

A Pioneer Woman's Advice to Immigrant Women



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Document historique

Les études de la femme se définissent comme des études pour et sur les femmes par les femmes. Depuis toujours, les femmes et les jeunes filles ont appris au contact de leurs aînées, les rudiments des différents métiers et des travaux de tous les jours indispensables au bien-être de leur entourage. Les mères de la bonne bourgeoisie du début du siècle en Amérique s'occupaient d'enseigner à leurs filles ainsi qu'à leurs servantes les règles de l'art ménager. Dans cet ordre d'idée, l'auteur présente un document d'époque rédigé par une femme, Magdalena Mary Drury, à l'intention des femmes qui immigraient au Canada vers la fin du 19^e siècle. Ses conseils visent à aider les femmes dans leur intégration à un nouveau milieu et à leur faciliter les contacts.

QUESTIONS

1. Where did you reside before moving to the North-West?

Answer: Broadway, Sutton, Surrey, England.

2. When did you settle in the North-West?

Answer: June 23, 1880.

3. Have you lived on a farm or in a city or town since you came to reside in the North-West?

Answer: Farm. Sec. 26. Tp. 12 R. 19 West.

4. How does the climate of the North-West suit you, and do you consider it healthy?

Answer: Admirably, my health has improved very much since I have come here; yes, very healthy.

5. Is the climate healthful for children, and will you kindly offer any suggestions to new comers on this point.

Answer: Decidedly so; plain clothing, and wholesome food with plenty of open air exercise in summer; a good warm house, plenty of instructive books, and keep them indoors in winter only when cold; there is no fear of epidemics.

6. Did you experience any difficulty or hardship in commencing your home in the North-West, and does your present position compensate for any inconvenience or trials you may have endured?

Answer: Yes, through want of railway communication with the outside world; waiting for lumber to complete house, also the stores running short of provisions, expected to arrive by boat or trail. Yes.

7. Are you contented with your present lot and the prospect ahead?

Answer: Yes, although a hailstorm has thrown us back a year, through destroying all our crops this season.

8. Would you recommend an emigrant to bring his wife and family with him from the old country, or leave them behind till he has a home ready for them?

Answer: By bringing his family, all can assist in making a home, which is the best way in my opinion.

9. Have you schools within a reasonable distance from you, and are they well conducted?

Answer: Yes, at Rapid City, 6 miles, highly spoken of.

10. Have you churches near you, and if so, of what denomination are they?

Answer: At Rapid City; Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Church of England, Roman Catholic Priest, at intervals.

11. Do you experience any dread of the Indians?

Answer: None whatever; I consider them quiet, civil, in so far as my experience is concerned.

12. Can you obtain the ordinary necessities of life without difficulty and at reasonable charges?

Answer: Yes, both at Rapid City and Brandon.

13. Is clothing more expensive than it was in the country you came from, and can it be obtained easily?

Answer: Rather dearer; but of good quality.

14. Did you find difficulty in accommodating yourself to the methods of home life peculiar to a new country like the North-West, and have you any suggestion to make on this point for the benefit of the new comer?

Answer: No; I was prepared to rough it for a while; it is undoubtedly a great change to those leaving town life, but the beauty of the scenery, bright sunshine, variety of birds and animals, added to the prospect of a house you can call your own for a pleasing novelty and fully atone for the loss of artifacts.

15. Can hard working, honest girls easily obtain situations at good wages on farms or households in the North-West, and what advice in this respect would you give to young girls who contemplate making the North-West their home?

Answer: Yes, in certain localities. Let them apply to the church of whatever denomination they belong to, as a precautionary measure bring plain, comfortable clothing, sufficient good sense to discard all ro-

mantic ideas of accepting the first offer of marriage upon arriving here; also frivolous notions about dress; read no novels and the like; but set themselves to work steadily to learn the ways of house-keeping in this country, after which they may prove bright ornaments to the bachelor farmers' households.

16. Please state, if possible, the general wages paid to girls as Cooks, Housemaids, and Farm Helps?

Answer: Vary according to demand.

17. Are there openings for girls in trades, such as Milliners, Dressmakers, etc., and can you state general wages?

Answer: Not in this locality.

18. Do you consider the North-West a good country for producing butter and cheese?

Answer: A first-class country for dairy farming and produce.

19. How do poultry thrive, and are they profitable?

Answer: Well; I have 150 fowls; they are *very profitable*; eggs readily find a market at Rapid City or Brandon.

20. Kindly give any advice that may be of service to in-coming mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and any practical information or any household receipt that may be of service to them.

Answer: To the female portion of in-coming settlers, I would say bring a cheerful heart and determination to make light of petty troubles; do not run away with the idea that it is not safe to live in a tent on account of wild animals and Indians; I have gone through all the phases of pioneer life, in a tent, both in the heat of summer and early snow in the fall, yet have gained health and strength, never meeting with any interruption from either human being or animal, although often left with only my two young children, no house nearer than 1¼ mile. You will be sure to like this country if you only give it a fair trial, think of the advantage to be gained by the change, do not look back with vain regrets but forward to the time when you may reasonably hope to make a competence, more especially if you rear poultry, make butter, and culti-

vate vegetables; there is so much a woman can do, in that way, when the male portion are at work in the fields; gardening is pleasant and profitable work, also saving seeds is saving money. There are many varieties of wild fruits that make excellent preserves, making a nice addition to the table in winter, a few of the best are raspberries, currants, gooseberries, strawberries, cranberries, cherries, Saskatoons, and choke cherries.

Bring bedding, blankets, a good supply of all kinds of clothing, especially woolens, any useful articles that will pack into small compass, good amusing books, but nothing heavy or cumbersome. Purchase electric oil, painkiller, castor oil, and a few useful drugs before settling in the farm, in case of accident. Also De Price's cream baking powder — I can say that it is most healthful and valuable, as it has been used by me ever since my arrival in this country; good bread, buns, dumplings, pancakes can be made at once, without the necessity of proving, if you are camping.

Do not use water taken from ponds or streams without filtering, or passing through a cloth if nothing better offers. I did so until a well was dug on the farm, and never experienced any ill effects through using the water; it is best drawn from a pond surrounded by willows, being then free from alkali, and invariably good.

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Hoping that your efforts to enlist the ladies in the good cause may prove successful; in haste

I remain, Sir
Yours respectfully
Magdalena Mary Drury
Rapid City P.O.
Manitoba, Canada

To: Alexander Begg, Esq.

*Alexander Begg Papers, Add Mss 467, CPR Questionnaire, Vol. 3, Female Settlers, *Public Archives of British Columbia*.



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