *Prairie Farmer*. Generally, the letters in both papers were similar in content and tone. A very good description of the letters published in the *Grain Grower's Guide* is given by McCallum, *supra* note 61.

³⁴⁹ See e.g. "Mother of Three" *Grain Grower's Guide* (8 January 1913) 10(42); "Content" *Grain Grower's Guide* (29 January 1913) 10(130); "Lasca" *Grain Grower's Guide* (18 June 1913) 9(681); "Topsy" *Grain Grower's Guide* (6 May 1914) 8(572); "Mrs. E.P. Edwards" *Grain Grower's Guide* (4 November 1914) 10(1234); "Pelle" *Grain Grower's Guide* (6 January 1915) 10.

comment from "Observer" who wrote in each of the summers of 1913, 1914 and 1915:

I consider it a burning shame and disgrace to womanhood that the law should allow her not even a word of defence, to say nothing of protection against her home being sold and she left destitute after spending the best of her days helping to get that home ... We ask suffrage that we may be able to send suitable representatives who will be in a position to represent these and many other points of law from a class of equally intelligent human beings who simply ask for justice, and at present have no representative.³⁵⁰

Sometimes Francis Beynon used anti-dower, anti-suffrage letters from women as a foil against which to make her case. In October 1913, "Wolf Willow," a woman, wrote that the dower and the vote were not the solution to the problems of male drunkenness and oppression. She called for more attractive women—"men admire beauty and feminine graces"—and more Spartan men—"a fearless man who accomplishes things, who provides for (his wife)."³⁵¹ Francis Beynon would have none of it. In a page long editorial headed "Answers to an Anti-Suffragist," she replied:

The theory that a woman should appeal to a man through her basest qualities—her vanity, her weakness, for which a more honest word is incompetence, her mental dependence, which is either ignorance or stupidity, revolts me ...³⁵²

She cited progressive dower and guardianship laws passed by the state of Colorado since women there had obtained the franchise and called for the ballot as a necessary weapon in the fight for the health, chastity and life of children. Wolf Willow replied, as did someone who shared her views, "A Lover of Womanly Women and Manly Men."³⁵³ This prompted other letters on both sides of the issue³⁵⁴ as well as three more editorials from Beynon calling for a dower law, child labour laws and laws controlling the prostitution and the liquor trade.³⁵⁵ Beynon concluded that government was simply housekeeping on a larger scale: "When women vote we look for the sweeping away of many social wrongs, for higher standards in politics and business, for less graft and more humane legislation."³⁵⁶

³⁵⁰ *Grain Grower's Guide* (4 June 1913) 9(641). See also *Grain Grower's Guide* (15 July 1914) 8(868); *Grain Grower's Guide* (16 June 1915) 10(958).

³⁵¹ *Grain Grower's Guide* (1 October 1913) 10(1010).

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ *Grain Grower's Guide* (29 October 1913) 10(1114).

³⁵⁴ *Grain Grower's Guide* (12 November 1913) 10(1138); *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 November 1913) 10 (1166).

³⁵⁵ *Grain Grower's Guide* (29 October 1913) 10(1114); *Grain Grower's Guide* (5 November 1913) 10(1138); *Grain Grower's Guide* (26 November 1913) 6(1190).

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The dower news stories published during the suffrage campaign came from Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 1915, the Alberta government passed the *Married Woman's Home Protection Act*.³⁵⁷ It gave a wife the right to enter a caveat with the Land Titles office forbidding the registrar from entering any transfer, mortgage or encumbrance against the home in which the wife had been living for two months. The legislation was criticised because it required the wife to take action by registering a caveat and because it could be easily defeated by the husband moving his family into rented premises.³⁵⁸ Saskatchewan's *Homesteads Act*,³⁵⁹ also passed in 1915, gave the wife a right of veto over any transfer or encumbrance of the homestead property, defined in other legislation as the 160 acres on which the farmhouse stood. It also gave a widow the right to use and enjoy the homestead after the husband's death.

The implication of this legislation in the neighbouring provinces was brought home to Manitoba women at the start of their suffrage petition campaign. Alison Craig wrote in the *Free Press* that Manitoba farm women had worked just as hard to earn the homestead as had wives in Saskatchewan and Alberta and yet could be left penniless by a husband who,

takes to drink and mortgages the town or farm property in favour of the corner saloon. ... One need scarcely point out the moral. These abuses would not be if women had had a voice in the making of the laws under which they must live.³⁶⁰

B. Passing the Bill

1. Pressuring

In 1916, when Manitoba women won the right to vote, they, alone among women on the prairies, could still have had their homes transferred or willed away from them by their husbands. Unlike women in the other prairie provinces, Manitoba women faced a government, in Premier Roblin's administration, unalterably opposed to any law that would have provided better protection for them. Their need was the most urgent and they had to fight the hardest for reform. This may explain why they got the vote first. For Manitoba women, the ballot was "the most direct [and] the quickest method" by which to achieve change.³⁶¹

³⁵⁷ *Statutes of Alberta*, 1915, 5 Geo. Vc. 14. *Grain Grower's Guide* (28 April 1915) 12; *Grain Grower's Guide* (19 May 1915) 11.

³⁵⁸ *Grain Grower's Guide* (9 August 1916) 9(1241); *Grain Grower's Guide* (30 August 1916) 9(1337).

³⁵⁹ S.S., 1915, c. 29.

³⁶⁰ *Free Press* (3 July 1915) 1 at "Women's Section."

³⁶¹ *Winnipeg Tribune* (15 May 1912) 9 [Mary E. Crawford, then vice-president P.E.L.].

Like the legendary bird, the Phoenix, the Political Equality League of Manitoba has transformed and taken on a new life under the name, The Political Education League of Manitoba.³⁶²

This was how the *Grain Grower's Guide* described the results of the League's annual convention held in Winnipeg beginning on 16 February 1916, three weeks after the grant of suffrage. The Convention decided to set up a Legislative Committee to propose reform of the dower, inheritance and child guardianship laws.³⁶³ The Committee prepared draft legislation on each of these topics.³⁶⁴

The P.E.L. committee had to decide what form a dower clause should take. There were two choices. They could have adopted the traditional common law model in effect in Ontario. Under that approach, a widow received, at the time of her husband's death, a one-third life interest in all of the property of which he had been seized at any time during their marriage, including any that he had sold or mortgaged during the marriage. Alternately, the Committee could have adopted the homestead model in effect in Alberta since 1917,³⁶⁵ in Saskatchewan since 1915, and in many American states. Under that model, a husband was required to obtain his wife's consent to any sale or mortgage of the family homestead. The homestead model was typically described as the 160 acres on which the farmhouse sat or up to four city lots on which the city home sat.

The two approaches differed in several respects. First, because dower gave a wife an unregistered interest in land at the time of her husband's death, it violated the Torrens principle that only registered land interests could be considered valid. The homestead approach avoided this by not giving a wife any interest in her husband's property. Second, because dower applied to all lands of which the husband had been seized at any time during his marriage, his wife's consent, or more accurately her bar of dower, was, as a practical matter, required for all of his land transactions. The homestead approach avoided this by permitting a husband to deal with any of his property, except the homestead, without his wife's consent. The homestead approach was, therefore, less of an impediment to land transactions than the dower approach.

It does not come as a complete surprise that Beynon Thomas preferred the homestead approach. Even during the 1908–12 dower agitation, she worried

³⁶² *Grain Grower's Guide* (1 March 1916) 10(342).

³⁶³ *Free Press* (18 February 1916) 3; *Grain Grower's Guide* (13 December 1916) 10(1882).

³⁶⁴ "Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women in Canada," 31 May to 8 June 1917 at 163.

³⁶⁵ In 1917, Alberta replaced the 1915 *Married Woman's Home Protection Act*, which required a wife to file a caveat in the Land Titles Office to protect the homestead, with a *Dower Act*, S.A., 7 Geo. V., c. 14. Despite its name, the *Alberta Dower Act* was homestead legislation along the lines of the Saskatchewan model. A wife's consent was required before the homestead was transferred or encumbered. The caveat requirement was done away with.

about the Torrens problem³⁶⁶ and about impeding land transfer.³⁶⁷ Now she made a new argument. Since 1875, the *Rights of Property of Married Women Act* had permitted Manitoba women to buy, sell and own land without their husband's consent. If a dower law were to require a husband to obtain his wife's consent before he dealt with his land, fairness would dictate that a wife should obtain her husband's consent before she dealt with hers. In an argument that turned the tables, Beynon Thomas maintained that, "the modern business woman ... would not care to have her property tied up and subject to the whimsical consent of an inexperienced man."³⁶⁸ This fit with Beynon Thomas' belief in the economic independence of women. It also reflected the emancipating effects of a World War in which women had become wage earners in large numbers and of a suffrage campaign in which women had fought and won political equality. Homestead legislation would provide a measure of protection without compromising a woman's economic freedom.

The Political Education League met on 11 December 1916 to finalise the reform package it was going to seek. Among the changes agreed upon were dower type legislation in the form of a homestead law; an amendment to the *Intestacy Act* that would give a widow the first \$2,500 out of her husband's estate so that she could raise the family, the residue to be divided one-third to the wife, two-thirds to the children; and an amendment to the *Wills Act* providing for the same \$2,500 payment and stipulating that the wife was to receive one-third of the remaining estate regardless of terms in the will to the contrary.³⁶⁹ 500 copies of draft legislation in this sense were circulated to women's organisations throughout the province for comment prior to being presented to the government.³⁷⁰

Once the proposed amendments had been circulated, an education campaign began. Beynon Thomas led the way. On 23 December 1916, and again on 13 January 1917, she wrote detailed columns in the *Free Press* explaining the homestead and intestacy provisions. She told her readers that they would give "the minimum amount of trouble to all men and women in the handling of their property, and the maximum amount of protection to the ones needing it."³⁷¹ On 11–12 January 1917, she attended the Grain Grower's Convention in Brandon where she spoke once to deliver a paper entitled "Woman Suffrage and the

³⁶⁶ *Free Press* (20 February 1911).

³⁶⁷ *Free Press* (9 April 1912) 4.

³⁶⁸ *Free Press* (23 December 1916) 14. See also *Winnipeg Tribune* (12 January 1917) 2.

³⁶⁹ *Free Press* (12 December 1916) 7; *Farmer's Advocate* (24 January 1917) 135.

³⁷⁰ *Farmer's Advocate* (24 January 1917) 135; *Free Press*, *ibid.*; *Free Press*, *supra* note 368.

³⁷¹ *Free Press* (13 January 1917) 16.

Dower" and a second time to explain the P.E.L. proposed reforms.³⁷² This latter explanation prompted a lively discussion among representatives of the Women's Canadian Club, the Council of Women and the Red Cross Society, all of whom were in attendance at the Convention. It ended with the Grain Growers endorsing all of the P.E.L. proposals.³⁷³

Other familiar faces participated in the educational effort. On 10 January 1917, Dr. Mary Crawford, P.E.L. president, outlined the proposals to the Winnipeg Women's Teacher's Club. On 24 January 1917, Mae Clendennan ("Dame Dibbins") wrote a *Farmer's Advocate* article headlined, "What Laws Do Women Want?" In it she mentioned that the Winnipeg Council of Women, representing nearly all organised women in the city, had approved the proposals.³⁷⁴

The Political Education League took its homestead and testamentary proposals, as well as proposals in areas such as guardianship, to Premier Norris on 23 January 1917.³⁷⁵ The delegation consisted of Mary Crawford, Beynon Thomas, Mrs. E.M. Harrison and the League lawyer, Arthur Johnson. The government promised to consider all of the requests and intimated that some of them might be adopted. No action was taken, however. The 1917 legislative session was nearing completion. It had been occupied almost entirely with completion of the 1916 reforms to education and with the conscription debate.

The meeting with Premier Norris must have been an uneasy one for Beynon Thomas. For one thing, the Premier was not speaking to her. He was still angry for the pressure that she had placed on his government a year earlier in connection with extending the suffrage bill to permit women to sit in the Legislature.³⁷⁶ There was an even darker cloud, however. F.J. Dixon,³⁷⁷ founding member of the Political Equality League, independent member of the Manitoba Legislature, and one of the most articulate reform politicians in Manitoba's history, stood up in the Legislature on 17 and 18 January 1917, and explained why he opposed the war and would not sign a conscription card. The speech caused a

³⁷² *Free Press* (12 January 1917) 2; *Free Press* (13 January 1917) 11 at 13; *Farmer's Advocate* (17 January 1917) 67; *Grain Grower's Guide* (17 January 1917) 11(87); *Winnipeg Tribune* (12 January 1917) 2.

³⁷³ *Free Press* (13 January 1917) 11; *Grain Grower's Guide* (17 January 1917) 11; *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (1917) at 740.

³⁷⁴ *Farmer's Advocate* (24 January 1917) 135. See also V. Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada* (Winnipeg: National Museum of Manitoba, 1976) at 296. The author points out that the N.C.W. endorsed dower during World War I as a measure that would protect the family. It felt that strong homes were necessary for a strong war effort.

³⁷⁵ *Free Press* (24 January 1917) 4; *Winnipeg Telegram* (23 January 1917).

³⁷⁶ Ellenthorpe, *supra* note 17 at 68; N.A.C., *supra* note 65.

³⁷⁷ There is a fine biographical sketch of F.J. Dixon: Gutken & Gutken, *supra* note 52 at c. 1.

storm of indignation. Premier Norris thundered that those who refused to sign registration cards should be jailed.³⁷⁸ Immediately after the speech, there was an incident reported only in the *Winnipeg Tribune* and then only with the following curt sentence: "Two Free Press reporters hurried from the press gallery and congratulated Mr. Dixon on his 'great speech'."³⁷⁹ In fact, the reporters, in their enthusiasm, had rushed onto the legislature floor in order to convey their congratulations. One of the reporters was A.V. Thomas, Beynon Thomas' husband. The *Free Press* summarily fired him. He and his wife left for New York City in May 1917, to live in self-imposed exile before returning to Winnipeg in June, 1922. The incident must have been on Beynon Thomas' mind as she carried her homestead proposal to Norris five days after Dixon's speech.

Before leaving for New York City, Beynon Thomas attended her last Political Education League annual meeting. She could not have enjoyed it. The divisive effect of the War on the reform movement was felt everywhere. The conscription issue was raised. President Mary Crawford, sensing the danger, tried to head it off by suggesting that the national service was a military matter that had nothing to do with the politics of the country and therefore was outside the educational work of the League. Patriotic zeal was running too high with some for that argument to carry. A "heated discussion which bordered on personalities" followed.³⁸⁰ One conscription opponent said that only women who had no sons to give to the war favoured the draft. A standing vote was called. The result was 15 to six in favour of conscription.

In the election of officers held immediately after the debate, not one of the women journalists who had founded the P.E.L., and been so vigorous in championing its activities, remained in office. The new president, Mrs. Luther Holling, had not been on the previous year's executive and had seconded the pro-conscription motion. In a 29 June 1920 retrospective, written on the occasion of the first provincial election at which Manitoba women were eligible to vote, Anne Anderson Perry, P.E.L. pioneer and Leader of the Opposition in the Woman's Parliament, expressed disillusion:

Already there is a floating to the surface, in the body politic, of the grasping, greedy, 'practical' woman, who lifted neither hand nor voice to gain the vote for their sex, because to be a feminist was to be unfeminine, but who, now the battle is won for them by their more courageous, honest sisters, are very willing to steal the spoils of conquest and climb with them to power. Of those cuckoos there are many and there is a corresponding submergence of those better, finer women who worked not for power or personal aggrandisement but for an idea and ideal.³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ *Winnipeg Tribune* (18 January 1917) 1 at 3; *Winnipeg Tribune* (19 January 1917) 11.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ *Free Press* (16 February 1917) 5.

³⁸¹ *Grain Grower's Guide* (7 July 1920) 9(1503).

On 2 May 1917, Lillian Beynon Thomas began her last column in the *Prairie Farmer* with the words, "Everything comes to an end."³⁸² Less than two months later, her sister, Francis Beynon, began her last column in the *Grain Grower's Guide* with the words, "Every once and so often in life one comes to a parting of the ways."³⁸³ Francis Beynon's increasingly strident pacifist columns had caused her to have a falling out with editor George Chipman who may have been concerned about the War Press Censor and who, in any event, was himself moving to support conscription.³⁸⁴ Francis Beynon left Winnipeg that summer to join her sister in New York City. At the *Western Home Monthly*, E. Cora Hind was also having a "difference of opinion" with the editor and with her old friend Nellie McClung. The editor and McClung favoured restricting the Dominion franchise to women who were next-of-kin of servicemen. Hind favoured universal enfranchisement. She refused to publish her column for several months and only returned to discuss food conservation "in view of the present crisis."³⁸⁵ She had joined the ranks of women journalist reformers made outcast by the war.

2. Legislating

Finally, on 15 February 1918, S.E. Clement, a Liberal Member of the Legislature representing Brandon, brought in a bill on behalf of the Norris government.³⁸⁶ He was chosen by caucus to introduce *An Act Respecting the Dower of Married Women*³⁸⁷ because of his longstanding study of such a measure.³⁸⁸ In his maiden legislative speech two years earlier he had urged the need for a proper dower law.³⁸⁹ Clement introduced his bill to a receptive House. Earlier in the 1918 session two government members had argued for such a law in their Replies to the Speech from the Throne.³⁹⁰ One noted that the province's women were entitled to full equality and justice given their contribution to the war effort. Clement was greeted with "thunders of applause and great poundings of desks on both sides of the legislature" when he sat down.³⁹¹ Even the opposition newspaper,

³⁸² *Prairie Farmer* (2 May 1917) 7.

³⁸³ *Grain Grower's Guide* (27 June 1917) 9.

³⁸⁴ Cook, *supra* note 12 at 200. Hicks has rightly described Cook's essay on Francis Marion Beynon as "architectural" [as noted in Kinnear, *supra* note 17 at 48].

³⁸⁵ *Western Home Monthly* (December 1917) 26.

³⁸⁶ *Winnipeg Tribune* (16 February 1918) 4.

³⁸⁷ S.M. 8 Geo. V, Vol. 1-2, 1918.

³⁸⁸ *Winnipeg Telegram* (8 February 1918).

³⁸⁹ *Free Press* (20 January 1916) 8.

³⁹⁰ *Free Press* (26 January 1918).

³⁹¹ *Winnipeg Telegram* (16 February 1918).

The Telegram, predicted that the matter would probably go through all procedural stages unanimously.³⁹²

Clement's bill was part homestead legislation, part estate law. He borrowed heavily from the 1917 Alberta *Dower Act*.³⁹³ Although the bill was technical, it basically provided for three things. First, no homestead could be transferred or encumbered by a husband without his wife's consent, freely given. The homestead was defined as 160 acres of land on which the farmhouse stood or up to four lots on one block on which the city house was located. Second, his wife was given a life interest in the homestead. As it was only a life interest, she could not bequeath it in her will. If a mortgagee sold the homestead, the wife of the mortgagor was entitled to one-half of the proceeds, less any amount owing to the mortgagee. Third, Clement's bill provided that regardless of any contrary provision a husband might make in his will, or in the event that a husband died intestate, his wife was entitled to an absolute interest in one-third of the real and personal property in his estate after debts, funeral and testamentary expenses were paid. One newspaper correctly referred to this as, "a widow's dower rather than a married women's dower."³⁹⁴

Clement's bill was close to what Beynon Thomas had advocated prior to her departure for New York City nine months earlier. It was not what her allies were now demanding in her absence. Representatives from the W.C.T.U., the Political Education League, the Portia Club, the Women's Non-Partisan League, the Civil League, the Home Economics Associations, the Women's Grain Grower's Association and the Women's Labour League held a mass

³⁹² *Winnipeg Telegram* (16 February 1918).

³⁹³ *Free Press* (19 February 1918). The Manitoba legislation has been attributed to American precedents [See Manitoba Law Reform Commission, *An Examination of The Dower Act* (Winnipeg: Queen's Printer Office, 1984) at 6]. No statement in any newspaper report was found to that effect. Bowker argues that the 1917 Alberta legislation and the 1915 Saskatchewan *Homesteads Act*, were both modeled on American legislation but cites no support [W.F. Bowker, *A Consolidation of Fifty Years of Legal Writings 1938-1988* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1984) at 248]. However, it is clear from the published dower letters cited above that American settlers on the Canadian prairie brought their understanding of homestead principles with them.

Clement also indicates that he had referenced Ontario legislation, but this must have been with reference to the estates sections of his Bill.

³⁹⁴ *Winnipeg Telegram* (19 February 1918). The allusion to a "married woman's dower" refers to the common-law approach where a married woman received a life interest, but only a life interest, in *all* property of which the husband was seized *during the marriage*. By way of contrast, under Clement's bill the widow received an absolute interest in *only* the property of which the husband was seized, clear of debts, *at the time of his death*. She had no claim on other property that he had possessed, but had alienated, during the marriage.

meeting three weeks prior to the introduction of Clement's bill.³⁹⁵ What they wanted was a "radical Dower Law," something that went even further than the common law form of dower in effect in Ontario. Mrs. A.H. Oakes, president of the Manitoba W.C.T.U., argued that women should have an absolute, not just a life, interest in one-third of all of the lands of which her husband had been seized at any time during the marriage. The idea was that the wife would then be able to will these lands to her children. After further study, this proposal was retained and presented to Premier Norris on 30 January 1918.³⁹⁶

When Clement opted instead for the homestead approach he knew that his bill would be considered inadequate by the leaders of the province's major women's organisations who advocated radical dower. During Second Reading on 19 February 1918, with a Political Education League delegation listening from the gallery, he stated that the bill was not "the last word on 'Dower Law'" nor was it "a perfect law by any means." Further, he noted that it would be subject to amendment in a year or two.³⁹⁷ He refuted the claim that a wife should receive, on her husband's death, an absolute interest in all of the property of which he had been seized at any time during their marriage. Such a radical dower law would hamper a husband's ability to borrow money, would require his wife to act as a guarantor of his borrowing, would interfere with the Torrens system and would increase the involvement of lawyers. Surprisingly, given the recent enfranchisement of women, Clement offered one other argument:

... often the wife is so tied up with home duties that she would lack the experience necessary to form a good judgment on the matter [i.e., whether or not to give consent to her husband's request to sell or mortgage his property]³⁹⁸

The day after his Second Reading speech, Clement defended his bill before the eighth annual convention of the Home Economics Societies of Manitoba being held in Winnipeg. Although reports differ, it appears that after much discussion of the "homestead" and "radical" dower alternatives, the Convention decided not to pass any formal resolution approving the bill.³⁹⁹ What the Societies did do, however, was visit Premier Norris the next day to ask first that the definition of homestead be enlarged and second that the widow have the right to bequeath her life interest in the homestead to her children.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁵ *Free Press* (19 January 1918); *Free Press* (22 January 1918); *Winnipeg Tribune* (19 January 1918) 1-2; *Winnipeg Tribune* (22 January 1918) 8.

³⁹⁶ *Free Press* (31 January 1918); *Winnipeg Telegram* (30 January 1918) 2; *Winnipeg Telegram* (4 March 1918) 4.

³⁹⁷ *Free Press* (19 February 1918) 7.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ *Free Press* (22 February 1918) 2; *Grain Grower's Guide* (27 February 1918) 50; "Editorial" *Free Press* (25 February 1918).

⁴⁰⁰ *Winnipeg Telegram* (22 February 1918).

The Law Amendments Committee met on 4 March 1918. The major women's organisations, including the W.C.T.U. and the Political Education League, sent a delegation to ask that the bill be altered to give radical dower. F.J. Dixon moved a motion in this sense which was defeated.⁴⁰¹ Then, by a vote of seven to six, Clement and the other government members opposing, the Committee adopted part of the Home Economics Societies' suggestion as a compromise. Although it had said "no" to radical dower, the Committee agreed to enlarge the definition of homestead to 320 acres, up from 160, in the country and to a maximum of six city lots, up from four, in the urban areas.

The *Dower Act*, as amended, received Third Reading and Assent on 6 March 1918. Although the Speaker's Gallery was expected to be crowded, not a woman was there either to cheer or condemn the new law: "*The Dower Act*, which on introduction was received with such thunderous applause, was passed in silence."⁴⁰² In his speech proroguing the legislature, the Lieutenant-Governor stated that the Act was, "in keeping with the recognition of the new status of womanhood of our province, and the great service they have rendered to the state in this time of war ..."⁴⁰³ The *Dower Act* went into effect on 1 September 1918.⁴⁰⁴

3. Disappointing

Newspapers that were sympathetic to the government reported that the *Act* was a step in the right direction, a progressive piece of legislation, even if it did not go as far as some might have wished.⁴⁰⁵ "Alison Craig" (Kennethe Haig) editorialised that it was something to have recognition of the wife's claim to property that she had helped to acquire, even if that claim was limited to the homestead.⁴⁰⁶ Newspapers hostile to the government were strident in their insistence on a more radical dower law. The opposition conservative paper ran an editorial headlined, "Unjust to Women." It concluded that the government had made a "particularly bad showing in framing and shoving through its ridiculously inade-

⁴⁰¹ This was the same member who helped found the Political Equality League and who, a year earlier, had made the pacifist speech in the Legislature that triggered the chain of events leading to Beynon Thomas' departure for New York City.

⁴⁰² *Winnipeg Tribune* (6 March 1918) 6.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.* at 1-2. A minimum wage law for women was adopted at the same time as the *Dower Act*. This Act was also a compromise that angered women, particularly the Women's Labour League. Rather than getting an across the board minimum wage of \$10 per week, the women got a five person commission with the power to examine different classes of employment and set a minimum wage on a job by job basis.

⁴⁰⁴ *Supra* note 387.

⁴⁰⁵ "Editorial" *Free Press* (25 February 1918). Reprinted: *Prairie Farmer* (27 February 1918) "Editorial Page"; *Grain Grower's Guide* (6 March 1918) 54(510).

⁴⁰⁶ *Free Press* (9 March 1918) 10.

quate Dower law."⁴⁰⁷ Premier Norris could have noted with irony that the same paper had offered Premier Roblin strong support for his intransigent stance on women's issues a few years earlier.

Women's organisations were not satisfied.⁴⁰⁸ The W.C.T.U. maintained its position in favour of a radical dower measure that would give a wife a dower interest in all of her husband's property acquired during the marriage, an interest that she could will to her children. It invited a woman lawyer and president of the Portia Club to address its annual convention in May 1918. She vigorously denounced the *Dower Act* as affording no relief whatever to the married woman: "The act is not successful in any degree."⁴⁰⁹

The next year, on 20 January 1919, between 50 and 60 women, representing Manitoba women's organisations, "invaded" the provincial Legislative Building for an interview with Premier Norris and three members of his cabinet.⁴¹⁰ The social changes demanded included such traditional requests as equal guardianship rights for mothers over their minor children. Mrs. A.H. Oakes was back demanding a radical dower law. She proposed that a wife be given a one-third, or better a one-half, interest in all of her husband's possessions, not just the homestead. The interest would arise immediately, not just upon the husband's death. It was to be absolute so that the wife could will it to whomever she wished. The Premier left the delegation gratified by acknowledging the importance of their requests and indicating that they would receive careful consideration. With respect to dower, he signalled that legislation would be brought in at the 1919 session. However, there was a hint of dissent in his remark that a one-third interest in a husband's assets would attract a one-third responsibility for his debts. There was also a hint of "I told you so" when he expressed hope that the women now saw the good in the government's decision to go ahead with a dower law the previous year in spite of their opposition to the homestead approach.⁴¹¹

The Norris government did introduce a new *Dower Act* in 1919.⁴¹² Despite the fact that it repealed the previous year's act, the 1919 legislation was basically procedural in nature. For the most part, the changes dealt with how consents to transactions were to be documented and how land registrations were to

⁴⁰⁷ *Winnipeg Telegram* (7 March 1918) "Editorial Page." See also *Winnipeg Telegram* (27 February 1918) "Editorial Page." The *Farmer's Advocate* adopted a similar position on 6 March 1918 at 375.

⁴⁰⁸ *Free Press* (5 March 1918); *Grain Grower's Guide* (6 March 1918) 54(510).

⁴⁰⁹ *Winnipeg Telegram* (3 March 1918).

⁴¹⁰ *Winnipeg Telegram* (20 January 1919); *Winnipeg Tribune* (20 January 1919); *Free Press* (21 January 1919) 9; *National Council of Women Yearbook 1919-20* at 93.

⁴¹¹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, *ibid.*

⁴¹² S.M. 1919, c. 26.

be done. The minor substantive changes that were made tended to work against the wife. One enabled her to give a blanket release in her husband's favor so that he would not have to seek her consent every time that he wished to sell or encumber the homestead. Another limited her claim to her former husband's estate to cases where he had bequeathed to her an annual income for life of not less than \$6,000 or property valued at not less than \$100,000. A third made it clear that her interest in the homestead was subject to any judgment registered against it by her dead husband's creditors. Finally, unlike the 1918 legislation which vested the homestead in the widow immediately upon her husband's death, the 1919 legislation vested it in the executor or personal representative of the husband's estate. Technically, the widow was not entitled to possession until after the executor or personal representative had conveyed the life interest in the homestead to her. One court suggested that the widow in occupation of the homestead should not be turned out immediately after her husband's death. Justice Bergman wrote:

I expect that the personal representative will use ordinary common sense in the administration of the estate and will not disturb the widow's possession until it becomes abundantly clear that the homestead is required to be sold for the payment of debts.⁴¹³

IV. CONCLUSION

THERE WERE THREE REASONS why the cause of dower reform in Manitoba was spent by 1919. First, the 1918 *Dower Act* was a significant reform even if it was not as extensive as the more radical demands of the leaders of the women's movement of the time. The reform was certainly sufficient to take the sting out of the possibility that a family could be turned out of its home on a father's caprice or that a widow could be left penniless after spending a lifetime building the family assets. The reform might not have been perfect but it rectified the most urgent cases of unfair treatment.

Second, the reform movement at the centre of vibrant pre-war Manitoba politics was in sharp decline by the end of the war. The war, and the issue of pacifism, had split the movement in general and the Political Education League in particular. The journalistic sorority that had given the movement such visible leadership had dispersed. Florence Lediard, "Dame Durden" of the *Farmer's Advocate*, had died in 1912; Nellie McClung had left for Alberta after the 1914 Manitoba election; and Lillian Beynon Thomas and her sister, Francis Marion Beynon, had fled to New York City.

Third, "despite its initial strength and outstanding record of reform," the Norris government was exhausted as it moved towards its 1920 date with the

⁴¹³ *Crichton v. Zelenitsky*, [1946] 3 D.L.R. 729 at 757. For comment see: A.D. Hughes, "Reform of the Dower Act Rights of Widows," (1979) 9 Man. L.J. 393 at 396-8.

electorate.⁴¹⁴ In the years between 1915 and 1918, it had given Manitoba the most intensive period of progressive legislation in its history: temperance laws, woman's suffrage, dower, compulsory education, a direct legislation law, laws against electoral corruption, civil service reform, a Workmen's Compensation Act, minimum wage legislation for women, mother's allowance legislation for single mothers, good roads legislation, a Farm Loan and Rural Credit Act and hydro-electric development.⁴¹⁵ All of this was happening while Manitoba was contributing heavily to the war effort. Once the war was over, the problems of re-integrating returning soldiers, of restoring social stability after class polarisation had crystallised into the 1919 General Strike, and of controlling rising costs after three deficit budgets in five years, preoccupied Norris. The 1918 *Dower Act* slipped by the post just as the last flicker of reform zeal was fading.

In 1959, the Manitoba Historical Society asked Beynon Thomas to reflect on how it happened that Manitoba women were the first in Canada to win the vote. She began by writing: "There is a tide in the affairs of women."⁴¹⁶ She borrowed the metaphor, likely unconsciously, from Nellie McClung's 1946 autobiography, *The Stream Runs Fast*.⁴¹⁷ In that book, McClung quoted herself from a 1914 meeting that she had had with Premier Roblin:

But I wish to tell you again, Sir Redmond, as clearly as I can make it, that we are going to create public sentiment in this province, which will work against you at the next election. Did you ever hear that quotation about there being a tide in the affairs of men, which taken at the flood leads on to fortune?⁴¹⁸

Tides come in and tides go out. By 1919, the women's dower cause in Manitoba had passed its high water mark. Still, a 1908 letter from an "Old Woman" who lived in B.C. had created quite a swell. It started an agitation in the middle pages of a weekly country newspaper that was led by a novice woman's page editor and backed by hundreds of letters from farm women. They wanted a law, in the name of justice and in the name of security, that would give them an interest in the land that had accumulated during their marriage in part because of their contribution to the family. The agitation evolved into a sophisticated lobby led by professional city women backed by a network of active women's clubs. When that failed, the now experienced woman's page editor called upon the political savvy that she had honed during the dower agitation to help organise a successful women's suffrage campaign. The demand for

⁴¹⁴ Morton, *supra* note 2 at 373.

⁴¹⁵ *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (1919) at 735. The Liberal Party of Manitoba, *A Review of the Administration of the Provincial Government—Manitoba 1915–1920*.

⁴¹⁶ Pageant, *supra* note 62 at 10.

⁴¹⁷ McClung, *supra* note 11 at 109.

⁴¹⁸ McClung was quoting William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 4, Sc. III, L. 217.

dower led to women's suffrage; women's suffrage was then to lead to the return of dower. Lillian Beynon Thomas was the link between the two.

What brought Beynon Thomas to politics was journalism; what brought her to journalism was her love of writing. While in New York City, she worked for the Seaman's Church Institute, an Episcopalian mission for sailors. In her spare time she attended short story writing classes at Columbia University and became a regular playgoer in the theatre district. Upon her return to Winnipeg in 1922, her husband joined the editorial staff of the *Winnipeg Tribune* where he rose to become municipal editor for many years. Lillian devoted her time to writing short stories and plays and conducting classes in fiction technique. She won the first fiction prize ever given by *MacLean's* for her 1927 short story, "Five Cents for Luck," a story about pioneer women. There were other short stories and other magazine prizes. In 1932, her three act play, "Among the Maples," a story about the competition between Grits and Tories in early Ontario, was produced by the Winnipeg Little Theatre. In 1934, she wrote, "As the Twig is Bent," a play about Abraham Lincoln as a boy that was produced by the Coach House Theatre in Wisconsin. In 1936, she won the Canadian Drama Award for her contribution to the development of Canadian drama. In 1946, she published her only book, *New Secret*, in which she explored life in the age of the atomic bomb. In the first part of her life, writing was her principal tool for doing politics; in the second part, politics became a source of themes for her writing.

Beynon Thomas' husband, Vernon, died on 11 September 1950. Her sister Francis Beynon, who had returned from the United States to be with her after Vernon's death, died in October 1951. Lillian carried on, in poor health, until 2 September 1961 when she died two days before her 87th birthday. At the time of her death, she was researching techniques for the production of television dramas. In retrospect, it is not surprising that Lillian Beynon Thomas was the one to suggest the play, "The Women's Parliament," that became the turning point in the suffrage campaign some 47 years earlier.

