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Review of *A Female Economy: Women's Work in a Prairie Province, 1870 - 1970*, by Mary Kinnear.

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A Female Economy: Women's Work in a Prairie Province, 1870-1970. By Mary Kinnear. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. xiv + 215 pp. \$55.00 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

A Female Economy analyses how women disposed of their labor during the century from 1870 to 1970 in the Canadian province of Manitoba. This ambitious project, the culmination of Mary Kinnear's interests and activities in the history of women's work, reflects the skills of a mature scholar who has lived with the material for decades.

The volume is arranged by themes. Kinnear's preliminary chapter, devoted to what she calls "parameters," includes explanations of historical approaches to domestic economy and of terms such as "women," "class," "ethnicity," and "feminism." A second chapter outlines changes in the demographic characteristics of Manitoba's female population over the century; the third, focusing on "prescriptions," summarizes historical ideas about women's work espoused by women and embedded in cultural norms, as well as challenges to those norms. Subsequent chapters center on

women's work itself: education and training; homemaking farm work; paid labor; and public service. "Looking Back," the final chapter, deals with the interaction of women's reproductive and productive roles and the ideological frameworks surrounding them, which had to be negotiated and renegotiated over the century.

Kinnear claims that this is the story of ordinary women. She is partially successful in capturing this elusive category, but I would have liked to see ordinary lives given more prominence in the story, and the words and experiences of women of all classes used more extensively throughout the text. She acknowledges the limitations inherent in using existing sources that document women's work, which often yield "provisional and incomplete" results. Perhaps it is time to move beyond the archives and enhance the narrative with women's voices we have not heard before. More personal stories would assist in illustrating the complexity of women's lives and how intricately economic and social realities interweave to shape the reproductive and productive activities of women. The story Kinnear tells merely suggests this complexity, and the analysis of the interaction of motherhood labor with other labor is particularly weak.

Kinnear places the Manitoba story within a larger western global framework by skillfully drawing on historical developments in the United States, Britain, and Canada. Her claim, however, that "this story of women working in Manitoba between 1870 and 1970 can be repeated in the rest of Canada and in other modern countries" ignores the particular and unique features of a Great Plains settlement economy and of the place of women in it, especially the role of Native and Métis women in the fur trade and farming activities that formed the historical base of Manitoba's economy. It also defies the geography of the Plains that shaped settlement and economic activity, and in particular the economic opportunities available to women. While Kinnear does not forget these factors, she does not acknowledge them as critical forces in

determining women's place in Manitoba's economy.

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