

**A Natural Adaptation: Elsie (McAlister) Cassels
Scottish Immigrant and Naturalist on the Albertan Prairie, 1889-1938**

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Abstract

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Ernestine Crossfield

Elsie McAlister Cassels (1864-1938) was a well-respected naturalist and served as Vice President of the Alberta Natural History Society from 1917 to 1922. A Scottish immigrant who homesteaded with her husband near Red Deer, Alberta, she corresponded with such Canadian ornithologists as Percy A. Taverner and William Rowan. Strongly opposed to shooting birds for identification, she kept meticulous field notes and focused on the life-histories of birds. As an early conservationist, she helped educate the public about nature, and assisted in the creation of the Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary. The following biography will highlight her contributions to Canadian ornithology, and situate her within the context of British imperialism on the Albertan prairie.

To Harald

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Abbreviations

ANHS	Alberta Natural History Society
AOU	American Ornithological Union
CCC	Canadian Commission of Conservation
CFA	Canadian Forestry Association
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
GSC	Geological Survey of Canada
IODE	Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire
OFNC	Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club
PQSPB	Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds
PNHS	Provincial Natural History Society
TNHS	Territorial Natural History Society

Preface

Elsie Cassels was a naturalist and ornithologist who homesteaded with her husband on the Albertan prairie in 1889. She adapted to a frontier environment, found fulfilment in nature study, and became a recognized authority on birds. Moving into Red Deer in 1902, she took an active role in the Alberta Natural History Society (ANHS) and became not only its first woman vice-president, but the first woman to hold an official position in any Canadian natural history society. As a member, she helped establish purple martin colonies at Sylvan Lake, and campaigned in 1906 (unsuccessfully) for the creation of a provincial park to encompass the Red Deer River Canyon. As vice-president, she formulated plans for the Gaetz Lake Sanctuary, commissioned as a Dominion Wildlife Refuge in 1924,¹ where she served as a game officer for the Canada Bird Protection Service.² In great demand as a speaker, no venue was too large or small. From groups of school children, to women's organizations, and neighbouring natural history societies, people eagerly listened to what she had to say about the importance of preserving wildlife and natural habitats.³

¹ This area was formerly known as the Red Deer Bird Sanctuary and was renamed The Kerry Wood Nature Centre and Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary in 1986. Harvey J. Smith, *The Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary: Wilderness in the City* (Red Deer: Kerry Wood Nature Centre Association, 1991), 1-6.

² The Canada Bird Protection Service fell under the jurisdiction of the Dominion Parks Branch, Ottawa in 1921.

³ Elsie Cassels, "Our Familiar Birds," *Red Deer Advocate*, 15 July 1921. And "Obituary Notice," *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, LIII (1939): 29. And Martin McNicholl and Philip H. R. Stepney, Peter C. Boswell, and David A.E. Spalding, *A Bibliography of Alberta Ornithologists* (Edmonton: Provincial Museum of Alberta Natural History, 1981), chapter 1, 1-9, chapter 4, 47, 139, 142, 143, 232, 236, 248, chapter 5, 4.

The search for Elsie Cassels began after her name was fortuitously discovered by science historian Marianne G. Ainley, in the correspondence of Percy A. Taverner, a zoologist/ornithologist at the Victoria National Museum in Ottawa,⁴ and William Rowan, ornithologist and head of zoology at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Later, when Marianne G. Ainley was researching her biography of William Rowan, the letters between him and Elsie Cassels re-surfaced, which discovery led to the basis for her biography within this thesis.⁵ Although her initial contact with Rowan was made through the ANHS, he eventually became a lifelong friend and supporter. Other important letters include those written between Elsie Cassels and three local naturalists: Charles Snell, an engineer-surveyor in Red Deer, Frank Farley, a real-estate agent in Camrose, and Tom Randall, a farmer in Castor. In addition, letters exchanged between these three men often contained reference to Elsie Cassels in the form of a personal greeting or scientific acknowledgment. These papers reveal a small, but significant network of naturalists who had an important impact on the state of wildlife and wildspaces during a time when Canadian conservation was only a concept in the minds of a few federal civil servants.⁶

In gathering clues to Elsie Cassel's story, every detail has been viewed as important, from the house and log cabin where she lived, to the nature trails she helped

⁴ Renamed the National Museum of Natural Sciences in 1928.

⁵ In keeping with the practice of modern feminist biography, I have chosen to use Elsie Cassels' full name whenever she is mentioned. For more information, see Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16.

⁶ Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife. The Beginning of Preservation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

create. Further insights came slowly, through interviews with elderly townsfolk who had remembered her from when they were young, and anecdotes about the Cassels as pioneers, occasionally printed in the local press. Many of these stories, whether accurate or not, had become well-entrenched over the years. Sifting through the array of gossip and rumour, it was difficult to uncover even basic facts, such as Elsie Cassels' maiden name, next of kin, or level of education. Tragically, after she died all of her personal journals, field notes, and letters are believed to have been destroyed by her husband. Therefore, most of her surviving letters are those she wrote to other naturalists and scientists. What was contained in their replies, in many cases, can only be assumed.

Elsie Cassels' personal story is fraught with many complexities. William Cassels was not only considered to be an 'English' remittance man, but to others, his frugality seemed almost unbearable. Throughout their marriage of almost forty years, she lived a penniless existence. When they took their long awaited trip home to Scotland in 1912, they wore the same thread-bare tweeds they had on when they first arrived in Canada in 1889. The couple later became the focus of astonishment and some bitterness in the Red Deer community when it was discovered upon William's death, in 1941, that the value of his private estate was in excess of \$90,000. A journalist with the town newspaper wryly commented that "there had always been plenty of money, but Elsie had never been allowed to spend any of it."⁷ Because her death preceded William's by three years, and there were

⁷ "Many Brave Women," *Red Deer Advocate*, 27 July 1955.

no immediate heirs, money was willed back to his relatives in Scotland.⁸ People in Red Deer felt great pity for her as a charming and generous person they believed wronged by William's selfishness. They also felt that if she had outlived him, the execution of funds might have been handled differently, although at the time the Alberta Dower laws would have made this difficult.⁹

The Cassels were unable to have children, which may have had an effect on the eventual failure of their homestead. Even more subtle, was the stigma of not having children at a time when prairie society was firmly centred in the family. Women who had experienced pregnancy and/or childbirth tended to form close bonds and would support each other through difficult times. Elsie Cassels clearly lived outside of this network. While some women were critical of her barrenness and interest in matters other than domestic, others would elevate her status to a higher calling. In an article written in 1935, it was said that "Mrs Cassels knows her birds as mothers know their children. She will remain forever young, for she lives in a world of nature and nature never grows old."¹⁰ Her

⁸ These people were William Cassels' uncle, a niece, and his brother's (Reverend Gilbert Cassels) three sons. See William Anderson Cassels, Estate, Inventory B, Succession Duties Act, District Court of Northern Alberta, Judicial District of Red Deer, 1934, Provincial Court House, Red Deer.

⁹ In the Dower Act, a married woman could use the family home and surrounding property upon the death of her husband, but she could not sell or dispose of it by will or mortgage, or use it as collateral in order to make a living. These property laws were only amended in 1979. See Catherine Cavanaugh, "The Limitations of the Pioneering Partnership: The Alberta Campaign for Homestead Dower, 1909-1925, in *Making Western Canada. Essays on European Colonization and Settlement*, eds. Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), 186-214.

¹⁰ Annie L. Gaetz. "Woman Provides Sanctuary for Feathered Folk," *Calgary Herald*, 13 April 1935.

only extravagance seemed to be the 150 pounds of wheat she acquired each winter to feed the partridges and pheasants that discovered her garden. The daughter of a close neighbour and friend expressed it this way; "She loved birds and animals, and always had two or three cats *which never touched birds* - as she claimed! I am proud to say that my love affair with birds, which has enriched my life, and my Mother's life, originated with 'Lady Jane.'"¹¹

It is precisely this emotional attachment which Elsie Cassels had toward her favourite subject that first caught my attention. Drawn toward biology from an early age, I have spent countless hours exploring the environment while camping and pursuing outdoor recreation. Sometimes accompanied by friends or family, but more often on my own, I have photographed whatever sparked my interest, and recorded my questions and observations in a journal. That I could have become a naturalist myself seemed remote, as I had grown discouraged and dissatisfied with 'professional' science. I already had a fulltime occupation as a senior technician in molecular biology when, several years ago, I decided to leave the laboratory and begin a new career as a historian of science with a special focus on women's achievements. This led me to reflect a great deal on my own experiences, and to investigate some of the reasons why women's participation in science remains problematic.

Another reason for my interest lies in personal history. During the late 1880s, the

¹¹ "Lady Jane" refers to a comic play in which Elsie Cassels starred as the main character. Margaret Yule of Saanichton, B.C., correspondence with author, 14 February, 1995.

excitement generated over western expansion caught the attention of many easterners including three of my great-uncles, who left Quebec permanently for Alberta with their families. Of Scottish and English descent, they traded the rich apple orchards and dairy farms of St. Paul D'Abbotsford for arid ranchlands southwest of Calgary. I have always been intrigued about the mixture of fact and myth that marked their departure, but until recently, I was not as curious about how my great-aunts coped with their transition. In this respect, I am indebted to historian Diana Pedersen, who brought the field of women's history alive for me through literature and discussion, and encouraged me to question some of the older, traditional histories of Canada.

During the last stages of writing this thesis, I have moved from Montreal to Calgary with my husband and children. When I began working on the biography of Elsie Cassels, I had no idea that a relocation to the prairies would be a factor in my own life, and it has brought with it both insight and dilemma. While I pursued the initial phase of research with my feet firmly planted in Quebec, most of the actual writing took place as I was struggling to settle into a new landscape and culture. The sentiments I experienced in leaving family, friends, and familiar surroundings enhanced my understanding of Elsie Cassels and her transition from Scotland to Canada. While this background brought me closer to my biographical subject, I have struggled against introducing my own personal bias.

When writing about the life of a particular scientist, it is not only essential to understand the vital aspects of her life and the scope of her research, but to form a personal attachment by remaining open to personal experience. I attempted to solve this

dilemma in several ways. I had already been exposed to birding techniques through my close friend Marianne G. Ainley, a very keen and experienced field-naturalist. In order to cope with common terms and practices used by ornithologists, I embarked on a ten week field-course with the Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds (PQSPB). Concurrently, I enrolled in an intensive 'Bird Course' with Roger Titman and David Bird at the Avian Science and Conservation Centre of Macdonald Campus, McGill University. This provided me with a more secure basis for the scientific aspect of Elsie Cassels' work.

As part of my own 'field experience,' I began the study of a fresh water marsh where my regular field observations were recorded in poetic form. With binoculars around my neck, and a camera dangling at my elbow, I attempted to identify and record species, as well as reflect on the stamina needed to pursue this activity under various conditions. Over the course of three years, the marsh project evolved into a manuscript called *River Rain*, and was supervised by Richard Sommer, a poet, creative writer, and English professor at Concordia. The reason for doing creative work of this kind was to be more attentive to the writings of Elsie Cassels, and to discover some of the non-traditional ways that women have recorded information about the environment despite obstacles like weather, health, and opportunity.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one is an introduction which sets the Canadian historiographical context for women in science and the practice of feminist biography. Chapter two discusses Elsie Cassels' early experiences on the prairie

frontier as a wife and homesteader, before she became deeply involved in the ANHS. Chapter three provides a glimpse of the conservation movement in Canada and in Alberta, and within it, the role of the ANHS with Elsie as vice president. More specifically, chapter four is about Elsie Cassels' work as a naturalist and ornithologist, and explains her personal and working relationships with other scientists. Chapter five discusses how her life was affected by immigration and British imperialism, and how her experience on the prairie frontier brings a different perspective to the understanding of the homesteading partnership. Finally, a conclusion provides a summary of the main points, plus suggestions for further work.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the guidance and support of supervisors Diana Pedersen, History Department; Richard Sommer, English Department; and Marianne G. Ainley, Chair of Women's Studies, University of Northern British Columbia. Dorothy Markiewicz and Darlene Dubiel, Concordia School of Graduate Studies, directed my way through the SIP Program and provided assistance in every way possible. Ann Barry carried out my research requests in Edinburgh, Scotland, where she uncovered Elsie Cassels' early history. I also wish to thank Michael Dawe and Linda Ottosen, City and District Archives, Red Deer; Michel Gosselin, Canadian Museum of Nature; Fay Hutchinson and Mark Vajcner, Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton; Juanita Walton, Anglican Church Archives, Diocese of Calgary; and the archival staff at the Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives. After I moved to Calgary, Jane Kelley and Joan Ryan offered me desk space at the Calgary Institute for the Humanities, and Eliane

Silverman helped me to form links with the University of Calgary. This project was funded in part by a McConnell Graduate Fellowship, and further assistance was given by the School of Graduate Studies and the Concordia Graduate Students' Association.

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1. Introduction

The experience and influence of an individual life is important for understanding what was happening to women who participated in Canadian science, and those who found themselves adjusting to a new life through immigration and settlement.¹ While the scholarly literature on women in the sciences, and on the history of the prairie west, may seem diverse, they are vitally intertwined in the life history/biography of Elsie (McAlister) Cassels, a naturalist/ ornithologist who homesteaded with her husband in Alberta in 1889. While some work has been done on both areas, there are still many gaps in the historical record. The published accounts of women pioneers, while not numerous, are predominantly those of British wives and mothers, while the involvement of women in the sciences during the late Victorian period still requires more research before it can become integrated into the history of Canadian science.

Biographical research is important for several reasons. An individual's lifetime achievements cannot be separated from her/his personal story or historical era. Every event is dependent on others which are happening concurrently, and often the questions are those which might not arise in other forms of scholarship. These are often the 'whys' of the human condition. What attracted that person initially to science? What factors helped or hindered advancement or recognition within a particular field? Were there personal struggles, such as illness or domestic responsibilities, that lengthened the time frame for success or led to withdrawal? Did other individuals act as role models or act as

¹ Joan W. Scott, "Experience," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, eds. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22-40.

immoveable obstacles? While this line of inquiry applies to both women and men, it becomes crucial when examining the lives of women in science. Because their participation in science follows a non-linear path around obstacles, their invisibility gives the impression that their efforts were not serious, and that their contributions were inconsequential.

Feminist biography is an interdisciplinary genre which strives to address these concerns.² Using a "whole person" approach, every aspect of a person's life becomes important, from the science, to working conditions, geographic location, financial stability, family life, significant relationships, and household arrangements. The study of an extraordinary/ordinary woman, such as Elsie Cassels, is a journey through natural history journals, diaries, field or experimental notes, letters, and anecdotes supplied by people who knew her. Unfortunately, as in the case of other women who were actively involved in natural history during this era, finding her limited written record was difficult and time consuming.

Insights acquired from compiling feminist biographies are often found in no other type of scholarship, and the social sciences have much to gain by adopting this approach. Women's lives are surrounded by male-dominated culture, in which they have become marginalized and under-represented in society. While traditional (male) auto/biography insists that the life under scrutiny is authoritative, exemplary, and central, women's

² Marianne G. Ainley, "(En)Gendering Canadian Science: Feminist Scientific Biography and the History of Canadian Science" (paper presented at the History of Science Society Conference, Sante Fe, N. M., 13 November 1993). For a discussion on the problems associated with traditional biographies see Helge Kragh, *An Introduction to the Historiography of Science* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 168-173.

auto/biography includes contentious issues of race, class, and sexual orientation.³ Until the 1980s, scientific biography was charged with presenting a distorted view of the development of science and was largely dismissed as fictional entertainment.⁴

Feminist biography is about balancing many issues and concerns. However, difficulties often arise in methodology, and there are few rules or guidelines to follow. When writing about women's culture, questions which plead consideration are how evidence is gathered and interpreted, and what effect the work will have on scholarship in general, or surviving family members in particular.⁵ Because biography is essentially a narrative, an author needs to be particularly concerned whether or not gender makes a difference to her/his point of view. Indeed, an author should never assume that she/he is writing a definitive work devoid of cultural or personal bias.⁶

When regarding autobiographical materials, such as letters, the questions become slightly different.⁷ To whom and for what purpose were these women writing? What kind

³ Belle Brodski and Celeste Schneck, eds., "Introduction," in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women's Autobiography* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 1-15.

⁴ Kragh, 168-173.

⁵ Diane Middlebrook, "Postmodernism and the Biographer," in *Revealing Lives: Autobiography, Biography, and Gender*, eds. Susan Groag Bell and Marilyn Yalom (Albany, 1990), 155-166. And Susan Arpad, "Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives," And "Writing a Woman's Life," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26 (summer 1992), 165-169.

⁶ Janet Malcolm, "On Sylvia Plath," *New Yorker*, double issue (August 1993).

⁷ Helen M. Buss, " 'The Dear Domestic Circle': Frameworks for the Literary Study of Women's Personal Narratives in Archival Collections," *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 14, 1 (1989): 1-17.

of self-image did they wish to portray, and what were their political, class, and educational backgrounds? What influenced their ideas and what literature did they read? Finally, what historical facts influenced their observations and sense of place in the world? Recent innovations in autobiography include points of intersection between biography and autobiography, as well as the co-existence of fiction and fact, reality and fantasy, self and others, and individuals and their networks.⁸ This genre will always be bounded by the collection and interpretation of facts or 'truths,' and it is important to realize that all texts have their own inherent limitations. A good biography should illuminate the individual within a wider context, and provide enough insight to validate her/his past experiences. In other words, if a biographical subject living a hundred years ago were to read her own biography, she should first be able to recognize herself, and second, understand some of the factors which affected her life.⁹

The first book to provide an historical context on the history of women scientists in America was written by Margaret Rossiter in 1982.¹⁰ In fact, interest in examining why women have been consistently under-represented in science from the late 17th Century (often called the Scientific Revolution) to the late twentieth century, only began in 1980.¹¹

⁸ Liz Stanley, "Moments of Writing: Is There a Feminist Auto/biography?" *Gender and History*, 2, 1 (spring 1990): 58-67.

⁹ Linda Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women's Lives. The New Biography* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Margaret W. Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America, Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.)

¹¹ This area of study was heightened in the late 1980s when the U.S. government recognized that it had a shortage of labour in the sciences and recruiting women to science

Rossiter's work concluded that until 1960, some research institutes accommodated some women workers, but they were refused entry to universities and national academies because of discriminatory policies. This prompted many historians to wonder about the state of a society where the production of 'objective' scientific knowledge was almost solely based on the achievements of white, middle and upper class men. For example, how can there be any room for diversity in science when only one segment of the population can participate, and only one methodology is acceptable? How are gender relationships affected by women's historical absence from most scientific disciplines? Who benefits most and least from the application of scientific knowledge? And how can the gender hierarchy in science be addressed when women continue to face societal pressures and academic obstacles? These and other concerns are still relevant in the 1990s despite women's increased visibility in the science professions.

Much of what is known today about women in science has been derived from feminist biography. The first comprehensive look at Canadian women in science, from the early days of settlement to the mid-twentieth century, was produced by science historian Marianne G. Ainley, using multiple biography as a tool.¹² Along with many names and background sketches, she pieced together the emergence of women's scientific careers

seemed to provide a viable solution. See Pnina G. Abir-Am, "Women in Modern Scientific Research: A Historical Overview," in *The Gender Dimension of Science and Technology*, eds., Sandra Harding and Elizabeth McGregor, an excerpt from the *World Science Report* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1996.)

¹² In order to simplify the terminology, the many forms of auto/biography can be called multiple biography. See also Marianne G. Ainley, "Last In the Field? Canadian Women Natural Scientists, 1815-1965," in *Despite the Odds. Essays on Canadian Women and Science*, ed. Marianne G. Ainley (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1990), 25-62.

from the 1880s to the mid-1960s. While not restricting the term "professional scientist" to those with salaries and university positions, almost exclusively men, she identified women as being interested and involved in science from the start. This countered the widely believed notions that North American women were not present in science, were not capable of doing science, and therefore did not contribute to the scientific process.

Building on her research on women in the American Ornithologists Union (AOU), and later in her dissertation on the history of Canadian ornithology, Marianne Ainley was able to place in context the problems faced by three outstanding North American women ornithologists because of combined social and domestic pressures.¹³ A new appreciation of the importance of women as writers and popularisers of science writers then led her to re-evaluate the works of five nineteenth-century Canadian women science writers. Although their works reached a wide audience at the time, with the exception of Catharine Parr Traill, most have since been forgotten.¹⁴ Without research on their life-histories, their

¹³ These women were Althea R. Sherman, Margaret M. Nice, and Amelia Laskey, See Marianne G. Ainley, "Field Work and Family: North American Women Ornithologists, 1900-1950," in *Uneasy Careers and Intimate Lives. Women in Science, 1789 - 1979*, eds. Pnina G. Abir-Am and Dorinda Outram (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 60-76. And, "From Natural History to Avian Biology: Canadian Ornithology 1860-1950" (Ph.D. Dissertation, McGill University, 1985). And, "The Involvement of Women in the American Ornithologist' Union. Unpublished paper, 1983.

¹⁴ In the nineteenth century, Catharine Parr Traill was known for her emigration literature rather than her science literature. The other women were Lady Dalhousie, Harriet Campbell Sheppard, Annie L. Jack, and Eliza M. Jones. Marianne G. Ainley, "Women and the Popularization of Science: 19th Century Women Science Writers in Canada" (Paper given at the Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association, Kingston, 16 October 1993). And "Science from the Backwoods; Catharine Parr Traill (1802-1899)" in *A Natural Eloquence: Women Re-Inscribing Science*, eds., Ann B. Shteir and Barbara Gates, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, Forthcoming).

place in Canadian science would have remained obscure.

The scientific areas most accepting to women were in the observational sciences like astronomy, botany, ornithology and anthropology. These fields required huge amounts of space and time for the collection of specimens or data, and were conducive to collaborations between married couples. In Canada, women's entry into education was about a generation later than in the U.S. and women faced many hardships in obtaining academic training and later, meaningful scientific work.

Other studies on women in science have also used a biographical approach. Researcher Nancy Slack studied nineteenth-century American women botanists in relation to their experiences as single persons, widows, or wives, and Ann B. Shteir investigated British women's botanical activities within a domestic context. Farley Kelly has researched a diverse group of nineteenth century Australian women science workers, and a more recent study has focused on women scientists who collaborated with male partners.¹⁵ Marcia Myers Bonta studied thirty-three women natural scientists, paying close attention to the American historical context.¹⁶ Her sketches are useful for determining the

¹⁵ Ann B. Shteir, "Botany in the Breakfast Room," and Nancy G. Slack, "Nineteenth-Century American Women Botanists: Wives, Widows, and Work," in *Uneasy Careers and Intimate Lives, Women in Science, 1789-1979*, eds., Pnina G. Abir-Am and Dorinda Outram, (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1989), 31-44, 77-103. And Farley Kelly, ed., *On the Edge of Discovery; Australian Women in Science* (Melbourne: Text Pub. Co., University of Melbourne, 1993.) And Helen M. Pycior, Nancy G. Slack, and Pnina G. Abir-Am, eds., *Creative Couples in the Sciences* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Marcia Myers Bonta, *Women in the Field. America's Pioneering Women Naturalists*. And *American Women Afield. Writings by Pioneering Women Naturalists*

difficulties facing each woman scientist according to her 'career' and background. As well, her work provides a wonderful review of original writings, many of which contain natural history data that has been relegated to dusty archival shelves.

There are few full length biographies on prominent women in the sciences. While there is an excellent book on nuclear scientist, Harriet Brooks,¹⁷ others, such as naturalists Louise de Kiriline Lawrence and Catharine Parr Traill await biographers. Feminist biography need not be restricted to women subjects, however, as Marianne Ainley demonstrates in her work on William Rowan, a British immigrant to Canada, as well as a European-trained scientist. In her text, she discusses Rowan's contributions to Canadian science and ornithology in connection to his significant relationships, economic status, non-science interests, and the social climate of the prairie west.¹⁸

One of the many challenges in writing the biography of Elsie Cassels has been to situate her within the context of late nineteenth-century prairie social history. According to existing scholarship, her experiences both confirm and contradict what is presently known about British women pioneers. Although it would be easier to locate her within the realm of pre-professional science, relying solely on her scientific pursuits would not provide an

(College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1991 and 1995.)

¹⁷ M. F. Rayner-Canham and G. W. Rayner-Canham, eds., *Harriet Brooks: Pioneer Nuclear Scientist* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queens' University Press, 1992.)

¹⁸ Marianne G. Ainley, *Restless Energy. A Biography of William Rowan, 1891-1957* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1993.)

accurate picture of either science or society. In much of the traditional prairie literature, women are either farm-wives and mothers who struggled within the confines of their homesteads, or single women who immigrated in hopes of finding employment or marriage.¹⁹ While some women were involved in various social organizations, little is known about their participation in scientific societies. The story of Elsie Cassels, a seeming anomaly, will broaden this perspective.

Canadian womens' historians, who wrote about the prairie experience in the 1970s and early 1980s, focused almost exclusively on British women. This is partly due to personal connection to the research material: scholars of British descent were likely to begin with records which reflected their own ethnic group. In some ways, their work became a celebration of "grandmothers," whose stories told of a rugged life in which hardships were great and survival was heroic.²⁰ Historians writing on similar topics in the

¹⁹ Gordon Morley and Doug Owram. "British Women and the West." And, "A Country in Need of Refinement: A Middle-Class Female View of Canada." in *Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada 1880-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 187-211. Also, Angela E. Davis, "Country Homemakers: The Daily Lives of Prairie Women as Seen Through the Woman's Page of the Grain Growers Guide, 1908-1928. In *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, ed., Donald Akensen, III (1992): 163-174. And Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie." *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21, 3 (1986): 32-52.

²⁰ Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg, "Farm Women on the Canadian Prairie Frontier: The Helpmate Image" in *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier. A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1983). And Susan Jackel, ed., *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty. British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982). Linda Rasmussen and Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne Wheeler, *A Harvest Yet to Reap. A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976). and

1990s are more likely to be influenced by feminist multiple-biography. This approach will present a more inclusive picture of society, one that incorporates First Nations peoples and those of different ethnic backgrounds, such as Europeans from non-British backgrounds, Afro-Canadians, and Asians. The difficulty of this task is considerable because of the meagre supply of pioneer writings by women in low socio-economic brackets.

When working towards an integrated history of science, many factors need consideration: the influence of European and non-Western science on society, the reintroduction of Native environmental knowledge, and feminist perspectives on gender, race, and class.²¹ Elsie Cassels' contribution to Canadian science combines her background in British natural history with her exposure to new ideas starting to emerge in North American science. How, when, and with whom she was able to pursue her passion for nature is directly related to her personal struggles. As a middle-class Scottish woman, whose marriage was 'for better or for worse,' her efforts to survive on a prairie homestead, and later, find a niche for herself as a British immigrant within a rapidly growing community, are integral to her life as an ornithologist and early conservationist.

Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West. Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984) and "Women and the Victorian Work Ethic on the Alberta Frontier. Prescription and Description." *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan 1905-1980*, eds., Howard Palmer and Donald Smith (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1980), 91-99.

²¹ Marianne G. Ainley, "Multiple Connections: Feminist Perspectives on an Integrated History of Canadian Science" (Invited presentation, History and Philosophy of Science Unit, University of New South Wales, Sidney, Australia, 10 May 1996).

2. Elsie Cassels and the Frontier Experience

While it would take roughly fifteen years for Elsie Cassels' scientific contributions to take shape, her settlement experiences are both typical and different from those of other British women who found themselves on the Canadian prairie. In the spring of 1889, Elsie McAlister met and married William Cassels, who had already been living in the American west for eight years. They emigrated in April. Theirs was an irregular marriage, performed without church or state ceremony, and carried out by a lodger at the McAlister household using a simple county warrant. The addresses of both Elsie and William were listed as the Free Church School House where the marriage took place.¹ William's mother, Hannah, may have had reason to object to their marriage on religious grounds as the Cassels were staunch supporters of the Church of England while the McAlisters belonged to the Free Church of Scotland.²

Although William Cassels was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1864, his parents were Scottish.³ As a widow, his mother returned home to Edinburgh where William enrolled in the Edinburgh Academy, a private secondary school which he attended until the age of fifteen.⁴ A clever man, whose immediate family included physicians and

¹ Registrar General for Scotland, University of Edinburgh Archives, 1889.

² Dr. Chalmers seceded from the Church of Scotland in 1843 in what became known as 'The Disruption'. His new sect became the Free Church of Scotland. James W. Buchan, *History of Pebbleshire*, III, (Edinburgh, 1927), 528.

³ William Cassels' father, Rev. Andrew Cassels, served as Vicar of Bately from 1839-74. "Bately Worthies. Portraits of Former Leading Citizens." *West Yorkshire Reporter* (England) 23 May, 1925.

scholars,⁵ William had first ventured to Chicago with the Wilkins family, in 1882,⁶ before accompanying them to Wyoming and then Iowa. When William returned to North America with his new bride, he would again seek out the Wilkinses who, by this time, had decided to try their luck near Red Deer, Alberta.

Before settling down, the Cassels made a short detour to Iowa, probably to sell William's remaining assets, then back-tracked to Winnipeg where they caught the CPR's transcontinental railway to Calgary. Passage by "Colonist car" was a fairly inexpensive way for settlers to journey to the west. Far from comfortable, the rock-hard seats jolted and swayed over the miles, while soot from the steam engine would sprinkle black particles on everything in sight.⁷ They were joined at one point by William's brother and his family, who came from England for a short visit. Together, they remained in Calgary while William obtained some land near Penhold, slightly south of Red Deer. A short time later, they departed for their homestead property, perched precariously on top of a mail stage stocked-piled with provisions and baggage.

There were many stories about the Cassels' difficult marriage, including William's frugality, which bordered on wife-abuse, and his tendency toward reclusiveness and

⁴ William Anderson Cassels, "Years 1875-1879," *Edinburgh Academy Records*, (1914), University of Edinburgh Archives.

⁵ These people were Jane B., Mary H. (scholar), Charles J. H. (agent for Standard Life Insurance Co.) John G. (physician), and Gilbert Kennedy (Vicar). *1881 Census for Edinburgh*, University of Edinburgh Archives.

⁶ Francis Wilkins was William's classmate at the Edinburgh Academy.

⁷ For a good description of "Colonist cars" see Evelyn Edgeller, *Mary Bell Barclay: Founder of Canadian Hostelling* (Calgary: Detselig Ent., 1988), 8-9.

eccentricity. It was generally believed they were poverty-stricken even though they had "good horses" and "good guns." This belief was largely due to observations by visitors that they looked "half-starved" most of the time.⁸ Elsie Cassels was competent with a rifle and shot game for the larder. While she tended the garden and built the furniture, rumours flowed that William suffered from fits of depression where he wouldn't speak to anyone for weeks, or do anything around the house. Neighbours often spoke of their concern for Elsie Cassels, whom they believed to be isolated and lonely, despite her consistent charm and good humour.⁹

Acquaintances believed that Elsie McAlister's marriage to William Cassels so displeased his family that they were banished to Canada for the remainder of their lives on 'remittance' instalments. Whether true or not, they easily fit this stereotype. It was well known that they received money from Britain, and neighbours regarded the Cassels' "green" farming skills with humour and disbelief. It was Elsie who handed the heavy sods up to William from the wagon during the building of a new roof, and she who was seen punching fence posts into the unbroken ground while William poured small amounts of water from a tin cup to soften each hole.¹⁰ Even being a parson's son did not improve William's reputation.

A cliché at the time suggested that 'remittance men' were usually parson's sons

⁸ "Pioneers of Central Alberta. Mr. and Mrs. Cassels Lived Frugal Life, But Left Estate of \$90,000," *Red Deer Advocate*, 28 March 1967.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

who, because of their sheltered English public schools, were incapable of doing any productive work in the 'Old Country.'¹¹ Writing in the 1910s, Georgina Binnie-Clark remarked that "Remittance-men. . . are just at the very bottom of things in Canadian estimation. . . Horsemanship was often way beyond their skill, and some bore the brunt of cruel jokes whether they deserved it or not."¹² It was precisely this incompetence with which many women had to deal. Without much training, most men couldn't even manage a horse-drawn plough, or guide it along a straight path.

Monica Hopkins, an Englishwoman who adjusted well to ranch life, describes in a letter to an Australian friend the plight of the Davis Family. They were living on adjacent land that Monica's husband described as "a 'brush pile' on which nothing but a gopher could make a living. While the husband was extremely gullible in believing all the propaganda of an easy life and quick fortunes, he was also terribly inept as a homesteader. His wife confessed that she never wanted to come to Canada, and had been quite content in the mining village they had come from. Their rudimentary cabin had one multipurpose room, one window, one door, and a very low roof. This cramped space housed themselves plus four boys, the eldest of whom was fifteen."¹³

The Irish born writer Moira O'Neill (a pen name for Agnes Skrine, née Higginson)

¹¹ Ellen M. Hughes, "Remittance Men," typescript, Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives, 1978.

¹² Susan Jackel, "Introduction," in *Wheat and Woman*, Georgina Binnie-Clark, reprinted from the 1914 edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), xvi.

¹³ Monica Hopkins, *Letters of a Lady Rancher* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1982), 22.

strongly contested the stereotyped view that as an 'Englishwoman' on the prairies, she was married to a 'hopelessly incompetent' Englishman, or that they "were to linger out an unenviable existence in the bare-handed struggle to make existence self-supporting, and that was all."¹⁴ Although some British settlers were considered as 'black sheep' of their family, and were paid to leave home, others were quite wealthy, equally arrogant, and spent money on anything they fancied. Still others were regular settlers, and received no income at all from the Old Country. The large wave of British immigrants into the west caused resentment in many people who were trying to sustain a living. Signs of "No English Need Apply" plastered the shop windows and was written into job postings. Few employers wanted the hassles of training a middle-class 'Englishman,' who had few practical skills. The remittance label, and the undesirability of having English neighbours, persisted well into the 1920s. Naturalist Tom Randall admitted in a letter that "Things are rather strained between Ruth [Tom's wife] and her father as he strongly objected to her marrying "one of the darned Englishmen. He's a Yankee, you see."¹⁵

In the 1880s and 1890s, the challenges of homesteading were similar in the regions north of Calgary.¹⁶ Life was undoubtedly hard. During the initial years, settlers often

¹⁴ Moira O'Neill, "A Lady's Life on a Ranch," in *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*, Jackel, 98. O'Neill returned with her husband to Ireland in 1902 where she became a successful poet and out-lived him by twenty-five years.

¹⁵ Thomas Randall, of Camrose, to Charles Snell, of Red Deer, correspondence, 3 April 1927, Snell Family Fonds, Red Deer and District Archives (hereafter SFF).

¹⁶ For an overview on homesteading, see Anna McNellis, "A Woman's View of Pioneer Life," *Alberta History* (summer 1994); 11-14; Joanna L. Stratton, "Aprons and Plows: Daily Life on the Prairie" in *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 57-59; Evelyn Slater McLeod, "Our Sod House,"

stayed with another family while their house was under construction. In the interim, some lived in a canvas tent well into the fall, using travelling chests as tables and chairs. Owing to the severe Alberta weather, snow often covered the boxes and bales that held their possessions. For those who were inexperienced, or too proud to ask for help, sod homes could even be lethal if not well constructed.¹⁷ In one pioneering account, the structural frame of the Campbell's 'soddie' gradually pulled away from the ridgepole, while seven tons of sod were poised to crush everyone and everything inside.¹⁸

When crops failed, or disasters such as fires or floods wiped out their entire holdings, it was often women who found the energy to start from scratch. Some encountered conditions that went far beyond their expectations. "We had no vegetables of any kind. Grain was only fit for cattle feed and poor at that. The winter of 1896-1897 rabbits had a disease and were unfit for food."¹⁹ The same year the Cassels arrived, the last frost occurred on June twenty-fifth and swooped in again on August fifth, leaving only

The Beaver (Autumn 1977): 12-15, and "Restless Pioneers," *The Beaver* (Summer 1976): 34-41. And Heather Robertson, "Homesteading," in *Salt of the Earth* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co., 1974), 28-107.

¹⁷ In building a "soddie," poles were notched and fitted together, leaving an opening for windows and a door. A ridgepole, which stretched lengthwise, held up the ceiling while sod was placed green-side down over the top. Spaces between the poles were chinked with a lime and sand plaster.

¹⁸ Marjorie Wilkins Campbell, *The Silent Song of Mary Eleanor* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983), 32-49.

¹⁹ Mrs. John Irwin Jameson (1895), "What did Western Canadian Pioneers Eat?" in *Canadian Women on the Move*, eds., Beth Light and Joy Parr (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1983), 171.

forty-two frost-free days.²⁰ In an interview, Elsie recounted their meagre provisions during the winter, and lack of adequate clothing.²¹

Whether or not a homestead was successful depended on one's individual perseverance and ability to survive. In studies done on 130 Albertan women, it was found that they did what was economically necessary, often performing tasks that were traditionally male.²² Previous studies done on Alberta pioneers indicate that farming successes were attributed to individualism, or every family, couple, or person for themselves.²³ Like other pioneer women, Elsie Cassels did whatever was necessary and had little time to analyze whether or not it was women's work.²⁴ Given that she had originated from a rural area, it would have made perfect sense to undertake even those tasks which would have calloused the hands of many able-bodied men.

²⁰ Calgary Horticultural Society, *The Calgary Gardener: The Essential Guide to Gardening in Alberta's Chinook Country* (Calgary: Fifth House, 1996), 2.

²¹ "Many Brave Women," *Red Deer Advocate*, 27 July 1955.

²² Eliane Leslau Silverman, *Last Best West. Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1984).

²³ Eliane Leslau Silverman, "Women and the Victorian Work Ethic on the Alberta Frontier: Prescription and Description" in *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan 1905-1980*, eds., Howard Palmer and Donald Smith (Vancouver: Tantalus Research, 1980), 91-99. And, Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies. A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 316.

²⁴ Barbara Evans, "We just lived it as we came along. Stories from Jessie's Albums." In *Standing on New Ground. Women in Alberta*, eds., Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi Warne (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993), 33-54. And, Julie Dorsh, "You Just Did What Had to be Done": Life Histories of Four Saskatchewan "Farmer's Wives." In *"Other" Voices; Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women*, eds., David De Brou and Aileen Moffat (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995), 116-130.

The Cassels were borderline between farmers and ranchers. William was likely attracted to the hierarchy of ranching, but at the time, his pocketbook could never have supported it. Large company ranches were prevalent in western Alberta in the 1880s, managed by wealthy easterners, and gentlemen landowners as well as aristocrats from Britain. In sharp contrast to the modest initial funds needed by subsistence farmers, ranching required a substantial capital investment in livestock and buildings. With its manager/employee relationship and semi-leisured lifestyle, ranching evolved differently from the rest of the mixed frontier.²⁵ Thus, if a family didn't have the financial means to establish a working ranch immediately, it was unlikely to acquire them at some later date, even if they already owned several stock animals. The implication was that settlers were very unlikely to rise to the higher status enjoyed by the rancher, and consequently made a much different contribution to the social development of a community.

Women's hardships were not as severe on the new ranches as in the agricultural settlements. Frame houses soon replaced earlier soddies or log cabins, and ranch style additions could be added when needed. Female settlers made a regular income from the selling of livestock, could purchase non-perishable goods, and could hire young women as governesses, housekeepers, and companions. The preparation of meals was difficult, and housework tended to vary according to the state of the family income. They made clothing, and did the washing, ironing, mending, and seasonal chores. Many kept track of the ranch's business accounts, and acted as doctor, veterinarian, and dentist when none

²⁵ David H. Breen, "The Ranching Frontier In Canada, 1897-1905," in *The Prairie West to 1905. A Canadian Sourcebook*, ed., Lewis G. Thomas (Oxford University Press, 1975), 217-229.

could be found or consulted.²⁶ Unlike homesteaders, these women rarely did much outdoor work because of their husband's objections to women doing predominantly male jobs. Perhaps this was because of traditional class-bound notions of gender roles rather than any unwillingness on behalf of ranch women.

The prevailing stereotype of the prairie woman as mere helpmate to her husband is slowly being eroded as more information about women's lives becomes available through autobiographies, letters, journals, and oral histories.²⁷ Some women were more optimistic about homesteading than historians first thought and recognized the economic and or social opportunities in the west before their husbands did. For others, it was the promise of adventure, or the improvement in their own, or their family's health. They were expected to be self-reliant and do whatever work was necessary. Many were in full functional, though not legal, partnership with their husbands in the farming business and participated in the decision making process, or made decisions on their own.²⁸ Subsistence and reproductive labour was performed inside the household, and labour involved in

²⁶ Linda Rasmussen, Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne Wheeler, *A Harvest Yet to Reap. A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976) 42.

²⁷ Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg, "Farm Women on the Canadian Prairie Frontier: The Helpmate Image" in *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1983), 71-90.

²⁸ Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21, 3 (1986): 32-52.

commodity or income generating production took place in the fields and barns.²⁹

Elsie Cassels was neither a helpmate to William nor a full partner.³⁰ The Cassels had started out in the Wavy Lake region, east of Penhold, in 1889, an area prone to early frost.³¹ William Cassels applied for this property in September, 1891, listing his occupation as "farmer." However, his application was cancelled by the government two months later, the reason being that "W.A. Cassels cannot satisfy you [the Commissioner] that he intends to become a bonafide settler [and] you will refuse his application to obtain this quarter section and hold it for actual settlement."³²

After moving to a second property near Clearview, closer to Red Deer, William tried again, in 1894, to obtain the rights to purchase 160 acres.³³ On a government patent form, he indicated that he and his wife were the only residents, and had been on the property since 1892. They had broken six acres of prairie, and within two years, their

²⁹ Sheila McManus, "Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women, 1905-1929," in *When Women Went West: Essays on Women and Western Canadian Colonization and Settlement*, eds., Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi Warne (Vancouver: UBC Press, forthcoming).

³⁰ Fairbanks and Sundberg, 71-90; Strong-Boag, 32-52.

³¹ For example, on 15 August 1890, a severe chill was recorded at Red Deer which reduced hay and grain harvests by more than fifty percent. E. L. Meeres, *The Homesteads that Nurtured a City. The History of Red Deer, 1880-1905* (Red Deer: Fletcher Printing Co., 1977), 121-22, 139-140.

³² Dominion Lands Office and Department of the Interior, Winnipeg, reference 218662, 3 December 1891, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

³³ This homestead was later called the Eversole Farm, and is currently part of a Red Deer golf course.

livestock had risen from five head of cattle to nine, and the number of horses varied from three to four. They also had one brood sow. The size of their house was sixteen by twenty-four, and valued at \$150.00. They had built two miles of fencing, erected two stables, one milk house, a privy, and a well, all valued at \$200.00. When asked if there were any minerals found on their land, he said no because he believed that the land was more valuable for stock. When questioned whether he had applied for homestead rights before, he claimed that he had abandoned a prior location due to "no water."³⁴

By 1895, patent records indicated that William and Elsie had cleared an additional five acres, had maintained all their livestock, and had converted their sod-roofed house to brick, measuring twenty-six by twenty-six. The government finally granted the Cassels title to their land on October, 25, 1897.³⁵ However, by 1902, William had sold the property to move into the growing town of Red Deer. He removed all the bricks of their first house and used them to construct their second one, a feat that caused many neighbours and acquaintances to snicker at his stinginess.³⁶ Their new home was called "Riverside" and people said it was terribly cold in the winter because William had skimped on the basement. Even so, the new property had many advantages over the farm. Neighbours commented that "it was deeply set in the trees and was a natural place for Mrs. 'Bird'

³⁴ William Cassels to Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Department of The Interior, Ottawa, 26 December 1894, and 19 August 1895, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

³⁵ John R. Hall, secretary to Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, to William Cassels, 30 November 1897, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

³⁶ "Pioneers," *Red Deer Advocate*.

Cassels.³⁷

What might have been viewed by neighbours as failure was in fact commonplace. In Alberta, forty-five percent of land claims did not survive first ownership.³⁸ Even experienced farmers, who had considerable knowledge of the environment, were vulnerable. Naturalist Tom Randall and his wife, Ruth, formerly of Castor, Alberta, moved to Camrose after a long struggle on their homestead. In a letter, Charles Snell offered his support and concern: "You soldier settlers are under a great handicap from the start and it is a wonder to me that so many stay with it as do." The decision to leave was partly based on the imminent birth of the Randall's next child, and Tom's prospects of finding work with the Parks Branch of the Department of the Interior.³⁹

Because the emigration literature painted such glowing pictures of pioneering success, failures were difficult to accept. According to the writings of Irish-born naturalist John Macoun, all that was needed for success was dry, level or rolling land, free from brush or other small obstacles, with an adequate supply of fresh water. He also claimed that the practice of throwing loose seed on the surface, before breaking the sod, would allow crops to grow amid the natural vegetation. Personal testimonies also circulated in British papers. One man claimed that it was "no uncommon thing to see potatoes which weigh from a pound and a half to two pounds each. . . and cabbages from three to four

³⁷ Harold Dawe of Red Deer, interview with author, 3 June 1994.

³⁸ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 309.

³⁹ Randall occasionally worked as an honorary game warden. Snell to Randall, correspondence, 16 February 1927, SFF.

feet in circumference."⁴⁰

Despite what was said about the Cassels, she had enough skill to direct the farm, and his physical strength was evident in his passion for outdoor work. This information contests the myth that he was an incompetent remittance man. He may not have found farming very satisfying, but his ability to handle business transactions led him to amass a private fortune in real estate before the first war, even underwriting private mortgages when the opportunity arose.⁴¹ Although their marriage continued to intrigue many people, the recollections of a close neighbour are as follows: "Mrs. Cassels, with her husband, was our next door neighbour for many years. . . She was my mother's best friend, and a dear friend to us all. . . I have no reason to believe the Cassels's marriage was other than a happy one and I cannot understand why his parents would disapprove."⁴²

Another memoir provides a slightly different view.

[Will] did the shopping as he controlled the purse strings. They wore old clothes. She didn't have many close friends because of a standoffish husband. They had skimpy meals, sometimes with wild berries, and I would sometimes go to the store for them to buy ten cents worth of butter, or fifteen cents worth of hamburger, and asked to bring back all the change. They lived in a very cold house with no basement, and gathered wood from the bush around them. The ANHS was their only social outlet, and they were not particularly happy as a couple. Maybe because they were half-starved, and this was the cause of the friction between them.⁴³

⁴⁰ Morley and Owsram, 123-4.

⁴¹ Michael Dawe of Red Deer, interview with author, 3 June 1994.

⁴² Margaret Yule of Saanitchon, B.C., correspondence with author, 14 February 1995.

⁴³ Kerry Wood of Red Deer, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

The Cassels were never able to have children, something which probably mattered more to Elsie than to William, who "always had trouble approaching kids."⁴⁴ Often regarded as "aloof, but not unfriendly" he was fearfully respected by youngsters in Red Deer. According to one recollection, "Bill always had a moustache, took big steps, and wore a bulky coat with a cape attached. . . he was a massive shape coming down the street. . . (In contrast, Elsie) was approachable and kind, and in those days, kids were afraid of adults."⁴⁵ Without children to keep her company, or help with chores, many acquaintances imagined her to have a surplus of spare time. Yet few people would have classified Elsie Cassels in the liberating term of 'new woman.'⁴⁶

Having children on the farming frontier often meant the difference between success and failure. The loneliness and greater risk in newly-settled areas with a lower population probably encouraged parents to strive for large families. Children filled multiple roles on the frontier as workers, producers of goods, providers for the elderly, and future inheritors of the farm or property assets. As most settlers had obtained homesteading quarters in remote areas of the prairies, the risks involved in having children must have run parallel to the risks of economic disaster should the homestead fail due to outright exhaustion of its

⁴⁴ Harold Dawe of Red Deer, interview with author, 3 June 1994.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ According to Linda Rasmussen et al, "the 'new woman' was an autonomous person, with rights and priorities of her own. She was intelligent, self-directing and financially independent, probably unmarried: a career woman," 88.

owners.⁴⁷

According to Nanci Langford, prairie women who were about to become mothers, or were already, developed strong sisterhood bonds during the settlement years.⁴⁸ As childbirth on the prairie was fraught with many dangers, such as isolation and lack of medical care, extended family and women who had first hand experience often volunteered to assist others in need. This included inexperienced women too, who happened to be the only helping hands within miles. There was little efficient contraception available, and unwanted pregnancies added to the emotional and financial burdens carried by many women. Research done by Judith Leavitt in 1980 has shown that many American women at the turn of the century feared death with every pregnancy, whether or not it was brought to term.⁴⁹ Even women who were unable to conceive worried continually about their chances. Motherhood was so precarious that pregnancies were often not mentioned in letters, diaries, or memoirs, which may explain why there is no mention of this subject in any of Elsie Cassels' remaining correspondence.

Reasons for the inability to conceive might include extreme overwork on the

⁴⁷ With little land left to improve or cultivate, the need for child labour usually fell, and the time between births tended to rise. See William L. Marr, "Family-Size Limitation In Canada West, 1851: Some Historical Evidence," *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, ed., Donald Akenson, VII (Langdale Press, 1990): 273-291.

⁴⁸ Nanci Langford, "Childbirth on the Canadian Prairies, 1880-1930," *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 8, 3 (1995): 278-302.

⁴⁹ Dianne Dodd, "The Canadian Birth Control Movement: Two Approaches to the Dissemination of Contraceptive Technology," *Scientia Canadensis*, IX, 28 (1985): 53-66. See also Judith Leavitt, *Brought to Bed. Childbearing in America, 1750-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.)

homestead and/or an inadequate diet on the part of both partners. Certainly during Elsie Cassels' prime childbearing years, she was often underweight and involved in strenuous labour on the farm. Other possibilities include poor health or chronic illness. According to Mini Cunningham, a young woman who cared for her in later years, "[Elsie] had heart trouble, had it quite some years. She couldn't get too excited and always walked slowly. Really, since she was married, she'd been ill most of her life."⁵⁰ Mention of illness was common in Elsie Cassels' correspondence to William Rowan, where she talked about having to rest due to high blood pressure.⁵¹

In the recollections of Harold Dawe, who was a youngster in the 1920s,

Bill had the physique, but she was very bright. They had a rare, double-ender Peterborough boat, and he could really row that thing. He made it all around Sylvan Lake once or twice a year, and rowed a couple of miles to the village store. . . He would also volunteer for road gangs. In those days, farmers could work off some of their taxes that way. "⁵²

After Elsie Cassels suffered a fatal stroke on Saturday, the twelfth of November, 1938, "William stayed within himself. Then he was in hospital for awhile. It was a big loss for him when she died."⁵³

The Cassels had spent thirteen years on their prairie homestead. Starting out in an

⁵⁰ Mini Cunningham of Red Deer, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

⁵¹ Elsie Cassels and William Rowan, selected correspondence, Red Deer and District Archives, and William Rowan Papers, Edmonton, University of Alberta Archives (hereafter ANHS and WRP)

⁵² Harold Dawe, *Ibid.*

⁵³ Cunningham, *Ibid.* And "Many Attend Funeral for Mrs. Cassels," *Red Deer Advocate*, 18 November 1938.

isolated location with very few material goods, Elsie and William progressed from a canvas tent to a sod-roofed cabin, and finally to a brick house. They had been able to acquire and maintain livestock, and clear eleven acres of prairie before deciding to sell their holdings and move to Red Deer. Attending the occasional dance or social function in Innisfail or Red Deer, Elsie Cassels was freed to mingle and share experiences with other women. Although much of her story during this period has been lost, neighbours describe a woman well equipped to handle any difficulties in her path. She could deal with a cantankerous husband as efficiently as with any ornery horse, and was not afraid to go off alone in search of game for supper. She recalled that her most exciting experiences in those days were their excursions to and from Calgary, which included overnight stops at various road houses, and fording the Red Deer River at the Old Crossing.⁵⁴

Recent studies have shown that many women, like Elsie Cassels, adapted positively to the land in two ways: through relationships with family and friends, and through some creative or imaginative activity in which they could discover their unique relationship within it.⁵⁵ Contrary to the recurrent themes in frontier literature, which

⁵⁴ The Red Deer Crossing is now the present site of the Fort Normandeau Historical Site. When the Calgary Edmonton Railway pushed through in 1891, the community was abandoned, having served travellers up until then. See "Many Brave Women: Mrs. William Cassels," *Red Deer Advocate*, 27 July 1955. And, Jean Gibson, *The Old House. A History of "The Spruces," A Stopping House and Farm Home* (Red Deer: Privately Published, 1975.)

⁵⁵ Helen. M. Buss, "Women and the Garrison Mentality; Pioneer Women Autobiographers and Their Relation to the Land," in *Re (Dis)covering Our Foremothers: Nineteenth Century Canadian Women Writers*, ed., Lorraine McMullen, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), 123-136. For an American perspective, see Sandra L. Myers, "The Pleasing Awfulness: Women's Views of Wilderness," *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press,

emphasized safe indoor havens by stressing the immense landscape, aggressive climate, and terrible isolation, most women made the natural world part of their lives and wrote about themselves within it to friends and relatives. Aside from practical concerns for their families' safety, they were not as enclosed or engulfed by the land as suggested in most fiction from this era. Adaptations to the land meant developing new strategies for success; old skills were fitted to new needs, the desire for community increased, and new knowledge about the environment helped them feel secure.⁵⁶

Writing in the 1890s, Moira O'Neill, for example, was immensely captivated by the natural landscape. Although she employed a cook, she simplified her household as much as possible in order to leave room for other, more enjoyable pursuits. There were no elaborate meals or superfluous furniture, and she limited indoor work to two hours per day. Like Elsie Cassels, Moira O'Neill had no children and confessed that when she first came to Alberta, she did "nothing at all, and enjoyed it very much" spending many hours riding solo on the prairie.⁵⁷

Elsie Cassels would never be able to claim this sort of independence. However, she was able to adapt her Scottish skills to a prairie environment, keep her intellect and good humour intact, and continue to grow both as an individual and a naturalist. While she

1982), 1-11, 167-212.

⁵⁶ On fear of the natural environment, see E. Tina Crossfield, "Experience and Perception: A Comparison of the Environmental Outlooks of Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie in 19th Century Canada," *Bulletin Simone de Beauvoir Institute Bulletin*, 15 (Montreal: Simone de Beauvoir Institute, 1995), 20-30.

⁵⁷ Moira O'Neill, "A Lady's Life on a Ranch."

would never have the luxury or privilege of being idle at home, her tanned complexion and soft-soled shoes would have blended in with the marshes as if they belonged.

3. Elsie Cassels and the Conservation Movement in Canada and Alberta

Starting in 1902, Elsie Cassels was able to participate in a variety of new activities in Red Deer, and for the next twenty-five years would work hard for Canadian science. At the age of thirty-eight, she was still working far too hard at balancing the needs of her husband, their meagre household, and her natural history interests. She continued to study wildlife and plants on her own, but soon took an active role in the local chapter of the Alberta Natural History Society (ANHS), joining in its inaugural year in 1906. With the additional purchase of thirty-three acres of shoreline property at Sylvan Lake (formerly Snake Lake), she carried out field work on flora and fauna in both regions.¹ The isolated north shore, where the Cassels had their summer residence, was surrounded by poplars, cottonwoods, and birches. The couple divided their time between their log cabin, affectionately named *The Ark*, and their Red Deer home, called *Riverside*, leaving town in mid-May and returning mid-November.²

There was little doubt that the prairie frontier was becoming civilized. In less than a generation, what was once an expanse of unploughed prairie quickly transformed into ranches and farms. With the abandonment of the Old Crossing near Red Deer, the long strings of Red River carts, pulled by stocky Indian ponies, ceased to haul cargo and supplies down the trail. Since 1900, Red Deer had been linked by the Calgary and

¹ Sylvan Lake Historical Society, *Reflections of Sylvan Lake* (Calgary: Friesen Printers, 1984), 65.

² An application to purchase the land at Snake Lake was made by William Cassels in March, 1903. He states that the area is "swampy and unsuitable for agricultural purposes. . . and is not railway land." Cassels to the Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, 17 March 1903, Provincial Archives of Alberta.

Edmonton Railway, which had already been making regular stops for the last two years. A spur line, connecting Red Deer to other townships west of Red Deer, facilitated outings into the Parkland where people could relax at Sylvan and Gull Lakes on warm, summer days. According to the Dominion census, the population grew from 323 individuals, in April 1901, to 851 one year later, when Red Deer became incorporated as a town. St. Luke's Anglican Church, a focal point for the young community, officially opened in November, just after the Agricultural Society's ninth Annual Fair. A hospital opened in 1903, followed by construction of the Red Deer Public Reading Room, which was stocked with periodicals, newspapers, and writing materials.³

The demographics were also changing. American settlers streamed into the region, adding to the British, Estonian, Icelandic, Finnish, and Swedish who had taken up settlement land during the past two decades. Having been restricted by the treaties of the 1870s and 1880s, small bands of Stoney, Cree, Salteau, and Métis were seldom seen in town, except for those who bought provisions or attended the Indian industrial school, in operation since 1893.⁴ This unusual mix of people from different nations would hold

³ Train service from Calgary to Red Deer commenced on 14 April 1890. For the general development of the town, see E. L. Meeres, *The Homesteads that Nurtured a City. The History of Red Deer, 1880-1905* (Red Deer: Fletcher Printing Co., 1977), 120, 138, 212, 228, 234-45, 249-253. Also, Donald G. Wetherell and Irene R. A. Kmet, *Town Life. Main Street and the Evolution of Small Town Alberta, 1880-1947* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995), xiv, 80. And *Red Deer Historical Walking Tour* (Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism and the Red Deer Historical Preservation Committee, circa 1990.)

⁴ Meeres, 138, 212. And Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), 37-51.

different ideas about the land and its uses for wildlife.

Even though William was moderately interested in nature, Elsie Cassels sought wider expertise using the ANHS as a starting point. One of the first natural history clubs in western Canada to form a cohesive group,⁵ it was launched as a successor to the Territorial Natural History Society (TNHS) in 1903 under the leadership of Dr. Henry George, a British physician keenly interested in birds.⁶ The ANHS was recognized by the Provincial Government Registrar as an ancillary branch of the Department of Agriculture, whose annual bulletins published their activities. They also received an annual grant of one hundred dollars, which was distributed to the society's satellite branches. While Henry George and Elsie Cassels would direct the ANHS together for several years, Elsie's major influence would emerge only after George's retirement in 1922 to Vancouver.

The impact of natural history clubs on Canadian science and conservation from the early 1900s until the 1930s should not be underestimated. Among the earliest organizations for intellectual activity in Canada, they attracted membership from a wide range of occupations other than science, and were not only concerned with gathering data,

⁵ The Edmonton Field Naturalist's Club was formed in 1907. The Calgary Field Naturalists' Society began in 1910, while others in Alberta came into existence in the 1960s. "The Federation of Alberta Naturalists," *Alberta Naturalist* special issue, 3, suppl. (Fall 1996): 18-33. The much older Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club started in 1879, along with the Manitoba Historical and Scientific Society, while the Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds was established in 1917.

⁶ The TNHS required a change of name in Alberta after the division of the North West Territories into two separate provinces in 1905. Prior to this political event, members of the TNHS could be found in Assiniboia and Saskatchewan. See M. T. Myers and D. J. Stiles, "History of the Calgary Field-Naturalists' Society," *Alberta Naturalist*, special issue, 1 (July 1981): 40-41.

but with bringing it to the attention of the scientific community through publication.⁷ Holding regular monthly meetings, these clubs maintained an impressive selection of books and periodicals, sponsored public lectures, and led field trips for the purpose of collecting specimens. Many members came from the educated middle classes, and worked as pharmacists, medical doctors, teachers, and clergy. Still others were clerks, skilled tradesmen, or farmers.⁸ Members would often choose one area of natural history that interested them, and share their findings or speculations with the entire group. In many localities, newcomers did not know which species were residents in an area, or only migrated through it. Therefore, people like Elsie Cassels were able to make significant contributions by generating detailed species lists, writing articles in popular journals, lecturing to other groups and natural history societies, and corresponding between themselves and others.

Organized by volunteer scientists, natural history societies represented the few collective voices raised over habitat destruction and diminishing wildlife. Although the reasons for wildlife decline were not fully understood, the practices of market gunning and plume shooting were already driving some species over the edge. While the "balance of nature theory,"⁹ or the interdependence of species, was still thirty years ahead, some women and some men, who were living in close proximity to nature and had scientific

⁷ Carl Berger, *Science, God and Nature in Victorian Canada*, 1982 Joanne Goodman Lectures (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 10-13.

⁸ Berger, 12.

⁹ Richard Mackie, *Hamilton Mack Laing: Hunter -Naturalist* (Victoria: SONO NIS Press, 1985), 146.

interests, would be among the first in Canada to recognize the danger signs. Native people already knew, but few people asked them.

Historically, conservation efforts in Canada were largely due to American initiative. Before 1850, wildlife was considered as a free public good and fluctuations in their numbers were seen as naturally occurring phenomena, not as the result of intense human activity. A few regional laws offered protection to some game species, but were rarely enforced. In particular, waterfowl were at great risk because behaviours such as migration and reproduction, were not well understood and flight patterns took them outside provincial or national boundaries. Other species were believed expendable, and hunters were encouraged to destroy predators which threatened either human, domestic, or wildlife populations. This list not only included cougars, wolves, and foxes but many predatory birds such as hawks, eagles, and owls. Given the perception of limitless space and abundant wildlife in North America, it came as a shock to many people that a species, such as the passenger pigeon, could become extinct by 1914.

When the decline in wildlife was finally taken seriously, one solution undertaken in the United States was to change the structure of property rights. When fencing began to enclose properties, opportunities were reduced for others to hunt or observe wild birds or mammals. Some owners even attempted to protect game at their own peril by posting no trespassing signs and chasing away poachers. Access to game animals had always been taken for granted as an important frontier liberty. Subsistence hunters, or those who scrounged their existence from the land, felt that shooting game for food was completely within their rights. Propelled by the actions of concerned sportsmen, a proprietary interest

in wildlife found its way into U.S. legislation in 1900 (Lacey Act), and game laws were initiated defining seasons, bag limits, licenses, and acceptable hunting methods. The problems, however, only seemed to intensify.

Sportsmen, market gunners, and landowners fought continuously over wildlife access, and differences in lifestyle created much tension among all three groups. Sport hunting was a relatively new activity in the U.S. and was modeled on the English tradition of the sport hunting gentleman. He could be readily identified by a deep interest in natural history, specialized vocabulary, code of ethics, and fashionable dress. Above all, a sportsman sought to distinguish himself from a subsistence hunter, who shot to survive, or a market hunter, who shot to sell. This elite, influential class led the movement for restricted access on wild animals, pressed the government for better game laws, and restricted membership in sporting organizations.¹⁰ Indeed, the majority of nineteenth-century pioneer conservationists, including Henry George, were themselves recreational hunters or natural history collectors.¹¹

The market hunters carried a negative image. They were often viewed by sportsmen as farmers, frontier settlers, disgruntled youth, and/or unwelcome immigrants. Many worked for railroads and lumber companies, and their unsporting methods included

¹⁰ James A. Tober, *Who Owns the Wildlife? The Political Economy of Conservation in Nineteenth Century America* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), 52.

¹¹ A list of 80 impressive names includes Theodore Roosevelt, George Bird Grinnell, Gifford Pinchot, Ernest Thompson Seton, John Burroughs, John J. Audubon, and C. Hart Merriam. See John F. Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation* (New York: Winchester Press, 1975), 45-46. See also Maxine Benson, *Martha A. Maxwell, Rocky Mountain Naturalist* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1986.)

nets, camouflage, and rapid-fire guns. Their effectiveness was consumer-driven, and led to the slaughter of bison for skins and tongues, the shooting of game birds during breeding season, and the killing of songbirds for their feathers. A single hunter in California claimed to have marketed 6,380 geese, 5,956 ducks, 367 sandhill cranes, and 60 swans while working during a nine month period.¹² American sportsmen viewed the rise in commercialism as the single major factor in wildlife decline.

With the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885, trophy hunting, adventurism, and settlement were actively promoted in regions of western Canada that had previously been inaccessible to most people.¹³ Urban populations, who might have wanted to hunt for themselves but couldn't, provided a growing market for prepared game. With a firm link to eastern markets, refrigerated rail cars allowed dealers to obtain 'exotic' meats from greater distances and distribute them more easily. Opportunities flourished for mineral exploration by prospectors and miners, and alpine mountaineers flocked to the Rockies for new challenges. Because Canadian initiatives focused on resource development, when the national parks were first established preservation was coupled with the tourist industry.¹⁴ With little 'wilderness' regulation, and practically no one to enforce it, most animals were increasingly at risk.

Canadians were aware of conservation efforts in the United States, but due to

¹² Tober, 78.

¹³ E. J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada. The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude Publishing Ltd., 1983).

¹⁴ Banff National Park, established in 1885, was Canada's first.

sparse frontier settlements, great distances between cities, and lack of knowledge about wildlife, protection developed at a slower pace. While some provincial governments, notably Ontario, already had some legislation in place, the closing of the 'eastern' frontiers didn't make much impression on the western myth of superabundance.¹⁵ While most federal politicians were unconcerned, a small group of senior civil servants initiated the first policies that formed the basis for Canadian conservation.¹⁶ Influenced by what had been taking place in America with regard to national parks, game associations, and nature literature, they watched what was happening in similar U.S. government departments, like Agriculture, and monitored their progress. Even though the singular achievements of these men are commendable, before the ratification of the Migratory Bird Convention Act in 1917 there was literally no protection in place for most Canadian birds.¹⁷

Government science in Canada was utilitarian. The land was considered as a warehouse of resources where a knowledge of soils, minerals, and farming practices would prove economically valuable.¹⁸ Federal or provincial funding for basic scientific

¹⁵ Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife. The Beginning of Preservation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 10-11.

¹⁶ These men were Howard Douglas, superintendent of Rocky Mountain Park; Robert Campbell, Director of the Forestry Branch; James Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks; Maxwell Graham, of the Parks' Animal Division; and Gordon Hewitt, Dominion Entomologist with the Department of Agriculture and Consulting Zoologist to other departments. Foster, 13-14.

¹⁷ Marianne G. Ainley, "The Emergence of Canadian Ornithology - An Historical Overview to 1950" in *Contributions to the History of North American Ornithology* (Boston: Nuttall Ornithological Club Press, 1995), 283-302.

¹⁸ Susanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada. Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987). See also Trevor

research was scant, and if results were not immediately useful, then more far-sighted projects were not encouraged. This lack of government interest, of which the British administration was partly to blame, would effectively stall some areas of Canadian science. For example, because Britain had no government policy to investigate the worth of birds either in Britain or its colonies, Canadian ornithology lagged behind that of the United States. Where the most likely position for a naturalist/ornithologist should have been with the Department of Agriculture,¹⁹ in fact the first person employed in that capacity was botanist John Macoun, who worked for the Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada (GSC).²⁰

Along with the GSC, the U.S. government's rail and boundary surveys encouraged naturalists to keep records of their observations and collect various species when appropriate.²¹ Agents with the U.S. Biological Survey felt that birds were a farmer's best hope of controlling harmful insects and noxious weeds, and enlisted the help of settlers to discover more about regional species. The work of science historian Marianne G. Ainley

H. Levere, "What is Canadian About Science in Canadian History?" *Science, Technology, and Canadian History*, eds., R. A. Jarrell and N. R. Ball (Wilfred University Press, 1980), 14-22.

¹⁹ In the U.S., there was a paid position for ornithology in the Department of Agriculture in 1885. A similar position in the Canadian government would have made a large difference in the early accomplishments of this field. Marianne G. Ainley, "From Natural History to Avian Biology: Canadian Ornithology 1860-1950" (Ph.D Dissertation, McGill University, 1985), 84.

²⁰ John Macoun was not well equipped at the time to handle other specialties like zoology and ornithology. See Ainley, Dissertation, 88.

²¹ The GSC was founded in 1842, in Montreal by William Logan, and is the oldest scientific establishment in the federal Government. See Ainley, Dissertation, 70.

has shown that all active Canadian ornithologists from the late nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century contributed notes to migration studies and data was sent to the U.S. Biological Survey, American Ornithologists Union (AOU), and only much later to the National Museum of Canada.²² In the case of Margaret and Esther Wemyss of Saskatchewan (1898-1940) daily records of their bird sightings were forwarded to the former.²³

The federal government had been slow to implement the necessary changes. However, two groups are worth mentioning; the Canadian Forestry Association (CFA), established in 1906, and the Canadian Commission of Conservation (CCC) in 1909, which struggled for twelve years before being dissolved in 1921.²⁴ The CFA was particularly important because it provided a national forum where government, business, and academic science could exchange views and ideas, such as forest ownership, water quality, wildlife management, and education.²⁵ This set the stage for Canada's participation in the North American Conservation Conference in 1909, after which the CCC was formed with

²² Renamed The U.S. Biological Survey in 1919, it was formerly a Department of Agriculture section which had been dealing with economic ornithology since 1885. The AOU was founded in 1883. While the GSC had a small museum of its own, specimens were eventually incorporated into the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa, which opened in 1911. This was later renamed the National Museum of Canada in 1926.

²³ C. Stuart Houston, "The Wemyss Sisters: Saskatchewan's First Lady Birdwatchers, 1898-1940," *Blue Jay*, 39, 1 (March 1981): 26-29.

²⁴ Thomas L. Burton, "The Historical Perspective," *Natural Resource Policy in Canada: Issues and Perspectives* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 28-33.

²⁵ Burton, 29.

Clifford Sifton as Chairman.²⁶ The accomplishments of the CCC are more subtle. While it introduced the concept of a yearly National Wildlife Conference, it reinforced the notion that conservation was a handy tool for natural resource development. In other words, government supported science and technology were to be deftly pointed towards industry.

While there would be no influential or well organized Sierra Club or Audubon Society to lobby the Canadian government for wildlife preservation, some natural history societies were able to voice their concerns to like-minded individuals in more powerful positions. For example, the Province of Quebec Society for the Protection of Birds (PQSPB), the Canadian Society for the Protection of Birds, the Essex County Wild Life Conservation Association, and a number of smaller societies, in conjunction with the CCC, saved Bonaventure Island, Percé, and Point Pelee as bird reserves where hunting would be prohibited.²⁷ These areas and others fell under the administration of James Harkin, Commissioner of the Parks Branch, who was deeply interested in creating more sanctuaries and wildlife reserves. Through correspondence with Harkin, the ANHS would later protect the delicate Gaetz Lakes ecosystem from rampant exploitation in 1924.²⁸

Individuals were also effective in taking a stand on preservation. As early as 1885, Catharine Parr Trail expressed her concern in *Studies of Plant Life* over the disappearance

²⁶ The CCC was an independent government body responsible only to Parliament. The story of its demise is one of bitter argument over jurisdiction, rivalry between other government departments, and personality conflicts. During its term, the CCC launched the first national Wildlife Conference in 1919. See Foster, 210-216.

²⁷ Point Pelee was exempt from the non-hunting and trapping policy. Foster, 197.

²⁸ About James Harkin, see ANHS correspondence, Red Deer and District Archives (hereafter ANHS), 1922-24.

of forests and woodland plants by cutting and firing in the district of Peterborough, Ontario. She called for the protection of these wild spaces in the form of national parks and botanical gardens and insisted that written records be made of plants which were important for dyes, medicines, spices, and other uses.²⁹ Mary Shäffer (b.1861), of Pennsylvania, first worked with her husband, a botanist, producing paintings and photographs for a detailed study of the flora of the Canadian Rockies. Her individual actions resulted in the preservation of Maligne Lake, near Jasper, as a parkland and refuge for game species. Elizabeth Parker (b.1856), of Nova Scotia, was among the first journalists to publicize the mountains with regards to aesthetics, preservation, recreation and science, and was instrumental in organizing the Canadian Alpine Club (CAC, 1906) which included both women and men in its membership. Parker used her environmental knowledge to assist the government, and through her influence in the CAC, helped protect new parks from commercial exploitation.

Not all sciences were based on their applied value. In British North America, scientific culture consisted of various branches of natural history (geology, entomology, botany, ornithology, etc, and applied agriculture) and natural philosophy (such as physics and chemistry). Composed mainly of 'inventory' style investigations of new lands, science

²⁹ Marianne G. Ainley, "Science from the Backwoods." E. Tina Crossfield, "Experience and Perception: A Comparison of the Environmental Outlooks of Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie in 19th Century Canada," *Bulletin Simone de Beauvoir Institute Bulletin*, 15 (Montreal: Simone de Beauvoir Institute, 1995), 27. Catharine Parr Traill, *Studies of Plant Life: Or Gleaning from the Forest, Lake and Plain* (Ottawa: A. A. Woodburn, 1885), 212-3. Pearl Ann Reichwein, "Beauty, Health and Moral Uplift. Guardians of the Rockies," *The Beaver* (August-September 1994): 4-13.

was the basis for increasing and diffusing knowledge. Anyone was welcome to participate in 'collecting' and recording information, and to some extent, the activities of a few, such as geologist William Logan and the GSC (formed in 1842), fuelled ideas of western expansion despite Canada's uncertain political boundaries prior to Confederation.³⁰

Before natural history specialized into botany, ornithology, entomology, and geology, men and women who found enjoyment and fascination with the environment moved easily from the study of flowers to birds, insects, mammals, and even stars. These people were largely self-taught, since opportunities for scientific training were only available at a few colleges by the early nineteenth century.³¹ As many women could not attend these institutions, their access to science was often through male relatives. Many middle-class women settlers in New England already had a growing involvement in nature study through school teaching, the writing of children's literature, and organization of women's clubs³² Like their male counterparts, they were as willing to endure discomfort, ill health, single life, and even poverty in order to pursue their passion for nature.

³⁰ Zeller, *Ibid.*

³¹ Catharine Parr Traill (1802-1899), a naturalist who emigrated from Britain, questioned in 1868 whether a botanist was a herbarium/museum-based taxonomist, or like herself, a field naturalist. See Ainley, "Catharine Parr Traill (1802-1899). A Woman Science Writer." The Merriam family of New England, during the same era, offered their own definition of a naturalist as "one who knew not only the plants and animals, but stars, rocks, birds, and all of nature's wonders." See Harriet Kofalk, *No Woman Tenderfoot: Florence Merriam Bailey, Pioneer Naturalist* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1989), 9.

³² Carolyn Merchant, "Nature, Mother, and Industry," *Ecological Revolutions. Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 250-260.

From the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a noticeable shift in Canadian science away from Britain, with whom Canada had shared information, scientific ideas, and the safeguard of museum specimens.³³ Those involved in natural history increasingly looked to the U.S. for institutional affiliation and scientific exchange. While some Canadians continued to pay membership dues to British scientific organizations, and to publish in British journals, many were now seeking association with American peers and sending articles to U.S. publications. In return, Americans collected specimens for their own museums, and carried out extensive research protocols in Canada with little or no organized opposition. While the impact of American science on Canada has yet to be assessed, many scientists living in Canada were anxious to do original work in their own country before too many species disappeared.³⁴

By the 1890s, a small but distinct Canadian scientific community was moving towards professionalization. However, for serious volunteers like Elsie Cassels, there was ample room for broad natural history study of which ornithology, or the study of birds, was one of the most popular. The number of Canadians interested in this field rose significantly between 1860 and 1890. Their work consisted of patient, repeated observations over a wide geographic area, the recording of birds found or stalked (in later years, with a camera instead of a rifle), notes on nesting behaviors, and the listing of new species. There are several reasons why birds were studied so intensely. Aside from giving pleasure to human observers, birds appeared to be closely related to the environment in

³³ Ainley, "The Emergence of Canadian Ornithology," 8.

³⁴ Ainley, Dissertation, 88, 120.

either a useful (such as eating insects which damaged crops) or disturbing (or predatious) way. The scope of ornithology was wide open to new discoveries or theories.³⁵ Lists generated over long periods of time could indicate the number of breeding, wintering, and migratory birds in a specific geographic location and region. With additions and deletions, they could reveal habitat changes due to human activity. The latter reason was a fairly urgent mission on the part of ornithologists because of the imminent danger of extinction for several North American species.

The trials and frustrations were a challenge to early ornithological field workers. Modern field guides did not exist, and many natural history lists contained errors and inaccuracies. As late as 1919, there was a lack of Canadian bird books,³⁶ and museum collections were too widely dispersed for efficient comparative work. Science, itself, was also in a state of transition. Only thirty years had passed since Charles Darwin first published his *Origin of Species* (1859) but few naturalists of Elsie Cassels' generation thought much about evolution.³⁷ Many still believed that the best way to decide whether a new species was actually a sub-species, was to shoot first and save their opinions for later.

³⁵ Darwin built part of his evolutionary theory on finches.

³⁶ Some of the available bird books were: Frank M. Chapman, *Birdlife: A Guide to the Study of Our Common Birds* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1907) ; Chester Reed, *Bird Guide: Landbirds East of the Rockies from Parrots to Bluebirds* (Toronto: Musson Book C., 1905.) ; Roger Tory Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds* was not published until 1934.

³⁷ Darwin's theories would not have a real impact until after the emergence of genetics and the modern synthesis in the 1930s and 1940s. Marianne G. Ainley, *Restless Energy: A Biography of William Rowan, 1891- 1957* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1993), 196-7, 219, 236. See also Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution. The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 250.

Gradually, as knowledge of the economic value of birds grew, concern for their welfare prompted more field observations and less 'collecting.' Prismatic binoculars, developed in Germany in 1900, were a tremendous advance and partially led to a transition in the way birds would be studied.

Until the end of the nineteenth century, ornithology was mainly concerned with classification, distribution, and migration through the examination of museum specimens. Better field equipment and photographic cameras, as well as new roads and rail lines, which allowed easier access to more remote areas, stimulated an interest in life-history work. Indeed, ornithologists resisted the trend towards specialization because living birds could not be studied in isolation from their natural environment. As no college or university degree for ornithology then existed in North America, practically anyone with a serious interest in birds could be an ornithologist. Most were self-educated specialists, who were first naturalists or European trained scientists. Reputations could often be made or broken in the pages of British, American, or Canadian natural history journals, as well as informally through personal correspondence, or at meetings. As few paid scientists, either in government or academia, had the time or institutional support to carry out extensive field work, many volunteers had the opportunity to participate in large scale studies involving observation and behaviour. Women ornithologists could therefore find themselves associated with some of the most respected scientists in Canada. As long term studies were needed, and data was almost nonexistent, many volunteers in their spare time could contribute to a science which was, itself, in a state of incomplete

professionalization.³⁸

Later, when a more specialized knowledge was required to participate in natural history, many field-naturalists felt diminished beside the more academically trained scientists. The widening gap between the 'professional' and the 'elite non-professional' would prove discriminatory to the interests of both women and men, but women would remain the more disadvantaged because of added social pressures to uphold traditional domestic roles.³⁹ As new scientific societies formed ranks in the U.S., based on university credentials or paid positions, women were rarely welcomed.⁴⁰ In their haste to rise in prestige, some organizations often excluded them or minimized their efforts. However, this did not hold true for all societies. For example, while some women found the American Ornithologists Union (AOU) to be largely conservative and somewhat restrictive, other North American ornithological and natural history societies would differ.⁴¹ For example, on a smaller scale, the ANHS in Red Deer would be one such

³⁸ I have chosen to use the term 'volunteer scientists' rather than try to distinguish between professionals and non-professionals. This distinction has been usefully pointed out by Marianne Ainley. Today, ornithology is still only partially professionalised, and paid positions for both female and male scientists were scarce until the 1970s. Ainley, "Dissertation," vi. And "Field Work and Family: North American Women Ornithologists, 1900-1950," in *Uneasy Careers and Intimate Lives. Women in Science, 1789-1979*, eds., Phina G. Abir-Am and Dorinda Outram (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 60-62.

³⁹ David Elliston Allen, *The Naturalist in Britain: A Social History* (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 158-194.

⁴⁰ Margaret Rossiter, *Women Scientists in America: Struggles and Strategies to 1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1982), 73.

⁴¹ Marianne G. Ainley, "The Involvement of Women in the American Ornithologist' Union," (unpublished paper, 1983), 18. A Canadian example is the gender distribution of

society, and its accomplishments from 1906 to 1928 reveal a community that was not only committed to natural history, but egalitarian in structure.

Current readings of natural history outings during the nineteenth century allude to the plunder of fauna and flora by well-meaning naturalists. Although the transition in ornithology cannot be attributed to one person, institution, or set of events, the 1880s and 1890s brought together those people who possessed a greater understanding and appreciation for living things.⁴² As one who had been involved in bird study for most of her life, Elsie Cassels firmly believed in the value of field study and observation. Although she partially agreed with the scientific necessity for positive identification, she deplored the taking of life, and tried to persuade others to change their strategies.

At a lively meeting held in the home of Elsie and William Cassels in 1910, the Red Deer Natural History Society (RDNHS) eagerly talked about that year's Annual Fair.⁴³ The Society had compiled an impressive exhibition of weeds, and school children were invited to create displays of flowers, and small books on natural history subjects were to be given as a premium to every boy or girl exhibiting at the Fair.⁴⁴ Later in the evening, Elsie presented a paper entitled "Birds I Know," an informative report filled with notes

the RDNHS, which in 1910, included eleven women and seven men among its members.

⁴² Elsie Cassels' American contemporaries would have been Florence Merriam Bailey (1863-1948) and Althea R. Sherman (1853-1943) but unlike them, she would not be able to travel extensively, attend college, work in museums, or write books on ornithology. Ainley, "Field Work and Family," And Kofalk, *No Woman Tenderfoot*.

⁴³ Letterheads from the PNHS, TNHS, RDNHS, and ANHS can all be found during 1906 to 1915, after which amalgamation brought them together under the ANHS.

⁴⁴ RDNHS, Minutes, 24 August 1909, ANHS.

gleaned from her field observations. Active since 1906, members of the society campaigned (albeit unsuccessfully) for the creation of a provincial park to encompass the Red Deer River Canyon, part of which remained undeveloped because it was considered of little worth by property investors. Consisting of two oxbow lakes, spruce, poplar and mixed-wood forest, spreading marshland, and towering spruces, its 300 acres were an important refuge for migratory birds and diverse plants and animals. Even though they were at first refused, protection was eventually formalized after eighteen years and a different approach.

After negotiations with owner J. J. Gaetz and James Harkin, Commissioner of National Parks, the Gaetz Lake Sanctuary, (formerly the Red Deer Bird Sanctuary) was commissioned as a Dominion Wildlife Refuge in 1924. Harkin suggested that certain members of the ANHS who were already honorary officers under the Migratory Birds Convention Act, should supervise the Sanctuary as few federal funds were available for bird protection. These people were Elsie Cassels, Charles Snell, and Hannah Pameley (ANHS secretary).⁴⁵ Although the sanctuary was protected by a Federal Order-in-Council, threats and disruptions were numerous, and were it not for the vigilance of Red Deer naturalists, the area would have been completely destroyed in succeeding years.

For the young society, 1910 had been a year of progress beyond any existing year. With financial assistance from the Provincial Natural History Society (PNHS), the parent organization also known as the ANHS, attendance had doubled with a membership of fifty people. They had held a record number of meetings, and interest was keen among all the

⁴⁵ *Red Deer Advocate*, 14 May 1921.

members. According to the secretary, "Papers given this year covered a wider range than ever before being also of a larger scope and more exhaustive nature." These subjects covered botany, zoology, ornithology, geology, and astronomy.⁴⁶ Two of these lectures included one on wild flowers, by Marion Moodie, a Calgary nurse and naturalist, and the other on birds, illustrated by lantern slides, by Sidney Stansell of Edmonton.⁴⁷ A small museum had been started to which members willingly donated animals, birds, insects, minerals, and fossils from their own collections.⁴⁸ Even the society's library had grown, containing a number of valuable books and government reports relating to the province's natural history.

From 1906 until 1926, the Society's members worked in four major areas: the amalgamation of its natural history branches under one organization, the commissioning of Gaetz Lakes as a Dominion Bird Sanctuary (mentioned earlier), the compiling of species lists, and the fate of the *Canadian Field-Naturalist*.⁴⁹ The ANHS was a serious group,

⁴⁶ ANHS Annual Report I, Red Deer Branch, H. G. Munro, 30 November 1910.

⁴⁷ Sidney Stansell (b. 1877) was an Alberta teacher and ornithologist. He started the first Christmas Bird Counts in that province, as well as founded the provincial Audubon Society. A contributor to the U.S. Biological Survey, he published several articles on birds from 1907-1912. Geoffrey L. Holroyd and Carla Palaschuk, "Sidney Stansell, Alberta's First Christmas Bird Counter," *Alberta Naturalist* 26, 2 (Summer 1996): 26-27.

⁴⁸ Henry George would later claim this museum as his own after the PNHS became the ANHS in 1915, after which it became more inaccessible and private.

⁴⁹ The journal was called the *Ottawa Naturalist* until it changed its name in 1919 to *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*. See John L. Cranmer-Byng, *A Life With Birds: Percy A. Taverner, Canadian Ornithologist. The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, special issue, 110, 1 (Ottawa: The Ottawa Field-Naturalist's Club, 1996), Chapter 10, endnotes 78, 223

having already decided not to branch out into the "Horticultural line of things" because they felt they would be spreading themselves too thinly.⁵⁰ Committed to education, they donated forty dollars worth of books each year to the public library, and as early as 1915, over fifty books on natural history topics were available for loan.⁵¹ They also held competitions each year at the school for the best birdbox or collection of plants, and published leaflets on noxious weeds, and the mindless destruction of birds' eggs.

In 1912, Dr. Henry George was still trying to build an institution of Alberta naturalists with the ANHS as the core. At a Provincial Natural History Society (PNHS) meeting at his home in Red Deer, he encouraged the Erskine Branch to merge with this larger group. Two years earlier, he had travelled to Edmonton to persuade the Edmonton Natural History Society to join the ANHS, and add to the two branches already in existence: Innisfail and Red Deer. Calgary had formed their own natural history society, and preferred to be independent.⁵² The Edmonton group later decided to share its expertise with the ANHS, thereby becoming a regular branch.

With the First World War, matters changed drastically. The Innisfail Branch had dropped to three members and Erskine was in slightly better shape. The Calgary Branch

⁵⁰ This was an ambitious plan to organize several elementary 'horticultural' branches headed by the school teacher, plus one other volunteer. The ANHS was sympathetic to the cause, but felt that they did not have enough members to support the launching of supplementary branches. RDNHS, Minutes, 7 December 1909 and PNHS, Minutes, 1 September 1909, ANHS.

⁵¹ J. N. Bayce of Red Deer to F. C. Whitehouse of Red Deer, 10 March 1915, ANHS.

⁵² Henry George, Provincial NHS, Annual Report for 1910, ANHS.

was inactive, without enough members to keep it going. Finally, a resolution was adopted at the home of Dr. George, on November 4th, 1915 which stated: "That it is not in the best interests of the ANHS that its membership and resources be split up into various branches as in the past. Therefore, be it resolved that the Red Deer Branch be absorbed in the ANHS, and its funds be turned over to the parent society."⁵³ This, he felt, would "prove a good step forward" towards the study of Natural History in Alberta."⁵⁴

This idea was not received without complaint. The secretary of the Wetaskiwin society argued, "I can not accept that view point that it is better to have a society of half a dozen trained scientists than an organization of 100 seeking information and distributing enthusiasm for this line of research. I have found it hard to get people to join the PNHS because they are quite certain it would not be convenient to go to Red Deer to the annual meeting." At one point, Elsie Cassels had travelled to the Wetaskiwin meeting with Dr. George and F.C. Whitehouse, and as a result, was invited back to give another address. But Wetaskiwin would remain as a separate branch.⁵⁵

The Red Deer Natural History Society (RDNHS) had fared better than others in 1915, although according to President, R. E. Fiske, "Little progress has been made in furthering the aims of the Society, chiefly on account of the difficulty in people not being sufficiently interested in the scientific investigation of this branch of nature." Even so, they

⁵³ George, Report of the RDNHS for 1915, 23 November 1915.

⁵⁴ RDNHS, Ibid.

⁵⁵ Emma J. Root, of Westaskiwin, to Hannah Pameley of Red Deer, ANHS Secretary, 26 January 1915, ANHS.

had a successful Field Day, "with a fine list of Botanical specimens. . . collected and properly named," an excellent collection of insects containing eighty-three varieties, and a [youngster's] composition on bird life of twenty-three pages on foolscap which was "very good."⁵⁶ As one of the societies' objectives was to help farmers to recognize various insects and other pests, F.C. Whitehouse's articles were published in the local press, and he had been corresponding with entomological societies in Edmonton, Ottawa, and England.

With George at the helm, members of the ANHS concentrated much of their time on the preparation of lists. In 1916, George confidently wrote that their bird list was nearly complete, and a botanical list was in the works. By November, he reported that the "Society had made considerable advance, not only in the addition of its membership, but also in the valuable and interesting field-work carried out by its active members."⁵⁷ He acknowledged the courtesy and valued help of the Department of Agriculture in publishing the reports of the society,⁵⁸ and encouraged members to continue investigations in scientific work and the production of useful knowledge.

Election of officers for the ensuing year included the following positions: 1st Vice President, Elsie Cassels, 2nd Vice President, Dr. Henry George, F.C. Whitehouse, President, and The Honorable Duncan Marshall, Minister of Agriculture, as Honorary

⁵⁶ RDNHS, Annual Report, 1915, ANHS.

⁵⁷ ANHS Report for 1916, 29 November 1916.

⁵⁸ Publishing of the ANHS reports would have been impossible without the financial assistance of the Minister of Agriculture.

President.⁵⁹ Expertise was grouped into categories; Elsie Cassels, Henry George, and Charles B. Horsbrough were in charge of birds, Barbara Mary George, Mina Cole, and H. H. Gaetz (a pharmacist), and Hannah Pameley worked on plants. F. C. Whitehouse specialized in dragonflies and had already donated a permanent collection of moths and butterflies to the local school in "scientific order, and correctly named" in order to help students with identification, and show them the proper techniques for mounting. George lamented that "It is to be regretted that School children. . . do not take a greater interest in Natural History study, and compete in larger numbers for the prizes offered annually by our society."⁶⁰

One of the main topics of great contention among the ANHS naturalists from 1916 to 1922 concerned *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*,⁶¹ published by the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (OFNC) and the only journal of its kind in Canada. George was not in favor of supporting the enlargement of the journal despite appeals made by Taverner to the ANHS, starting in 1916, to increase subscriptions. This is probably because George was still trying to make a name for himself in Alberta as a naturalist, and wanted to continue publishing his own natural history booklets through the ANHS and the Department of Agriculture. From 1918-20, the society had produced three small

⁵⁹ ANHS Report for 1916, 29 November 1916.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ This publication was originally called *The Ottawa Field Naturalist*.

brochures on dragonflies, beetles, and butterflies.⁶² In a disgruntled letter to Taverner, Horsbrough described George as being "a narrow-minded, incompetent and jealous president so that as I feared, your admirable suggestion was not formerly considered."⁶³ At the beginning, Taverner was patiently persuasive.

I do not look with favour on a multiplicity of local publications. . . Now would it not be better instead of adding to this long list of hardly struggling periodicals to unite all Canadian efforts into one. We have the basis for it already. . . with a little government support and an already considerable prestige. . . arrangements could be made with the Ottawa Naturalist to publish a department for your organization. . . We need such a paper in this country badly. If all the at present disconnected effort can be united into a strong one we should be able to represent Canada scientifically in an adequate manner.⁶⁴

According to Taverner, the only other ornithology journals which had survived to 1916 were American: *The AUK*, *The Condor*, and *The Wilson Bulletin*.

Taverner's call to the ANHS for assistance in order to keep *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* alive was often repeated over the next six years, but George seemed to have complete control over the committee. By June, 1922, an open letter by Clyde L. Patch, taxonomist, and R.M. Anderson, mammalogist, both at the Victoria Memorial Museum and officers of the OFNC, again prompted discussion at a meeting of the ANHS.

"It is urgent that this receive the prompt and active assistance of the affiliated Societies if

⁶² These booklets were published by the ANHS. F. C. Whitehouse, *Dragonflies, 'Odonata' of Alberta* (1918); K. Bowman, *Annotated List of the Macrolipidoptera of Alberta* (1919); F. S. Carr, *An Annotated List of the Coleoptera of Alberta* (1920).

⁶³ Charles B. Horsbrough of Red Deer to Percy A. Taverner of Ottawa, 4 February 1916, Percy A. Taverner Papers, Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa (hereafter PATP).

⁶⁴ Taverner to Horsbrough, 14 March 1916, ANHS.

it is to succeed, and if it does not succeed it is altogether likely that the *Naturalist*, the only publication of its kind in Canada, will be discontinued."⁶⁵

Fortunately by this time, George had decided to retire and the new president, Charles Snell, was whole-heartedly in favour of supporting the journal. He wrote:

I am leaving this in the hands of our Vice-President - Mrs. W. A. Cassels - who will bring it up at our next meeting and write you in due course. I'm making the following suggestions to our membership - that as many subscriptions as possible be obtained and forwarded at once, and that a grant be made from the funds of the ANHS towards the upkeep of the Canadian Field-Naturalist. . . Canadian naturalists cannot get along without it.⁶⁶

The Canadian Field-Naturalist later developed into the most important natural history publication in twentieth century Canada, and one of the most important in North America.⁶⁷ It not only kept Canadian scientists in touch with work done across the country, but its editors accepted notes and articles from volunteer scientists who would likely not have found publication elsewhere.

The second contentious issue concerned bird lists. Early that spring, Horsbrough had made inquiries to Percy Taverner to find out where he stood on the matter. Taverner's reply might have unsettled George had he cared to read the following letter:

In regard to the Alberta checklist of birds. There has been nothing of the sort published. There are scattered lists in *The AUK* and other periodicals, Macoun's List,⁶⁸ but nothing authoritative on the

⁶⁵ The OFNC, Letter to Absent Members of Council, 2 June 1922, ANHS.

⁶⁶ Charles Snell, of Red Deer, to Clyde E. Patch of Ottawa, 16 May 1922, ANHS.

⁶⁷ Ainley, Dissertation, 44.

⁶⁸ Macoun's List was his *Catalogue of Canadian Birds*, published in 1900.

Province. The work of making one has yet to be done. . . it is a labour that cannot be accomplished without several years of personal work. . . I do not think that a list can be published unless it is plainly stated to be tentative. . . each species would be tied up to a definite record, location of specimen and authority of identification given. I should make no exception to this even in the case of the commonest species for as soon as we let our judgement differentiate degrees of possibility of missidentification [sic] a large amount of personal equation enters. Our published lists are so full of error that they must all be questioned.⁶⁹

Worried about the validity of records, Taverner made discrete inquiries among members of the ANHS about George's skill and reputation as a naturalist.⁷⁰ On his 1918 bird list Frank Farley jotted down the following notes beside the Sandhill Crane;

Have you ever differentiated between the Little Brown and the Sandhill? Dr. George of Red Deer tells me he has found the eggs of both. However this is far from likely. The species are very difficult to tell apart in the hand, let alone by eggs, or in life.⁷¹

In a second letter, Farley wrote that "Dr. George and I have been together for 28 years here, and should know birds but he has always specialized in the rarer ones. He always saw or took rare ones but I am sure he did not know all the common ones."⁷² These and other clues led Taverner to conclude that George's naturalist's endeavors were "hardly satisfactory viewed from this distance. . . some of his statements are impossible but

⁶⁹ Taverner to Horsbrough, 14 March 1916, ANHS.

⁷⁰ Taverner to Frank Farley of Camrose, 2 Dec 1918, PATP.

⁷¹ The little brown and the sandill were found to be the same species. Farley to Taverner, 9 December 1918, PATP.

⁷² Farley to Taverner, 6 December 1918, PATP.

advanced without a seeming thought of the possibility of question."⁷³ George, on the other hand, insisted that Taverner had falsely credited Frank Farley with his find of a Sandhill Crane at Spotted Lake, in 1895, and to add further weight to his observations, wrote that "his [own] name was not unknown in the naturalist world."⁷⁴

In fairness to Dr. George, Frank Farley wrote a letter of appreciation to the ANHS executive; "Dr. George's absence will be keenly felt, as I understand he was the first man that I met in Alberta over thirty years ago that had taken any interest in Nature, and I think Alberta owes him much for his early work."⁷⁵ George believed that it was a mistake for natural history collectors in Canada, and particularly in Alberta, to ship species out of the country, a practice which had been going on for some time.⁷⁶ Unfortunately, much of his later activities as an ornithologist were tied to collecting in the traditional style of a sportshunter and naturalist. Clad in breeches, leggings, and mountie hat, George had already stalked and stuffed many unfortunate specimens for his own personal collection, never hiking without his pocket revolver at the ready.⁷⁷ Regardless of assurances that he would do no harm, he was known to shoot rare birds on sight, and take their nests and

⁷³ Taverner to Farley, 10 December 1918, PATP.

⁷⁴ George to Taverner, 13 November 1918, PATP.

⁷⁵ Farley to Pameley, 9 November 1922, ANHS.

⁷⁶ William M. George of Phoenix, correspondence with author, 7 December 1994.

⁷⁷ George also collected stamps, coins, weapons, Native artifacts, and curios as well as birds, and animal heads, which he prepared himself. Also displayed in the museum were Barbara Mary's artworks and paintings.

eggs for his private collection.⁷⁸

From 1916 until he moved to B. C. in 1922, Elsie Cassels and Dr. George were constantly at odds over methods of studying and classifying wildlife. This exemplifies the division that was starting to occur between the old conservationists and the new practitioners who had different ideas. With Elsie Cassels and Charles Snell freshly installed as leaders of the ANHS, questions concerning the validity of lists and the proper methods for scientific inquiry would test their observational skills, endurance, and convictions to the limit. Their efforts, and those of the ANHS, would result in improved protection for wildlife and their habitats in the Red Deer area.

⁷⁸ Kerry Wood of Red Deer, correspondence with author, 7 September 1995.

4. Elsie Cassels: Naturalist and Ornithologist

I know of no prettier sight than a flock of Redwings flying back and forth over their nesting grounds in the morning sunlight, trilling their lovely call note, and spreading their scarlet wings to show the gorgeous scarlet and cream-edged shoulder patch as they hover over the nest.¹

The unfolding of Elsie Cassels' life-history and scientific work is revealed through her letters to significant individuals, and in the correspondence which circulated among a select group of naturalists and ornithologists. Aside from her notes in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, this literature is the only way of ascertaining her beliefs, feelings, and methodologies within a fairly accurate time frame. In some cases, a series of letters would be exchanged rapidly, or a query might wait several months, even years for an answer. Woven between bird sightings are insights into her personal struggles and basic needs for encouragement and acceptance. Above all, she was firmly grounded in her convictions about not shooting animals for natural history collections, and that if an ornithologist was patient enough, she/he would discover that life-history study could be more revealing than taxonomy. The taking of even one life was too many, a philosophy which would be severely tested by her observations in the Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary. For her and William, their Sylvan Lake home, called *The Ark*, was a refuge where 'collecting' would never be permitted.

The 1920s marked Elsie Cassels' most energetic and involved activities as an ornithologist. She was already closely associated with local naturalists such as Frank

¹ Elsie Cassels, "Our Familiar Birds," *Red Deer Advocate*, 15 July 1921.

Farley, a real-estate agent in Camrose,² Tom E. Randall, a farmer in Castor, and Charles Snell, an engineer-surveyor in Red Deer. Snell was very active in the ANHS, and served as president for several terms. In fact, it was mainly through correspondence with Charles Snell that these four naturalists were able to keep in touch with each other's activities.³ Two important names would soon be added to this growing network: Percy A. Taverner and William Rowan.⁴

It is not known when she met Frank Farley, but given that Farley had known Dr. George for over thirty years, it is likely that Farley had also known Elsie Cassels since she first moved into the region.⁵ He always began his letters with a friendly greeting, followed by his latest bird queries. The following letter, sent in 1921, is a good example; "My dear Mrs. Cassels, I have been wondering what you learned of the birds this past season. Have you any new ones? I think I have taken the Arkansas Kingbird (now western kingbird), either it or the Great Crested flycatcher. They are very much the same and I will send my bird to Ottawa for identification."⁶ Elsie Cassels, while pleased with the letter, might have

² Frank Farley was an uncle to Farley Mowat, a Canadian nature writer and environmental activist.

³ Charles Snell of Red Deer, selected correspondence, 1920-1938, Snell Family Fonds, Red Deer City and District Archives (hereafter SFF).

⁴ John L. Cranmer-Byng, *A Life With Birds: Percy A. Taverner, Canadian Ornithologist*. *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, Special Issue, 110(1), (Ottawa: OFNC, 1996). And Marianne G. Ainley, *Restless Energy: A Biography of William Rowan, 1891-1957* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1993).

⁵ Frank Farley of Camrose to Hannah Pameley of Red Deer, ANHS secretary, correspondence, 9 November 1922, Red Deer and District Archives (hereafter ANHS).

⁶ Farley to Elsie Cassels of Red Deer, 8 October 1921, ANHS.

frowned at this statement because the two birds he mentioned are not at all similar, and she had come a long way in her knowledge of bird identification.

Five years earlier, Elsie Cassels had written to Percy Taverner, at the Victoria Memorial Museum in Ottawa, requesting a pamphlet called, "Some Suggestions for Canadian Ornithological Field Work." A hand written note on the edge of her letter indicated that it was mailed out within four days.⁷ Indeed, Taverner was delighted to comply. As ornithologist and assistant zoologist at the museum, he coordinated the Canadian ornithological observations for the federal government and pioneered the museum's collections. Throughout his life, he encouraged the contributions of many naturalists and welcomed any information if it led to the assembly of accurate records.⁸ The booklet recommended the systematic study of life history and behaviour as a new field with much scope for original research.⁹ Their next series of letters would wait until 1920.

Perhaps Elsie Cassels needed this time to sharpen her skills, gain some confidence, and decide what approach she would use for bird study. Her next letter to Taverner contained a detailed description of a jaeger attacking a common tern, "repeatedly giving me a splendid chance with my X8 prism binoculars to observe shape and colouring." She

⁷ Cassels to Percy A Taverner of Ottawa, 20 January 1916, Percy A. Taverner Papers, Canadian Museum of Nature, Ottawa (hereafter PATP).

⁸ Ainley, *Restless Energy*, 92. And "Louise de Kiriline Lawrence (1894-1992) and the World of Nature: A Tribute." *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, 108 (1994): 113. And Dissertation, 163.

⁹ Late nineteenth century life-history studies were a growing trend. See William E. Davis, "From Shotgun to Binoculars," *Dean of Birdwatchers, A Biography of Ludlow Griscom* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 99-112.

wrote that it was the second time she'd seen this species at Sylvan Lake, the first being the summer of 1916. At the time, she wrote "I had made no report on that occasion - outside of my own circle of friends, thinking I would not be believed, but I do so now without the slightest hesitation as I fancy it cannot be so very rare as I first thought. I only wish I knew which one it is!"¹⁰

Taverner's reply came as soon as he had returned from his summer field work. "I had already heard of this personally from Mr. Farley in Camrose and had promised myself the pleasure of calling upon you in Red Deer on my way through and getting the account from you personally."¹¹ This he was unable to do because she was not in town; however, he confirmed her sighting, saying that species identification would only be possible if the Jaeger was unlucky enough to be 'taken.' He then suggested that she send a short, detailed note about the jaeger, and her basis for its identification, to *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*. This was published in the next issue of the journal.¹² This marks her first contribution to a major natural history journal, and her first effort to publicize her work.

Their next exchanges are almost typical of two old friends who are bound together by a common interest. On November 22nd, 1920, Elsie Cassels wrote:

Your kind and encouraging letter reached me at Sylvan Lake when I was busy packing up to return home. . . If in Alberta next summer could you not come and stay with us for a few days at Sylvan Lake? It would be a great pleasure to us, and I am sure you would

¹⁰ Cassels to Taverner, 21 September 1920, PATP.

¹¹ Taverner to Cassels, 26 October 1920, PATP.

¹² Elsie Cassels, "The Jaeger at Sylvan Lake, Alberta," *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, 34 (1920): 159.

find lots of things to interest you.¹³

In the same letter, she verified the dates for her two earlier jaeger sightings. Restating her methods, she added that "I never report anything I have the slightest doubt about, and someday I may be able to prove my report - by securing a specimen - although I have not shot a bird for that purpose for many years."¹⁴

Elsie went on to describe what she thought was a ruby-throated hummingbird, despite differing opinions at the ANHS that it might be a rufous hummingbird. She talked about Frank Farley, who would have been interested to see a family of sapsuckers near her cottage at Sylvan Lake, and provided information about a pair of Bohemian waxwings which had nested in her garden at *Riverside*. From this letter, it is evident that during the previous decade she had kept good field notes as she could cite exact dates. Elsie Cassels closed with her own support for Taverner to finish the *Birds of Western Canada*, an indication that encouragement went both ways in their relationship.¹⁵

That same September, William Rowan wrote a somewhat exasperated letter to the ANHS complaining that he couldn't find the full names and addresses of any of the officials of the ANHS in the columns of *Canadian Field-Naturalist* or in the Annual Reports of the Provincial Department of Agriculture. He explained that he had been appointed Assistant Professor in Biology at the University of Alberta, and unlike most

¹³ Cassels to Taverner, 22 November 1920, PATP.

¹⁴ Cassels to Taverner, *Ibid*.

¹⁵ Percy Taverners' *Birds of Western Canada* was finally published in 1926. However, when Elsie Cassels, Tom Randall, and Charles Snell read it, they were disappointed. Snell to Randall, 18 February 1927, SFF.

university zoologists, was keenly interested in all field work. As such, he inquired after ornithological activities of their society.¹⁶ There is no evidence of a direct reply by the ANHS, but this may be due to a loss of records rather than any disinterest on the Society's behalf. However, Dr. George was still president of the ANHS, and still likely upset over what he considered false allegations concerning the validity of his bird list made by Taverner. The following year, Rowan was invited by the ANHS to lecture at their November meeting, and in a thank you note to the ANHS secretary, he said that " It was a real pleasure to meet so many enthusiasts and experts in one little evening. Long may they flourish to carry on the good work in the interests of science."¹⁷

In early 1921, Elsie Cassels wrote again to Percy Taverner, this time with a tantalizing find:

Perhaps it may interest you to know that I discovered in our local taxidermist store this week a fine specimen of the White Gyrfalcon. It was shot 10 miles north of here. I never saw one before in these parts. He has mounted it in a rather fantastic manner having the wings high above the head, but that position certainly shows off the elongated black diamond markings to perfection.¹⁸

Taverner's reply was swift. He commended her for the "discovery," the first such record of this species in Alberta, and asked if she would send a note about it to the

¹⁶ William Rowan of Edmonton to F. C. Whitehouse, 25 September 1920, ANHS.

¹⁷ Rowan to ANHS, 26 November 1921, ANHS. By 1922, Snell assisted Rowan in keeping migratory bird records, and Farley, who may have been introduced to Rowan by Elsie Cassels, accompanied Rowan on a spring outing. Cassels to Rowan, 10 May 1922, ANHS.

¹⁸ Cassels to Taverner, 29 April 1921, PATP.

Living at Sylvan Lake for half the year had both benefits and disadvantages. A lake with both shallows and depths, and surrounded by a dense covering of poplar, aspen, spruce, and alder, was an ideal location to study birds. Here Elsie would make daily notes for her two papers entitled "Observations of Bird Life at Sylvan and Gaetz Lakes," and "Notes on Wild Fowl at Sylvan and Gaetz Lakes."²⁰ Even so, the village train station was a considerable distance by rowboat, and *The Ark* was not connected to a road, telephone, or electrical line. In fact, the Cassels would never own a car, nor have a phone installed in their *Riverside* home. At one point, she wistfully wrote to the ANHS' secretary "Glad that you had a successful meeting of the N.H.S. . . I found it impossible to be present. If we only had a J'm diggie, how easy it would be to slip into town for occasions such as these."²¹ She likely missed out on many such occasions over the spring, summer, and fall, and isolation was a major factor in much of her field work. She once had to forego one of Rowan's lectures because "the train did not fit in and the weather was beastly, so I had to give up on the idea."²²

¹⁹ Taverner to Cassels, 9 May 1921, PATP. See also Elsie Cassels, "White Gyrfalcon in Alberta," *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, 36 (1922): 58. Having a rare specimen available for comparative purposes was invaluable to ornithologists, and this same specimen attracted the curiosity of William Rowan four years later. Snell to Rowan, 10 May 1925, and Rowan to Snell, 6 December 1925, SFF.

²⁰ These papers were given at the ANHS in 1917 and 1921.

²¹ The "J'm diggie" was an old jalopy or automobile. Cassels to Pameley, 19 October 1921, ANHS.

²² Cassels to Rowan, 27 November 1924, William Rowan Papers, University of Alberta Archives (hereafter WRP).

The Rowan - Cassels correspondence began on March 7th, 1922. Her first letter explains her situation:

I have been keeping records of migrating birds for many years - very incomplete I fear - just for my own pleasure mostly. But I shall be glad to assist you this year all I can. Of course having a house to look after often stands in the way of systematic observation, and it is hardly possible to get out into the woods every day in the week. . . Of course you understand that I do not shoot birds when I am in doubt as to their species and sometimes I have to trail for several seasons before I am quite sure of my bird. However, I am not a guesser and you may be pretty sure that my list is correct. . .²³

In the same letter, she recommended Tom Randall and George Cook as naturalists who might also be contacted for information, and concluded with her descriptions of hairy woodpeckers and various other species. An afterthought insisted that "Randall is an Englishman and one of the keenest naturalists I know." Rowan would appreciate this connection in later years.²⁴

Sprinkled throughout her Rowan letters are bird sightings, local events, discussion relating to articles in natural history journals, and comments about other people. There are also many personal notes which show how difficult it was for her to spend time in the field. "Marmalade oranges arrived and had to be attended to and that has taken up one whole week! How I detest all this sticky mess just when spring is opening up, but it is over thank heaven."²⁵ This is another indication that for many women naturalists and scientists, there was, and still is, little separation between work, family, and daily routines.

²³ Cassels to Rowan, 7 March 1922, WRP.

²⁴ Ainley, *Restless Energy*, 152.

²⁵ Cassels to Rowan, 11 March 1923, WRP.

The Rowan - Cassels correspondence became regular in April 1922. She acknowledged the receipt of three instalments of his Merlin articles, and expressed her interest in others he promised to send.²⁶ She also wrote about the possibility of turning the Gaetz Lakes area into a bird sanctuary, as permission had finally been granted by the family. It was further hoped by the Gaetz's that Edith Marsh's lecture on birds, illustrated by lantern slides, would not only coincide with this event, but help raise public awareness about preservation.²⁷

An important function of the ANHS was to facilitate communication between local naturalists and those living great distances away. This can be seen in correspondence from Elsie Cassels to Rowan concerning the proposed visit of Edith Marsh, of Peasemarsch Farm, Georgian Bay, whose 300 acres of land had been declared a wildlife preserve in 1917. She had also published a small book about the sanctuary's birds and general concerns pertaining to wildlife management.²⁸ She offered to stop in Red Deer provided additional visits could be arranged for Calgary and Edmonton. Elsie Cassels praised Edith Marsh's efforts as they would be "of great interest to beginners in bird study."²⁹ She also hoped that Rowan would support the visit by inviting Edith Marsh to the Edmonton

²⁶ William Rowan, "Observations on the Breeding-Habits of the Merlin." "I: General Environment," *British Birds* 15, 6 (1921-1922): 122-29. "II: Incubations," *British Birds* 15, 9 (1921-1922): 194-202. "III: Rearing of the Young," *British Birds* 15, 10 (1921-1922): 222-31. "IV: The Young," *British Birds* 15, 11 (1921-1922): 246-49.

²⁷ Cassels to Rowan, 21 April 1922, WRP.

²⁸ Edith L. Marsh, *Birds of Peasemarsch* (Toronto: Musson Book Co., 1919).

²⁹ Cassels to Rowan, 16 March 1922, WRP.

Natural History Society.³⁰

Guest lectures were important occasions for both speakers and audiences. Even though Sidney Stansell wrote, "I am through teaching here on the 21st. . . and expect to proceed direct to California where I now have an advance agent arranging for a series of lectures through the western states" after which "we expect to return to Alberta equipped for moving picture work of bird life. . . during the summer,"³¹ he still made time to visit the ANHS. Similarly, on his way to Edmonton, J. A. Munro made a point of attending a meeting of the ANHS to lecture on specific topics, as did E. H. Strickland, the entomologist at the University of Alberta.³² Often during these events, Elsie Cassels was seated in the front row, "aggressively asking most of the questions."³³

As Vice-President of the ANHS, her regular tasks involved communication with other natural history groups and sharing information relating to the scientific literature. When a secretary of the Lake Saskatoon district of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) sought books specifically about the avifauna and flora of Alberta, Elsie Cassels suggested Chester Reed's small handbooks on birds, flowers, and insects, Frank Chapman's *Colour Key to North American Birds*, and Julia Henshaw's *Mountain Wild Flowers of Canada*. Always attentive to the greater work of the society, she encouraged the forming of a

³⁰ Cassels to Rowan, 10 May 10 1922, WPR.

³¹ Sidney Stansell of Edmonton to Pameley, 10 December 1923, ANHS.

³² Snell to Rowan, 27 March 1925, and Snell to Randall, 2 December 1925, SFF.

³³ Fred Horn of Red Deer, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

branch in his district.³⁴ Sometimes, requests came from further afield. R. W. Tower, of the American Museum of Natural History, thanked the ANHS for sending him the three papers on insects which they had recently published. In return, he sent copies of their journal, *Natural History*, together with a few guide leaflets, and placed the ANHS on his list to receive future issues on the circulation list of the society.³⁵

Although Elsie Cassels' expertise was mainly in ornithology, she appreciated all aspects of the natural world. This is evident in her detailed description of a wasp's nest that clung to her bedroom window at *The Ark*, which she insisted that William not remove. "It was 9 1/2 inches long, 8 1/2 inches wide, with 4 tiers of combs and 21 layers of paper. "Halved" on the window, "scores of people have come to see it and I keep a stool below the window for people to stand on."³⁶ The wasps were not bothering anyone, and she felt that they should be left alone. This is indicative of both the careful way she carried out her observations, and her reverence for other living things.

By May, 1922, it was clear that William Rowan had begun to form close ties with certain members of the ANHS, and Elsie Cassels commented in her next letter that Charles Snell, who had returned from Edmonton, was "delighted in all Rowan showed him in connection with his work." Knowing that she couldn't make this journey herself yet, she invited Rowan to stop by on his planned excursion down the Red Deer River so that they

³⁴ Pameley to E. H. Keith of Lake Saskatoon, United Farmers of Alberta, 4 July 1921, ANHS.

³⁵ R. W. Tower, Curator of Books and Publications, American Museum of Natural History, New York to Pameley, 2 November 1922, ANHS.

³⁶ Cassels to Rowan, 28 August 1922, WRP.

could meet in person, and she could show him around the Sanctuary.³⁷ Her visit to Rowan's lab in Edmonton would have to wait two more years. In 1924 she wrote,

Thank you so much for your invitation to visit you. All being well, I will be delighted to accept in the New Year if that will suit you. I am eager to see your [bird] skins and things. . . tell Mrs. Rowan with my kind regards that I am a person of simple tastes and habits and will give as little trouble as possible.³⁸

In the meantime, she was making additions and revisions to her records:

MacGillivray's warbler, solitary and semi-palmated sandpipers, yellowlegs, killdeer, phalaropes, and ringneck ducks. Her letter to Rowan also mentions a Connecticut warbler, identified using guides by Chapman and Reed, who claimed that this bird was only known to breed in Manitoba. Modern distribution maps show that Connecticut warblers breed in central and north central Alberta.³⁹ As the differences in markings are slight between these and other warblers of the same genus, such as the mourning or the MacGillivray, Elsie Cassels must have been a very careful observer. She was apologetic about other sightings. "I remember about 30 years ago, shortly after we came to this country, my husband bringing me a curlew, but I did not keep records then."⁴⁰ The letter concluded on a more personal note;

A party [of naturalists] had a 2 ton scow built here and off they went down the river to hunt for pre-historian beasts! They are

³⁷ Cassels to Rowan, 10 May 1922, WRP.

³⁸ Cassels to Rowan, 27 November 1924, WRP.

³⁹ W. Earl Godfrey, *The Birds of Canada*, Revised (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1986), 489-491

⁴⁰ Cassels to Rowan, 14 June 1922, WRP.

lucky beggars to be able to do this work. Even although I can't collect birds, I could do a whole lot with my binoculars. If only I could have a month's real holiday - no washing, baking, cooking, etc. - just spend all my time observing. What joy it would be. I still hope I may be able to do [this] some day.⁴¹

In August, she thanked Rowan for his recent articles, commented on his "fine gift of drawing," and sent along her own encouragement and support for his work; "I look forward to your doing great things in natural history."⁴² She also wrote that J. A. Munro, a federal migratory bird officer for the western provinces, had visited them for several days accompanied by his wife. Meanwhile, a steady correspondence was developing between Rowan and Randall. Elsie wrote, "I am glad that Randall is proving of use to you. He is as keen as mustard and a very likeable fellow."⁴³ And later, "Randall will be delighted to get the books you are sending him. I know he is simply dying to meet you."⁴⁴

The Cassels were still at Sylvan Lake in November when a large group of hawks flew past on their way south. Elsie Cassels noted that according to her records, they had migrated on exactly the same day ten years earlier.⁴⁵ She was ideally located to observe birds both at *The Ark* and at *Riverside*. Her Red Deer home was in a semi-urban setting, with poplar and spruce trees between her house and the Red Deer River, and within an

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Rowan was a gifted artist and gave exhibitions of his work. See Ainley, *Restless Energy*, 119-20. Cassels to Rowan, 28 August 1922, WRP.

⁴³ Cassels to Rowan, 8 January 1923, WRP.

⁴⁴ Cassels to Rowan, 17 January 1923, WRP.

⁴⁵ Cassels to Rowan, 29 November 1922, WRP.

easy hike of the Canyon and Gaetz Lake Sanctuary. Establishing her backyard feeders for the winter, she told Rowan; "I am not really a very sociable person. I could spend all my time reading and watching birds around the place." While out with William, she observed a white-breasted nuthatch and a saw-whet owl, the first live saw-whet she had ever seen.⁴⁶

In 1923, the topic of sight records and their accuracy took on more importance in the Cassels and Rowan correspondence. She felt it was important that others accept her sightings, and she wanted to ensure the accuracy of bird records by other naturalists. In a letter to Rowan, she said that she had just told Randall "to get a pair of prism binoculars out from England [for himself] when his parents visit in the spring, as it is next to impossible to be accurate in reporting little known species unless they are taken."⁴⁷ Apparently, she had mentioned to Randall her sighting of a Connecticut warbler and in his reply, he said that the bluff near his home was "simply alive" with them as well as other birds. While she was fond of Randall, she was appalled by his quick assumptions and told Rowan,

Now we know how rare this bird is here, and I never saw it before [last summer.] I have been studying the birds since I came to Canada in '89! A strange bird note is exactly as a stranger's voice to me. As I pretty well know most of the birds by song-note now.⁴⁸

Rowan reported the Connecticut warbler record to Taverner's office. He later apologized to Elsie Cassels for not citing her properly. She replied, "I do not mind in the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Cassels to Rowan, 8 January 1923, WRP.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

least you mentioning [it] to Mr. Taverner. You are at liberty to use any of my notes if you care to."⁴⁹ This record confirmed the sighting and distribution of that particular species for central Alberta.⁵⁰

She didn't feel the same way, however, about Farley's recently published bird list in which he stated, "Cassels reports Pygmy Nuthatch as a winter visitor." This reference was misleading as it was the first sighting for this bird in the Red Deer region, and not much was known about its geographic range. To Rowan she wrote, "I can just see the smile on the face of any naturalist who happens upon that statement."⁵¹ It is now known to be limited to the southern interior of British Columbia.⁵²

Despite the snow and cold weather, Elsie did manage to spend some time in the field on skis lent by Rowan.⁵³ However, she again expressed some of her frustration at being tied to her domestic duties: "I must get my bird list finished and send it along. I fear it will be very disappointing to you, as [I] was not able to give it the time I should have liked... How I should love to devote a whole year to the birds. [I'd] let housekeeping go hang!!"⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Cassels to Rowan, 17 January 1923, WRP.

⁵⁰ Godfrey, 489-491.

⁵¹ Cassels to Rowan, Ibid.

⁵² Godfrey, 406.

⁵³ The skis were obtained through Farley, who had just returned from visiting Rowan in Edmonton. Cassels to Rowan, Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Rowan was grateful for her efforts, but was always on the lookout for more information. This was because local naturalists were ideally situated to carry out daily observations in a given area. To Snell, he wrote, "Mrs. Cassels has sent me a very full and interesting [list], but a second one from Red Deer would by no means spell wasted energy, for when she is confined to the house, you may be on some lake getting water bird records that Mrs. Cassels would miss and vice versa."⁵⁵

In February 1923, the issue of sight records resurfaced, this time with a mixture of anger and frustration. Elsie Cassels wrote to Rowan that "Munro doesn't believe I had a Pygmy Nuthatch here last month! I had a letter from him today to that effect. But it hasn't altered my opinion in the slightest."⁵⁶ Instead, Munro believed that she had seen only a variation of the red-breasted nuthatch. She described to Rowan her rationale for determining the differences between the two species, using their calls: "How on earth is [Munro] going to explain away the notes of the bird? Every note of the R. B. is painless to me, and no one can say it's a noisy bird. The Pygmy. . . is a very excitable, noisy little chap with a voice out of all proportion to its size."⁵⁷

Munro had written: "A sight record can never be anything more than an opinion unless the bird in question is shot - when the opinion is either disproved or verified."⁵⁸ Munro's arrogant comments lingered as several weeks later, she wrote:

⁵⁵ Rowan to Snell, 25 February 1923, SFF.

⁵⁶ Cassels to Rowan, 19 February 1923, WRP.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

I am not down on Mr. Munro for his views on sight-records, for we all know what rotten descriptions we get from would-be naturalists. My kick is that he just classed me with all the Toms', Dicks', and Harrys' and after all, why should I blame him, because he does not know really what I have been doing in that line nearly all my life.⁵⁹

In fact, she had already told Rowan that she had been studying birds for over forty years, and "used to collect a little, I regret to say. So I ought to be able to verify a sight record at 30 inches."⁶⁰

Rowan's support was crucial at this point, because Elsie would not shoot birds. All of her records were based on sight/sound identifications. Concerned where he stood on the matter, she asked him point blank; "If you wish me to continue please say so. If the contrary, do not for a moment hesitate to say just what is on your mind."⁶¹ Rowan's reply must have eased the situation, as evident in her next letter:

I am so very glad that Mr. Taverner accepts my Pygmy Nuthatch records - it encourages one so. Thank you for standing sponsor for me. . . It's kind of you to say you are pleased with my bird list. . . Needless to add, I shall be extremely careful of my records - and you are at liberty to put all kinds of questions if you are not quite satisfied. . .⁶²

Apparently, Taverner felt the same about her list. In a note to Rowan, he said; "Mrs. Cassels' record is interesting. I think she is very painstaking, and her opinion has weight."⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Cassels to Rowan, 11 March 1923, WRP.

⁶³ Taverner to Rowan, 8 January 1923, WRP. Curiously, *Godfrey's Birds of Canada*, which was based on Taverners' records, does not mention the unusual pygmy

No wonder! Her attention to detail was impressive as seen from her comparison of two very similar owl skins. Rowan had earlier questioned her sighting of the saw-whet owl, and had loaned her a Richardson's (now called boreal) owl 'skin' for comparison. She replied that her owl was smaller than his, and that she had been to Dr. George's museum to study a saw-whet specimen.

In size and shape the latter corresponded exactly to mine but the colouring did not. His is a very pale rusty colour while the back of mine was darker than cinnamon. Almost chocolate with white spots. I was able to note this clearly as I managed to get a good look at him with my binoculars. . .⁶⁴

In addition to field observations, she watched birds at close range beside her various homemade feeders. One such feeder was made from a rough piece of cottonwood bark, pressed with fat drippings, and tied to a tree about five feet off the ground. Her walking path was so close that she could watch birds at less than three feet, and practically at close to eye level. Because the birds did not feel threatened, she could easily observe them while they feasted.

She could also identify birds by listening to their distinctive calls. She had a very good ear for music, and although she never had any lessons, played the violin and sang beautifully. Consequently, she knew when loons, coots, pied-billed grebes, and many other water and land birds arrived in her area without actually seeing them. Sound was the primary factor in discerning the pygmy nuthatch from the red-breasted nuthatch occurrence.

nuthatch sighting in Red Deer.

⁶⁴ Cassels to Rowan, 17 January 1923, WRP.

It was difficult for Elsie to remain firm about not shooting birds when her observations were under scrutiny by her closest associate. Still trying to prove her sighting of a parasitic jaeger, she wrote to Rowan;

I really would have borrowed a gun and shot it for you, for it was there when I returned. As I told you before I had seen them several times at this lake when I had such an easy chance to prove it, but I let it go, for I also remembered you mentioned in your last letter that you now have skins of the Parasitic Jaeger, and that surely no one would doubt my word of having seen it here.⁶⁵

Like Elsie Cassels, Charles Snell was keen on publishing a provincial checklist of birds along the same lines of the Saskatchewan list that had appeared in *the Canadian Field-Naturalist*. Snell had proposed this idea to Rowan in July, 1924⁶⁶ but it took time for Rowan's enthusiastic reply to reach them, as he had been fully occupied in university and field work. Rowan's answer went as follows: "When the time is ripe for a local list we can knock the spots off the Saskatchewan effort."⁶⁷ A follow-up letter suggested his willingness to attend a meeting of the society

to discuss chiefly the requirements of an Alberta checklist. . . I am looking forward more than I can say to chewing the rag during the two or three evenings we shall have together. . . I think the check list question should be thrashed out definitely one way or another. . . I hope [Mrs. Cassels] will be free in the evenings if not the whole time.⁶⁸

Sight records were a hotly contested issue in North American ornithology. Ludlow

⁶⁵ Cassels to Rowan, 2 October 1924, WRP.

⁶⁶ Snell to Rowan, 23 July 1924, SFF.

⁶⁷ Rowan to Snell, 7 October 1924, SFF.

⁶⁸ Rowan to Snell, 30 October 1924, SFF.

Griscom, an American ornithologist trained at Cornell University, was opposed to 'rank amateurs' who tried to publish their lists. Arguing that the literature was already cluttered with false or unverifiable reports, he urged 'sport birders' to enjoy their outings, but not to expect any accreditation for their efforts. His firm separation between 'amateur' and 'professional' irritated many people because he often used his own sight records as data while out birding in the company of 'amateurs.'⁶⁹ Clearly, the difference was in having formal scientific training and credentials. His justification went as follows;

Whether or not a man becomes by reputation an ornithologist depends not so much on money, advanced degree, a museum, or academic connections, but how he spends his time, [and] the degree of his interest and his accomplishments in research. . . the increasing horde of amateur birders don't want to go professional, they wisely wish to keep a healthful and recreational hobby in its place, have no burning urge to add to knowledge or make startling discoveries. . . Most professionals pray God to steer clear of them. . .⁷⁰

Another issue centred on who could be trusted to make decisions about wildlife, and who had the best methodology. In Canada, this included naturalists as well as scientists and various government 'experts.'⁷¹ Naturalists disagreed over the correct identification, range, and behaviour of a particular species, while university scientists involved in research, were

⁶⁹ Griscom was assistant curator of birds at the American Museum of Natural History, and member of the AOU. William E. Davis, 27, 131-142.

⁷⁰ William E. Davis, 100. To place this in perspective, employment opportunities for ornithologists in North America were very limited as this branch of natural history was slow to professionalize. Griscom was a wealthy man and could finance his own travels. Without the work of knowledgeable volunteers the progression of ornithology would have been much slower.

⁷¹ Marianne G. Ainley and E. Tina Crossfield, "Scientists vs Government Experts: The Wood Buffalo Controversy, 1920-1991," (paper presented at the Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association, 16 October 1991).

also in dispute over these and other matters. The University of Alberta President H. M. Tory, had a particularly narrow vision of science which he continually tried to impose on zoologist William Rowan. Tory's argument was that field work was not proper science.⁷² This put Rowan's ornithological research at a disadvantage because he had to do the necessary field work in his spare time in order to pursue his pioneering studies of bird migration.⁷³ In contrast, the larger scientific community praised Rowan's research based on his field and laboratory work.

In the federal government, Maxwell Graham, the self-appointed chief of the Animal Division of the Parks Branch, and James Harkin, Parks Commissioner, complained that "some members of the Forestry Branch may be scientifically trained in forestry, but none of them are scientifically, or specially, trained in biology and certainly not zoology. However, Graham and Harkin also lacked scientific training."⁷⁴ This made management of the national parks problematic, and decisions were being made about wildlife without an adequate understanding of the possible consequences.

In April 1925, the ANHS received a letter from the American Society of Mammalogy, a large international organization, urging cooperation of the ANHS, and other concerned groups, to resist the shipping of Plains Buffalo to the restricted range at

⁷² Ainley, *Restless Energy*, 105

⁷³ Marianne G. Ainley, "Rowan vs Tory - Conflicting Views of Scientific Research in Canada, 1920-1935," *Scientia Canadensis*, 12, 1 (1988): 3-21.

⁷⁴ Foster, 118. Both Graham and Harkin had a vested interest in this debate over 'experts' because they wanted to transfer wildlife from the Forestry Division over to the Parks Division, a shift that resulted in a heated six-year debate within the Department of the Interior.

Wood Buffalo National Park.⁷⁵ This meant that the Plains and the Wood Buffalo, which Rowan believed to be two separate species, could potentially interbreed and allow disease to spread from one herd to the other. Scientific approval for combining the two groups was given by Ernest Thompson Seton, the well known artist, nature writer, and 'controversial scientist' who had served as official naturalist to the Manitoba Government since 1893, and was an infrequent wildlife consultant between the Canadian and American governments.⁷⁶ The result was disastrous for the buffalo, and the ensuing problems are still unresolved to this day.

Wildlife management was a concern to more than government officials. There was widespread discussion among naturalists and scientists in North America over problems caused by predatory species in the newly created wildlife sanctuaries. These differences in opinion were due to the practice of separating animals into arbitrary categories of "good" and "bad." Seen in terms of competition with the efforts of farmers and ranchers, as well as natural history collectors and scientists, good animals could be swallows, because they ate annoying insects; hornets, because they were excellent scavengers; and rattlesnakes

⁷⁵ A. B. Howell, American Society of Mammalogists, U.S. National Museum, Washington, D.C. to Pamel, correspondence, 13 April 1925, ANHS.

⁷⁶ As a nature writer, Seton was always keen to heighten his scientific credibility. However, many of his earlier books were rejected by scientists because he repeatedly 'crossed the line' of fact into fiction. He was publically accused of being a "Nature Faker" by writer/naturalist John Burroughs and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt. Seton never intended his stories to be judged as anthropomorphic, but like other well known scientists of his day, he was guilty of errors. See John Henry Wadland, *Ernest Thompson Seton: Man in Nature and the Progressive Era: 1880-1915* (New York: Arno Press, 1978), and Betty Keller, *Blackwolf. The Life of Ernest Thompson Seton* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984).

because they feasted on rodents. Those that carried the "noxious" label were hunted down with vengeance. American zoologist William Hornaday wrote in 1900 that the "eradication of the puma from certain districts that it now infests to a deplorable extent is a task of the most urgency."⁷⁷ In British Columbia, 17,625 Horned and Snowy Owls, 7,095 Bald-headed and Golden eagles, and 2,246 magpies were shot for bounty in 1922.⁷⁸ Canadian hunter and naturalist, Hamilton Mack Laing, explained that "I'd better shoot that hawk, because if I don't, he'll threaten my rare birds which it is my duty to protect as a conservationist and destroy as a collector."⁷⁹

Vermin were defined as "any animal considered pestiferous or destructive to desirable wildlife or their habitat."⁸⁰ American conservationists during the 1920s and 1930s had unmercifully called for the extermination of these animals in order to encourage more favoured species. The rationale, however could be very subjective. Elsie Cassels had earlier noted the "disturbing increase" in magpies,⁸¹ and Frank Farley had commented on the problems with cut-worms in farmer's fields during the dry years: "I believe the Common Crow is very useful just in this one case, the only place where I can see that he

⁷⁷ Bruce Obee, "The Cats Came Back," *Canadian Wildlife*, 1, 2 (1995): 10-17.

⁷⁸ Richard Mackie, *Hamilton Mack Laing: Hunter-Naturalist* (Victoria: SONO NIS Press, 1985), 145.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Dian Olson Belanger, *Managing American Wildlife. A History of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 43.

⁸¹ Cassels to Rowan, December 1925, WRP.

should be on earth at all. The question is, does he do enough good work to make up for the thieving he does in the summer among the birds nests."⁸²

According to Richard Mackie, the emergence of the 'balance of nature theory' which stated that "given a stable habitat, predators will find their niche in a protected environment and cease to pose a threat," split the natural history community down the centre.⁸³ On the right were the old conservationists, like Allan Brooks and Hamilton Mack Laing, and on the left were protectionists like J. A. Munro and Harrison Lewis. Others fell somewhere in between. Hoyes Lloyd and Percy Taverner tried to keep the two more extreme sides from drowning each other out.⁸⁴ In many cases, these differing opinions were tied to the realities of an evolving frontier, where the activities of basic collecting were over by 1930, and some naturalists had started to believe in the equal worth of all animals.

In a series of exchanges in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, editor Harrison F. Lewis came under attack for a dissenting editorial he wrote earlier concerning a subject which was raised by Munro: "The Necessity of Vermin Control on Bird Sanctuaries."⁸⁵

⁸² Farley to Pameley, 17 December 1921, ANHS.

⁸³ Mackie, 146.

⁸⁴ Mackie, 148-9.

⁸⁵ Harrison F. Lewis (1893-1974) was the first Canadian scientist to obtain a Ph. D at Cornell University in Ornithology. He was both Migratory Bird Officer and editor of *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*. See Ainley, "Emergence of Canadian Ornithology," 14. And William Rowan, Elsie Cassels, Allan Brooks, Frank Speck, and Charles Townsend, "Correspondence," and Harrison Lewis, "Editorial" in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, xxxviii (February 1924): 30-36.

Lewis had written that in most sanctuaries, birds need protection only against 'man' and the unnatural enemies for which 'he' was responsible, like domestic cats and 'English' sparrows. In disagreement, Rowan felt that certain birds and mammals, considered verminous, often found safe havens within sanctuaries as they were immune to human controls. However, these animals preyed on insect-eating birds which the area was designed to protect. His answer was either to protect the predacious species of hawks, crows, and owls everywhere, thereby eliminating their attraction to refuges, or instead, reduce their numbers inside the sanctuaries. In contrast, Brooks was adamant about what he called 'fanatical protectionists" who sought answers to problems through extermination, and that government sanctuaries should be made into actual havens, leaving outside boundaries as places where predatory birds would not be molested.

Elsie Cassels' correspondence to *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* on the issue mirrored the letter she wrote to Rowan: ⁸⁶

I quite agree with you that sanctuaries are just a name unless vermin are kept down. You also know my horror of taking life, but when it means that Crows, Magpies, Squirrels, and co. find a place where they are not molested such areas set aside for the protection of useful birds. . . then I feel that their numbers ought to be reduced. I like to have the Crows and Magpies when the nesting season is over, but I have had my feelings worked up when Crows have come into our garden and take tiny birds out of their nests - and the distress of the parent birds - that given a stout club, and a row of Crows, I could have cheerfully felled the lot.⁸⁷

The last correspondents to the editorial were American naturalists/ornithologists

⁸⁶ Elsie Cassels, "On "Vermin" Control in Sanctuaries, Including Crows and Magpies," correspondence in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, 34.

⁸⁷ Cassels to Rowan, 29 January 1924, WRP.

Frank Speck and Charles Townsend. Speck believed that "It is nature that the naturalist wants, not animal propaganda evoked by sentiment or fancy for this songster or that insectivorous bird." Townsend wrote, "Sanctuaries are no places for the indiscriminate extermination of birds and beasts whose aesthetic value add to our interest and joy in life, not to mention their own feelings in the matter."⁸⁸

Even Harrison F. Lewis, who had the best training, wasn't entirely clear in his thinking, especially over what he considered to be 'normal' distribution.

While the Crow in natural numbers was probably chiefly a useful destroyer of insects and small mammals. . . in his present abundance he is an important menace to many of our most desirable game and insectivorous birds. This situation requires neither an attempt to exterminate the Crow nor absolute protection for it, but a policy of control, under which surplus Crows may be destroyed and the Crow population kept normal in number. . . Organized Crow "shoots" and poisonings and similar methods of wholesale destruction may occasionally be necessary . . . but they should not be permitted except under intelligent supervision, preferably governmental. Similar methods of control should be applied to such partly predatory species as the Bronzed Grackle, the Magpie, some Gulls, and Squirrels, and also the Cowbird. . . We should decide on the abundance desired of each species, and give to each its place, keeping it within limits. Both artificial conditions in some areas and 'natural' conditions in other areas must be maintained by human control.⁸⁹

This resolution would have appealed to Elsie, for she wrote in her next letter to Rowan, "I notice that *Canadian Field-Naturalist* has nothing more to say about the Crow and Magpie business. Lewis came around nicely did he not?"⁹⁰ It would be interesting to

⁸⁸ Lewis, "Editorial."

⁸⁹ Lewis, "Editorial," 36.

⁹⁰ Cassels to Rowan, 19 April 1924, WRP.

know if their discussion continued when Rowan visited the Cassels the following summer at Sylvan Lake.

In 1925, the Rowan family visited *The Ark* for the first, and unfortunately for Elsie Cassels, the only time. The young male professor and older female naturalist spent much time together observing and discussing birds while canoeing and rambling through the marshes and woodlands. Reta Rowan, who was eight months pregnant at the time, stayed around the cabin and shoreline to look after the three Rowan youngsters.⁹¹

In the late evenings their conversations probably drifted towards birds and the practice of ornithology. In 1926, she invited the Rowans once more to visit *The Ark* and in her humorous way, wrote, "I do hope you understand that I was only teasing about the "Ardent Protectionist" stuff [in your article] in *Country Life*. . . we do not allow any real collecting from our beloved Ark, but you will always be a most welcome visitor there if you behave yourself as nicely as you did last time!!"⁹²

Although this visit did not occur, they maintained their contact through letters and she followed Rowan's experimental work with great interest. The fact that he kept sending her his scientific articles is another indication of how high his esteem was for her: "Thank you very much for your Migration article which promises to be interesting. Doubtless I shall find it deep for me in spots, but as I have only had time to glance through it, so far, I

⁹¹ Cassels to Rowan, 30 July 1925, WRP. Ainley, *Restless Energy*, 153.

⁹² Cassels to Rowan, 19 February 1926, WRP.

hope it may not prove too hard."⁹³

In February 1938, Rowan wrote to Charles Snell that he was planning a trip back to Red Deer where he had not been for several years. "I would love to see something of you if you feel like a walk or a coffee during the day. I also badly want to see the Cassels." There is no evidence that Rowan was able to see Elsie Cassels before she died on November twelfth.⁹⁴ Their last correspondence took place the previous December, in which she chatted informally about her feeder:

This is the first winter I've had the Red-breasted Nuthatch feeding with the rest of the birds, and even during the cold snap they appeared quite lively. I have seen them three at a time and always two together to feed and carry off bits of fat to hide. They are very friendly and tame, and fuss around my hands when putting out fresh food.⁹⁵

Elsie Cassels' ornithological work has endured until present times. In the 1981 *Bibliography of Alberta Naturalists*, Martin McNicholl, et al. categorized her notes, published in *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, as dealing with nomenclature, taxonomy, management and conservation, although she was probably more active in migration and

⁹³ Cassels to Rowan, 28 April 1927, WRP. This article was likely "On Photoperiodism, Reproductive Periodicity, and the Annual Migrations of Birds and Certain Fishes," *Proceedings of the Boston Society of Natural History*, 38 (1926): 147-89. See Ainley, *Restless Energy*, 357.

⁹⁴ Rowan to Snell, 2 February 1938, SFF. Rowan's own health was a factor from 1932 to 1934. He spent time in England in 1933, and again from 1936-37. This may explain the lapse in the Cassels-Rowan correspondence. Ainley, *Restless Energy*, 212-222.

⁹⁵ Cassels to Rowan, 28 December 1934, WRP.

geographic distribution.⁹⁶ *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* acknowledged Elsie Cassels' contributions, but especially, that by "her keen enthusiasm, she stimulated a wide interest in the study of ornithology."⁹⁷ In fact, her greatest impact would be within her local community. This is more evident from her correspondence with Rowan and other people. Naturalist Kerry Wood, who was a youngster at the time, credited both Elsie Cassels and Charles Snell with installing purple martin nest boxes at Sylvan Lake. The nest boxes were part of a strategy to attract birds to that area, and this project was undertaken by younger members of the ANHS.⁹⁸

For almost fifty years, Elsie Cassels recorded her day's activities along with observations of birds and flowers in scribbler-type notebooks. Her scientific activities were a natural extension of her curiosity, talents and beliefs, and she was able to stay current with recent findings through discussion by reading *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, *National Geographic*, and *The Condor*, the latter passed to her by Charles Snell who joined the Cooper Ornithologist Society from 1926 to 1932. Earlier in 1927, she had the opportunity to hear a lecture in Red Deer by Dr. Charles D. Roberts, a well known Canadian nature writer. She told Rowan that "I was vastly disappointed in him. He read us some of his poetry and told funny episodes of himself. . . I went there hoping to get a few

⁹⁶ M. K. McNicholl, H. R. Philip, Peter C. Boswell, and David A. E. Spalding, *A Bibliography of Alberta Ornithologists* (Edmonton: Provincial Museum of Alberta Natural History, 1981): chapter 1, 1-9, chapter 4, 47, 139, 142, 143, 232, 236, 248, chapter 5, 4.

⁹⁷ "Obituary Notice," *The Canadian Field-Naturalist* (1939): 29.

⁹⁸ Kerry Wood, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

thrills, but if I could not give a more interesting lecture than his proved to be, I simply would not try!"⁹⁹

In her letters, Elsie Cassels usually addressed William Rowan as "dear professor Rowan," and only twice as "my dear professor" when she admitted to being depressed about her health: "I have been rather unwell for the last 3 weeks with spells of depression, a most unusual occurrence with me."¹⁰⁰ Two years later, illness was beginning to confine her to *Riverside*.

In a reply to Rowan's query about autumn bird sightings, Elsie Cassels wrote: "I fear that I cannot give you the information you wish, as I have been home for over a month. I do not know of anyone at the lake who could give me any satisfaction if I wrote to them, as I do not fancy they are very observant where birds are concerned."¹⁰¹ When asked the whereabouts of her papers, a young woman who cared for her before she died remarked that "William might have thrown them out. He was of that temperament."¹⁰² Fortunately, some of Elsie Cassels' correspondence did survive.

After the ANHS became less active in 1926, due to poor health and/or other activities of its members,¹⁰³ Elsie Cassels made two more contributions to *The Canadian*

⁹⁹ Cassels to Rowan, 16 January 1927, WRP.

¹⁰⁰ Cassels to Rowan, 6 August 1926, WRP.

¹⁰¹ Cassels to Rowan, 10 November 1928, WRP.

¹⁰² Mini Cunningham of Red Deer, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

¹⁰³ Michael J. Dawe and Rod. J. Trentham. "Red Deer River Naturalists," *Alberta Naturalist*, special issue, suppl. 3 (Fall 1996): 30-33. Elsie Cassels was given the title of Honourary President of the ANHS when the society was revived in 1938 by naturalist

Field-Naturalist. The first was about red-breasted nuthatches,¹⁰⁴ which over-wintered at her backyard feeder, and the second concerned red-winged blackbirds, which had chosen to build their nests in an area that had once been the site of a forest burn. They had likely adopted this semi-moist area, a half mile from the shores of Sylvan Lake, because their previous reed-bed had been devoured by horses.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, her observational skills and long time field experiences had not declined with age. The birds were seen drinking and bathing at the lake in large numbers, and she had noticed the same inland flight patterns as the year before. Thus, the redwings had returned to their unusual nesting location for the second year in a row. Their trills and flashes of scarlet on black must have delighted this sensible woman who took nothing for granted.

Kerry Wood.

¹⁰⁴ Elsie Cassels, "Red-Breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*)" *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, 47 (1935): 140.

¹⁰⁵ Elsie Cassels, "Unusual Nesting of Eastern Redwings," *The Canadian Field-Naturalist*, 51 (1937): 12.

5. Elsie Cassels: Imperialism, Immigration, and Settlement

As a Scottish immigrant and settler, Elsie Cassels could not have escaped the imperialist rhetoric which dominated Great Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century. While there still is not a great deal of literature on women and colonialism in Canada, several books and articles provide a basis for the understanding of this period.¹ As well, personal journals, letters, auto/biographies, and travel writing provide insight into how British women handled themselves as newcomers in the west, and how they were received by those already present.² British imperialism lies at the heart of many other events, such as settlement, missionary work, public education, moral reform, women's suffrage, and government legislation.³ The dynamics of gender, race, and class

¹ Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, eds. "Introduction" *Western Women and Imperialism. Complicity and Resistance* (Indiana University Press, 1992), 1-15; Jane Haggis, "Gendering Colonialism or Colonial Gender? Recent Women's Studies Approaches to White Women and the History of British Colonialism" *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 1&2 (1990): 105-115; Laura Ann Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 31 (1980): 134-161. Other sources include Sara Mills, "Introduction," *Discourses of Difference. An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 1-23.

² Monica Hopkins, *Letters of a Lady Rancher* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1982); Mary E. Inderwick, "A Lady and Her Ranch," *Alberta Historical Review*, 15, 4 (Autumn 1967); Moira O'Neill "A Lady's Life on a Ranch," in *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty. British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914*, ed., Susan Jackel (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), 95-110.

³ The term imperialism, as defined by Edward W. Said, is taken to mean: "The practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center (such as Great Britain) ruling a distant territory. Colonialism, which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory." He goes on to state that "colonialism was a commitment. . . which allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that [they could] rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples". See *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: A. Knopf Inc., 1993), 9-10.

are also important factors when dealing with demographics of a mixed frontier. But in order to unravel the many stereotypes of British-born women still prevalent in western Canadian history, the question of 'lived experience' versus 'official accounts' needs to be explored.⁴ Britishness was not a homogenous characteristic, and not all British women were imperialists. While some would view Canada as a place where much civilizing work needed to be done, others would adapt more easily to new ways of life.

Had Elsie McAlister remained in Scotland, her future prospects were not promising. As a single woman of twenty-six years, she may have been employed in the small town of Megget, a hamlet named after the river which flows into St. Mary's Loch, about sixty kilometres south of Edinburgh.⁵ Like her father, Elsie may have worked as a teacher. Only twenty years prior to Elsie Cassels' birth, the character of the chiefly rural community was described as "reflecting and intelligent. . . (with) a taste for knowledge and for reading. . . and a becoming regard to religion and morality."⁶ Writers of the 1845 county census claimed that there was "probably not an individual in the whole parish (of Megget) ten years of age. . . who is unable to read, and few, if any, who are not able to

⁴ Ruth Roach Pierson, "Experience, Difference, and Voice in the Writing of Canadian Women's History," in *Writing Women's History: International Perspectives*, eds. Karen Offen, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Jane Rendall (Indiana University Press, 1991). And Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 16-45.

⁵ Today, this area is described as "stunningly beautiful and still largely unspoiled and looks very much like it must have done in Elsie's day." Ann Barry of Edinburgh, research assistant, correspondence with author, 16 January 1995.

⁶ *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, III, (Edinburgh: Roxburgh, Peebles, & Selkirk, 1845), 169.

both read and write."⁷ Elsie would embody many of these values, and in Canada, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances would regard her as well-educated and well-versed in natural history.

Like other women immigrants, Elsie Cassels' personal record was not readily available. Extensive research in Scottish archives eventually revealed the basics. Eliza McAlister was born in February, 1864, in a small farming village near St. Mary's Loch. She had three brothers and two sisters living in Scotland with whom she may have corresponded regularly.⁸ While little is known about her mother, Janet Reid, her father, Archibald McAlister was schoolmaster at the Free Church Schoolhouse. Although specific records of Elsie's schooling are missing, elementary subjects taught by neighbouring schools during the same period included reading, writing, arithmetic, and scripture.

This observation is in keeping with other Scottish communities. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, notions of education were broader and more democratic in Scotland than in England.⁹ The universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Aberdeen were decades ahead of Oxford and Cambridge in science education. This had a beneficial effect on local education, and the Scottish emigrant was likely to be better

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ 1881 and 1891 Census Records for Megget, Edinburgh University Archives, Scotland.

⁹ D. C. Masters, "The Scottish Tradition in Higher Education," in *The Scottish Tradition in Canada*, ed., W. Stanford Reid (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart in Association with Multiculturalism Canada, 1976), 248-272.

educated than her/his English counterpart.¹⁰ Depending on the expertise of the teacher, more specific subjects could have ranged from English literature to Latin, French, Greek, physical geography, animal physiology, botany, and domestic economy.¹¹

While Elsie McAlister's financial circumstances are unknown, the sequence of events leading up to her Canadian immigration might have followed this pattern. Until she met William, she was still living with her parents. In the same household, the McAlister's also lodged another family of four.¹² Elsie and William may have been introduced through William's brother, Charles, who was a life insurance agent in Edinburgh. It is possible that Elsie's older brother, John, who was similarly employed, may have met Charles through business connections.¹³ As William had just returned from America in order to find a wife with whom to go homesteading, Charles and John may have felt that Elsie was an ideal candidate. Given her single status, and the fact that both her parents were still relying on her help at home, or in the schoolhouse, it would have been highly unlikely that she would have emigrated on her own.¹⁴ She would have been

¹⁰ Trevor H. Levere and Richard Jarrell, eds., *A Curious Field Book; Science and Society in Canadian History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1974), 8-11.

¹¹ *New Statistical Account of Scotland*, 173-4.

¹² 1881 and 1891 Census for Megget, Scotland.

¹³ Registrar General for Scotland, Parish of Megget, County of Peebles, 1889. Mina P. Cole, "William Anderson Cassels," and "History of Springvale: Mr. and Mrs. Cassels," *Red Deer Advocate*, 13 February 1959.

¹⁴ The 1881 census for Megget indicates that neither her two brothers, nor her eldest sister of 23 were yet married. With two younger children to care for, Elsie's position

restricted first by her class, and second by her financial resources. As there were no free quarters being offered to single women in Canada if they were not widows, divorcees, or deserted wives (who needed dependent children in order to qualify), only women of considerable means could buy their way into farming.¹⁵

Emigration in the 1880s and 1890s was an attractive alternative to life in Great Britain, which was experiencing economic difficulties, civil unrest, and overcrowding. Consequently, there was much interest generated around newspaper advertisements for plentiful jobs, high wages, and financial security in the Canadian west. Women who were strong, accustomed to housework, single, cultured, and English speaking were actively recruited by such companies as the CPR.¹⁶ The rewards for immigration were touted to be a leisurely and refined domestic life, marital satisfaction, and freedom from worry and fatigue.¹⁷ If a woman was fortunate enough to meet a successful farmer or rancher in the process, her chances for personal survival were greater (notwithstanding marital

in the family was fourth.

¹⁵ Georgina Binnie-Clark was a privileged-class Englishwoman who travelled to Saskatchewan. Her answer to the problem of 'superfluous women' was to pursue agriculture in the colonies where she believed that a "Woman can earn for herself independence and in time wealth. . . provided she has a fair start." From 1908 onward, she campaigned vigorously to modify these laws, which remained unchanged despite her petitions until 1930, when most land was no longer available. Susan Jackel, "Introduction," in *Wheat and Women*, Georgina Binnie-Clark (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), xxii, 305.

¹⁶ Linda Rasmussen, Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne Wheeler, *A Harvest Yet to Reap. A History of Prairie Women* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1976), 13.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

difficulties or abusive relationships) than if she married a 'poor' homesteader, or a man who was supported by remittance instalments. British women who did relocate in Canada, both single and married, would eventually influence the shape and character of Northwest society.

By the 1890s, imperialism saturated every facet of British daily life.¹⁸ Stories depicting the exploits of sport hunters attracted men, and some women, who had dreamed of an exciting life on the Canadian frontier.¹⁹ Investors were drawn by huge profits looming in colonial trade, and missionaries were promised enormous spiritual rewards for helping to Christianize the backwoods. Although Canada was prominently featured in poetry, prose, monographs, pamphlets, reprinted letters, and newspapers, the British government downplayed the harsher realities of homesteading. It was a well known fact that most steamers arriving in England in the 1870s and 1880s were loaded with returning disgruntled emigrants.²⁰

Britain was intent on selling the idea of emigration largely because of its problems with overpopulation and gender imbalance. Few literate people could have remained unaware that there were "too many" women in Britain and "not enough" in

¹⁸ Gordon Morley and Doug Owram, *Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada 1880-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 5.

¹⁹ Patrick A. Duane, "'Making Good': The Canadian West in British Boy's Literature, 1890-1914," *Prairie Forum*, 4, 2 (1979): 165-181.

²⁰ The number of emigrants leaving Britain for the U.S. declined yearly from 1873 to 1878. See Arnold Rollo, *The Farthest Land. English Villagers, New Zealand Immigrants of the 1870s* (New Zealand: Victoria University Press, 1981), 47.

Canada.²¹ Although the precariousness of being a single woman or a widower was felt among all levels of society, a gentlewoman without prospects was assumed to be the most vulnerable. The concept of 'redundant population' had been discussed openly since the late 1700s, especially in Scotland. According to W.R. Greg, in English society, this group was often classified as those immediately above the labouring poor and usually the daughters of impoverished tradesmen, clerks or curates.²² These women were limited by their class to activities like teaching, governessing, sewing, and nursing. Men who were legally bound to support their unwed sisters, cousins, and aunts often resented the extra financial burdens. Single men, who sailed on emigrant ships to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and America, merely contributed to the dearth of potential husbands, as did soldiers who were lost in the Napoleonic Wars.

In the beginning, it was difficult to encourage women to leave Britain. During the first twenty years of its existence, the Female Middle Class Emigration Society (1862) assisted some women to emigrate, most of whom were teachers and governesses.²³ Many weighed the odds of a dangerous voyage and the hardships on arrival against the

²¹ Single, female, middle-class emigration was never large enough to significantly alter the social and demographic situation in Britain. See James A. Hammerton, "Feminism and Female Emigration, 1861-1886," in *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women*, ed., Martha Vicinus (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 53-71.

²² Hammerton, *Ibid.* See also: Mary Poovey, "Uneven Developments," *The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1-23. In a much cited essay written in 1862 by W. R. Greg, entitled "Why Are Women Redundant," unmarried working women were identified as a major social concern. Greg's solution was to send 500,000 women to the colonies as prospective wives.

²³ Most of these women ended up in South Africa and Australia. See Jackel, xviii.

rhetoric that society would be relieved of its problems if they left. One of the most distressing arguments was that a gentlewoman might sacrifice her social position if she accepted the position of domestic helper overseas. While these sentiments would linger over the next thirty years, many new emigration societies were formed to assist educated, (middle class) women, and improvements in steamships and railways lessened the fears of illness or death along the way.²⁴

British colonists were never a homogenous group who shared common goals and fears, and there is little evidence that British culture was transferred directly to the colonies. Inevitably, people took only a portion of their total culture with them in the form of literature, music, theatre, newspapers, journals, and school textbooks. Scotland alone had two languages, Gaelic and English, two religions, Protestant and Roman Catholic, and two traditions; highland and lowland. Similarities between Scotland and Canada with regards to geography, climate, and social conditions indicate that many Scots felt at home in their new surroundings.²⁵ Elsie Cassels' favourite poem was Sir Walter Scott's "The Lady of the Lake," because it reminded her of youthful days spent on the shores of St. Mary's Loch. This rolling countryside, with its bountiful forests,

²⁴ Some of these societies included the Women's Emigration Society (1880-1884), the Colonial Emigration Society (1884-92), and the United British Women's Emigration Association (1884-1919). Hammerton, 56. And Jackel, xviii. See also, Suzann Buckley, "British Female Emigration and Imperial Development: Experiments in Canada, 1885-1931." *Hecate*, 3, 2 (1977): 26-40.

²⁵ Scottish people made significant contributions to Anglo-Canadian literature, music, and the arts. See Elizabeth Waterston, "The Lowland Tradition in Canadian Literature," in *The Scottish Tradition in Canada*, ed., W. Stanford Reid (McClelland and Stewart in Association with Multiculturalism Canada, 1976), 203-231.

streams and lakes, was almost certainly the origin for her love of birds, and Sylvan Lake, Alberta, was reminiscent of home.²⁶

For many women, the emphasis on household traditions from the Old Country was not easily dismissed, and emigration literature was full of advice on how to conduct themselves in Canada. Some were encouraged to give up dressing and acting like ladies when either their pocketbooks, or their circumstances didn't allow it.²⁷ In 1884, ranch wife Mary Inderwick insisted that guests continue to dress up for dinner with a collar, tie and jacket.²⁸ Other women would defy social convention altogether. According to one recollection, Elsie Cassels dressed plainly, shapelessly (as she wore no corsets), and smoked cigarettes to the shock of many young naturalists.²⁹ It was obvious that because of her husband's control over the finances, she seldom had the means to purchase new clothing. Smoking, however, was a more liberating behavior and one of her only indulgences.

In 1982, historian Susan Jackel recognized that the term "British" was a problematic one used to denote nationality.³⁰ Six years later, Akenson's work on the Irish

²⁶ Annie L. Gaetz, "Woman Provides Sanctuary for Feathered Folk." *Calgary Herald*, 13 April 1935.

²⁷ Lenore Davidoff, "The Anatomy of Society and Etiquette," *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 71-84.

²⁸ Mary E. Inderwick, 1-9.

²⁹ Kerry Wood of Red Deer, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

³⁰ Jackel, *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*.

in North America (1988) again raised this question.³¹ Whenever British data is used, a clarification must follow indicating to whom the research material pertains. Whether English, Scottish, Irish, or Welsh, not all British immigrants valued the same things, or conducted themselves in the same manner. There were rigid class differences both inside and outside these diverse ethnic groups. Similarly, the term 'middle-class' is hard to define, even though emigrants were thought to have left their social boundaries behind. Alberta was the last Canadian region to absorb the impact of first wave British and European culture. As late as 1920, the Tory government was still insisting that British immigrants didn't need to be assimilated into Canadian society because British 'meant' Canadian, while England's upper and middle classes firmly believed that they were at the centre of the civilized world.³² While the Canadian west did not begin as a class conscious society, life became more rigid with time. Thus, intricate patterns of social behaviour learned over scores of generations were increasingly difficult to shed in the New World, regardless of how liberating they might be.³³

³¹ Donald H. Akenson, "Data: What is Known About the Irish in North America," in *The Untold Story*, eds., R. O. Driscoll and C. Reynolds (Toronto: Celtic Arts of Canada, 1988), 15-25.

³² Most members of the ranching community were, "privileged settlers." Well educated and predominantly British. At times, they created a society which some immigrants, especially from eastern Europe and the United States, found overly elitist. Lewis G. Thomas, *Rancher's Legacy: Alberta Essays by Lewis G. Thomas*, ed., Patrick A. Duane (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986.) And Stephen Constantine, ed. *Emigrants and Empire. British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*. (Manchester University Press, 1990), 157.

³³ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies. A History* (University of Toronto Press), 316. Davidoff, 39-42.

On the prairies, class behaviour was often based on what people felt being British entailed, and many settlers invented new ways of incorporating these values into their daily lives.³⁴ Sorting out how British women adapted to frontier life is important because it challenges various stereotypes which have become entrenched in the historical literature. According to Emma Curtin, not all British middle-class gentlewomen were influenced by the imperialist propaganda, and many did not carry out civilizing missions on the frontier whenever the opportunity arose.³⁵ Not all British women transported their class and national prejudices to Alberta, and of all the women involved in missionary work, many were plagued with conflicting opinions, attitudes, and motivations towards the very people they were trying to help.³⁶ Nanci Langford feels that while urban-based middle-class women took on ambitious political goals, rural women were opposed to efforts made by urban women to provide them with 'political' education and direction.³⁷

It is not surprising that for many British women, prairie society was not a

³⁴ Stoler, 134-161. And, Catharine Hall, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains... to Africa's Golden Sand": Ethnicity, Race and Nation in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England," *Gender and History*, 5, 2 (1993): 212-230.

³⁵ Emma Curtin, "Two British Gentlewomen," *Alberta History*, 38, 4 (1990): 10-16.

³⁶ Michael Owen, "Lighting the Pathways for New Canadians: Methodist and United Church WMS Missions in Eastern Alberta, 1904-1940," In *Standing on New Ground: Women in Alberta*, eds., Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993), 1-18.

³⁷ Nanci Langford, "All That Glitters; The Political Apprenticeship of Alberta women, 1916-1930," In *Standing on New Ground: Women in Alberta*, eds., Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi R. Warne (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993), 71-86.

particularly harmonious place.³⁸ This was as much due to class as nationality. Practically speaking, many women struggled with the constant contradictions of ideal and reality. While some believed that the new communities would welcome their 'refining touch' others were shattered by signs of 'No English Need Apply.' In general, misgivings about "The English" affected a wide range of people. For example, personal conflicts between the Cassels and other townsfolk were subtle factors in their participation in Red Deer community life. Those who were American or Canadian-born often confused Elsie's Scottish accent with English. William was mistaken for an Englishman because his behaviour and livelihood fit a familiar, but erroneous stereotype, that of a 'hopelessly incompetent' remittance man. Other statements about undesirable neighbours were common in letters from this era:

I find that a good many Americans are finding their way into this country. They will never make good British subjects - in my opinion - the leopard cannot change his spots, but their children may become loyal citizens. It would be better, I think, to have our country filled with our own people.³⁹

Mary Inderwick commented on English women being "rather a lot of cats. . . they seem so gossipy and so different from what ought to be in the West, but I think most of their

³⁸ Marianna Valverde, "Racial Purity, Sexual Purity, and Immigration Policy, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991), 104-128. Settlement conflicts in Upper Canada in the 1830s and 1840s are common in the writing of Susanna Moodie. See *Roughing it in the Bush or Forest Life in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962 edition, originally published in 1871.)

³⁹ Ethelbert Schofield, Diary, British Columbia, 1913, in *Canadian Women on the Move*, eds., Beth Light and Joy Parr (Toronto: New Hogtown Press and OISE, 1983), 167-8.

husbands drink very hard when occasion offers, and that seems very often, that they are all with one or two exceptions bitter."⁴⁰ Inderwick, herself, was presumed to be English because she married an Englishman, an assumption that she found very insulting. Born in Perth, Ontario, she continually insisted that as a Canadian, she was vastly different from lower middle-class Britons, even in light of their 'imperial' education and material comforts. She attributed her good fortune to generations of gentle 'Canadian' family breeding. At one point, she exclaimed to some rather bothersome visiting Englishmen, "Oh, don't England me any more! I am so sick of it!"⁴¹

It was well known in Red Deer that Elsie and William Cassels were not friendly with British surgeon-physician, Henry George (1863-1932) and his wife, Barbara Mary (nee: Bernard, 1867-1936). The Georges had emigrated to Canada from England the same summer as the Cassels. Having first lived in Calgary, they moved to Innisfail, then settled in Red Deer in 1907. George worked as physician with the CPR and the "E" division of the North West Mounted Police, and was a medical officer to the battalions stationed in Red Deer in World War One. Although Elsie Cassels would never condone George's wildlife collecting methods, or support his many errors in identifying species, she would respect his title and authority in certain areas. Curiously, there is no mention of her in any of George's personal correspondence, records, or scrapbooks. Even the guest ledger for his first museum, located in Innisfail prior to 1907, does not contain her

⁴⁰ Inderwick, 5-6.

⁴¹ Ibid.

name, nor has she been identified in any of his photographs of field excursions.⁴²

Although Red Deer would never achieve the same economic or political status as Calgary, by 1902 it contained some of the same ingredients. Demographics for Calgary in 1895 show that it had a distinctly British flavour, and men outnumbered women four to one.⁴³ For those who were part of the emerging establishment, city life had much to offer in the way of culture and material convenience. But for the growing numbers of unemployed, both men and women, single and married, crowded conditions were rapidly deteriorating. There was a lack of adequate nutrition, clothing, and shelter, and according to the upper and middle classes, a rise in distressing moral behaviours. In particular, abandoned women with children were causing much concern among philanthropic societies, which relied on volunteers to provide the much needed help.

These volunteers were largely middle and upper-class British women who were economically secure, although their own situation could be precarious if their husbands fell on hard times. Their British heritage partially allowed for the establishment and reproduction of similar institutions and organizations from the Old Country. Of these, churches and missionaries fit well into Dominion government strategies by assuming

⁴² Henry George Family Fonds, Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives, and The Dr. George and Kemp House (Restoration Project), Innisfail. George was best known for providing medical care to the Stoney, Blackfoot, and Sarcee tribes, and was present at the death of Crowfoot, Chief of the Blackfoot.

⁴³ Freisen, 238. See also Marjorie Norris, *A Leaven of Ladies: A History of the Calgary Local Council of Women* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1995), 21-22.

much of the responsibility for education.⁴⁴ Among church groups, voluntarism was a mandatory part of belonging to any congregation. Not surprisingly, content was heavily Anglo-centric and Anglican. Membership in other organizations, such as the Alberta Women's Institute, a non-sectarian and non-partisan group, provided new British immigrants with contacts to other familiar organizations like the Imperial Order Daughters of Empire (IODE), Women's Christian Temperance, and Victorian Order of Nurses.⁴⁵ These women would have different agendas and opinions on how to better a culturally diverse and troubled society.⁴⁶ Influenced by imperialist training and Victorian moralities, many women were intolerant of ethnic and class diversity, and were unaware or unwilling to confront inequalities within their own gender or class.⁴⁷

Those immigrants who did not fit the norm because of colour, religion, language, behaviour, or ethnic background were thought inferior by the dominant (British)

⁴⁴ L. G. Thomas, "The Church of England and the Canadian West," *The Anglican Church and the World of Western Canada 1820-1970*, ed., Barry Ferguson (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991), 25.

⁴⁵ Catharine C. Cole, "Education, Community Service, and Social Life: The Alberta Women's Institutes and Rural Families, 1909-1945," in *Standing on New Ground: Women in Alberta*, eds., Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi Warne (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ Norris, *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Veronica Strong-Boag, "'Ever a Crusader': Nellie McClung, First Wave Feminist," in *Re-Thinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History*, eds. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991), second edition, 308-21.

classes.⁴⁸ Sarah Carter's work on First Nations people points to a sharpening of racial boundaries between peoples in settlement areas, resulting in the rise of certain types of discrimination. Historian Sylvia Van Kirk has shown that the appearance of white women in the Canadian northwest disrupted successful relationships between native women and white male fur traders employed by the Hudson's Bay Company.⁴⁹ Even so, Antoinette Burton believes that most British women were caught up in an imperial system they didn't create, couldn't recognize at the time, and therefore could not easily evade. Given the shifting middle ground of women's position within western society, it becomes increasingly more important not to cast all British women in one mold.⁵⁰

The movement to improve the condition of immigrant women and children was

⁴⁸ Valverde, 104-128. The concept of a "greater Britain," due to the establishment of British values in Canadian society, was a key ideological construction which fostered the notions of an imperial race. See Keith Williams, "A Way Out of Our Troubles: The Politics of Empire Settlement, 1900-1922," in *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, ed., Stephen Constantine (Manchester University Press, 1990).

⁴⁹ Carter, 147-161. And Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society in Western Canada, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer, 1980.)

⁵⁰ Historically, western women have been blamed for creating racial tension between the colonizers and the colonized in countries such as India. See Nupur and Strobel, 1-15. In a study on racial tensions during Northern Rhodesia's late colonial period, Karen Tranberg Hansen has pointed to British class structures as being the major cause for social unrest. See "White Women in a Changing World: Employment, Voluntary Work, and Sex in Post World War II Northern Rhodesia," *Western Women and Imperialism. Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 247-268. See also Edward W. Said, 162; Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith, eds., "Introduction," *De/Colonizing the Subject: the Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), xiii-xxxi; Antoinette M. Burton, "The White Woman's Burden. British Feminists and the Indian Woman, 1865-1915," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13, 4 (1990): 295-308; and Sara Mills, *Ibid.*

largely led by British middle-class women. One such organization was the IODE, a Canadian patriotic group designed to provide assistance to British soldiers in times of war.⁵¹ Formed during the Boer War, it became a nationwide group whose composition drew women from society's elite ranks. True to its name, members were intent on retaining and promoting British ideals in Canada. Non-Anglo-Saxon women were refused entry (and considered foreigners, whether or not they were born in Canada), as were British women who had neither the education nor the funds to participate in IODE functions. Part of their mandate was to express their love for the Empire, and encourage other women to support British culture and values, especially when that meant upholding the war effort in Canada. For British women who were denied applications, or who were not interested in promoting imperialism, relationships with IODE members may have become quite strained.

As President of the St. Luke Anglican Church's Ladies Guild for almost five years, Elsie Cassels was an active member of the choir until 1910.⁵² However, she was conspicuously absent from later records, a trend which can be traced in the minute books. By 1915, her name had been entered on the ledger, then scratched. This gradual disinterest coincided with the arrival of Barbara Mary, artist, volunteer botanist, and life

⁵¹ Nadine Small, "The 'Lady Imperialists' and the Great War: The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire in Saskatchewan, 1914-1918," in *"Other" Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women*, eds., David De Brou and Aileen Moffat (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995), 76-93.

⁵² Elsie Cassels was president of the Ladies Guild (later the Women's Auxiliary) in 1908, 1910, 1911, and 1913, and Honourary President in 1912. See Meeres, *Meeres' Notes*, and the St. Luke's Anglican Church, Women's Auxiliary Minute Books, 1911-1915, Anglican Archives, Diocese of Calgary.

member of the IODE.⁵³ Barbara was a former graduate of Buxton College in London, and had mothered twelve children, most of whom she home educated. Forming a branch of the "Mother's Union Group" in Red Deer, she gave classes to young mothers on the proper ways to raise their children.⁵⁴ While it could be discerned that Elsie Cassels' growing interest in the ANHS didn't leave much time for church activities, perhaps Barbara Mary's leadership as president was not compatible with everyone.

Elsie Cassels' was not IODE material, and it is unlikely that she was an imperialist, or someone who felt her British background far superior in every way to those less fortunate. This assumption is derived from three observations. The first concerns her politics, and is based on association. According to one interview, "She could have been a socialist, but [William] was really not - too stuffy. . . It was easy to see why she got along so well with Charles Snell, as he was a strong socialist and a Temperance man."⁵⁵ William was far too interested in capitalizing his own investments to worry about the state of prairie society. He was a strong believer in the American concept of rugged individualism, and was thought by neighbours to drink heavily on occasion. The second reason is Elsie's casual appearance, and the apparent lack of material comforts at home. In a letter to Rowan in 1925, she apologized for the

⁵³ Barbara Mary George was an accomplished artist and produced many paintings of botanical subjects. She is 'unofficially' credited with the design of the Alberta Provincial Crest. Henry L. George of Winnipeg, correspondence with author, 6 September 1994.

⁵⁴ William Michael George of Phoenix, AZ, correspondence with author, 7 December 1994.

⁵⁵ Harold Dawe of Red Deer, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

condition of *Riverside*: "We are having the house made modern and the place is like a pigsty. The house was built long before waterworks were thought of" twenty-three years before.⁵⁶

The third clue is her participation in Red Deer's Dramatic Club:

Elsie Cassels was a very talented woman. Although she had never had any music lessons, she played the violin and sang beautifully. She also loved the theatre, and took part in many of the productions. . . We called her 'Lady Jane' (from a part she played in an amateur play) and Lady Jane always called her husband 'The Boss.' While we, too, referred to him as the boss, we were always careful to address him as Mr. Cassels; I remember him as a rather reserved person, although Lady Jane was a warm individual with a wonderful sense of humour - she was always happy and cheerful and ready with good advice, or a word of praise or encouragement.⁵⁷

The ease and assurance with which she undertook this comic role meant that she would have left herself open to public criticism, something which many aspiring women were careful not to attract. Membership in elite circles, such as the IODE, represented a serious adherence to convention. Mistakes made in public could be unforgiven and likely damaging to reputation. Elsie Cassels' answer to this would be that it didn't matter. Her immigration to Canada brought with it few ties, and promoting the Empire wasn't one of them. Along with her 'birding' reputation, her nickname "Lady Jane" became incorporated into the folklore of Red Deer's second generation.

Other aspects of Elsie Cassels' affairs were not fondly remembered. One on-going

⁵⁶ Cassels to Rowan, 20 April 1925, WRP.

⁵⁷ Margaret Yule of Saanitchon, B.C., correspondence with author, 14 February 1995.

dilemma was Elsie Cassels' failure to pay membership dues.⁵⁸ Whether it was the Ladies Guild or the ANHS, she was constantly in arrears due to the fact that William controlled their finances down to the penny. Although speculative, perhaps subtle pressure applied from within the church group eventually became too uncomfortable and Elsie Cassels resigned on her own. However, the missed payments at the ANHS were grudgingly tolerated because her knowledge and expertise were in demand. At the time, the annual membership fee of the ANHS was only one dollar per couple. Officers of the society found it incredulous that the Cassels did not pay, and discussed among themselves whether this could be overlooked because of reputation and long-time service.⁵⁹

Although Elsie Cassels spent thirteen years on their Albertan homestead, not much would change after she and William had moved to Red Deer. In a sense, their marriage and partnership continued to operate as if on a perpetual frontier. In fall and winter, she scavenged firewood from the forests behind *Riverside*, and while at *The Ark*, she cooked her own preserves, tended the garden, and performed the countless tedious, but necessary tasks which defined her role as William's wife. Like other pioneer women, Elsie Cassels needed to fulfil many expectations in order to care for her family: physical strength, sound judgement, and domestic and inter-personal skills. The difference was that she managed a two-person household, one without children. However, she did not

⁵⁸ For some women's groups in Red Deer in the 1920s, the emphasis appears to have been on social refinement and providing a place for women to gather, rather than any direct involvement in women's issues. See Amy Von Heyking, "Red Deer Women and the Roots of Feminism," *Alberta History* (winter 1994): 14-25.

⁵⁹ Kerry Wood, interview with author, 26 May 1994.

regard all of her chores as drudgery. One of her passions was building, and more than once, she expressed the desire to have been a carpenter. Some of her feats were impressive, and to many youngsters, she was a 'larger than life' character.⁶⁰ In letter to Rowan in 1921 from *The Ark*, Elsie Cassels wrote, "I have been busy putting up a fence and Will declares he feels [that] he is living in a fort with stockade around it!"⁶¹

According to American historian Glenda Riley, every frontier setting had basic similarities.⁶² Because most women focused their attention on tasks defined by society as "female," they were affected only secondarily by the occupations and economic pursuits of husbands, fathers, or brothers. This is true for Elsie Cassels, as she was not partisan to William's business interests. Historian Eliane Leslau Silverman observed that women's work included everything from the production of clothing and household items, to harvesting crops and doctoring both people and livestock. In Silverman's research sample, however, only married women with children were studied. This was because many homesteads failed without the assistance of daughters and sons.⁶³ Therefore, in

⁶⁰ Harold Dawe of Red Deer, interview with author 3 June 1994.

⁶¹ Cassels to Rowan, 19 October 1921, WRP.

⁶² Glenda Riley, "The Female Frontier on the Prairie and on the Plains," *The Female Frontier, a Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and on the Plains* (Kansas: University of Kansas, 1988), 195-201, and *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 3-28.

⁶³ William L. Marr, "Family Size Limitation in Canada West. Some Historical Evidence," in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, VII, ed., Donald H. Akenson (Langdale Press, 1990), 273-291. See also Dianne Dodd, "The Canadian Birth Control Movement: Two Approaches to the Dissemination of Contraceptive Technology," *Scientia Canadensis*, IX, 28 (1985), 53-66.

most of the surviving records, women were mothers, and women and children were classified by historians as one broad group regardless of class, ethnicity, religion, and economic background.⁶⁴

As in America, persistent myths about Canadian women pioneers both elevated them to heroic stature and reduced them to monotony. The West had its share of "Calamity Janes" and "Madonnas,"⁶⁵ and many were considered as unsung victims of the prairies. The most unfortunate were those who were carried away to sanitariums because of mental breakdowns due to isolation and hardship. Elsie Cassels was a figure who was often pitied by neighbours and friends, and many wondered how she was able to keep her sanity while living with a miserly husband. The empty pantry in her sod-roofed house foreshadowed the very same situation at *Riverside*, the difference being that she no longer supplemented the larder with game birds.

Carol Fairbanks and Sara Sundberg proposed that some farm women had a more equal relationship with their husbands than first thought, and took an active part in decision-making on the farm, or at times assumed the major decision-making role.⁶⁶ In

⁶⁴ Women did whatever was necessary without transforming it into "virtue," a word often associated with class and morality. Eliane Leslau Silverman, "Women and the Victorian Work Ethic on the Alberta Frontier: Prescription and Description," in *The New Provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan 1905-1980*, eds., Howard Palmer and Donald Smith (Vancouver: Tantalus Research Ltd., 1980), 91-99.

⁶⁵ Sandra L. Myers "The Pleasing Awfulness: Women's Views of Wilderness," *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982) 1-11, 167-212.

⁶⁶ Carol Fairbanks and Sara Brooks Sundberg, "Farm Women on the Canadian Prairie Frontier: The Helpmate Image," *Farm Women on the Prairie Frontier: A Sourcebook for Canada and the United States* (Metuchen: Scarecrow Press Inc., 1983),

agreement, John Bennett and Seena Kohl have shown that some women, despite having no control over family finances, saw their marriages as economic partnerships and their homesteads as joint ventures with husbands.⁶⁷ However, Veronica Strong-Boag, who studied letters written by female readers to farming newspapers, showed that women's labour was much like working a double shift: gruelling, endless, and unpaid.⁶⁸ Their oppression, reinforced by the gendered division of labour, meant that their workday was never finished although their husbands sought private rest time on a regular basis.

In the case of Elsie Cassels, the physically demanding work on the homestead, plus a husband who was unskilled in agriculture, forced her into a position of near total responsibility for their welfare. There is little doubt that she was not an equal partner as William's absolute control over the finances left no room for negotiation. Because Elsie was not a mother, her workload may not have been initially as difficult as that of other women, who had several children to care for, but the lack of children also meant that there were no helping hands later on to ease the burden. This finding agrees with that of Veronica Strong-Boag, who also states that the plight of farm women was brought to public attention in the 1920s and 1930s through farm newspapers, and many women benefited from sharing experiences with others in the women's column. This information

71-90.

⁶⁷ John W Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, *Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 89-93.

⁶⁸ Veronica Strong-Boag, "Pulling in Double Harness or Hauling a Double Load: Women, Work and Feminism on the Canadian Prairie," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 21, 3 (1986): 32-52.

source would have been too late for Elsie Cassels, as she and William had already sold their homestead by 1902. Their section of land had never been a grain farm anyway, and being childless meant that she would have had little in common with farm mothers.

As Elsie Cassels grew older and more infirm, she was still attempting to do strenuous work around the house and garden. Naturalist Kerry Wood, then a young man, had often split firewood and purchased groceries for the Cassels. He reminisced in a recent interview that he had long felt exploited by William, who counted every cent of change from the store with nothing to offer him in return. Wood felt that in later years, Elsie Cassels "leaned on him too much" and was often too worn out to discuss ornithology or natural history, the entire 'raison d'être' of his efforts. He found it inexcusable that "They bought two-day-old bread and skimped in every way they could. But there was no need for their starvation."⁶⁹

As a British citizen who married after an extremely short courtship, and optimistically left Scotland in order to live as a homesteader, Elsie Cassels' personal choices were limited. Leaving her husband would not have been a viable alternative considering the plight of those women who had been abandoned or abused, and were subsequently devoid of income or shelter. It is also unlikely that she would have found enough employment to avoid her own poverty. As William's wife, she was able to manage her own household, and because they had no children, carve out enough spare time to pursue nature study. This intellectual activity that she had started as a settler, and

⁶⁹ Kerry Wood, interview with author, 26 May 1994, and correspondence, 7 September 1995.

later perfected as member of the ANHS, brought her into contact with many esteemed people with whom she collaborated and socialized. Being a naturalist, ornithologist, and early conservationist allowed Elsie Cassels to adapt more easily to a new life in Canada, where she would exert her greatest contribution to society.

Conclusion

Elsie Cassels's contribution to Canadian science began shortly after she first arrived in Alberta. Having already gained an intimate knowledge of natural history through public school and self-study while in Scotland, she was well prepared to pursue her passion for birds on the western prairie. Although she admitted that she once 'collected' species (in a limited way), she was adamantly opposed to shooting birds for identification and used her bird feeder and binoculars as observational tools. Endowed with perfect pitch, she could recognize many species by their songs. Indeed, many of her sight records were also sound records. Her details about birds were kept for over forty years, and included information about when and where they were seen, as well as notes about climate or behavior.

What caused Elsie to change from an old fashioned naturalist to one who was interested in the living bird? During her thirteen years on the frontier, she was a subsistence hunter, shooting mainly game birds and rabbits. After she moved to Red Deer, the proximity of general stores would have made these acts of survival unnecessary. Perhaps she had enough first hand experience with killing to make sport shooting distasteful. Elsie was likely aware of the threatened status and diminishing populations of many bird species, even though the survey of Alberta birds was still in progress. In this respect, it would have made little sense to take the lives of even more birds for collections, or to duplicate museum specimens for private enjoyment. The last reason concerns her feelings toward birds as 'parents.' She was very interested in nesting behaviors and thoroughly relished witnessing the rearing of the young. In this way, she formed a much deeper connection to her subjects, even though she may not have been able to positively

identify them. Shooting one of her subjects, or taking their eggs, would have been unthinkable.

Elsie Cassels' contribution to the Alberta Natural History Society is based on her membership over twenty years, nine of those as Vice President. From 1917 to 1922, she stifled some of her ideas about the aims of the society because of methodological conflicts with Dr. Henry George. After 1922, Charles Snell assumed the Presidency and Elsie Cassels became much more involved in leadership. The two were on the same wavelength with regards to natural history, and became long-time friends.

Why didn't Elsie become President of the ANHS? The answer may be because the arrangement with Charles Snell was a comfortable one. Being a land surveyor, he had the means and opportunity to travel, and was well placed to canvas Red Deer businesses for support. Elsie did not have the same freedom of movement. She may also have not been interested enough to take on the extra administrative work, preferring to spend most of her spare time either in the field or keeping records.

Elsie Cassels was part of a growing network of Alberta naturalists and scientists, with William Rowan at the center. These included local naturalists and collectors Thomas Randall, Frank Farley, and Charles Snell, and on the wider front, Percy Taverner, and J. A. Munro. Data collected by all of these individuals helped fill gaps in the provincial bird records for Alberta.

Members of the ANHS participated in science within a North American context. The society invited many esteemed guest lecturers to its meetings, where the latest information was shared from a variety of natural history specialities. The society also had a

substantial library, which offered Canadian and American natural history journals, pamphlets, and books. (Some British publications may also apply.) Although isolated geographically, and in some cases, financially, naturalists could stay informed of the progress within their speciality without attending meetings held in places like Ottawa or Washington, D.C. Ornithology, in particular, benefitted greatly from these journals, as they were used for information, notation, critical exchange, and correspondence.

The influence of natural history societies on Canadian conservation may be more significant than first believed. From 1906 to 1926, a crucial period for wildlife protection, members of the ANHS documented a large portion of Alberta's fauna and flora, and succeeded in saving the Gaetz Lakes ecosystem from complete destruction. At a time when the Canadian government was only beginning to wake up to American calls for wildlife legislation and the protection of vulnerable areas, the ANHS was hard at work writing letters to civil servants, 'environmentally' educating the public, and acting as unpaid game officers in the bush. Due to the fact that many naturalists were working fulltime in other occupations, and were not at liberty to spend a great deal of time in the field, they were simply not as visible as government or university people. However, it is likely that between 1900 and 1930, societies like the ANHS contained more scientific expertise than was ever present in the federal or provincial governments.

Elsie Cassels' experiences are both similar to and different from those of other British women on the western prairie. This is because their history is not as straightforward as traditional farming or ranching literature suggests. Although Elsie homesteaded with William, she was not his helpmate, nor did they have any children. Both

situations may have already put her at a disadvantage with other farm women. Elsie worked incredibly hard to sustain her two-person household, and did almost everything by hand, including carpentry. Even after moving to Red Deer, her homesteading life-style continued, presenting a endless series of obstacles to her field studies. This dispels the myth of the frontier woman as being either a mother and working hard, or childless and therefore leisured.

Participation in a natural history society was in keeping with other women's activities in western Canada. Parallel to other British women who worked as missionaries, educators, moral or health reformers, or political activists, Elsie's 'leisured' activity was work as a naturalist/ornithologist in the ANHS. One difference between natural history clubs and women's clubs was in their gendered composition. Another lies in affiliation. The scientific context for natural history societies' from the early 20th century had shifted from Britain to America. In contrast, many of the aforementioned groups were more closely aligned with British ideologies and the pursuit of imperialism.

Some women involved in natural history societies were imperialists, such as Barbara Mary George. Her work as a botanist may be viewed as being within the realm of the British natural history tradition, and therefore another avenue where women could work to benefit the Dominion and Empire. Although Elsie Cassels' science background was British, she was clearly not interested in this line of reasoning, a likely source of conflict between them.

The western frontier was not a harmonious place for many settlers, and tensions were not solely among the visible minorities. Because British women immigrants were not

homogenous either in class or culture, conflicts were inevitable between women who appeared more similar than different. Personal disagreements according to values or beliefs, though not openly discussed, affected their participation in various organizations. In researching the connection between British women and the west, many different voices need to be heard before making generalizations about women's roles within the colonizing process.

In researching a biography, information gleaned through town gossip, rumour, speculation, and/or anecdotes can assist or impede historical investigation. On one hand, interviews with people who knew Elsie Cassels, or had heard of her, distorted her story. This is because she was a "character," and her unconventional behavior was open to exaggeration. On the other, the rumors and tales acted as clues which could be used to piece her story together. Hearing the same snippet of gossip more than once often meant that there might be more information beneath the surface. When researching an 'invisible' woman, of ordinary/extraordinary stature, every lead needs to be taken into consideration, regardless of how trivial it may seem.

As in any feminist biography, there are unanswered questions. For example, it is not known if Elsie ever detoured to the Rockies during the many excursions she took with William from Red Deer to Calgary. It would have been difficult for a naturalist to resist the pull of these snow-laden peaks, sharply visible against a clear western sky. Accounts of the diversity of life lurking within the sulfur hot springs would have been irresistible even for William, and certainly possible by a short train ride to Banff. Her friend, Annie Gaetz, explained it this way: "For a good number of years, Elsie's time has been much in demand

as a bird lecturer, and as she explains their habits and their peculiarities, her face lights up with enthusiasm, and her audience is carried away from the realities of the present, and in imagination lives among the birds and the beauties of nature."¹ Perhaps this is the real key to Elsie's own adaptations to the prairie west: a natural ability to learn, imagine, and inspire.

¹ Annie Gaetz, "Woman Provides Sanctuary for Feathered Folk," *Calgary Herald*, 13 April 1935.

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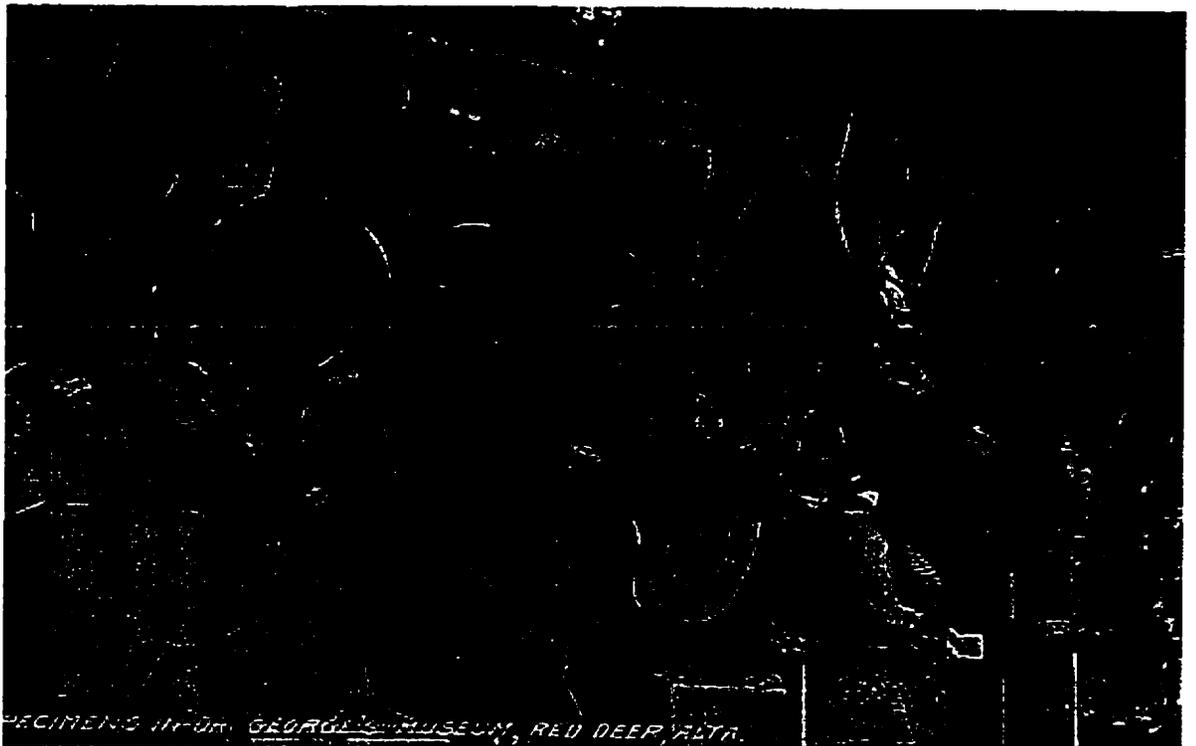


1. The St. Luke's Anglican Church Choir, 1910. Courtesy Red Deer and District Archives

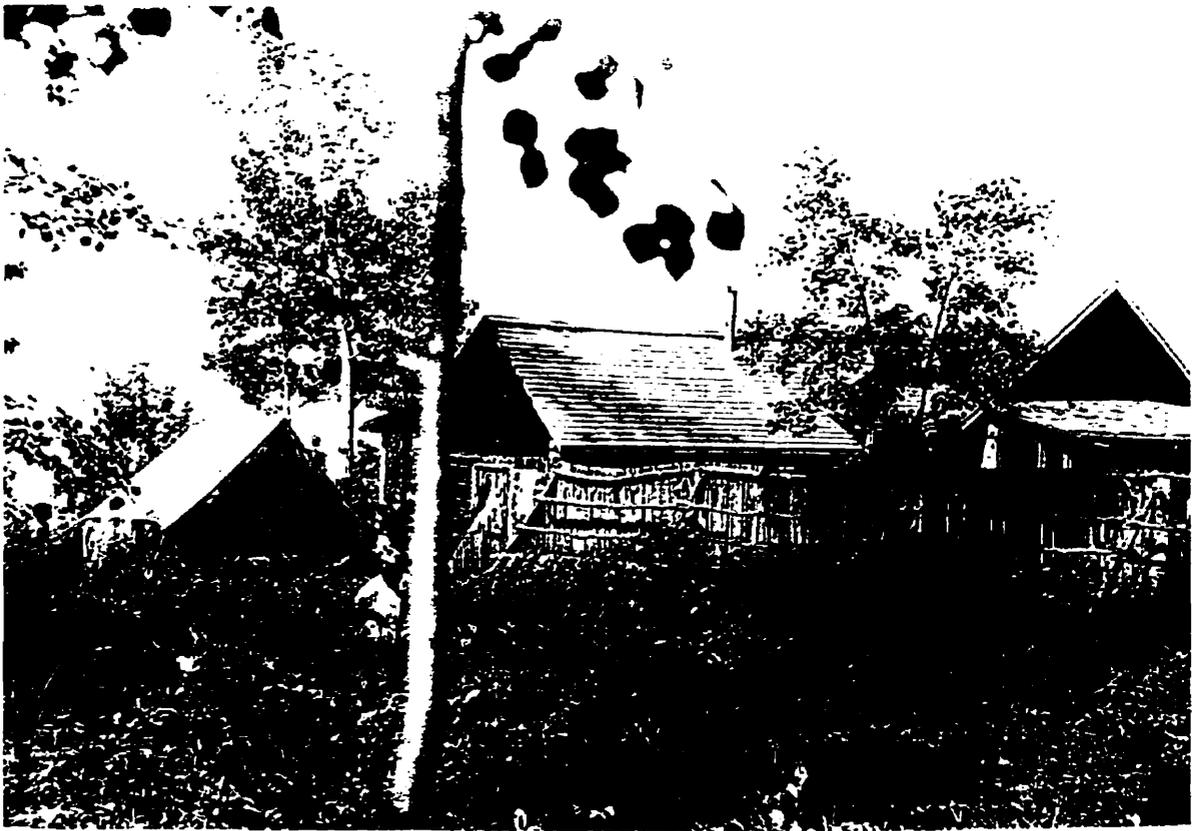
middle row: Miss Dolly Walker, Mrs. Brooks, Mrs. Lewis, Mrs. Alford, Miss A. Rowell,
Mrs Elsie Cassels, Mrs. Edgington



2. Dr. George's Museum in Red Deer, Alberta, circa 1908. Courtesy of Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives



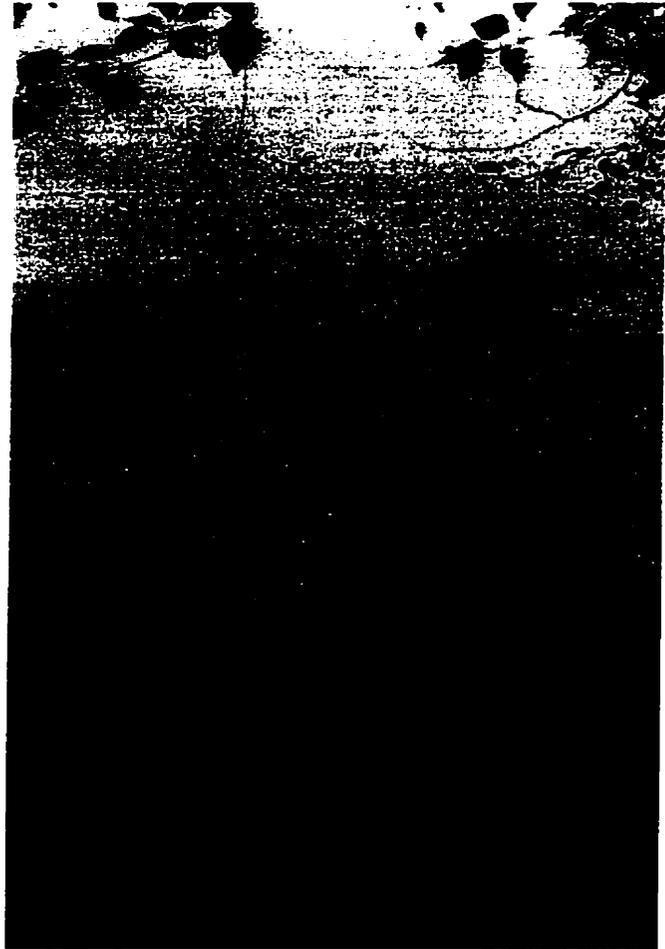
3. Dr. George's Museum, Interior, circa 1908. Courtesy of Glenbow-Alberta Institute Archives



4. *The Ark*, Sylvan Lake, 1925. Courtesy University of Alberta Archives.



5. *The Ark*, Sylvan Lake: Elsie Cassels (holding cat), Miss Rodwell (family friend), William Rowan, Reta Rowan, William Cassels. Sylvan lake, 1925. Courtesy University of Alberta Archives.



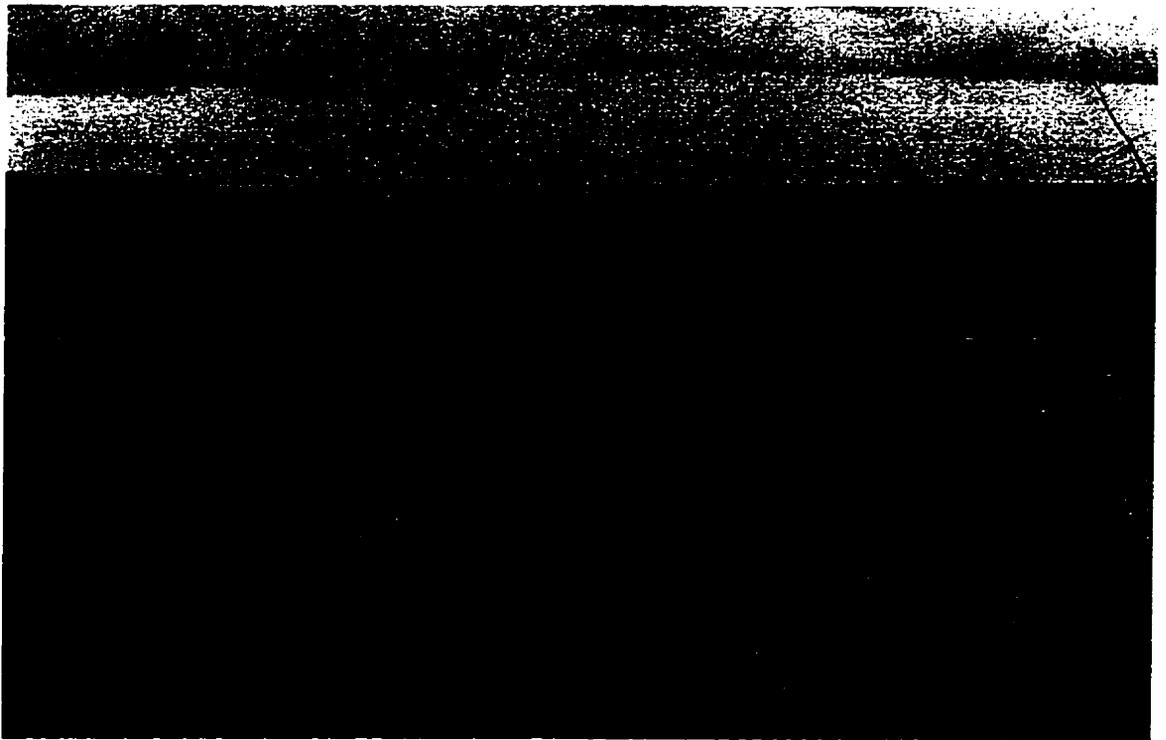
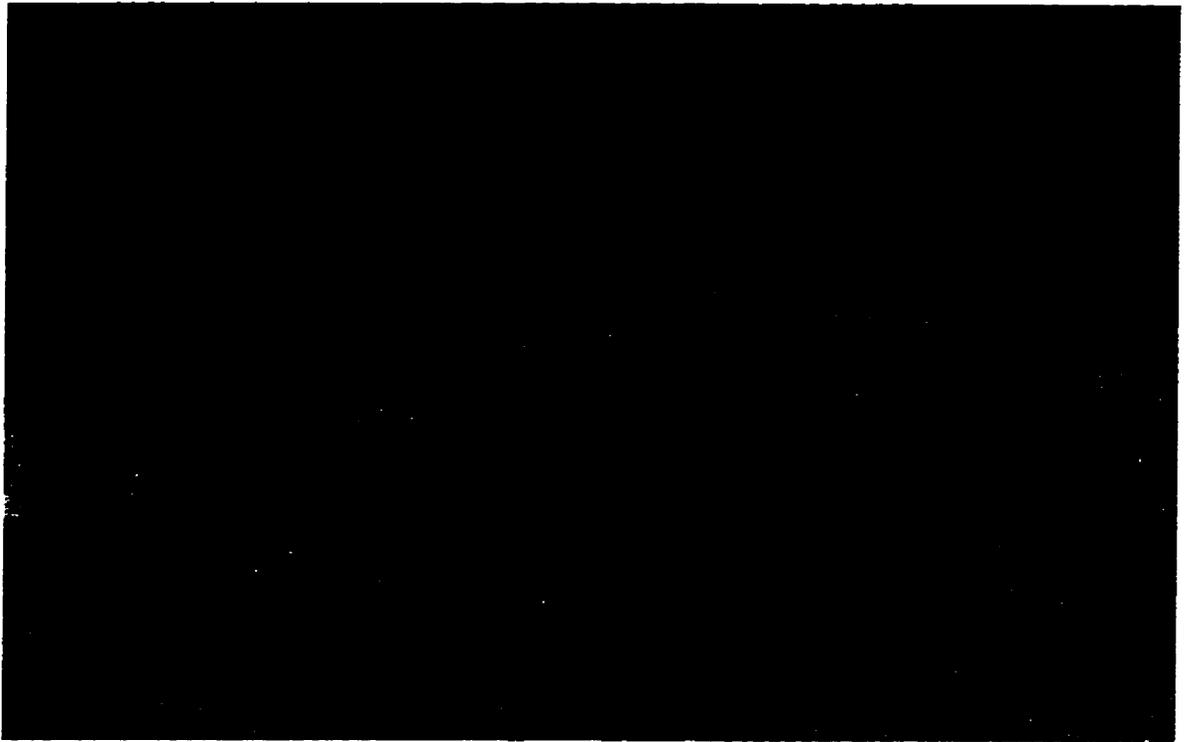
6. Purple martin bird houses (Cassels' former property), Sylvan Lake, 1994. Author.



7. Anglican Picnic, Sylvan Lake, n.d. Courtesy Red Deer and District Archives.

Elsie Cassels, 2nd row, seated, center, 3rd from left.

William Cassels, 3rd row, 1st left, standing, wearing white hat.



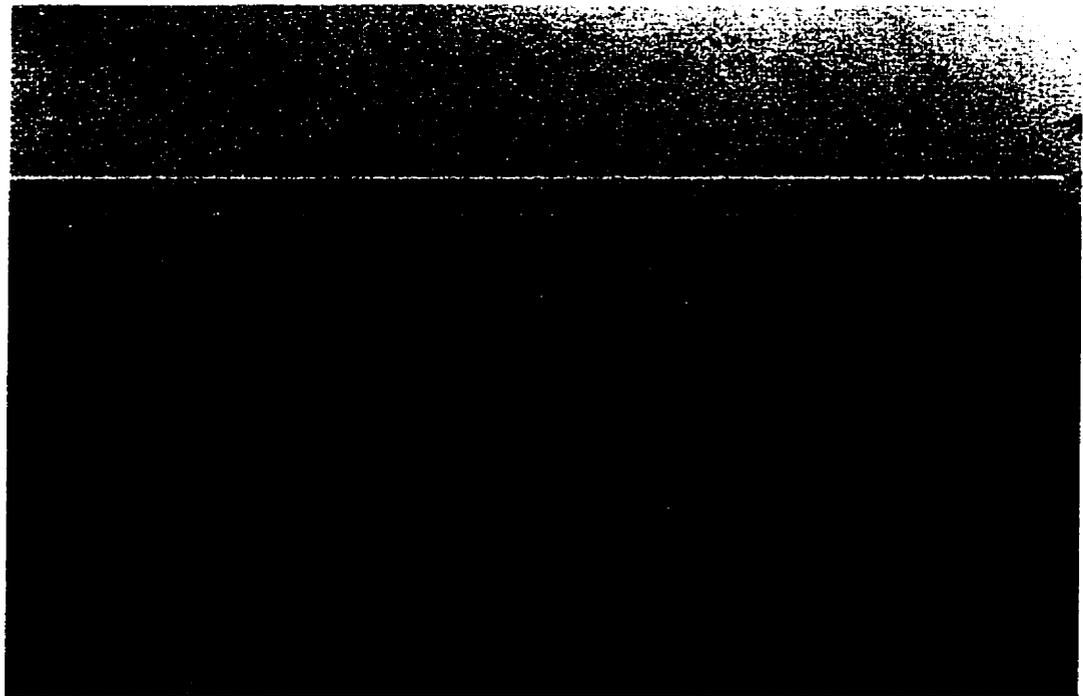
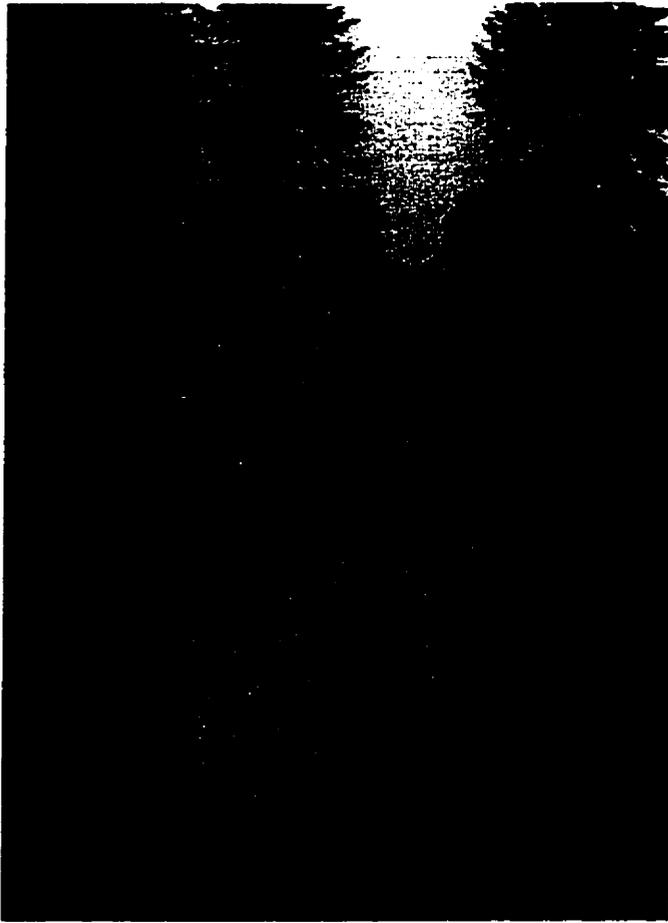
8. Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary (Kerry Wood Nature Centre), 1994. Author.



9. *Riverside*, Red Deer (exterior was originally in red brick), 1994. Author.

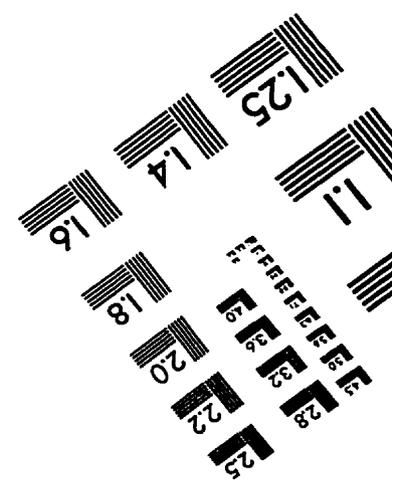
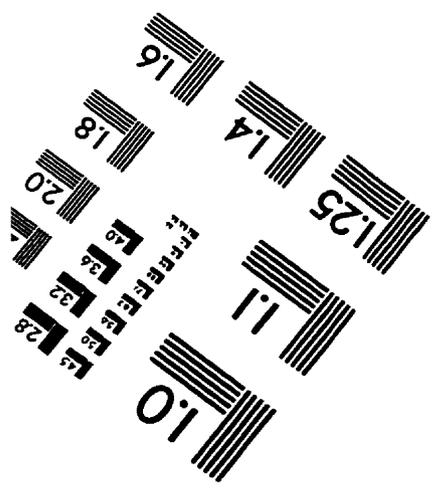
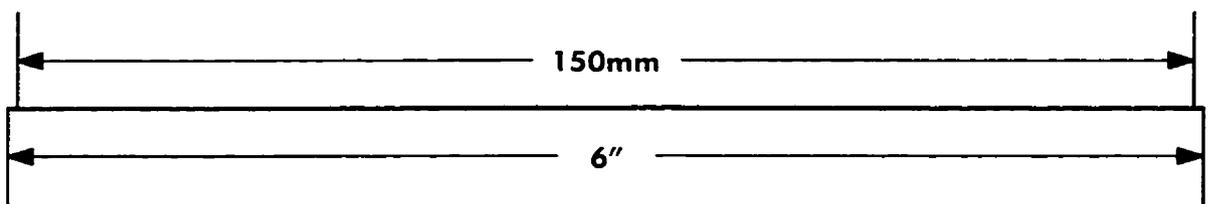
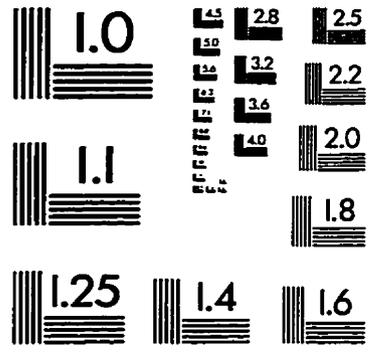
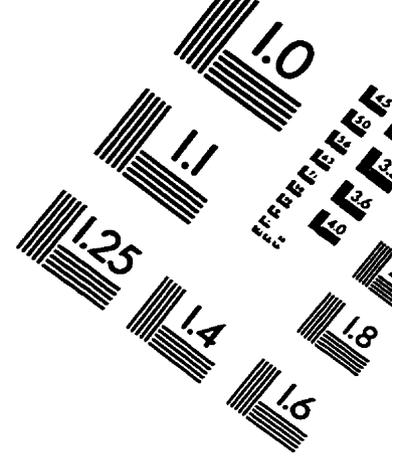
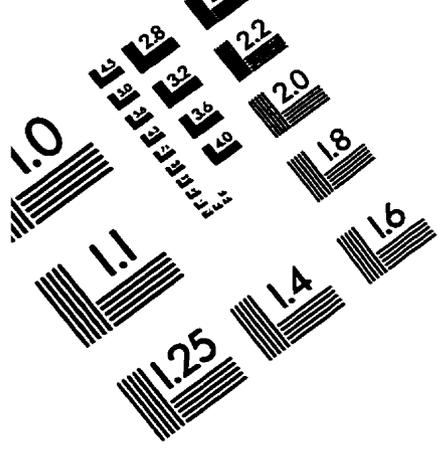


10. Elsie Cassels, circa 1935. Courtesy Red Deer and District Archives



11. Elsie Cassels' grave overlooking Gaetz Lakes Sanctuary. 1994. Author.

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