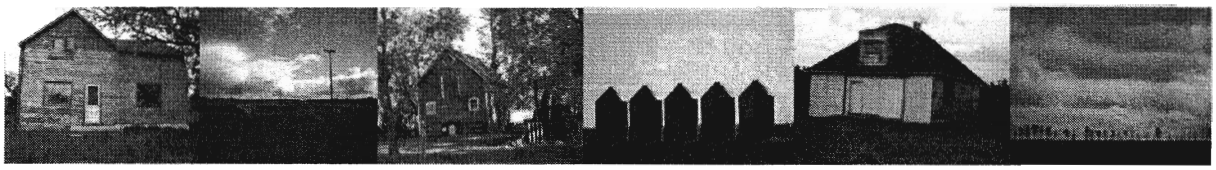
Finding Meaning in the Everyday:
Interior Design Decision-Making in the Rural Prairie Home



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“Music heard so deeply that it isn’t heard at all…..”
T. S. Eliot

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Abstract

The Canadian prairie experience is most often recognized by its residents' ability to produce excellent hockey players and survive extremely harsh winters. Yet these infamous distinctions are only two examples of the rural prairie landscape which reflect the spirit, determination and self-sufficiency of its citizens. Evidence of this unassuming, pragmatic culture can also be found in the organic evolution and influence of every- day decision-making upon the design of rural prairie houses. This study focuses upon the design of these environments with a particular emphasis on the meaning of home, the role of women in the creation of these interior environments and the prairie landscape of which these houses are an integral part. The influence of the steady rhythms of ordinary life and the ways in which these quotidian events have affected the design and decoration of rural housing is read specifically through the voices and experiences of five Manitoba women.

Based upon an analysis of narratives gathered from first person interviews, and complemented by photographs and architectural drawings, I argue that the meaning of home is transmitted through interior design and decorating decisions which result from a combination of two distinct arenas of influence: those which are based upon the broad historical and cultural traditions of the Manitoba prairie (such as patriarchy, frugality and farm heritage) , as well as those which are a reflection of a very personal and emotional connotation (such as desire, grief, family and immigration) unique to each household.

The purpose of this research is to reveal how the seemingly ordinary in architecture becomes the extraordinary. Its primary contribution is as a contemporary exploration of the complex relationships which exist between the tangible and the intangible within an interior environment, and which together combine to form the essence of our own personal and profound sense of home.

Sommaire

La vie dans les Prairies canadiennes évoque généralement l'habileté de ses résidants à produire d'excellents joueurs de hockey et à survivre à des hivers extrêmement rigoureux. Toutefois, ces particularités notoires ne sont que deux exemples du paysage rural des Prairies illustrant l'âme, la détermination et l'indépendance de ses citoyens. Cette culture pragmatique et sans prétention se manifeste également dans l'évolution et l'influence naturelles de la prise de décision quotidienne liée à la conception des habitations rurales des Prairies. La présente étude porte sur la conception de ces environnements en mettant l'accent sur la signification du foyer, le rôle des femmes dans la création de ces aménagements intérieurs et le paysage des Prairies, auquel sont intimement liées ces habitations. L'influence du rythme familier de la vie ordinaire et la façon dont ces événements quotidiens ont affecté le design et la décoration de l'habitation rurale sont étudiées particulièrement à travers les propos et l'expérience de vie de cinq femmes du Manitoba.

À partir de l'analyse de témoignages recueillis au cours d'entrevues à la première personne, et à l'aide de photographies et de dessins architecturaux, je fais valoir que le sens profond du foyer s'exprime par le design intérieur et les décisions sur la décoration qui découlent de deux champs d'influence distincts : les influences fondées sur l'ensemble des traditions historiques et culturelles du Manitoba (comme le patriarcat, la frugalité et le patrimoine agricole), ainsi que les influences relevant d'une connotation très personnelle et émotive (comme l'ambition, le chagrin, la famille et l'immigration), propre à chaque maisonnée.

Cette recherche vise à révéler comment l'architecture d'apparence ordinaire devient quelque chose d'extraordinaire. Sa contribution principale consiste à explorer les relations contemporaines complexes qui existent entre le tangible et l'intangible dans un environnement intérieur, et qui se combinent pour former l'essence même de notre notion personnelle et profonde du foyer.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to many people for their generosity and support throughout the preparation of this project.

Firstly, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Annmarie Adams, not only for her guidance and wisdom with regard to the preparation of this study, but also for her support of my entire learning experience within the School of Architecture. When I was a 'deer in the headlights', she was the voice of calm and understanding. Her wisdom, creativity and approach to the study of architecture has been a constant source of inspiration and one which will enable me to return to my own work with a new excitement and sense of engagement.

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I am grateful to Linda Eddy, librarian at the University of Manitoba Archives for her assistance in sourcing early editions of farm magazines and showing such a strong interest in my work, and to Lynn Stoffman for her generosity in contacting the Sawatzky family who have painstakingly restored her late grandfather's house.

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Finally, I would like to thank my husband and children: in particular, a huge thank you goes to my husband for his incredible patience and support in my latest academic endeavor. I am also indebted to my children for their constant faith in me, and for giving me the courage to become a student again.

Preface

A Prairie Story

Gordie Howe, or "Mr. Hockey", grew up on the Canadian prairies in the small village of Floral, Saskatchewan about 30 minutes south-east of Saskatoon. As was common when he was a child, the prairie provinces were in the depth of drought and depression due to significant crop failure.

One winter day a poor woman came to the door of the Howe family home with a sack of odds and ends that she wanted to trade in exchange for some cash to feed her family. Although Mrs. Howe had no need for anything this woman might have to offer, she quickly recognized that the woman at her front door was desperate.

When the sack was dumped on the floor, a battered pair of skates came into view and Mrs. Howe decided to purchase them. Gordie Howe and his sister each grabbed one skate. Soon enough, Gordie had managed to permanently 'borrow' the other skate from his sister and by the end of a week of non-stop skating on the frozen pond near his home, Gordie had mastered the game of hockey. A shy and awkward child had found his place in the world. Needless to say, little Gordie never looked back.[1]

The reason for this story's inclusion in this paper, aside from the interesting account of a hockey legend, is two-fold:

Firstly, it is a narrative of a community culture; of the limited possessions and bank accounts of many prairie residents, and of the spirit, determination and self-sufficiency of rural citizens. In essence, it is the story of the enveloping prairie landscape which remains until today.

Secondly, it is a story of the 'everyday'. It was the daily routine of practicing the game: of skating, passing, moving economically and anticipating, rather than flashy stick-handling or intricate skating technique, that brought quality and ultimately enormous meaning to Gordie's game. No fanfare, no tricks, just plain hockey.

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[1] This narrative is adapted from: Gerald Friesen, "Perimeter Vision: Three Notes on the History of Rural Manitoba. Hockey and Prairie Cultural History," in *River Road: Essays on Manitoba and Prairie History* (Winnipeg, Man.: University of Manitoba Press), 1996.

It is this sense of meaning and culture of everyday life that is the starting point for this research project. But this time, rather than the story of an individual's climb to hockey fame, the focus is the home where Mr. Hockey's journey began. It is this same place where so many of our own personal stories began that is the center of our attention.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My own story has also profoundly influenced this research. The distinctive (non)design of rural prairie houses has always been of interest to me: perhaps this curiosity stems from a childhood growing up in Saskatchewan during the 1950's and 1960's, where the values and images previously described were in evidence on a daily basis. Although I grew up in an urban environment (at the time, the population of Saskatoon was approximately 150,000), three of my mother's brothers and their families, all immigrants from Eastern Europe, lived in the neighbouring small towns of Wynyard, Humboldt and Prince Albert.

Frequent visits to their homes were always exciting as it meant a chance to eat my aunt's unusual poppy seed cakes, collect fresh farm eggs, dig up cucumbers for pickling, and, most importantly, explore the small town houses of local friends: houses which seemed so different from mine.

Although I was proud of our home, with its modernist den furniture, full height paneled teak living room wall and built - in television cabinet, theirs were absolutely fascinating: precisely because of the lack of formal design and seemingly spontaneous arrangement of decorative accessories and keepsakes. In spite of the lack of 'capital D design', theirs seemed more interesting, more 'real' and in some ways more meaningful. These seemingly un-designed houses carried a feeling of 'home' absent from ours. Did the apparent mish-mash of furniture, home-made afghans and window curtains; in other words, complete lack of "sophistication", have more meaning than my modern city house? Where did this meaning originate?

Figure 1: Krolik family den circa 1965

Figure 2: Mothers, aunts, cousins, sisters in the Krolik living room circa 1962

I left Saskatoon in 1968 to pursue degrees in interior and urban design, eventually becoming a professional interior designer, urban planner and finally interior design educator. Yet these

childhood impressions about the meaning and creation of home that I encountered in the most unassuming of rural houses stay with me.

In fact, the more sophisticated my knowledge of design and architecture became, so did my appreciation of the architecture of everyday life. Perhaps this was as a result of the contrast between the academic and professional environments, and my own childhood experiences. In the words of architectural historian Dell Upton, "discussion of the everyday takes place at the intersection of architecture and Architecture –of the study of the material settings of human life and of the narrower concerns of professional design".[2]

With this growing awareness of the everyday as a pivotal influence in the creation of the prairie home, and a chance to return to academic studies, my research question became apparent: *In what way do everyday activities, relationships and objects, in their very banality, physically shape and bring meaning to the concept of home?*

We can list a variety of activities that may be labeled 'everyday', yet the notion that these routine behaviours might be a source of appropriate and even respected design decision-making has often gone against the grain of conventional architectural discourse, which speaks primarily to a knowledge of history and tradition. It is my belief that it is precisely the outwardly unimportant activities, relationships, moments and objects that are the most significant. I am not alone in this belief. Quoting Upton once again, "it is that which is leftover, which falls outside of or runs counter to the scrutiny of power or officialdome. It is an Other of some sort, better defined by what is not than by what is."[3] This "Other", however, can be somewhat illusive. How does the intangible become realized in the tangible spaces we inhabit? Aspects of this question are explored in later chapters of this paper.

It is often the most mundane objects (e.g. as broken measuring cups, inexpensive decorative souvenirs from long past vacations, torn door mats) that evoke our most intense personal emotions; thereby assisting us in our ongoing determination of the very questions of who we are, how we view the outside world, and how we wish to present ourselves to those around us.

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[2] Dell Upton, "Architecture in Everyday Life," *New Literary History* Volume 33 No. 4 (Autumn 2002):708.
[3] Upton, "Architecture in Everyday Life," 711.

Even our personal relationships are affected by the everyday and the seemingly banal, adding to this significance. Husbands and wives, parents and children, widows and widowers, single adults - each living under his or her own roof, develop patterns of behaviour. To what extent does the design and decoration of the spaces, under these seemingly bland roofs, affect these most intimate of relationships? Is it possible that people's relationship to their own homes can also be a factor in the foundational structure and pattern of their own lives and their relationships with other people? Finally, is it possible that the opposite is true; that personal relationships shape the physical structure of the home? I believe that our most profound emotions are evidenced in the home. If we are willing to look for them, intangible feelings of grief, surprise, ritual, desire are all present in the way our homes are arranged.

The notion of the 'everyday' can easily be overlooked and ignored. Additionally, the concept of 'home' is one which is difficult to define. This is primarily because of its breadth of meaning, richness of significance, and links to numerous scholarly disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and women's studies. A variety of emotions and experiences, associations and implications may also be associated with the term "home", further complicating our understanding of its meaning(s) and impact(s). For example, the final act of dying has been described as "going home" and countries of origin are termed "home", both clearly lending a much larger scale to the traditional intimacy of a residential dwelling. Philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote that "the truck driver is at home on the highway, but he does not have shelter there".[4] Environmental psychologist Lynne Manzo, in discussing "home" as a spatial metaphor writes,

> This is a rich conceptualization of place experience, yet labeling these experiences as "at- homeness" obscures both our connections to places beyond the residence and the impact of negative experiences of the residence, leaving unexplored the ways in which we can understand what is not home – literally or metaphorically. [5]

For the purpose of this report, I have chosen to define 'home' within an architectural or built-form context. Notwithstanding this rather "concrete" definition, it is important to identify "home"

[4] Barbara Miller Lane, *Housing and Dwelling: Perspectives on Modern Domestic Architecture* (New York, NY: Routlege, Inc., 2007), 51.
[5] Lynne C. Manzo, "For better or worse: Exploring multiple dimensions of place meaning" *Journal of Environmental Psychology* Vol. 25 Issue 1 (March 2005): 67.

as much more than a physical structure, but rather as a physical structure which embodies meaning. In fact, the mere mention of the word "home" signifies a host of varying emotions and reactions. How these emotions affect the design and use of space to create a "setting for meaning"[6] , combined with the resultant physical layout and decoration of this space, also forms the focus of this research.

Because my own interest is borne of a childhood on the Canadian prairies, I have also chosen to further narrow this study to an exploration of rural Canadian prairie vernacular houses.

Research Themes and Paper Structure

A discussion of the research question to be addressed requires not only a thorough exploration of the terms 'architecture of the everyday' and 'home': it also necessitates recognition of the many interwoven threads that together form the fabric and therefore meaning of the 'cultural landscape'.

Several scholars have tackled this topic, resulting in a plethora of cross-disciplinary writing and reflection upon the nature of these terms. My intent is to explore the richness of these themes and to offer some reflections based upon new field research. Rather than focusing on canonical architectural theory as the basis for analysis, this study of the cultural landscape examines the organic, multi-layered and somewhat untidy interventions of 'everyday' design intention. I believe the complexity of this cultural landscape is best articulated by architect Robert Venturi who wrote,

> I like elements which are hybrid rather than "pure," compromising rather than "clean", distorted rather than "straightforward," ambiguous rather than "articulated," perverse as well as impersonal, boring as well as "interesting," conventional rather than "designed," accommodating rather than excluding, redundant rather than simple, vestigial as well as innovating.....I am for richness of meaning rather than clarity of meaning; for the implicit function as well as the explicit function. A valid architecture evokes many levels of meaning and combinations of focus; its space and its elements become readable and workable in several ways at once.[7]

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[6] Toby Israel. *Some Place Like Home.* (Chichester, West Sussex, England: Wiley-Academy, 2003), 2.
[7] Robert Venturi, "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture," in *The Architecture Reader,* ed. A. Krista Sykes (New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc., 2007), 191.

This "richness of meaning" evolves from many subjects and from many inspirational sources. Consequently, broad research frameworks addressed in this paper are fourfold: the architecture of the everyday; the nature of the meaning of 'home'; the influence of prairie culture and domestic life on design decision-making; and the character of prairie material culture.

The first chapter of this report focuses upon a literature review of scholarly writing surrounding these themes. I begin with the notion of the 'everyday' in architectural thought: its origins in European philosophy and its eventual transfer to North American academic discourse with a focus upon the work of twentieth century philosophers such as Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre. A brief chronology of this migration is discussed within the context of twenthieth century architects such as Adolf Loos, and contemporary architects such as Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown.

This Chapter continues with an exploration of the theme of 'home' and place attachment, building upon the work of scholars such as Clare Cooper Marcus, Amos Rapoport, Yi-Fu Tuan, Dolores Hayden and David Benjamin who have collectively explored the numerous visions and nuances of the term 'home'.

A review of the historical and cultural context for the rich rural life on the Canadian prairies, and more specifically, the province of Manitoba follows. The significant influence of massive late nineteenth and early twentieth century immigration is discussed, with particular emphasis upon the origin and depth of communal spirit, the importance of the extended family, and the independent "self-directed amateur design and production activity"[8] that still exists. The work of geographers Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth, as well as that of historian Peter Ward have been of significant value in the documentation of this early prairie history.

The role of women in rural Canadian twentieth - century society also forms a very important part of this discussion. The inherently feminist nature of women's lives, situated within a strongly patriarchal framework, their significant contribution to the rural economy, and their unassuming approach to the design of their own homes are all important aspects of this research. Through a discussion of family life and prairie women, Chapter One also traces the historic roots of interior decoration/interior design and its expression in the design, construction and material culture of the prairie home.

[8] Paul Atkinson. "Do It Yourself: Democracy and Design" in *Journal of Design History* Vol. 19 No. 1 (Spring 2006): 1.

Lastly, the unique prairie landscape and (in)famous prairie winters, as distinctive shapers of rural life, also inform the content of this chapter.

Chapter Three provides a lateral, perhaps slightly "sideways", or tangential exploration of the major themes of this paper, through the words of prominent writers of Canadian fiction. Based on both historical fact and well-researched fantasy, the work of prairie authors such as W.O. Mitchell, Carol Shields, Sharon Butala, Armin Wiebe and Miriam Toews is utilized for its rich evocation of the tempo of rural life. Through the grace and nuanced detail of their elegant prose, small-town prairie life is rendered in its most mundane beauty. Although fictional in nature, it is my belief that the detailed descriptions of unobtrusive, ordinary lives offered by these authors lends a wisdom, poignancy and validity to the previous theoretical framework which could not otherwise be found.

With both this theoretical framework and the prose of accomplished prairie novelists as literary companions, the fourth chapter of this paper consists of five case studies of rural prairie families and their homes, completed in the summer of 2009. The location of the case studies was the town and surrounding farmlands around MacGregor and Winkler, Manitoba. The scholarly and literary frameworks described in Chapters One and Two are analyzed within the context of this fieldwork.

Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of the case study findings and an analysis of information synthesized from the previous three chapters. The original question posed is revisited and conclusions are drawn, with the hope of providing additional insights (and perhaps questions) into the meaning and power of this most ordinary and banal of places – the everyday prairie home.

Case Study Methodology

As mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to examine the influence of everyday activities, relationships and objects upon people's attachment to their homes and possibly vice versa. In order to do so, this research paper utilitizes a descriptive case study approach. This methodology is a means to validate, refute, and elaborate upon the discussion of the theoretical

frameworks previously described. To this end, each theme is also grounded in real-life narratives which were compiled as a result of fieldwork conducted in rural Manitoba.

This is a phenomenological approach to the study of home. A "user-centred" or performative[9] approach, accompanied by secondary sources retrieved from archival and scholarly literature, utilizes personal interviews, photographs, drawings and personal narratives to provide a snapshot of the human experience of space. Because this study is focused specifically upon the commonplace activities and relationships which physically shape and bring meaning to the concept of home, a case study approach such as this is particularly appropriate.

Specifically, the homes of five Manitoba families were studied during the summer of 2009: four were located in and around the town of MacGregor, and one was located approximately 10 kilometers west of Winkler.[10] The interviews were focused on how rural women "read" their homes as narrated through stories of their everyday experiences. As a result, women's stories, as well as the tenor of their narrations, shaped the nature of this study. During two interviews, the spouses of the women participants were present for a part of the conversation and also offered constructive commentary. Participants in the study ranged in age from forty to seventy-six. All have been living in their current home for over twelve years and one for over forty years.

This methodology is modeled on those used by several other scholars such as architectural historians Robert Mellin[11] and Ann Michael Wilson, and sociologists David Halle[12] Mihaley Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton [13]where "oral testimony through first person interviews allows us to examine the complex relationship between people and their dwellings."[14]

An analysis of the information collected from interviews reveals the existence of two layers of association linked to the notion of 'home'. In recognition of this finding, the case study portion of this research paper (Chapter Four) is organized into two sections: the first focusing upon the notions of broad, common themes, and the second section focusing upon more personal

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[9] Dr. Abigail A Van Slyck,, Dr. Annmarie Adams, Getty Research Grant application, 2008.
[10] The distance between these two towns is approximately 120 kilometers.
[11] See Robert Mellin, *Tilting: House Launching, Slide Hauling, Potato Trenching, and Other Tales From A Newfoundland Fishing Village* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2003).
[12] See David Halle, *Inside culture: art and class in the American home* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
[13] See Mihaley Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
[14] Michael Ann Williams, *Homeplace: The Social use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (Charlottesville, N.C.: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 1.

sentiments. The broad, common themes are those of patriarchy, pragmatism and frugality, family transitions, farm heritage and material culture. The personal associations are those linked to feelings of grief and loss, love and protection, dreams and desires, family values, and immigrant roots. Together they form the basis from which a sense of meaning is derived and from which conclusions can be drawn.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Everyday

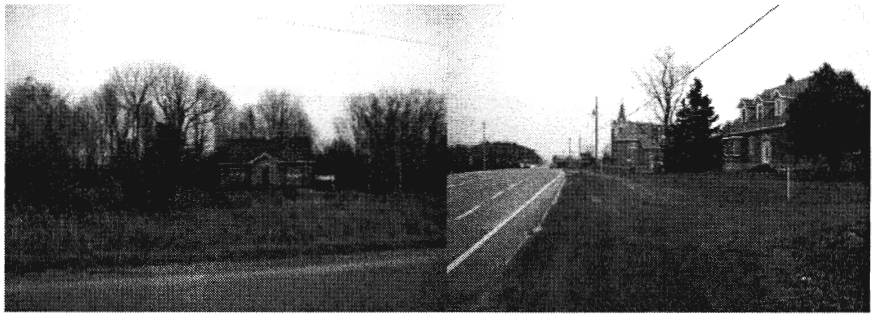

Figure 3: prairie house

Figure 4: prairie scene

With origins only as recent as the middle of the twentieth century, the notion of "everyday" architecture as a formal field of study is a relatively new concept to North American architectural history.

Beginning in the 1930's, and through approximately half a century of writing, at least three prominent European philosophers addressed the theme of everyday life as intrinsic to architecture and urbanity. The French philosophers Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau as well as German philosopher Martin Heidegger, wrote extensively about daily existence and its relevance to the complex ways in which people occupy and interpret space.

Lefebvre's concept of the everyday was significantly influenced by the writings of socialist philosophers such as Karl Marx and Georg Hegel whose books focused considerably on alienation. Lefebvre, rather darkly regarded "everyday life as a means of countering the 'mystified consciousness' that encoded alienation in all spheres of existence."[15] It was Lefebvre who wrote: "...sometimes the spectacle of the distinctly non-everyday; violence, death, catastrophe, the lives of kinds and stars – those who we are led to believe, defy everydayness.[16]

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[15]Mary McLeod, "Henri Lefebvre's Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction," in *Architecture of the Everyday,* ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997),11.
[16]McLeod, "Henri Lefebvre's Critique of Everyday Life" , 17.

De Certeau, however, in countering the pessimism of Lefebvre, focused upon the repetitive and unconscious nature of daily activity as well as the contrast between individual power and institutional power. In his writings, he famously distinguishes between institutional rules or 'strategies' commonly created for society's interpretation of space, and the everyday 'tactics' utilized by ordinary people to circumvent and personalize these strategies.

Heidegger, on the other hand, focuses upon the "immaterial structures of human existence which link our "everyday" activities to those moments that are extraordinary..... and the activation of these relationships when a designer welcomes the uncertainty, contingency and vulnerability that are fundamental to one's being."[17] Further, Heidegger stresses the importance of "building or making to our notion of home and our very existence".[18]

Beginning as early as the 1930's, European architects such as Adolf Loos adopted an interest in this philosophy of the everyday, thereby attempting to mediate between the strict ideologies of design control and those of public accessibility. In railing against the popularity and theoretical ideals of the Modern movement, Loos wrote the following:

> I did not grow up, Thank God, in a stylish home. At that time no one knew what it was yet. Now unfortunately, everything is different in my family too. But in those days! Here was the table, a totally crazy and intricate piece of furniture, an extension table with a shocking bit of work as a lock. But it was our table, ours! Can you understand what that means? Do you know what wonderful times we had there?.... Every piece of furniture, everything, every object had a story to tell, a family history. The house was never finished, it grew along with us and we grew within it.[19]

Although largely unknown in North America during the first half of the twentieth century, by the 1960's, the broader elements of these quotidian philosophies eventually crossed the Atlantic to influence North American architectural discourse. Since then, contemporary architects such as Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and architectural historians such as Dell Upton, Henry Glassie and Robert Mellin have continued to support the notion of 'everydayness' and 'accessibility' as a way to return to the centrality of the 'lived experience' as an architectural paradigm.

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[17] Randall Teal. "Immaterial Structures: Encountering the Extraordinary in the Everyday" *Journal of Architectural Education,* Vol. 62 No.2 (November 2008): 14.
[18] Shelley Mallett. "Understanding home: a critical review of the literature." *The Sociological Review* Vol. 52 No. 1 (2002): 83.
[19] Hilde Heynen. *Architecture and Modernity: A Critique.* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999): 76.

Perhaps the most famous of these is architect Robert Venturi. Breaking from Modernist principles of simplicity of form, lack of ornamentation and extreme architectural control, Robert Venturi, in partnership with his wife, Denise Scott Brown, "wanted his architecture to be legible and accessible to his audience".[20] Further describing Venturi's philosophy of understandable and genial design, in her book *Women and the Making of the Modern Hou*se, Alice Friedman continues:

> He drew on familiar vernacular and commercial sources, assembling a pastiche of signs and motifs; this characteristic of his work is fundamental to its contribution to Postmodernism. But it was the reinscription of the user/participant/observer at the very heart of the architectural project that marked Venturi's most radical break with modernism. Now the client became not simply a passive recipient but a participant in the process of communication and experience…[21]

In this current era where architects such as Rem Koolhass and Daniel Libeskind are engrossed respectively with the subjects of "bigness" and "deconstructivism", there is little regard for the humanity and quotidian details of the architecture of the everyday.

In addressing this drift away from the emotional connection of architecture, to the rush to embrace the novelty of "starchitecture", architectural historian Mary McLeod comments,

> From the perspective of everyday life, such neo-avant-garde strategies as "folding", "disjunction," and "bigness" deny the energy, humanity, and creativity embodied in the humble, prosaic details of daily existence.[22]

However, in a revitalization of the significance of the prosaic, American architectural historians JB Jackson, Dell Upton and Henry Glassie have all written extensively on the subject of the everyday through the study of vernacular architecture. Often concentrating on rural environments, Glassie, in discussing the designers of buildings, wrote the following:

> Buildings like poems and rituals, realize culture. Their designers rationalize their actions differently……but all of them create out of the smallness of their own experience.[23]

Dell Upton describes the architecture of the everyday in contemporary thought, stating that "architecture is inescapably concrete and it forms the fabric and the setting of everyday life."[24]

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[20] Alice Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. ,1998), 197.
[21] Friedman, *Women and the Making of the Modern House*, 197.
[22] Steven Harris and Deborah Berke, *Architecture of the Everyday.* (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press 1997), 27.
[23] Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture.* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press , 2000), 17.

This thought resonates with me. While there will always be a special place in the world for the greatness of 'capital A' architecture, in the end, humanity is always brought back to the simplest and most ordinary in our lives – that which we return to on a daily basis for comfort and renewal; that which is the most often forgotten, that which is so seemingly plain when compared to the wonder of the uber-sophisticated. Authentic architecture represents and reflects a way of life.

Continuing this argument, architect Juhani Pallasmaa has written that architects, so consumed with the grandeur of space, have more or less forgotten about the subtle, emotional aspects of home. [25] I suggest that this is as a result of the pervasive educational emphasis on architectural principles and theories; compounded with the concern for the house as an exquisite architectural object rather than as a place allowing opportunities for personalization, organic growth, ambiguity and individualization. Perhaps the best example of this duality is the famous lawsuit between Edith Farnsworth and Mies van der Rohe over Dr. Farnsworth's disappointment with her unlivable but architecturally significant home. [26]

Finally, it is JB Jackson who most succinctly describes the architecture of the everyday with the statement, "I realize that even the simplest dwelling demands respect for its rich symbolism and the memories it holds."[27]

It is from this statement that my own research departs. In examining the everyday, I am seeking to better understand the "exotic in the familiar rather than the familiar in the exotic." [28] It is in the "words, places, and ideas that are too easily dismissed or taken for granted"[29] that I believe we find the source of the beauty of the everyday, and its profound influence upon a contemporary cultural landscape. It is this form of architecture that is perhaps the most authentic.

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[24] Dell Upton. "Architecture in Everyday Life" *New Literary History* Vol. 33 No. 4 (Autumn 2002): 707.
[25] Juhani Pallasmaa. "Identity, Intimacy and Domicile – Notes on the Phenomenology of Home", in *The Home: Words, Interpretations, Meanings, and Environments* ed. David N. Benjamin (Brookfield, Vermont: Avebury Publishing Limited, 1995), 131 – 147.
[26] See Alice T. Friedman. *Women and the Making of the Modern House* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998), 126 – 160.
[27] JB Jackson. *A Sense of Place: A Sense of Time* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 57.
[28] John Rennie Short, "Foreword", in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space* ,ed. Irene Cieraad, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), ix.
[29] Chris Wilson and Paul Groth. *Everyday America: Cultural Landscape Studies after JB Jackson* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2003), 163.

Home

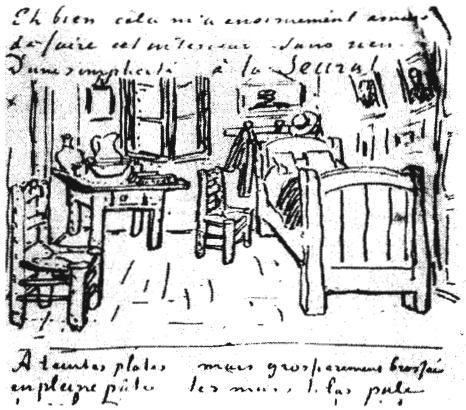

Figure 5: Vincent Van Gogh: Letter Sketches, Arles: 17 October 1888

The concept of the term "home" is common to most people, yet its meaning and definition varies considerably. Indeed, the terms 'home', 'house', 'place' (and sometimes even 'dwelling') are often conflated and frequently used interchangeably. Perhaps the confusion is related to the colloquial, sometimes inseparable connections between these three words - often used interchangeably in contemporary conversation. Examples of this type of idiom are the phrases "Come over to my *place* for a drink ", "I am going *home* now", or perhaps the ubiquitous "home for sale" rather than "house for sale": wording found in advertisements in the real estate sections of typical newspapers. In fact, eminent sociologist Amos Rapoport has commented that this confusion may be a primary obstacle in terms of scholarly research in this field.[30] Similarly, British anthropologist Irene Cieraad has gone further to suggest that it is not only the idiomatic but also the self-evident characteristics of domestic activities and spaces, qualitative research into this subject area has been somewhat limited. [31]

Notwithstanding this comment, Rapoport, Cieraad and many other scholars have focused over forty years of research into the concept of 'home' within disciplines such as environmental psychology, philosophy, sociology and architecture. The question of whether or not a home is "(a) place(s), (a) space(s), feeling(s), practices, and/or an active state of being in the world"[32] has been considered at length.

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[30] See Rapoport, A. "A Critical look at the concept of "home", in D. Benjamin, ed. *The home: Words, interpretations, meanings, and environments* (Brookfield, VT.: Ashgate Publishing, 1995), 25 – 52.
[31] Cieraad, *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space,*1.
[32] Shelley Mallett. "Understanding home: a critical review of the literature" *The Sociological Review* Vol. 52 No. 1 (2002): 62.

In the current climate of economic instability and recent international recession, the symbolism of the term 'home' has taken on additional significance. Indeed, the severe global economic recession had its roots in the powerful dream of home ownership, regardless of financial ability to manage an expenditure of this magnitude, and aided by the eagerness of lending institutions to satiate this most universal ideal. In addition to functioning as a place of privacy, intimacy and security, the overpowering goal of home ownership has come to represent the origin of the current global crisis. The fact that thousands of Americans have instead lost their homes and their livelihoods in the pursuit of this most fundamental dream dramatically emphasizes the power of this emotion, as does the relentless media focus upon the huge number of home repossessions in the United States and varying house prices in Canada.

The deleterious effects of these losses (which spin off in numerous ways to the foundations of North American society) further emphasize the very concept of *homelessness* and the serious implications of this situation in terms of the potential loss of one's societal rights - including the ability to vote, apply for credit and qualify for nationalized health benefits. The sense of ruin linked to the term 'homeless' therefore reverberates loudly against the sense of wellbeing associated with the notion of 'home'.

To be sure, these are tragic events which speak of horrible hardship. Yet, at the same time, they underscore the degree to which the very core of our North American society is based upon the cherished concepts of family, home and commitment to community. Although this crisis originated largely in suburbia, how does it impact upon rural homes and communities? Within the limitations of this study, it seems to have had very little effect; largely, I suspect, due to the strong identification with place and community found within the prairie population.

I believe it is this identification with place as well as the modesty and pragmatism of a rural life, that is the basis for the shaping of rural homes. To quote Mark Kingwell;

> "Even the simplest room has the profound grace of human life and everyday aspiration."[33]

[33]Mark Kingwell, *Practical Judgements: Essays in Culture, Politics and Interpretation* (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 243.

Further, the nature of people's emotional relationships to 'ordinary' places is largely linked to their own personal experiences (both positive and negative) within these places. In fact, 'home' is not necessarily a good thing.

Within the field of place theory, research suggests that 'home' may also be used to describe both a variety of places and a "way of being in the world"[34]. Psychologist Jeanne Moore, in her article *Placing Home in Context* argues that the current discourse on this subject has tended to place too much significance on the positive experiential and personal aspects of home and needs to be broadened to include a "transactionalist approach", writing that "home can be a prison and a place of terror as well as a haven or place of love."[35] This important approach includes the study of less positive concepts of home such as the homelessness, domestic violence and the loss of economic security previously mentioned. Less traditional residential environments such as prisons and outdoor recreational sites have also been the focus of this sphere of research.

While it is important to acknowledge the reality that home is not necessarily always a positive construct, it is equally important to reflect upon what it is, precisely, that evokes such strong emotions. What is it that differentiates the tenderness of place from the loneliness of space? What is it about the concept of home that is so powerful?

Gaston Bachelard's 1958 book *The Poetics of Space* attempts to answer these questions from a phenomenological perspective. Writing that "it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word"[36], Bachelard sets the tone for a viewpoint which places tremendous emphasis on the home as a safe and secure haven for the "thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind."[37]

Similarly, philosopher and geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, in his seminal work, *Space and Place,* eloquently evokes the familiarity of home, focusing on the use of ordinary objects as the epicenters of this attachment.

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[34] Lynne C. Manzo, "For better or worse: Exploring multiple dimensions of place meaning," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* Vol. 25 Issue 1 (March 2005): 68.
[35] Jeanne Moore, "Placing *Home* in Context." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* Vol. 20 Issue 4 (December 2000): 212.
[36] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1994), 3 – 4.
[37] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 4.

> Home is an intimate place. We think of the house as home and place, but enchanted images of the past are evoked not so much by the entire building, which can only be seen, as by its components and furnishings, which can be touched and smelled as well: the attic and the cellar, the fireplace and the bay window, the hidden corners, a stool, a gilded mirror, a chipped shell.[38]

It is descriptions such as this that underscore the ambitions of this research paper.

The precise meaning of 'home' continues to be debated by many additional scholars such as sociologist Shelley Mallett, who, in her very informative paper entitled *"Understanding home: a critical review of the literature"*[39] , also summarizes the many current and complex theories about home dominant in the literature. Perspectives of home which are discussed include the etymology of the term 'home', the concept of the ideal house/home, home as haven, home and gender, home/journeying, to name a few. It is beyond the scope of this paper to comment upon each of these theories. However, of particular interest for this study is her reference to the work of Clare Cooper- Marcus who has written extensively on people's emotional bonds to the places in which they live. Drawing on the work of Carl Jung, in *House as Mirror of Self*, Cooper-Marcus argues that it is the interior design of the house itself, complete with all of the decorative accessories and use of space that gives a house its meaning:

> It is the movable objects in the home, rather than the physical fabric itself that are the symbols of self. Home is expressed by" remodeling a dwelling as family needs change; by building, buying or refinishing furniture; by changing décor after the end of a relationship;.....It really is the movables which create the air of homeliness, and which are psychologically movable rather than the physically rooted house.[40]

In an additional explanation of the powerful bonds between people and their homes, Cooper-Marcus further describes the tenderness of this relationship:

> A home fulfills many needs: a place of self-expression, a vessel of memories, a refuge from the outside world, a cocoon where we can feel nurtured and let down our guard.[41]

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[38] Yi-Fu Tuan. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 144.
[39] Mallett. "Understanding home: a critical review of the literature", 62.
[40] Clare Cooper Marcus. *House as Mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home* (Berkeley, Calif.: Red Wheel/Conari Press, 1996), 8.
[41] Cooper Marcus. *House as Mirror of Self*, 2.

Despite the poignancy of Cooper-Marcus's writing and her extensive real-life examples, Mallett suggests that she conflates the term 'home' with 'house', even suggesting that this confusion is "typical" [42] to the discussion of how the term home should be understood. In Mallett's opinion, house and home are two different things. In a reference to her own personal memories ofher childhood, Mallett writes: "Home is a place..... but it is also a .... familiar, if not comfortable space where particular activities and relationships are lived" suggesting that virtually any space, even one found in a dream world, could be considered "home". [43]

Despite Mallett's argument, I agree with Cooper-Marcus that participation in the construction of the interior, as well as the making of choices and self-expression with regard to design and decoration are, indeed, integrally associated to the meaning of home; that our attachment to home goes well beyond the immovable.

This opinion is substantiated both through the findings of field research described in Chapter Four of this paper, as well as during previous interviews carried out in Balderson, Ontario in the Fall of 2008. During a discussion about the redesign of her farmhouse, Balderson resident Carol James remarked that: "We had no budget to spend on home decorating; however, in 1965, we did lay the tiles in our bathroom, den and laundry room – these had been left in a box, by the previous owners. And I think we did a darn good job. "[44]

In addition to providing insight into the frugality of the James household, this comment is evidence of the sense of pride and self-expression Mrs. James took in the active design of a portion of her farmhouse floors. Or perhaps, in the words of architect Pieter Sjipkes, this is an example of the "architecture of occupancy". [45]

This diversity of thought underscores the depth of personal experience which is at the heart of our feelings towards home, and is a further reflection of the emotional connotations associated with this most personal of spaces. The shape of our houses, the design/decoration of our interiors, the personal possessions we choose to display, the care we take to maintain our

[42] Mallett, "Understanding home: a critical review of the literature", 82.
[43] Mallett. "Understanding home: a critical review of the literature", 63.
[44] Carole James, personal interview, November 13, 2008.
[45] Pieter Sjipkes, discussion in class ARCH 627 Research Methods for Architects, McGill University, November 20, 2008.

homes, are all articulations of our identity and outward expressions of how we wish to relate to our own family as well as friends and strangers.

In terms of rural Manitoba, an additional theme inherent to the concept of home is that of the influence of prairie culture and its history upon the design and decoration of residential environments. If, as previously discussed, our homes are indeed a physical representation of our most profound values and relationships, in what way, if any, has the distinctive prairie culture and history influenced this physicality? What additional meaning is reflected in the design decision-making as a result of this unique landscape?

Prairie History

Figure 6: Poster promoting immigration to Canadian west.

Many books have been written on the history of farming in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, primarily from an economic and government land policy perspective. Very few have been written about the history of the rural house and, to date, I have found none that have been written specifically about the design of the rural interior. This paper is not intended to provide a detailed account of western Canadian agricultural and cultural history, yet a basic understanding of the history of prairie life seems appropriate as a starting point for this discussion of the design of rural prairie interiors.

The prairie region of Canada was populated largely as a result of the federal government decision to fulfill a national policy objective of populating and developing this part of Canada's vast territory. Beginning in 1870 and ending in the early 1930's, this six-decade era of settlement brought over two million impoverished immigrants to the "promised land" of western Canada from a variety of ethno-cultural groups including Mennonite, Doukhobor, Ukrainian, Jewish, French and British settlers. While waves of settlers arrived by train from Halifax, having survived the arduous boat ride from a variety of exotic European towns, there was significant public debate about what was then called the North-West Territories. Interestingly, in 1901, Frederick Haultain, the territories first and only premier, attacked the federal plan to divide the country up into distinct provinces, suggesting that one large province called "Buffalo" would be the best solution.

While this idea was not to survive, the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta were formed in the late 1800's and early 1900's, amidst such an influx of population that Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier ordered a special census to better gauge the extraordinary growth of this part of Canada.[46]

Yet settlers who arrived to settle 'foreign colonies' were not allowed to apply their own land management strategies to their new properties. Historian Peter Ward has noted that early patterns of prairie settlement resulted from a federal homestead policy (The Dominion Lands Act) that established the square mile, or "section" as the basic unit of land. Further, the "quarter section" was established as the unit for the creation of individual dwellings. Any other form of settlement, such as that which might have been common in European villages, was not tolerated by the Laurier government. An example of an alternative form of settlement which was curtailed by the Government of Canada, was the Doukhobor community's attempt to farm their lands communally as they had done for centuries in their native Russia. Although this concept of shared living was quickly stopped in western Canada, it is interesting to speculate that perhaps this sort of venture was the foundation for both the creation of grassroots liberal social policy as well as the Canadian tolerance for cultural diversity which is evident in federal policies such as "multiculturalism" until today.

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[46] See Bill Waiser. "The Tale of Two Different Futures: Saskatchewan in 1905 and 2005", *Canadian Issues (* Winter 2005): 18 – 20.

Despite the fact that settlers were not allowed to determine even the size and shape of their land (often in the face of blatant prejudice), no one could stop them from transporting and building upon the unique cultural heritages which they brought to their adopted land in other ways. Not surprisingly, therefore, what happened on the interior of the rural home tells a different story to what happened beyond the farmhouse walls.

Male immigrants typically worked both on and off the original colony (e.g. in mines, for more prosperous farms owned by more established settlers, or for the railways) simultaneously gaining exposure to more modern North American farming techniques. In contrast, women generally stayed on the homestead in a much more spatially and culturally cloistered environment. "They remained on the homestead, clearing and breaking land, herding stock and maintaining a home while the man "worked out", raising capital for improvements."[47] This isolation, intensified by poor roads and an inability to speak either English or French, resulted, at least temporarily, in the preservation of "old country" traditions of ethnic crafts, cooking and interior decorating.

In fact, as noted by John Lehr and Yossi Katz, community status (within the settler colonies) was "acquired from facility with the traditional roles of women in the old country."[48]

Figure 7: Abandoned Ukrainian pioneer house, Caliento, Manitoba

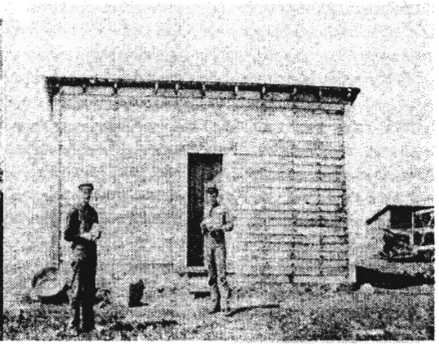

Figure 8: Exterior view of settler shack Nanton Alberta, 1903

[47] John C.Lehr and Yossi Katz. "Ethnicity, institutions, and the cultural landscapes of the Canadian prairie West." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* Vol. 26 Issue 2 (1994): 76.
[48] Lehr and Katz. "Ethnicity, institutions and the cultural landscapes of the Canadian prairie West", 76.

Aside from the preservation of traditional domestic roles that the previous discussion reveals, it is the reference to the extent which women were also required to participate in the hard labour of the homestead which is most striking. Sadly, this enormous workload has been noted only anecdotally in the histories of the Canadian prairies, yet I believe deserves much more attention from the perspective of women's indispensable contribution to the viability of the prairie economy.

Whether or not the retention of these ethnic traditions was deliberate or not is debatable. John Lehr has argued that the preservation of these traditions was, in fact, unconscious and not particularly important. He suggests that this maintenance of traditional house décor, colour schemes, room arrangements, traditional dress was simply as a result of habit, as well as women's spatial, cultural and social isolation from any alternative forms of material culture.[49]

I am not so sure, and in fact, would argue that in these early years, these activities were both central to women's self-expression, self-esteem and self-fulfillment in an otherwise male-dominated world. Because travel was difficult, undoubtedly the simple sharing of recipes, decorative ideas and craft projects provided a vital sense of female friendship and support. As noted by anthropologists Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, "…women developed their selves through interaction with objects that changed little with time: kitchen utensils, gardening tools, brooms, looms, and those things in involved in raising children."[50]

Eventually and not surprisingly, through assimilation in school classrooms and on school playgrounds, it was the children of these early immigrants who led the way in the cultural acclimatization to Canadian life, perhaps with their parents following nostalgically and somewhat reluctantly behind.

To this day, the rich multiplicity which grew from this 'cultural mosaic' is reflected in spheres such as the music, art and literature, as well as in the architecture of churches and other public buildings on the Canadian prairies. Yet the extent to which this diversity is still evident in the ordinary, simple structures which form the rural domestic landscape is questionable. As Lehr and Katz have noted, over time this diversity of form has been highly diluted. Realistically, this is as a result of the simple passage of time; although, once again, it may also be traced to the

[49] See John C. Lehr. "The Landscape of Ukrainian Settlement in the Canadian West", *Great Plains Quarterly* Vol. 2 No. 2 (1982): 97.
[50] Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The meaning of things: Domestic symbols and the self,* 93.

fact that originally "overt expressions of ethnicity whether manifested in religious observance, in custom or in a material fashion were frowned upon, greeted often with derision or outright anger."[51] Attitudes such as these led to an increased desire to "blend in". A very poignant reminder of the pressures placed upon immigrants to adapt as quickly as possible is contained in the following quote:

> Let me see: You take the first generation of immigrants. They have a very big complex. They don't speak the language well. They don't know the ways of the new country. They don't feel so important in the eyes of their children anymore. The second generation have a complex, too. They think their parents don't know anything about life here. They think their fathers and mothers are dummies. So they feel lost. The third generation, if everything goes well, maybe they will have no complex.[52]

Two additional, important factors must also be recognized in this cocktail of influences. One is the dominant culture of Canada's two founding groups, the French and English;[53] the other is the flat, distinctive nature of the natural prairie landscape. Both of these have further added to this snapshot of prairie life and have had a major influence in terms of prairie vernacular architecture. While the assimilation to Canadian culture took place as a slow and steady manifestation of daily interactions with the outside world, the less pragmatic, more artistic architectural expression of the natural surroundings continues to be evidenced in the functional nature and simple materiality of prairie structures, as well as in the dominance of the flowing horizontal landscape.

It is the legacy of these complex physical, historical and emotional realities: the desire for new immigrants to want to quickly embrace a new society, the notion of self-expression as a determinant in the meaning of home , the influence of new cultures, everyday life, as well as the natural landscape that help to explain why rural prairie housing presently reflects not only the values of the original designers and builders, but also the values and needs of those who currently occupy and modify these homes.

Finally, it is important to note that the settlement of the Canadian prairies was not exclusive to the rural landscape. In addition to working in mining and logging camps, the City of Winnipeg was the chosen destination for an enormous number of immigrants who preferred to find their

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[51] John C. Lehr and D.W. Moodie. "Polemics of Pioneer Settlement: Ukrainian immigration and the Winnipeg Press 1896 – 1905" Canadian Ethnic Studies Vol.12 Issue 2 (1980): 97.
[52] Edward Hillel. *The Main: Portrait of a Neighbourhood* (Toronto, Ont.: Key Porter Books, 1987), 12.
[53] See, John C.Lehr and Yossi Katz. "Ethnicity, institutions, and the cultural landscapes of the Canadian prairie west." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* Vol. 26 Issue 2 (1994): 70 – 87.

way in an urban setting. My own ancestors were a part of that immigration, arriving in Winnipeg at the turn of the century from Romania and Russia. Theirs was a typical narrative of oppositional forces such as opportunity and heartbreak, racism and tolerance, as were the stories of most immigrants to Canada's multicultural cities during the first half of the twentieth century. Yet the character of this "society of newcomers" and the "shared difficulties of immigration and settlement" [54] regardless of ethnic origin, in the end, fostered a tolerant and inclusive culture which still remains today.

Prairie Life, Prairie Women

Figure 9: woman driving combine 2005

Mrs. A. H. Warr, the new president of the U.F.W.A.

Figure 10: Mrs. A. Warr, President United Farm Women Association, 1929

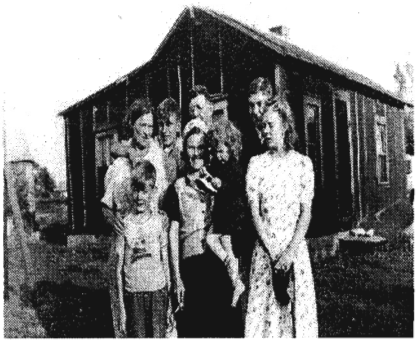

Figure 11: prairie family circa 1930

Few histories have provided a rounded picture of rural culture which includes an analysis of domestic life and the role of women in the household:[55] Even fewer have acknowledged the salient role of women in the viability of rural society. Sociologist Nora Cebotarev, in 1995, wrote that, "The first serious studies of women in agriculture have appeared only in the last twenty years."[56] The recognition of gender difference in rural studies was also addressed by British geographer Jo Little in her 2002 book entitled *Gender and Rural Geography: Identity, Sexuality and Power in the Countryside.* Citing problems with past studies of rural communities, Little notes that although these studies were flawed, they did highlight the key (but largely

[54] Lyle Dick, Review of *Acres of Dreams: Selling the Canadian Prairies*, by Sandra Morton Weizman *The Public Historian* Vol. 28 No. 2 (Spring 2006): 110.
[55] See Jo Little. *Gender and Rural Geography: Identity, Sexuality and Power in the Countryside* (Harlow, Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited, 2002.
[56] E.A. (Nora) Cebotarev, "From Domesticity to the Public Sphere: Farm Women, 1945 – 1986," in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945 – 1980* ed. Joy Parr (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 200.

unrecognized) roles of women as agricultural labourers and as domestic workers; and that both roles were central to the existence of farm and village life.[57] The arduous demands made upon Canadian farmwomen is described in detail in Monda Halpern's excellent 2001 study of Ontario farms entitled *And on that farm he had a wife.* Chronicling the stress of "domestic, productive, and reproductive work, and the care not only of husband and children, but of infirm and relations and farmhands", [58] Halpern goes on to note that it was a widely held belief in early twentieth-century Ontario that because of "interminable monotony, overwork, and exhaustion..... countless farm women had gone hopelessly insane and were alarmingly over-represented in the province's lunatic asylums."[59] Although further studies by psychiatrists of this era indicated that farm women were apparently no more prone to "nervous disorders" than were city women, the numerous articles found in early twentieth –century farm journals speak to an undeniable burden.

An excellent example of the continuous cycle of work required to sustain rural life at the beginning of the century is found in the documentation of the Motherwell Homestead[60], which was located in the Abernathy district of south-central Saskatchewan.

In its prime, during the 1920's, the 160 - acre farm employed "at least "two hired men" or agricultural labourers" and at least two "hired girls" for domestic work" [61] in addition to the Motherwell family of three. The chart below (Figure 12) indicates the yearly cultivation cycle of the Motherwell Farm, providing a sense of the uninterrupted requirement for hard work necessary to manage a prairie homestead.

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[57] Little, *Gender and Rural Geography: Identity, Sexuality and Power in the Countryside*, 76.
[58] Monda Halpern. *And on that farm he had a wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900 – 1970.* (Montreal & Kingston, Ont.: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 28.
[59] Halpern, And on that farm he had a wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900 – 1970, 28.
[60] William Richard Motherwell (1860 – 1943) was one of the early homesteaders to arrive on the Canadian prairies. Motherwell was both a successful farmer and distinguished Canadian politician during the 1930's. The Motherwell Homestead has been restored and is now under the management of Parks Canada.
[61] Lyle Dick. *Farmers Making Good: The Development of Abernathy District, Saskatchewan 1880 – 1920.* (Hull, Quebec: Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1989), 99.

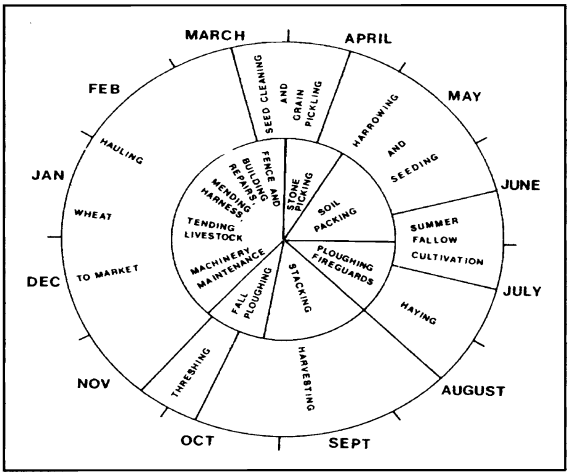

Figure 12: Yearly cultivation cycle Motherwell Farm

Not surprisingly, missing from this diagram is an inclusion of the enormous contribution of the "hired girls" to the farm's viability and in particular, to the health and well-being of its owners and employees. Indeed, it has been suggested that even though farm horses were given ample time to rest, rural women were not offered any respite, often beginning their work long before sunrise and not stopping until long after sundown.[62]

This paper is not intended to provide a concise account of the Western Canadian cultural landscape, with or without an explicit focus on women. However, given its focus upon the domestic environment, it seems fitting that a brief description of daily life in this rural society might be useful. Based upon the richness of details provided in Lyle Dick's book *Farmers Making Good: The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1920,* it is possible to recreate the endless daily routine of a typical "hired girl", as follows:

> Her day would generally start at approximately 4:30 a.m. regardless of the season. The first task of the morning would be to peel potatoes, separate the cream for milk, "fix fish", carve pork and get eggs ready for the hired men's breakfast – most likely 3 -4 men who would already have been working in the stables for a few hours – watering and feeding the animals. Once the hired men had been served, the farm family would then be served their breakfast and the entire routine of cooking, serving and clearing would take place again. The remainder of the morning would be spent cleaning house until lunch time when the dinner cycle would begin again. Invited guests for any meal would mean additional food preparation time as well as additional time being spent setting a formal table.
>
> In the afternoon, a hired girl would typically milk cows, churn butter and perhaps accompany a male worker to town where the butter would be

[62] This observation was made by one of the study participants (Roberta Stone) during interviews.

> sold. In fact, this occasional trip was often the only relief available to young female employed labourers. The afternoon would also be spent doing laundry, baking bread and continuing the cleaning cycle until it was time to get supper ready for the entire household once again. During spring and summer, "cleaning" may also have included whitewashing walls using lyme and chalk – a task which required both strength and stamina.
>
> In spring, summer and fall, hired women would also have been responsible for the planting, maintenance and harvesting of the gardens. This task would be added to all of the other routine tasks.
>
> A typical evening would have been spent completing other domestic chores such as ironing mending and sewing clothing until approximately 11:30 p.m. allowing for approximately five hours of sleep until the cycle began again the next day.

An account such as this, describing the essential tasks of a female worker at the beginning of the twentieth century would have been very common. Although technology has changed, the vital role of women in the twenty-first century and the associated long work hours continue to be essential to the viability of the rural home and broader community.

The subject of women's roles and gender relationships in rural communities is one which is very complex. The reason for this is the historic acceptance of the undervaluation of rural women's work by society in general. Issues which seem quite straightforward at a cursory level are instead quite dense at a more detailed level of inquiry. This is compounded by the tolerance of rural women *themselves* of their role as farm wives, rather than as full economic partners.
The prevailing lack of perception or undervaluation of the very worth of women's work on rural farms, small towns and in the greater community is also at issue.

Although rural women, in many ways, have perhaps traditionally been considered somewhat equal partners by virtue of their active and full participation in both outdoor labour as well as indoor domestic duties, the reality is that this contribution is eclipsed by the over-arching patriarchy which has been in existence for centuries, and which to a large extent, persists in rural communities today. An example of this domination is found in the fact that as recently as the early 1970's, only male heads of household could be considered legal property owners. Yet for many, this was perfectly acceptable. As noted by Canadian sociologist Nora Cebotarev in two quotes from her study of Ontario farm women:

> An older farm woman said, "I never got involved in farm business decisions, this was something the men (husband and sons) discussed among themselves." Women's area of decision-making was limited: it applied to meal planning and, to a lesser extent, clothing.[63]
>
> The group of oldest, retired women had few doubts about their domestic roles and family roles. They accepted them as normal and natural, and saw the expansion of the roles of younger women with disapproval and suspicion. "It is natural for women to take care of the family and the home. It's women's work and responsibility. I don't know why women now are trying to become like men… women should not get involved in men's things.[64]

It was not until the late 1980's and early 1990's that this tradition of subordination and its acceptance as a de facto way of life was challenged and subsequently changed in Canadian law.

Another revealing example of women's subordination at this time, and the normative value of this uneven power relationship can be found in a November 25 1963 episode of the CBC radio broadcast entitled *Women in Their Place: A Discussion about the Role of Women in their Community Today: Their Responsibilities, their Needs, their Accomplishments.*[65] One segment in the *Farm Forum* series which aired across Canada from 1940 until 1965, this particular episode was broadcast across Canada from the United Church hall in Knowlton, Quebec. Over the course of the one hour open forum, several issues of concern to the lives of farm women in Canada were discussed and the opinions of local rural men and women in attendance were voiced. The following quotes serve as excellent examples of the embedded patriarchal views of both male and female participants:

> Male participant: I think that is the crux of the problem. ….. If the reason that they [women] are going out is just because they have been doing too much credit buying or licking too many stamps and over-consuming… this is a very poor reason for going out to work. They should go to work to lead a fuller life not to add to their material standard of living. …..Your place is at home to raise family.
>
> Female participant: We can't have a lot of old maids all over the place. Women are so damn stupid they haven't prepared themselves to work. Women are quite content not to have interesting work and take dull, dreary jobs. It is their fault.

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[63] E.A. (Nora) Cebotarev, "From Domesticity to the Public Sphere: Farm Women, 1945 – 1986," in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945 – 1980* , 208.
[64] E.A. (Nora) Cebotarev, "From Domesticity to the Public Sphere: Farm Women, 1945 – 1986," in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945 – 1980* , 222.
[65] Michael Enright, "National Farm Radio Forum 1963," *CBC Radio Rewind Podcast November 20, 2009* rewind_20092210_23190 (accessed November 21 2009).

While established rural women's organizations such as the Women's Institutes (WI) play(ed) a pivotal role in providing opportunities for social interaction and support to isolated prairie women, they remain(ed) centered upon traditional activities such as baking, sewing and volunteer community service. Although certainly noble in intent, these sorts of activities remain typically narrow in their focus upon the traditional women's roles associated with domesticity and care-giving. One explanation for this might be that organizations such as the WI, in fact, are essentially an extension of the informal gatherings which historically took place in women's kitchens. Compounding this issue is the unspoken belief that the caring role performed by women should extend almost automatically from the home to the community. Not surprisingly, therefore, membership in the Women's Institutes is drawn primarily from rural women over the age of fifty.[66]

By the mid 1970's, new organizations such as The New Farm Women's Organizations (NFWO) emerged in recognition of the changes in rural family and society and to meet the needs of younger rural women ill at ease with gendered nature of traditional women's roles. These women, dissatisfied with the status quo, look for full recognition of their participation in rural life. Some, such as the Concerned Farm Women (CFW) have had political agendas as well, lobbying for recognition and a voice in the traditional, male-dominated farm organizations.

However, once again, the complexity of rural women's politics and role definition was evident. The creation of organizations such as these was greeted by older women with comments such as "We don't approve of the new women's organizations nor of their influence on the WI: they went political!"[67]

These tensions continue to exist in rural communities even today. In conversations with both members of the Perth, Ontario Women's Institute in November 2008 and members of the Manitoba Women's Institute in June 2009, it became evident that the vitality of this organization is in danger of severe decline due to ever-increasing lack of interest by young rural women. The information age, access to employment in urban areas and ease of travel were all cited as

[66] As discussed in personal interview with Carole James, Margaret Campbell and Phyllis Strong, Balderson, Ontario, November 13, 2008.
[67] Cebotarev, "From Domesticity to the Public Sphere: Farm Women, 1945 – 1986," in *A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945 – 1980*, 213.

reasons for this drop in membership; nonetheless, all of these women lamented the loss of rural sisterhood and organizational strength that this lack of vitality has precipitated.

Nevertheless rural life continues and women continue to work long hours to preserve this way of life. Adapting to broader societal influences, young women now work both on and off the farm – certainly a mixed blessing. The result is a current generation of women who continue to live within a strongly patriarchal society while, at the same time, somehow manage to rationalize or perhaps reconcile any manner of inferior status. Even from within this patriarchal structure, they somehow see themselves as distinctive individuals more than capable of contributing to the ongoing viability of not only their local economy, but also that of their broader community. As sociologist Carolyn Sachs has noted, perhaps their sense of resistance is fostered from within the farm house itself: a space in which there is at least only minimal male supervision.[68]

Prairie Homes: Architecture, Interior Design and Decoration

Figure 13: Farm boy bathing in galvanized steel washtub in kitchen

"This being the case, if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace."[69]

From a historical viewpoint, and notwithstanding the fact that women worked outside the dwelling, it seems reasonable to assume that rural women spent a majority of their time performing household duties, nurturing family, friends, and an assortment of others from within the boundaries of a variety of houses, despite the gendered nature of these activities. How

[68] See Carolyn Sachs, *The invisible farmers : women in agricultural production* (Totowa, N.J. : Rowman & Allanheld), 1983.
[69] Gaston Bachelard. *The Poetics of Space* ,6.

were these houses designed and what did they look like? Was the arrangement of furniture and the design of the interior a form of "life support"[70] for these women? In the little time they did have to furnish and decorate, what sorts of influences determined their choices? Was there an opportunity to somehow bring meaning to the home through their everyday routines? Did the house conjure up images of privacy and a peaceful haven as the previous quote might suggest, or, did the drudgery of continuous work negate the possibility of creating any sort of oneiric home?

On the Canadian prairies, the first dwellings built by early settlers could barely be described as homes. They were extremely modest, constructed of log or sod, or simple shacks erected quickly and temporarily simply to provide shelter. Even with the extensive immigration previously discussed, as late as 1917, most dwellings in Alberta and Saskatchewan had only one or two rooms. [71] Figure 14 (on the following page), from Peter Ward's book, *A History of Domestic Space,* although undated, offers a glimpse of what these interiors might have looked like. Similarly, the adjacent image of a log house with sod roof (Figure 15), from Wetherell and Kmet's *Homes in Alberta* provides a sense of both the exterior design as well as a bit of insight into a woman's daily activities. If one looks closely at this photograph from 1911, the woman in the image is feeding chickens and has planted a vegetable garden, complete with protection from the cold. Curtains on the windows, neatly drawn back to reveal decorative accessories indicate that interior ornamentation and the creation of a pleasant interior environment must have also been a priority.

Figure 14: undated sketch of interior of pioneer cabin

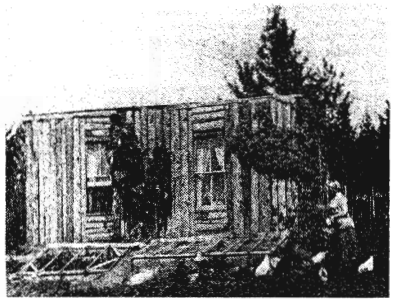

Figure 15: slab shack at Bingley, Alberta, 1911

[70] Tim Putnam, "Postmodern Home Life," in *At Home: An Anthropology of Domestic Space,* Irene Cieraad, ed., 144.
[71] Peter Ward, *A History of Domestic Space: Privacy and the Canadian Home* (Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 11.

As large families were the norm in the early part of the twentieth century, the rooms in modest homes such as these served many functions. The fact that there was no electricity in these dwellings also meant that families clustered together after nightfall, perhaps engaging in activities which included card playing, singing, reading or story-telling by candlelight or by the light of oil lamps. While wooden washstands would have been used for bathing, toilet facilities were relegated to the exterior. In fact, as late as 1941, "only slightly more than half of all households in the nation had an indoor flush toilet, in many cases shared, while the outhouse continued to serve the needs of almost all others."[72]

Typically, a single room would be used for activities such as cooking, eating, socializing and sleeping. In a two room dwelling, food preparation was generally carried out in a separate, or partially separated kitchen, although this space too might easily have been used for other activities as well, including entertaining guests – strikingly similar to the way in which many kitchens are utilized in the twenty-first century. It is interesting to speculate about the social benefits to families of participating in group activities (or even in individual activities) in one room, on a nightly basis. Perhaps hovering together around a stove, or even a single light source after the invention of electricity, was of benefit in terms of family cohesion – something which seems to be difficult to achieve in our era of individualized spaces and computerized social networking sites. Unfortunately there are very few images of the interiors of these one or two room prairie homes, leaving a void in our ability to determine interior decoration influences at this time.

While the emphasis may have been on the functional rather than the decorative in such small spaces, the following two images do offer a glimpse of an interior from a decorative perspective. Clearly, the making of "home" and self-expression through some sort of decoration was of consequence. Figure 16 shows a rather spartan bedroom, yet visible elements of personalization and decoration are evident through what seem to be family photographs and newspaper articles displayed on the wall.

The image shown in Figure 17, somewhat grander in appearance, portrays a prairie parlour in a four room settler's home at the turn of the twentieth century. In this image, we also see family photos decorating the walls, as well as an attractive piano featured prominently in the picture.

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[72] Ward, *A History of Domestic Space.* (Vancouver, B.C.: UBC Press, 1999), 53.

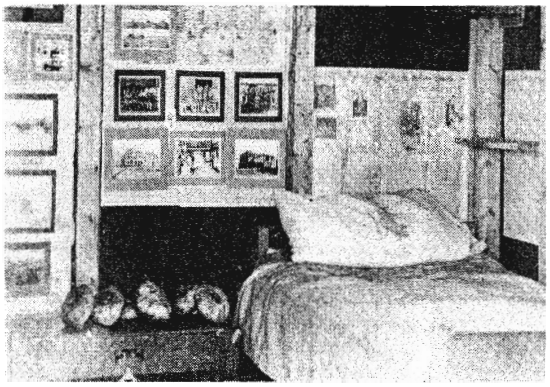

Figure 16: Farm house bedroom, 1903

Figure 17: Farm house parlour, 1910

The piano played an extremely important part in the design of early Canadian interiors, as it was a mark of middle-class affluence and social superiority. In the "Winnipeg Piano" advertisement (Figure 18), the importance of the piano as a social mediator is evident in the advertisement's banner, stating "music for every home."

For many years the piano continued to be played predominantly by women and was always located in the parlour, or in rural areas, the 'sitting room' [73] of the house, stressing the highly-valued feminine virtues of sensitivity and musical talent. As anthropologist Kenneth Ames points out in his book *Death in the Dining Room*, during the Victorian era "achieving and demonstrating mastery or just competence to oneself or others [can be] immensely rewarding, allowing one to feel a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. Success may even bring prominence and flattering attention."[74] I suggest that this feeling of accomplishment, while affirming established roles, may at the same time have been particularly important for women in their search for affirmation and identity, especially in a notoriously patriarchal rural environment.

[73] The rural 'sitting room' was the name given to the urban parlour counterpart: the name itself reflecting the more informal nature of rural culture.

[74] Kenneth L. Ames. *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture (* Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 1992): 179.

Figure 18: Ad for pianos, The Nor' West Farmer March 1929

Figure 19: Ad for piano lessons, The Country Guide May 1929

The social value playing the piano also produced intense pressure for women, as is also evident in the adjacent advertisement (Figure 19), which shows a woman sitting at the piano "afraid of this new way to learn music". Looking at the photograph in the ad, her hesitation is certainly understandable. What student, male or female, would be comfortable with the man in the advertisement standing over him/her, scrutinizing every sour note? Apart from the patriarchal symbolism of this image, the copy also reads: "When I heard others playing, I envied them so that it almost spoiled the pleasure of the music for me." This too is a clear indication of the significance of female piano-playing to Canadian society in the early-mid twentieth century. While there would certainly have been at least some emotional bonding in just enjoying the music-making, women who could not actively participate apparently also ran the risk of ruining their own evening of socializing with friends.

Pattern Books and The Four Square House

One of the most important developments in the interior design of housing at the turn of the twentieth century was the creation of pattern books for residential dwellings. Originally created in the United States, and widely available for purchase, these books were filled with inexpensive house plans which provided examples of simple, inexpensive houses which could then be

constructed. As the manufacturing of these dwellings was based upon standardized building elements, floor plans could easily be adapted to the various local vernaculars across North America. As architectural historian Dell Upton has noted, "Pattern book users freely extracted what they found interesting ..."[75] Also of importance at this time, and contributing to the popularity of these books, was the desire for the middle class (including the rural middle class) to project appropriate societal norms and standards, in keeping with those of the more affluent.

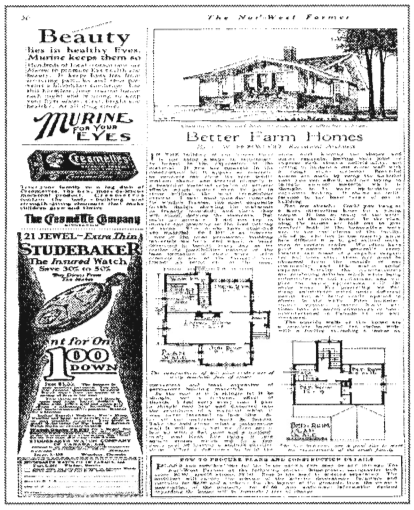

Figure 20: Ad for pattern book house: The Nor'West Farmer July 1930

Figure 21: Ad for Aladdin Homes pattern book house: Country Squire Magazine, 1929.

An exceptional example of information on precisely how to achieve this goal of societal propriety was found in Catherine and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *The American Woman's Home*, written in 1869. There are many fascinating aspects of this book, including the presentation of a revolutionary redesign of the Victorian kitchen, emphasis upon proper etiquette for women and detailed instruction with regard to instructing servants. Most interesting with regard to house design was the inclusion of a chapter on the ideal floor plan, ensuring that proper decisions could be made by even the most uneducated or unsophisticated woman.

[75] Dell Upton. "Pattern Books and Professionalism: Aspects of the Transformation of Domestic Architecture in America, 1800 – 1860," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 19 No. 2/3 (Summer – Autumn, 1984): 149.

Not surprisingly, the use of pattern books spread quickly across North America. Offering well-designed houses (which ranged in price from as little as $500 for a modest cottage to $4500.00 for a much larger dwelling), their popularity soared. On the Canadian prairies, the timing of these pattern books coincided with inflated grain prices. As a result of these price increases prosperity came to western Canadian farmers. House plans, available from many manufacturers such as Canadian Aladdin Co. Ltd., Sovereign Construction and B.C. Mills were available both in book form as well as in newspaper columns and farm magazines. The most common of these designs was called the Four Square House, created by Denver architect Frank Kidder in 1891 (Figure 22). Because of its simple, square, symmetrical box shape, this was a design which could easily be modified to suit both the modest rural vernacular and unassuming lifestyle of prairie residents. As noted by Saskatoon author Les Henry in his book *Catalogue Houses: Eatons' and Others*, "modifications are evident in the hundreds of mail order houses still occupied in towns and cities". [76]

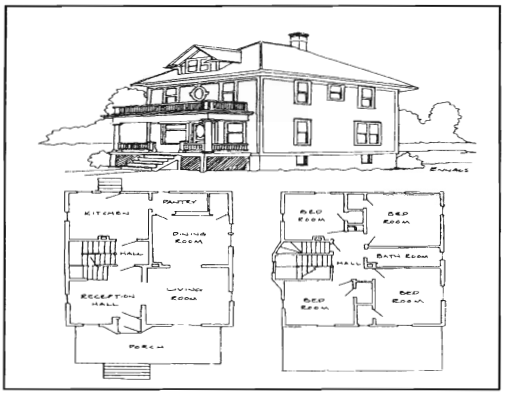

Figure 22: Four Square House from Radford's Pattern Book, circa 1908.

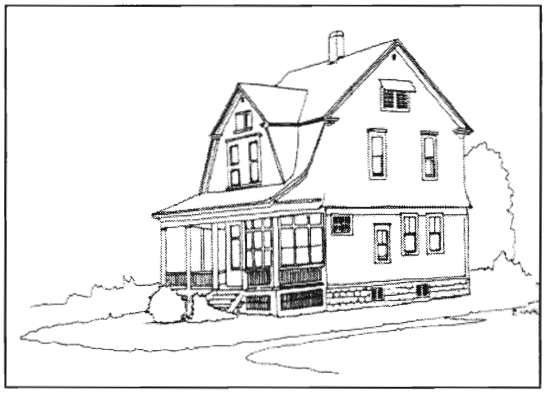

Figure 23: T. Eaton Co. Ltd. Mail Order House

Perhaps not unexpectedly, by 1936, even the venerable T. Eaton Co. was in the business of selling mail order housing.

[76] Les Henry. *Catalogue Houses: Eaton's and Others* (Saskatoon, Sask.: Henry Perspectives, 2000): iv.

Figure 24: Cover of Eaton's Pattern Book

Figure 25: Eaton's Pattern Book Four Square House near Monarch, Alberta

Producing no fewer than eight different Four Square House plans[77], the T. Eaton Co. pattern houses became so popular that virtually all pattern houses were commonly termed "Eaton's Houses", even if manufactured by another company. Many of these designs were a result of "ideal home competitions" promoted by the managers of Eaton's to develop modest houses for middle-class clients and provide relief to the building industry during the Depression.[78] The image on the right (Figure 25) is an example of an Eaton's mail-order house which was particularly popular in western Canada. In fact, Four Square Houses are still in evident throughout Manitoba and Saskatchewan and "are still lived in and a great source of pride to their owners". [79]

The same can be said for similar houses which were designed under the auspices of the Small House Bureaus: organizations created by the Canadian architectural association to combat the popularity of purchased house plans and the potential subsequent decline of the architectural profession – at least in terms of residential construction.

Just a few years later, and at a slightly more modest level, bungalows and cottages were also constructed under the auspices of the Soldiers' Land Settlement Scheme to house returning

[77] The names of the eight Four Square House models were Earlsfield, Eastonborough, Eastbourne, Earlscourt, Eadgley, Eastlynn, Eardlsey and Eager with Earlsfield (No. 68 or No. 668) being the most popular. From L. Henry. *Catalogue Houses; Eaton's and Others, 28.,*
[78] Susan Haight, "Machines in Suburban Gardens: The 1936 T. Eaton Company Architectural Competition for House Designs", Material History Review 44 (Fall 1996): 23.
[79] Les Henry. *Catalogue Houses: Eaton's and Others*, 38.

World War I veterans and their families. The popularity of this plan, offering a low down payment and large monthly mortgage payments, allowed returning soldiers the opportunity for low cost housing. As a consequence over six thousand houses were built in 179 municipalities across Canada.[80]

Post - Second World War Housing

By the latter half of the twentieth century, the federal government had become increasingly involved in the form of housing available to Canadians of average income, providing both mortgages and mortgage insurance. A very popular program for returning veterans of World War II was offered under the auspices of the Wartime Housing Limited crown corporation.
Initially intended to be temporary shelter, these extremely modest tract homes were built without basements. However, as discussed in their paper *Wartime Housing and Architectural Change, 1942-1992,* Annmarie Adams and Pieter Sjipkes have indicated that many of those who purchased these "temporary" homes have still remained, with owners having undertaken extensive renovations over the course of decades of changes to family structure and pride of ownership. [81]

Government standardization in the design of Canadian housing extended as late as 1949 when Canada Housing and Mortgage Company (CMHC) developed a series of "Small House Designs" consisting of four pattern books from which purchasers could choose a design solution

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[80] Peter Ennals and Deryck W. Holdsworth. *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling over Three Centuries.*(Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1998),211.
[81] Annmarie Adams and Pieter Sjipkes, "Wartime Housing and Architectural Change, 1942 – 1992," Canadian Folklore Canadien 17, No.2 (1995): 13-29.

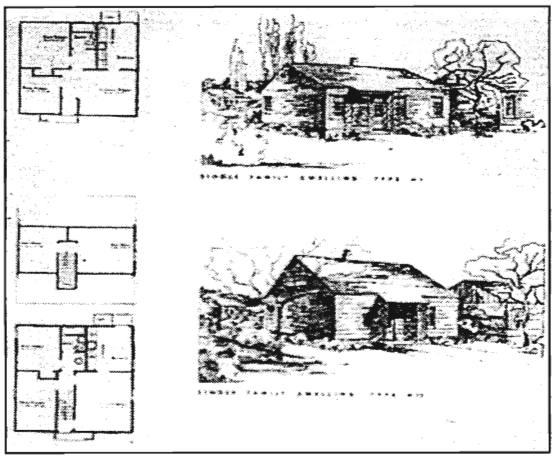

Figure 26: Example of Small House design

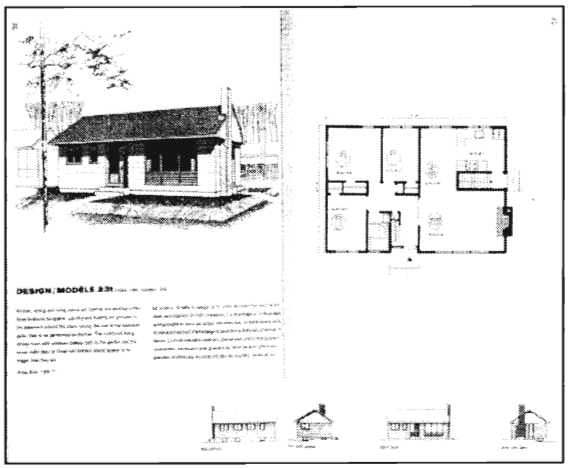

Figure 27: Example of Small House design

which best suited their circumstance (Figures 26 and 27). As pointed out by Ennals and Holdsworth, " since these architectural drawings were all standardized and completed in Ottawa or Toronto, this homogeneity in housing has once again contributed to the decline of a regional vernacular prairie or otherwise." [82] Their comment supports Lehr and Katz's earlier suggestion that distinctive vernacular housing has been largely diluted.[83]

But how were the *interiors* of these homes designed and decorated once inhabited by home owners? How were these houses personalized, modified, and restructured to bring a sense of meaning to their empty spaces and how did these spaces, once occupied, bring meaning to their occupants? While scholarly research has provided numerous contributions to an analysis of the exterior of prairie houses, I believe there is a noticeable lack of scholarship with regard to the way in which the interiors of these houses were furnished and decorated by their inhabitants. Therefore, from the sole perspective of academic sources such as these, it is virtually impossible to determine the effect of everyday activities, relationships and objects in terms of their meaning as 'homes'.

Fortunately, there is a wealth of information available to be found in prairie literature, film and poetry, as well as in the stories of those who currently live on the prairies. It is from these unique resources that the following two chapters are drawn.

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[82] Ennals and Holdsworth. *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling over Three Centuries*, 212.
[83] See page 23.

Chapter 3: Prairie Fiction

Much of the research for this paper has been drawn from scholarly writing in architecture and architectural history. Other sources, which have provided a refreshing diversity of interpretation included Canadian prairie literature and first-person narratives taken directly from individual interviews. Consequently, the connotation and sense of meaning attached to the term home has been richly described in a variety of fictional and everyday situations. In my view, it is often through the eyes and ears of writers and artists that we best understand the nuances of that which is often taken for granted. As Douglas Gibson has suggested, "home" is also the "stuff of literature".[84]

W.O. Mitchell, in the 1947 story of a young boy coming of age on the Canadian prairies vividly ehoes Yi - Fu Tuan's writing previously discussed in Chapter One. In the book *Who Has Seen the Wind*, the character Brian O'Connal laments the fact that his new friend Forbsie is sick with the mumps. Bored with nothing to do, and dreaming that he could ride (none other than) a vacuum cleaner to the edges of town to ease the tedium, Mitchell writes of the character Brian:

> It seemed that everybody was doing something except him. In the dining room he could hear the sewing-machine running along the edge of the stillness; the flat sounds of dishes being washed, came to him from the kitchen where his mother was. After they were done, she would be house cleaning again; the vacuum cleaner would go; the oily tartness of furniture oil would be through the house.[85]

It is W. O. Mitchell's gentle portrayal of the banal activities of sewing, dishwashing and vacuuming, as well as the uneasy relationship of young Brian O'Connal to his obsessive mother, that bring meaning to a young boy's discovery of himself. Through the detailed, scenic description of his own prairie home, complete with the ultimate symbols of domesticity (i.e. the vacuum cleaner, sewing machine and furniture oil), Brian Sean MacMurray O'Connal learns the meaning of home and eventually goes on to discover the meaning of life.

Carol Shields, in her celebrated novel *The Stone Diaries*, poignantly illustrates the relationship between people, their homes and the everyday through the portrayal of a deeply troubled Clarentine Flett and her longing for a better life far from the confines of a small Manitoba town. The following description of an unfulfilled Clarentine, eavesdropping on the tenderness and

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[84] Douglas M. Gibson, "Requiem for a Master Storyteller," *The Globe and Mail*, February 28, 1998,
[85] W. O. Mitchell. *Who Has Seen the Wind*. (Toronto, Ontario: McLelland and Stewart, 1947), 36.

modesty of a newlywed couple, brings meaning to the role of the house as a symbol of people-place relationships.

> She had been standing at the Goodwills' kitchen door, a basket of early lilacs in her arms, a neighbourly offering. In truth, she finds it hard to stay away; the houses of the newly married, she senses, are under a kind of enchantment, the air more tender than in other households, the voices softer, the makeshift curtains and cheap rugs brave and bright in their accommodation. The Goodwill's kitchen window was wide open to the fresh spring breezes. They were at table ..... – Mercy on one side and Cuyler on the other, the white tablecloth and the supper dishes as yet uncleared.[86]

Other contemporary prairie authors have also reached to a description of 'home' in their writing as a means to describe scenarios which touch our deepest emotions. Sharon Butala, in the short story *Eden*, beautifully describes the immense pain and ultimate acceptance of a father's death by contrasting this tragedy in a young woman's life with the everyday routine of a prairie farm family. The following excerpt reflects how traditional domestic images of the decorated prairie home, its everyday routines and the natural prairie landscape, contrasted against the pain of a father's death, can imbue a story with tremendous depth. Elinor, sent to visit from Toronto, and having just arrived at the home of her mother's friend, is greeted by Mrs. Hackett at the front of her farm house:

> "Goodness!" she said, before Elinor could speak, "you must be tired .....Elinor caught a confused glimpse of a white cloth on a table set with blue plates and cups, red enameled pots on the stove, clouds of steam rising from them, plaster ducks flying heavenward across the kitchen wall, a bouquet of artificial pink roses sitting on a crocheted doily on a hall table, before Mrs. Hackett, still talking, had shown her her room and then left her at the bathroom door."
>
> Mrs. Hackett was draining vegetables in the sink. She set a steaming bowl of carrots and one of green beans on the table and sat down herself..... Mrs. Hackett sighed. "It's hard on everybody," she said. "Those lung cancer deaths, Stomach.....wasn't it? I hated to ask Amy." ...All those trips to the hospital. Waiting. Watching a loved one suffer....." Elinor nodded. The heavy, rich smell of roast beef permeated the air. Mr. Hackett cut and chewed methodically, his eyes on his food.
>
> .....Behind them, the prairie, sculptured into long brown furrows as far as she could see, rose to the sky. What a strange, spare countryside, she thought."[87]

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[86] Carol Shields. *The Stone Diaries* (Toronto, Ont.: Random House Canada, 1993), 17.
[87] Sharon Butala, "Eden", in *Great Stories from the Prairies, ed.* Birk Sproxton, (Calgary, Alberta: Red Deer Press, 2000), 156 – 159.

The ordinariness of carrots and beans, the slow, regular movement of Mr. Hackett's mouth as he chews his food, the familiar image of prairie ducks arching up a kitchen wall, the sparseness of the prairie landscape act as the perfect tension-filled counterpoint to the jagged and raw personal upheaval of a parent's death.

In a different yet equally powerful narrative style, in *Boss in the House*, Saskatchewan author Armin Wiebe subtly mixes issues of gender, farm labour, conservative values and patriarchy in ordinary prairie life to describe a young Yasch Siemens's confusion over his girlfriend's unusual adoption of traditionally male behaviours:

> A woman can sure do a lot of things if you only give her a chance. I mean, just look at Oata there driving that 27 John Deere combine like she was born on it. And her father always complained that his fat daughter couldn't do nothing right……On a farm its' supposed to be fifty-fifty – the woman works in the house and the barn and the man works with the machinery on the field.

Deepening the plot even further, Wiebe uses the confusion of Yasch being asked to wash dishes, traditionally a woman's task, as a counterpoint to the fact that Oata, his girlfriend, is acting very strangely:

> "So what's loose with you, you're not crippled! Why can't you wash the dishes? "
>
> "But Muttachi, that's the woman's job."
>
> "Who says it's the woman's job?"
>
> "In the Bible it says the man is supposed to be boss in the house."
>
> "Then go be boss in the house and wash your dishes!"[88]

Although the reader is not yet aware, the role-reversal and puzzled aspects of this conversation about dishwashing are actually a metaphor for the fact that the traditional role of marriage prior to childbirth is also about to be reversed in the lives of Oata and Yasch. Later on in the story, we learn that Oata is pregnant and that, as a consequence, they will shortly be married. The confusion and abnormality of a man 'ordered' to wash dishes (one of the most mundane and gendered of domestic tasks), is used as a symbol for the confusion of pregnancy before

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[88] Armin Wiebe, "Boss in the House", in *Great Stories from the Prairies,* ed. Birk Sproxton, (Calgary, Alberta: Red Deer Press, 2000), 240 -245.

marriage : both non-traditional and oppositional approaches to mainstream conservative prairie values.

Finally, it is perhaps Miriam Toews' bestseller, *A Complicated Kindness* that describes prairie culture and the rural vernacular of a small town in the most simple, heartfelt way. Written in 2004, it portrays Nomi Nickel's troubled adolescence in a Manitoba Mennonite community through the most seemingly mundane, detailed descriptions of everyday life. Through Toews' description of Nomi Nickel's house and its contents, even the first paragraph evokes a sense of the power of the casual.

> I live with my father, Ray Nickel, in that low brick bungalow out on highway number twelve. Blue shutters, brown door, one shattered window. Nothing great. The furniture keeps disappearing, though. That keeps things interesting.[89]

While there is also no explicit reference to the importance of the interior design or decoration of the houses (nor are there any photographs) in any of these powerful portrayals, the emotional tension of all five stories is uncovered through a depiction of the interior spaces, a description of a mundane task or the reversal of gender roles and traditions. This power of place is further authenticated by a description of the most minute observations of everyday tasks and objects, in turn creating a sense of recognition to which the reader cannot help but respond. The 'low brick bungalow', 'uncleared/unwashed dishes', 'the noise of the vacuum cleaner', 'green beans" and 'rich smell of roast beef' : all reflect aspects of our own lives.

I believe that this method of expression, although not unique, is particularly prevalent in prairie fiction, prairie art and even prairie song. Perhaps this is because the flat, boring prairie landscape itself is somewhat mysterious in its very tedium. Perhaps it is a sort of 'unknown' that requires one to scratch the surface to understand. Or, as I prefer to believe, the complexities of life are actually all there 'in spades': in the monotony they are just so obvious that we cannot see them at all. As William Butler Yeats would have it, "we cannot tell the dancer from the dance."[90]

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[89] Miriam Toews. *A Complicated Kindness* (Toronto, Ont.: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 2004), 1.
[90] Robert Kroetsch, "Forward", from *Scratching the Surface: The Post-Prairie Landscape*", ed. Steven Matijcio, (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art, 2007), 7.

Just as our lives unfold daily extending outward from within our houses, like novels, so do our houses tell stories. Philippa Tristam suggests that houses are essentially stage sets for life, writing:

> Every new-built house or freshly furnished room is a fiction of the life intended to be lived there. Every inhabited building or interior tells a different story, of how life is or was..... Moreover, a house, like a novel, is a small world defined against, but also reflecting a larger one. The plan and appearance of houses, the way they are furnished, mirror the social values of their time.....inheriting the past, receiving the present, but shaping the future. The same can of course be said for a great novel, for if houses are like stories, stories are also like houses.[91]

Although we may not identify specifically with Brian, Clarentine, Elinor, Yasch or Nomi, the settings portrayed resonate in their representation of the common cultural landscapes of our time. Perhaps this is why all five of these authors have won major literary awards for their work.

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[91] Phillipa Tristram *Living Space in fact and fiction* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), 2.

Chapter 4: Five Prairie Houses: A Case Study

The following chapter contains the case study portion of this research document. As previously noted, this fieldwork was completed in June 2009. Extensive first person interviews with five women took place in their homes located in and around both Winkler and MacGregor, Manitoba.

MacGregor and Winkler are well-established small communities typical of Manitoba. Boasting a population of only 900, MacGregor is the smaller of the two, and is located approximately 130 kilometers west of Winnipeg in the Central Plains region of this province. It is the centre of a surrounding agricultural community of approximately 3500 inhabitants. As its name suggest, MacGregor was originally developed by British and Scottish settlers attracted to this part of Manitoba by the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Although European settlement dates to 1881, the town was not incorporated until 1948. There are many small manufacturing firms and home-based businesses in MacGregor, in addition to small retail establishments, schools and daycares. The town is also a well known centre for recreational and all-season sporting activities such as hockey, skating, golf, curling and baseball and a highly successful annual summer agricultural fair. [92]

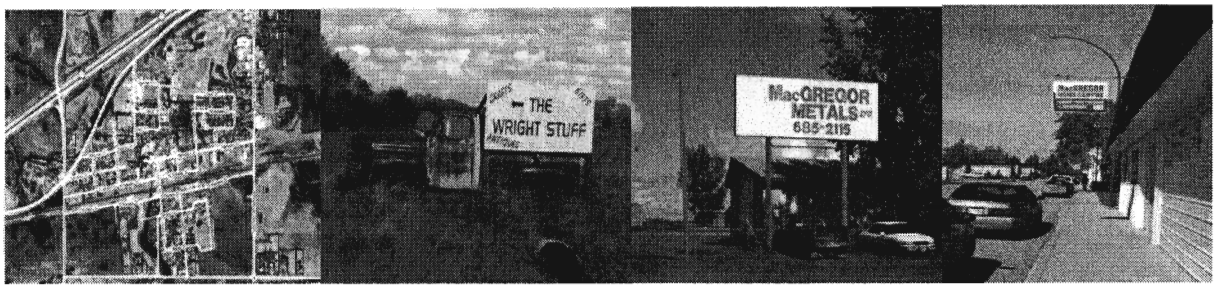

Figure 28: Aerial view and images of MacGregor Manitoba

Winkler, the larger of these two communities, boasts a population of 8,000 residents. It is located in south central Manitoba, approximately 120 kilometers southwest of Winnipeg. Established in 1892 by a lumber entrepreneur and politician named Valentine Winkler, it began as an offshoot of the local Mennonite community in nearby Morden. In 1906 Winkler was a mix of German, Jewish and Anglo-Saxon merchants as representative of the early - twentieth century European immigration to the Canadian prairies. However, in the twenty-first century, it has become a predominantly Mennonite community. With excellent soil conditions from the

[92] Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGregor,_Manitoba accessed October 03, 2009.

Red River Valley, the economy of Winkler is based predominantly on agriculture. Associated industries such as livestock production also form part of its economic base. As a result crops include cereal grains, oilseeds as well as specialty crops such as alfalfa and other "forage crops to supply local cattle producers."[93]

As with MacGregor, Winkler is a retail centre for many of the surrounding farmers, and houses many recreational and social services including sports fields, a hockey arena, and a heritage museum. The Winkler Harvest Festival, a major country fair, also brings many visitors to this region of Manitoba.

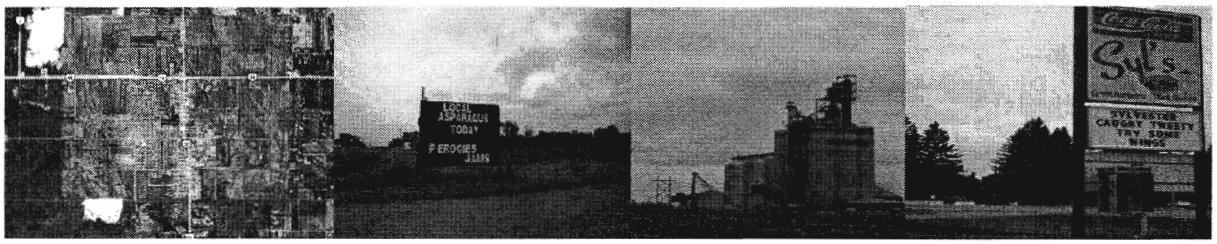

Figure 29: Aerial view and images of Winkler, Manitoba

Although accurate in content, these descriptions of MacGregor and Winkler could easily fit many other small and medium-sized communities on the Canadian prairies. In fact, Gordie Howe's home town, Floral, Saskatchewan could equally be described in this way. Located just outside Saskatoon, the most dominant landmark of this prairie village is a grain elevator built in 1927[94]: unique perhaps because it is the most dominant symbol of rural prairie life in Canada, yet one which is rapidly being replaced with giant concrete "super elevators."[95]

In terms of this study, however, it is the stories of five of their women, as read through their own phrases and viewpoints, which distinguishes these towns from other similar prairie settlements. From their detailed descriptions of everyday life, and through a careful reading of words and pauses, mental maps and imagery, it is possible to form a picture which extended well below the superficiality of census data and other provincial statistics. Most importantly, it enabled the transfer of these often intangible recollections of community and 'home' to the scale of the tangible physical dwellings which these women occupy. As author Ann Michael Williams noted

[93] Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MacGregor,_Manitoba accessed October 03, 2009
[94] Wikipedia https://en.wikipedi.org/wiki/Floral_Saskatchewan accessed October 24, 2009.
[95] Further information about the vanishing prairie grain elevator may be found at http://www.essortment.com/all/prairiegrainel_rmrl.htm accessed November 15 2009.

in her *book Homeplace: The Social Use and Meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina*:

> Between the narrative and the physical form of the house are the meanings and behaviors that shape the form of the house and the experience contained within, or attached to, the house……individuals use narrative to "reinhabit" the house – to order and comment on experiential aspects of the house….."[96]

The Interviewees: An Introduction to the Houses and their Voices

The previous descriptions of the towns of MacGregor and Winkler have provided a broad context for the physical locales of the case study analysis which follows in this chapter. In a similar vein before becoming intimate with the homes which form the basis for the case study portion of this paper, it seems appropriate to first provide a brief introduction to both the individual houses and their spokespersons. For while the house structure may provide the physical container, it is the voices of the women interviewees who give expression to the experiences and meanings which the house itself cannot articulate.

Roberta Stone's House

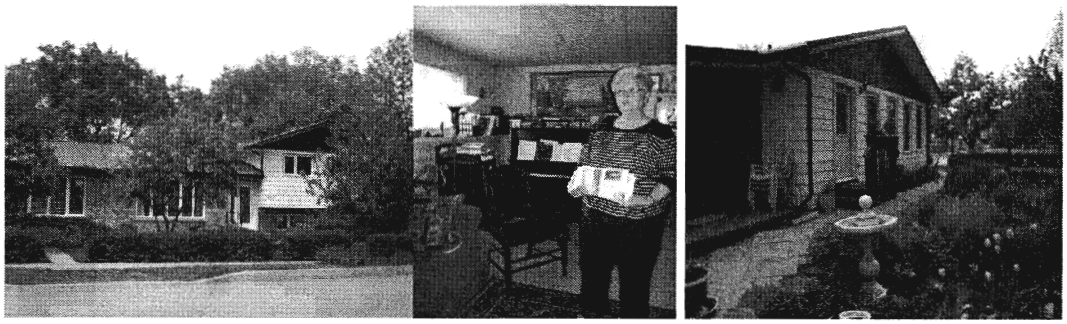

Figure 30: Images of Roberta Stone and her home

Originally constructed in the 1960's, Roberta Stone's home is a typical 'split-level' structure which she and her husband purchased from a previous owner in 1991. It is located in a residential section of Hampton Street - the main street of MacGregor. As is typical to many "side-split" configurations, the original house consisted of a garage on one side of the house,

[96] Ann Michael Williams, *Homeplace, The Social Use and meaning of the Folk Dwelling in Southwestern North Carolina* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1991): 14.

with public spaces (i.e. living area, dining area, kitchen) in the centre and private spaces (three bedrooms, two washrooms) located a half-storey above and below on the opposite side of the public spaces. In the case of Roberta's home, the original garage has been renovated to a family room and one of the bedrooms (located a half-storey below the public spaces) has been turned into a music room. The spaces located either a half-storey above or below the central public spaces are accessed by a small stairway. In addition to renovating the garage space, Roberta has also renovated her home to include a barrier - free washroom adjacent to the newly- created family room, and has also added a large screened-in porch to the rear of the house which she accesses via the central dining and kitchen areas. She has installed hardwood flooring throughout the public spaces of her home and has refaced and stained all of the kitchen cupboards in her kitchen. She has also added a kitchen work island with additional storage space below. Located at the front of the house, the living room boasts a tyndall stone[97] fireplace which acts as the focal point to this space. This room also looks onto a large and beautiful flower garden which is Roberta's pride and joy. Now seventy-four years old, in addition to being a retired music and voice teacher, Roberta is an avid gardener and Chairwoman of the annual MacGregor "Communities in Bloom" event. Roberta's daughter lives in MacGregor with her family, while her son lives nearby in another Manitoba community.

Hazel Olson's House

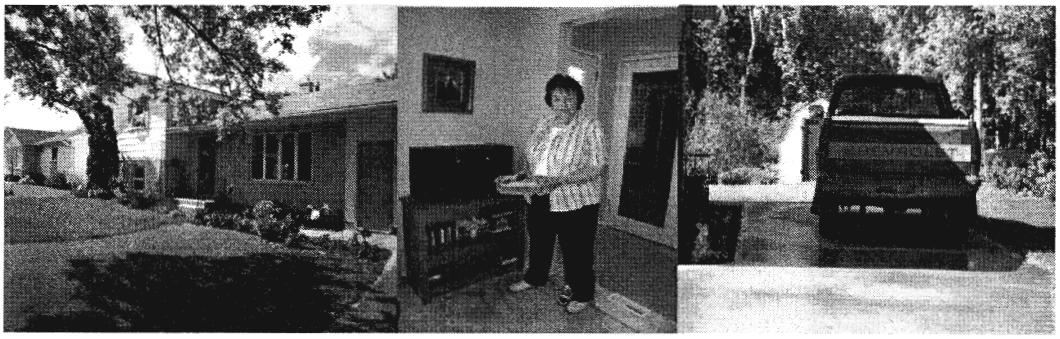

Figure 31: Images of Hazel Olson and her home

Similar in style and age to Roberta Stone's, Hazel Olson's house is a side-split, constructed in the 1960's. It is also located within the town of MacGregor, on a residential street only about a five minute drive from Roberta's home. Hazel and her husband have done very little to

[97] First used in 1832, Tyndall stone is a type of limestone native to Manitoba, quarried from the Red River around Tyndall, Manitoba. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tyndall_stone, accessed November 05, 2009.

renovate their house since they purchased it from a "preacher"[98] in 1985, with the only changes being the addition of a "three season"[99] sunroom at the back of the house and the construction of a cement driveway to the front side-yard. As is typical of a side-split configuration, the four bedrooms of the Olson home are located a half-storey up from the central living room space, with their large family room, guest room and guest washroom located a half-storey below. The family room is well-used and has recently been updated with extensive built-in wall units also surrounding a tyndall stone fireplace. Hazel's combined kitchen and dining space occupy the rear of the house and open onto the generous glassed-in sunroom. Her laundry room is on the ground floor, just a few steps from the dining area. At seventy-six years old, Hazel is a retired public health, hospital nurse and private home-care nurse. She and her husband Nelson, a retired grain farmer, have three grown children living in Winnipeg and several grandchildren. She now spends most of her current free time quilting, volunteering and gardening.

Sandra Sawatzky's House

Figure 32: Exterior of Sawatzky home, Jerry and Sandra Sawatzky on veranda, interior hallway, the original house circa 1915.

Surrounded by prairie wheat fields, Sandra and Jerry Sawatzky's home is located approximately 10 kilometers west of the town of Winkler. It is a striking 1903 heritage property with a unique history, having been transplanted by flatbed truck from Plum Coulee, Manitoba to its current location on their property. Purchased in a state of severe decay, the authentic "do-it-yourself" re-creation of this house to its turn - of - the century style has been a continuous restoration project for Sandra and her husband for the past thirteen years. The house is a three storey

[98] Nelson Olson used this term to describe the previous owner during a personal interview in June 2009.
[99] "Three-season" sunrooms are small glassed-in spaces which are used as informal living and dining spaces. Common to rural Manitoba, the only season in which they are not occupied is winter when extreme cold makes them unusable.

detached dwelling, although the third storey is currently not used. The second floor houses four bedrooms and a bathroom, with a TV room, formal living room, formal dining room, kitchen, laundry room and bathroom located on the ground floor. The rooms are laid out in a centre-hall style with a large stairwell connecting all floors. Although still a work in progress, it has been beautifully restored to highlight original details such as a wrap-around veranda, high ceilings, period light fixtures, eight- inch baseboards and hardwood floors throughout. Sandra Sawatzky is a forty year old mother of three school - age children who works part-time at the Rona Warehouse in Winkler. Her husband, Jerry, forty-three, is a teacher at the local Winkler secondary school.

Linda Hesselwood's House

Figure 33: Linda Hesselwood at front of her home, Linda Hesselwood in kitchen, equipment barn

Linda Hesselwood's farm home is located approximately fifteen kilometers from MacGregor, just north of the Trans Canada Highway. It is a three bedroom bungalow with a fully - finished basement, built by the Hesselwoods in 1967. In addition to the living room, dining area and kitchen, the family bathroom and three bedrooms (one is currently being used as an office) are located on the ground floor, while the "rec. room"[100] , laundry room, extra bedroom and extra bathroom are located in the basement. Over the years, aside from regular painting and repairing, the Hesselwoods have not renovated a great deal: however, they have replaced most of the windows in the house (including a new bay window in the dining area) and have renovated the kitchen to include an eating counter rather than a kitchen table. Linda has a huge garden of which she is very proud. Additionally, because it has been family- owned for over one hundred years, the Hesselwood farm has been designated a "Century Farm" by the Manitoba government. Linda is sixty-nine years old and her husband is seventy - three. Both have been

[100] The term "rec. room" is short form for "recreation room". It is a term which was commonly used in North America at the middle of the twentieth century to describe an informal living space used by teenagers, most often in the basement of a house away from the more formal living room.

farming for over fifty years, although before her children were born Linda worked in a local bank. Linda and her husband have three adult children and several grandchildren. All live in Manitoba, with her daughter and family living approximately three miles "down the road". [101]

Antoinette Wieberdink-Blankvoort's House

Figure 34: Images of Antoinette Wieberdink – Blankvoort and her home, flower pots ready to be placed at front door

Antoinette's Wieberdink-Blankvoort's house is located approximately five kilometers from Linda Hesselwood's. In fact, they are neighbours separated only by fields planted with wheat or left fallow for cattle grazing. Antoinette and her husband built their home on the present property in 1991. It is a two storey home with three bedrooms, bathroom and laundry room on the second floor; and a small office, bathroom, open kitchen, dining and living space on the ground floor. The basement is also fully furnished, and holds a "rec. room", two extra bedrooms, bathroom and various storage spaces. It, too, has a wrap around open veranda, with extensive gardens around the perimeter of the home. Antoinette has planted a small orchard of apple trees to the rear of the property and keeps her own chickens which provide fresh eggs to her and her husband. Antoinette and her husband were both social workers in their native Holland and became dairy farmers once they immigrated to Canada in 1971. At the present time, Antoinette is the librarian for the town of MacGregor and her husband continues to manage their farm. Antoinette is fifty-six years old and her husband is just turning sixty. They have two grown daughters both pursuing post-secondary education in Ontario.

[101] This was the expression used by Linda Hesselwood during our interview, June 2009.

The Analysis of Information from Interviews

The interviews in MacGregor and on a property just outside of Winkler[102] are about people, their homes, and sometimes, by way of context, also about their communities. Not surprisingly therefore, a "topoanalysis"[103] such as this revealed the emergence of broad-based cultural norms found in rural Manitoba. There were important common threads which linked each narrative to the other and which situated them within the context of the Canadian prairie. I therefore begin this section with a discussion of some of the common, dominant themes found throughout all of the case studies: patriarchy and women's labour, frugality combined with pragmatism, family transition as an instigator of physical change, and the importance of material culture and heritage as domestic symbols of self.

The interviews also revealed highly personal feelings regarding spatial relationships and the individual meaning of home for each participant. Indeed, the very personal and detailed nature of many of these stories made it possible to assign a specific emotion to each narrative, and by extension, to each house. Upon reflection, it became clear to me that, although these stories were recounted verbally and spoke of experiences rather than shapes, through their relationship to everyday life, these stories in fact, resided within the physical spaces of the dwelling. The intangible nature of the spoken word, therefore, took physical form in and around the spaces of the houses, bringing meaning to the relationship between the narrator and her physical environment. Upon further consideration, and based upon the undertones of each story told, each home could then be seen to possess a unique emotional connotation or symbolism all its own. In this way, everyday activities shaped the meaning of home.

[102] The Sawatzky home is located approximately 10 kilometers north of the town of Winkler.
[103] The term "topoanalysis" was coined by Gaston Bachelard to mean " the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives". See *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964): 5.

Common Themes: Patriarchy, Prairie Pragmatism and Frugality, Family Transitions, Farm Heritage, Material Culture

Patriarchy

Based upon the commentary within the "Prairie Life/Prairie Women" section of this paper, I suppose it should be no revelation that patriarchy and a continuous work cycle for rural women seem to be alive and well in rural Manitoba, even in 2009. Continuing reference to the double burden of prairie women was made during at least three interviews with Roberta Stone, Hazel Olson and Linda Hesselwood:

> The women had a hard life, from what I can understand. I mean when a woman went to make a meal, with no refrigerators, nothing… so the well was it. And the horses would have to quit because the horses were worn out….. whereas the women's work went on and on. If they went to pick up a crop or something, a gang of men would come in and they would just be….feeding men non-stop. And any woman that was not married, well if she had a married sister…..she went to help. It was impossible…..can you imagine!! *R.Stone*

> I worked part time and full-time. I shared a shift that way and worked on the farm. But the only thing I could never get done was all the house-cleaning. This is a big job in the spring and the fall. In those days the flies were much worse. Can you appreciate that? Flies were horrible and they get in the house and you *had* to wash walls. *H. Olson*

> Oh the manual labour! Because they didn't have the air conditioning and a decent stove, you know, and the wood-burning stove and hauling wood, and the water to do whatever…. like all that is so hard. *L. Hesselwood*

I was surprised at the extent to which this type of laboring and social organization continues to be the norm, although perhaps less overt than in previous years, and in not quite the same way. To be sure, for the most part, women are no longer toiling the extreme long hours of the original prairie settlers, nor would this be culturally acceptable. Yet, throughout our conversations, it became apparent that while all five women whom I interviewed are strong-willed, independent-minded individuals, they often remain(ed) deferential to the authority of their husbands, even when it came to interior design decision-making which is traditionally firmly within the domestic realm. At times this dichotomy was even strong enough to create a degree of matrimonial tension, as articulated in the following comment from Jerry Sawatzky. In speaking about his wife Sandra's feelings about the do-it-yourself renovation of their Winkler home, he offered the following comments:

> See, it is like a Catch 22. It has evolved into something else because of the stresses to our family relations. It is very stressful to tear things apart and try to live in it. Sandra is a very, clean orderly person. . And so, if it were myself living here .....I would relax and just go along you know... but we are a family unit... right. If what I am doing is affecting the whole unit, then there is no joy in this.

While Jerry's love of renovating and refinishing houses has its benefits, it has clearly been very irritating to his wife Sandra who has had to live with the chaos of construction. Sandra's reading of the house renewal was, at least in part, filtered through the ways in which it has affected not only their marriage, but their whole family's happiness. When asked if she would consider another renovation, Sandra responded: "No, never again!"

As evidenced in the following selection of quotes from other interviews, patriarchy is also apparent in more subtle ways. The following quotes are examples of women relinquishing control of their physical environment to their husbands and/or asking permission with regard to a housing choice:

> Before this we lived in a 1 ½ storey, so the second floor was just those little dormers. *He* wanted a full 2 ½ storey. *S. Sawatzky*
>
> And so we looked at this house and Nelson said "Well, how do you like that?" And I said, "Nelson, if I had that house I would never ask *you* for anything different." *H. Olson*
>
> I thought I was going to die when I moved to that house. But that's just the way it was. See Lyle....because that was the home that *he* was raised in... that's what he was used to. He saw nothing wrong with it. *R. Stone*

Sometimes patriarchy was also evident in terms of other domestic issues such as renovation timing, meal preparation or the decision to remove wallpaper:

> So I went away somewhere... and the guy came to remove the wall, and when I came home I was a little shocked .....but I did not expect that whole wall to be out. He decided, well, she is gone....so boom... it was gone! *H. Olson*
>
> Well, yes that was horrible. .....you get home from work at 4:00 p.m. and you are supposed to take meals out to the men and you just weren't quite sure which field to go to. *H. Olson*
>
> It is an office that my husband wants me to stay out of.... but I would really like to paint... but *he* thinks the wallpaper is just *fine*.... And [he says] you don't go in there and change anything! *L. Hesselwood*

None of these comments speaks to blatant oppression and, during the interviews some were spoken in humorous terms. Yet they do reveal how, within the physical framework of home renovation and domestic chores, the intangible notion of men as authority figures and women as subservient helpers is negotiated. On occasion interview participants mentioned joint decision-making with regard to domestic issues, yet never with regard to major expenditures related to equipment or other farm issues. In my view this could even be interpreted as an indication of male control and micro-management over *all* aspects of the budget: one which extends all the way from decisions regarding the purchase of large –scale heavy farm equipment to the minutiae of a few rolls of wallpaper. Of the five women interviewed, not one was able to decide upon her own purchase for the home without first consulting with her husband.[104] As noted, once again, by Nora Cebotarev in her 1995 study of Canadian farm women "….. they accepted the undervaluation of their work and their definition as farm wives, rather than as farmers and as an economically active person."[105]

Interestingly however, not one of the women interviewed vocalized any displeasure in this underlying social contract. Clearly, therefore, this power relationship is not considered problematic for these prairie women, nor perhaps should it necessarily be seen as negative. Indeed, one of the most touching conversations narrated to me during my visit to Manitoba was the following one, spoken between husband and wife, Lyle and Roberta Stone, the day before Lyle died.

> He did say to me the day before he died. "Are you going to be okay with all those expenditures?" And I said, "Yah, don't worry, I think I will be alright."

If patriarchy is alive and well in rural Manitoba, it would appear to be tempered with a healthy dose of love and concern. Perhaps tender moments such as this mediate all other tensions, or at the very least, compared to the pressures of farm economics, relegate concerns such as this to the "back forty".[106]

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[104] After the death of her husband, one woman consulted with her son.
[105]. Cebotarev, "From Domesticity to the Public Sphere: Farm Women, 1945 – 86," in A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945 – 1980, p. 200.
[106] The expression "the back forty" refers to the back forty acres of uncultivated farm land next to cultivated farm land. http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_meaning_of_plow_the_back_forty accessed October 09, 2009.

Prairie Pragmatism and Frugality

Pragmatism and frugality contribute heartily to the very soul of prairie culture. In fact, these life practices were imbedded in virtually every conversation about the everyday lives of farm families. This tradition of 'no waste' and careful, practical decision-making is, no doubt, as a result of the ever- present threat of financial disaster which dominates farm financial management to this day. Throughout the twentieth century and continuing into the twenty-first century, economic stress and farm crises have led to constant uncertainty and risk for prairie farmers. As spoken by Linda Hesselwood:

> The way things are with farming these days– everything is out of our control. Like, whether it is weather, or when they tell you that you are going to get $2.00 a bushel or whatever less than what you got before – it doesn't matter. It is all out of our control.

The response of women to this constant pressure was perhaps best summed up in the following phrase which was reiterated repeatedly in interviews: "*The farm always comes first.*" The spatial realization of this statement was expressed in numerous ways. Sometimes renovations were scaled back or existing materials were recycled:

> And you know, like for rural people… it is difficult… like money-wise it cost a lot of money. …..we were expecting to build a house on the farm, but we never just had the money. The cupboards here came with the house. I only changed the hardware and you know, I just didn't want to spend that much extra money because I didn't know. *H. Olson*
>
> Well, we built this house. The old house was here, right in front of this house and so my husband tore down two old homes. There were two homes… one here and one on the other grandparents farm which was a few miles away.. and tore them down and used the good lumber to build this home. *L. Hesselwood*

And sometimes these cost-saving measures were evident in domestic decisions related to self-denial, food preparation, furniture, sewing and other aspects of home management:

> The farm always comes first. Ah.. it is just such a given. I don't know… I always brought in… I am earning my own pay cheque too, but still, it is the economic engine. *A. Wieberdink-Blankvoort*
>
> We have two freezers full of food. For example, you butcher a whole cow, you butcher a pig, once in a while you buy it. I don't shop so we have to you know… buy 10 loaves of bread. *A. Wieberdink-Blankvoort*
>
> We never had enough money.. we were always struggling. This is the same bedroom furniture we bought 53 years ago in Winnipeg.. no worse for the wear! *R. Stone*

> I never sewed until the year before I got married. And I thought.. I am marrying this farmer... we would probably starve to death. I never had a bought dress until we were married 14 years. I made all of my dresses, and my kids clothes and I made coats. *R. Stone*

A further example of the pragmatism of everyday life transferred to design decision-making is the tradition of designing a separate entrance, washroom and/or laundry facility in the home for outdoor farm workers. Four of the five homes I visited utilized this design configuration. One "work washroom" was located on the ground floor at the side of the home immediately adjacent to the barns; in the remaining three the "work washroom" was located in the basement, accessed by a separate set of stairs. Traditionally designed for the male farmer, this was a huge labour-saving solution for farm women. As expressed by Roberta Stone:

> Now we are coming to the basement entrance. His work clothes are all there in that cupboard. He would grab his clean clothes. He would come in through this way... it is really... just wonderful... this idea. Unless my husband was coming through the door in a three piece suit, I want this. He would be all dirty.... and he would grab some clean clothes and he would go in here and he would strip off and shower and everything ..... and throw the dirty clothes in the laundry.

The everyday practicality of rural house design sometimes brings meaning to home which extends beyond the realm of humans. For example, Linda Hesselwood's "old fashioned heater" in her basement work entry functioned as more than just a provider of warmth for her husband Lawrence:

> So when he comes in, in the wintertime, we have these old heaters here at the back door where we have even brought frozen calves. One winter it was - forty something and Lawrence was calving all night. He went out to check .....between midnight and two, it is just so cold.....so he ended up bringing one calf into the house. I was back and forth to bed but either thawing out colostrums or to get something warm into them. At the back door down there, it is nice and warm in front of those heaters... so you know... they [the calves] could thaw out. Sometimes we do this.

At times this expediency extended further, to the private upstairs sphere of her home. Linda Hesselwood continued:

> We even had them [calves] in the bathtub. They would be frozen and we would bring them in, put them in the bathtub, and get them all thawed out, dry them down with a hair dryer and so they are thawed and now their hair is just like fluff balls and they smell so good.

In and of itself this story underlines the extraordinarily strong bond between farmers and their farm animals, emphasizing the interdependence of all life on the farm. As a consequence, the wonder and magic of birth has been transferred directly to the interiors of the rural Canadian prairie house, bringing meaning to the most humble and ordinary of physical spaces – the backdoor vestibule and the family washroom.

Family Transitions

The third common theme relates to the ways in which family life - cycle events affect rural prairie house design. It is well known that family transitions frequently serve as the impetus for physical changes to residential dwellings. As noted by Avi Friedman, in his book *The Adaptable House*, "The adaption of shelters by their residents to suit their varying needs has always been a part of human habitation."[107] The following paragraphs therefore focus upon how particular life cycle events have been manifested in terms of specific changes to the physical spaces of participants' homes.

Not surprisingly, one of the most significant events affecting house design in this study was the birth of children and grandchildren: an event which was clearly very important to the way in which women in particular comprehended their homes. In terms of significance, this was followed by children leaving home, the death of a spouse, retirement and the decision to sell farmland.

For the Sawatzky family, the renovation of their home was very much tied to the birth of their children, beginning with the decision to eliminate the sharing of bedrooms once their third child was born. As explained by Sandra Sawatzky:

> So with a child coming on and A. in a crib in our room, as she was getting bigger, we decided let's make sure that each person has her own room and let's work on that space. So the decision was everybody has their own personal space.

The Wieberdink-Blankvoort and Hesselwood families also tied the design and construction of their home directly to the birth of their children:

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[107] Avi Freidman, *The Adaptable House: Designing Homes for Change* (New York, NY): McGraw Hill Professional, 2002), 2.

> ...with two little children, and with an upstairs room that you couldn't heat, it was time to do something, finances permitting. I think for sure if it had been just the two of us we could have made do for a little while longer and I think (it affected) the style of the house that we then decided to build. *A. Wieberdink-Blankvoort*
>
> When we built the house, our children were just little. We had children in '61, '63 and '67 and the girls were small too. We had a great big old home before and so we thought it was the right time so these kids could grow up in a newer home. *L. Hesselwood*

Further, the ways in which these rooms were decorated combined with the actual use of the space was also tied directly to their children's lives. The Sawatzky children, and in particular their teenage son, especially benefitted, as the following quote illustrates:

> C. has had his room since kindergarten. We went all out for him. He wanted space wallpaper and ceiling paper and it had the planets and all these solar creatures. So we put that up and painted his room blue and orange to match the sky and the sun and all that, and the doors are orange... and it is still that way. A. was only three. She chose her paint between yellow and green. And later on we bought a green light shade from Old House Revival and tinted the paint [to match]. *S. Sawatzky*

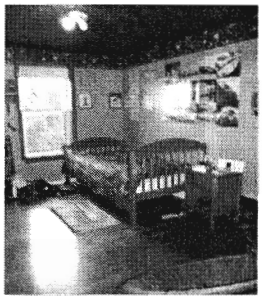

Figure 35: Child's bedroom Sawatzky home

Because family reorganization takes place over a very long period of time, other life cycle events, such as children leaving home, are also significant. In terms of the demographic of this study, the effects of aging and retirement, and the death of a family member were also often cited as major reasons for the redesign of physical space. Roberta Stone has renovated her home to include a barrier-free washroom on the main floor:

> I want a main floor bathroom because my knees are killing me. I need a bathroom on the main floor.

Nelson Olson recounts the addition to his parents' home being put on just before his brother joined the Canadian Armed Forces:

> And then they built onto that house. In 1940 I had a brother that was killed overseas, before he went over they built an addition. He joined up in the Fall of '40 and then he went over.

For Linda Hesselwood, the replacement of her kitchen table with an eating counter, as well as the conversion of a third bedroom, were as a result of grown children moving out and the decision to retire. Now this central island is used for eating and other non-food related activities:

> That area used to be a bigger area as far as where we had our kitchen table. But we had a table [in the kitchen].....rather than eating at the counter that we do now. Just the two of us eat there; it works fine for us. Sometimes I sit at the counter here and read. . It's a whole different way of using the kitchen.

Additionally, a bedroom, no longer required to house one of her children, has become an office. As she explained:

> We used to have three bedrooms but now the smallest is an office.

As families grew and families contracted, inevitably and not unexpectedly, these transitions resulted in changes to space utilization inside the home. For the most part, one would expect these same transitions in any evolving household over the course of time. Unusual , however (at least within one household), was the appropriation of space to accommodate farm animals: not just as family pets, but in terms of the animals' own life cycle requirements. This is surely a unique utilization of interior space, and one which reflects the distinctiveness and symbiosis of rural life.

Farm Heritage

Intergenerational farming is the fourth common theme extracted from participants' interviews. The "family farm" has been the backbone of prairie farm transference for decades. Generally, it is a phenomenon which is the result of farmers either retiring or seeking to expand their business operation. Most often, as parent farmers retire and as their children marry and begin their own families, the transfer of land to family members is considered a logical method for ensuring viability, control and continuity of the farm enterprise. In addition to the economic advantages of a land transfer such as this, there is also an emotional bond in the notion of

family property which is transferred from one generation to the next. While this transfer of property most often concerns the transfer of land, for women, there is a strong bond with regard to the transfer of the farm house as well. Four out of five of the participants in this study[108] referenced the fact that they have lived or farmed in an intergenerational environment and, in so doing, referenced the farm house as part of this transformation. Sandra Sawatzky's childhood home was on a farm that belonged to her grandfather and father:

> Sandra had a multi-generational farm that she grew up on. Her grandfather and her father.... so it started. I guess her grandma and grandpa grew up in a small house there and then they built a second house on the property and the next generation took over –and then a third house was built. *J. Sawatzky*

Similarly, Roberta Stone's childhood home once belonged to her grandparents, and Hazel Olson shared her family home with her aunt and uncle:

> I was raised in a lovely home here in town. That was my grandparents' home originally. *R. Stone*
>
> There were six or seven of us and my aunt and uncle. So there were nine in that house and the house would be 24 x 24 two storey. If we had visitors, there would be nineteen. *H. Olson*

The tradition of multi-generational farming continues today. Linda Hesselwood's daughter and son- in- law now farm together with their parents:

> My son in law .....farmed with his dad and his brother, but there wasn't enough land in that vicinity to support three families. And so.....my husband said "would you like to come out here and live?" Now they farm about 3000 acres that includes our land.

In some ways, therefore, the heritage of shared property tied families together. Further, I would argue that women have been instrumental in the consolidation of family property and strengthening of farm families through their contributions as homemakers, both inside and outside of the farmhouse. A delightful anecdote in this regard, is that of the women of the Hesselwood family who prepared coolers of food for eight people in order to save precious travel time at harvest, and drove combines while nursing infant children. In the words of Linda Hesselwood:

> You would stop sometimes before dinner. And you know my husband was never one who wanted to stop to eat... you wasted too much time,

[108] Antoinette Blankvoort-Wieberdink and her husband immigrated to Canada from Holland in the 1970's and therefore did not inherit their farm.

> so they take everything with them. And so, sometimes you have coolers of food just for our family... two out of that household and two of us say... so you have say eight people. Somebody had to be getting food for them.
>
> But we even took babies in the combines, because they would have their little car seat and they could go up there and sleep up there and it is dust free.... they are inside... and they've got this great big glass and they can look out and they are way up high.. and they are nice and clean in the fresh air. And so they were just fine.

For this family, perhaps the importance of farm heritage begins within the first year of life, riding high above the fields of wheat. The prairie landscape leaves its first imprint upon a future farmer from the sheltered cabin of a 10,000 pound combine.

Figure 36: John Deere combine

Material Culture

Finally, the chosen objects of each household played a key role in expressing the meaning of home for all study participants. As Kenneth Ames has pointed out, this is "because objects are receptacles, because they have little if any inherent meaning but only the meanings people make of them..." [109]

In his book *The Meaning of Things*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi places a psychological emphasis upon the objects of the household, arguing that:

> ..... the house contains the most special objects: those that were selected by the person to attend to regularly or to have close at hand, that create permanence in the intimate life of a person, and therefore that are most involved in making up his or her identity. The objects of the household represent, at least potentially, the endogenous being of the owner. Although one has little control over the things encountered outside the home, household objects are chosen and could be freely discarded if they produce too much conflict within the self. Thus

[109] Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture, 181.*

> household objects constitute an ecology of signs that reflects as well as *shapes* the pattern of the owner's self.[110]

All five women collected pieces of furniture and decorative items which brought a great deal of personal pleasure and offered insight into their personal interests. All displayed family photographs extensively, further bringing a sense of identity to their individual spaces.

Evidence of this self-expression and the latent association of meaning to objects was often articulated in terms of past memories of family members. Sandra Sawatzky's china holds the magic of childhood heroes and an antique light fixture reminds her of her grandmother:

> I got that (antique china) at an auction. It [belonged to] the police chief of Manitou – his wedding china from 1932. The light fixture up here has the same print pattern that my grandmother had on her shawl. And when I look at this light fixture, in the back of my head, I see my grandma.

Linda Hesselwood's chairs bring back memories of her grandparents:

> These chairs came from my side of the family, belonging to my grandparents. And when my parents passed away, I was lucky enough to get them.

And, with particular poignancy, Roberta Stone has displayed her deceased husband's unfinished carving:

> A lot of the items on display are my late husband's work. He did some beautiful stuff. .....and this is the one he was working on when he died. And I just decided to put it up... it is not finished.

At times, the items displayed were associated with hardship, triggering memories of a grand house that required hours of cleaning – a task given to the only female child in the family. As remembered by Hazel Olson:

> And this china cabinet came from my mother. And like I was brought up in a great big brick house. My mother always referred to is as "The Woodwork". It had all these curly things around the door. She and I.... I was the only girl... we used to clean on a regular basis, and I thought – this is the pits! My mother was very proud of that house.

As is evident, there was a clear pattern of association with cherished objects. These objects, in turn, were used to both animate individual lives and to bind families and history to the current

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[110] Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*, 17.

generation. The strategy of displaying and highlighting particular objects in the home also served to differentiate one family from another. It may therefore be considered an important communicative device which revealed the specific characteristics of each household.

Lastly, one might argue that the display of material objects and photographs was a way in which the rural women who participated in this study could retain a measure of control over their interior environment. All of the objects displayed were collected and organized by women. Interestingly, of those which were an inheritance, a majority were items which originated on the maternal side of the family, suggesting that it has historically been women who value this tradition. Collecting items for display is not particular to a rural environment. However, it is interesting to note that it was always antique or farm-related items that were on display in these women's homes, thereby relating their physical environment to their heritage as well as their livelihood.[111] I suggest that this is not the same case for urban collectors. While 'collecting' still offers insight into the 'collector', it is not always directly related to that individual's occupation as it is in the instances identified within this study.

Personal Sentiments: Grief and Loss, Love and Protection, Dreams and Desires, Family Values, Immigrant Roots

As previously illustrated, all of the homes studied in this research paper could be linked by broad themes. Notwithstanding these cultural associations, the symbolic power of domestic dwellings can be analyzed at a deeper level in terms of the narratives of particular activities and unique relationships which were bound up in the physical spaces of each home and its primary inhabitants. Michael Jackson, writing "from a phenomenological perspective"[112] of the Australian Walbiri[113], states that "home is always lived as a relationship, a tension."[114] : a comment that seems remarkably applicable to the specific bonds of attachment also articulated by participants in this prairie study. In many ways, as the following examples illustrate, it was the individual tensions and rhythms of life itself that served to form this evolving relationship:

[111] Collections included antique furniture, various types of china, quilts, farm implements, dairy cows.
[112] Mallett. "Understanding home: a critical review of the literature", 70.
[113] The Walbiri are an Australian indigenous people.
[114] Michael Jackson, *At Home in the World.* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1995), 122.

once again, associations which are amplified through the spaces in which they have taken place.

The following section of this paper focuses upon five personal sentiments assembled from the details of everyday events. The themes emerged as the dominant enveloping force or 'tension' behind each participant's relationship with the interior space of her home, and, as a consequence, best described the meaning of home to that individual. In the words of Elizabeth Shove, "the location, shape and form of our homes impinge directly on the smallest details of our daily lives."[115] The reverse is also true: the interior space of the home also describes the forces which are at play within its perimeters.

Grief and Loss

One could best describe Roberta Stone's relationship with (at least part of her) home as one primarily of sadness associated with the loss of her husband three years earlier. An awareness of this difficult relationship was evidenced through her descriptions of daily routines, physical spaces and the material objects found in her MacGregor house.

Perhaps most striking was the palpable tension I felt between Roberta and her newly created family room: a space which was completed while her husband Lyle was dying. As the following quote indicates, Roberta's grief over her husband's death prevented her from even entering this room once her husband had died.

> But then after Lyle died, I looked at this room and I just looked into it and said " I don't know what I am going to put into it. I have to confess: I kind of avoid that room because it has some emotional attachment - that's why. But I think if Lyle was still alive we would spend a lot of time in there. I just don't gravitate to it. But I think eventually I will. I need to get some better lamps.

Even the picking of paint samples, traditionally an exciting part of the interior design process was painful:

> My husband is dying in the hospital and I don't have time for picking paint samples. And by this time I was fighting the tears. I just don't have

[115] Elizabeth Shove, "Constructing Home: A Crossroads of Choices", in Irene Cieraad, ed. *At Home: Space, Place and Society (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 130.*

time for this. We picked two colours and it worked. I took those tiles with me – that's all I took, and that was it.

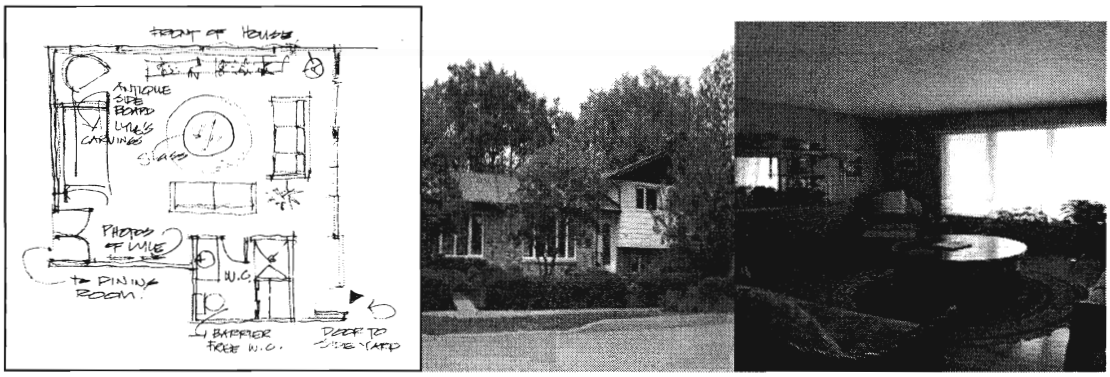

Figure 37: Family room floor plan, exterior view of home, interior view of family room

In this instance everything about this newly created space has taken on the meaning of loss; the family room in its entirety has become such a symbol of grief, and so filled with tension that Roberta can still barely enter it, even three years after its completion. Although meaningful, this is an example of an instance where 'home' is not a positive construct. As mentioned in an earlier portion of this paper, it instead conveys a very negative association.

From the many stories told of Lyle, and through the many objects he created in Roberta's home, it is evident that Lyle was a very talented artist and craftsman. As a way of dealing with her tremendous grief over the past number of years, and as a form of solace during this long period of mourning, I believe this talent has been physically transferred to a particular chair which Lyle hand-crafted, allowing Roberta to construct a special meaning for its presence. Lyle's 'presence' has been embodied in the chair which he crafted for his wife and which occupies a prominent place in Roberta's living room. The following quotes about this chair illuminate its emotional significance:

> Do you see that chair? I put crappy looking covers on it to protect it. Lyle built that chair. He was very talented. That is a special chair. That chair is going into a show next March in Portage la Prairie called *Furniture with a Story*.
>
> I just had it redone in a high end shop in Winnipeg and it was a fortune. But they were the first people to know what to do with these arms! You've got to do these arms right! I mean the fabric was $115.00/meter! I phoned my son and told him I just spent a fortune. He said "mom, that chair is never leaving the family. It is going to pass down through the generations. But I tell my grandchildren not to sit in the chair!

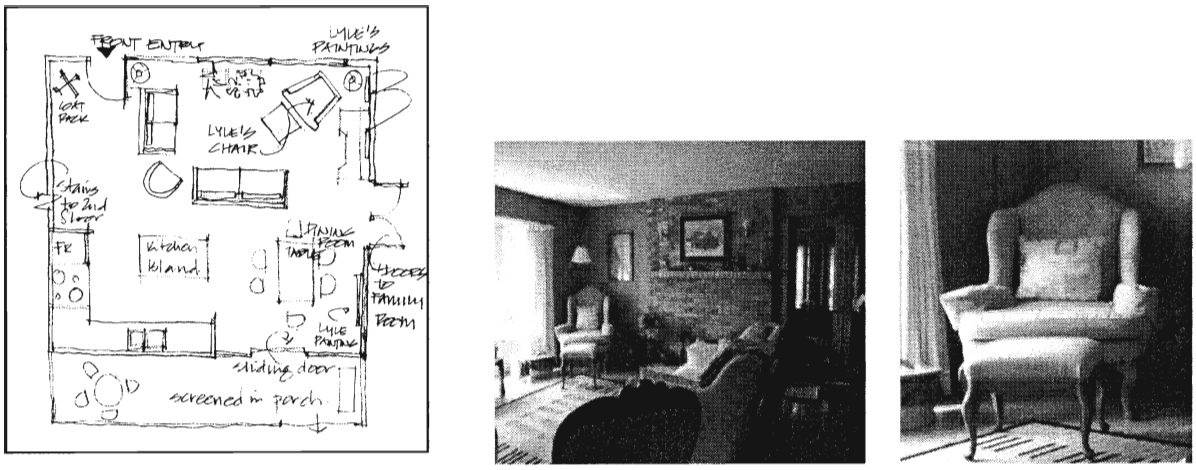

Figure 38: Living room floor plan, interior view of living room, Lyle's chair.

Unfortunately, as is the case with all of us, Roberta's husband could not live for more than one generation, but the chair he created is not restricted to one lifetime. Positioned in a prime location next to the picture window as it is now, in the years to come, I suspect this chair will continue to stand guard in its prominent location – a kind of motionless sentinel protecting future generations of the Stone family forever and ever. One could further argue that Roberta's insistence that the chair's arms be "done right", and that her grandchildren "not sit in the chair", exemplify a tension which further illustrates the profound meaning which this piece of furniture brings to the living room space. Could it be that the chair's arms have, in essence, become Lyle's arms?

The depth of Roberta's grief was also expressed in her descriptions about the paintings and wood carvings on display throughout her home. For example:

> A lot of the items I display for decoration are my husband's work. .... he did some beautiful stuff.
>
> This is one of the earliest pieces he did... And this is one he was working on when he died. I love this one. And I just decided to put it up. I don't care if it is not finished.

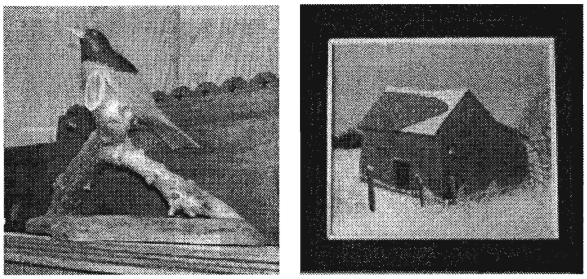

Figure 39: Examples of Lyle Stone's carvings and paintings

Interestingly, while a goodly portion of the wood carvings and paintings were on view throughout the house, all photographs were confined to the largely unused family room. Perhaps the combination of photo images and newly purchased furniture was just too much to bear – requiring both to be relegated to a space where access could be controlled and memories could be shut out.

Love and Protection

Hazel and Nelson Olson have been married for over fifty years and have lived in their current home for twenty - four of those years. Prior to moving into town, and for approximately thirty-seven years prior to purchasing this house, they lived on a farm one mile and a half from the MacGregor town limit.

Just as Roberta Stone's home could be read as one currently imbued with sadness resulting from the death of her husband, Hazel Olson's particular reading of her home may be understood based upon an examination of descriptions of experiences, spaces and objects.

The most appropriate theme one can assign to Hazel Olson's reading of her home is that of love and protection of her husband Nelson who has arthritis and has recently been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

One might argue that these sentiments are unrelated specifically to the meaning of home and can be considered purely as the typical response of a concerned life partner. This is undoubtedly correct. However, I also believe that the physical representation of this sense of tenderness is also found in design decisions related to the Olson home; decisions which have resulted in the physical alteration and use of space.

In this case, insights into the meaning of home are more subtle than in other instances. Yet, while perhaps somewhat understated, evidence is readily available if one examines the oral expressions and nuanced meanings offered during the course of the conversation with Hazel Olson[116]: For example, Hazel speaks of her favourite spaces, yet comments on the number of television sets in the house:

> We really love our living room in the winter time – it is so nice. Full sun and in the summertime I spend a lot of time out here in the sunroom. And Nelson has televisions everywhere, except in the living room and the sunroom. The sunroom and living room are my favourite spaces because there is no TV.

Nelson's fragility and dependence upon his wife is also expressed in the terms he uses to describe his house:

> I would use the term "about time" to describe this house... to describe my home .....you (Hazel) are finally home.... Well, you (Hazel) always go out and it's about time you got home. Comfortable would be a word to describe my home... relaxing.... secure. As long as I am still here.

Similarly, Hazel's frustration with her constricted life is also expressed in terms of his attachment to home, where he chooses to sit for most of the day and her decision to create a sewing room:

> Nelson never wants to go anywhere... if that has anything to do with it. This is where Nelson sits all day.
>
> I converted a room upstairs to a sewing room. This is my sewing and quilting room. My husband has Parkinson's and arthritis and I need to spend more time at home and this room is my answer to that because his Parkinson's is bad all year.

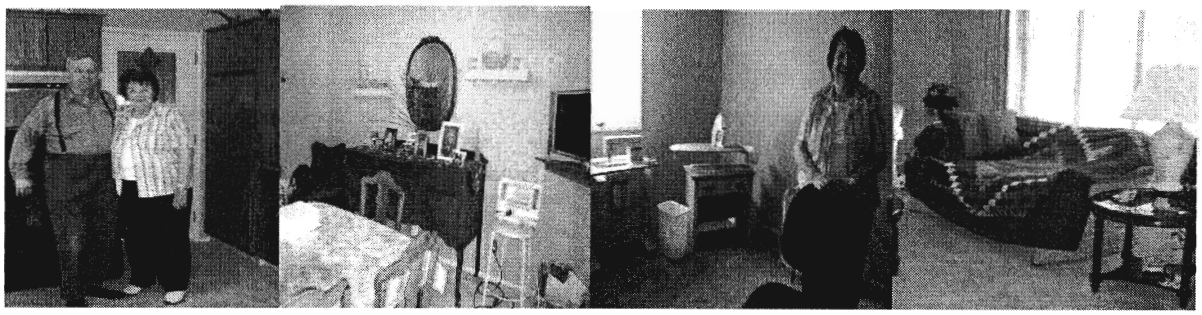

Figure 40: Images of Hazel and Nelson Olson, TV in corner of dining room, Hazel standing in new sewing room, living room

[116] Although this interview was primarily with Hazel Olson, her husband Nelson frequently offered his own comments with regard to the design and meaning of their home.

During the course of our lengthy interview, there was very little overtly stated about the increasing need to take care of Nelson within the confines of the Olson's house, or design decisions to accommodate his declining health. Yet it was the tone and mood of the conversation about the physical changes to their home which was striking. Although the conversation was focused directly upon renovation and decorating decisions, as well as the acquisition of family antiques, the true meaning of the Olson home was revealed within the subtext of Hazel's desire to care for Nelson. This tension was often expressed through reference to the television sets scattered throughout the house. Preferring to deal with Nelson's declining health through humour, on several occasions Hazel jokingly spoke of her dislike for their ubiquitous presence. Lynn Spigel in her book *Make Room for TV* has examined the dominant presence of the television in North America and its impact upon family relationships, women's roles within the household and interior design. In the epilogue of her book, Spigel writes "the placement of a chair, or the design of a television set in a room.... suggest the details of everyday existence to which the television inserted itself."[117] The presence of four television sets 'inserted' into four spaces within the Olson's home is testament to this observation.

The fact that Nelson prefers to spend most days at home and is uncomfortable when Hazel is out of the house for any length of time has also resulted in some recent renovations. Hazel has found a hobby to occupy her time while at home, and a bedroom has been converted to a sewing/quilting workroom to accommodate this new pastime. A new television has become the focus of the basement family room and most recently, the master bedroom will soon be redecorated to add a sense of optimism and renewal.

Interestingly, from Nelson's perspective no changes to the house were ever required, even from the moment it was purchased. When asked what makes this house a home, Nelson's response was quite revealing in its simplicity and reinforcement of the pragmatic, everyday nature of prairie culture:

> It's home because you don't have to haul any wood to it. I've got all the water I want to drink. When I was a little bugger, I used to have to get the wood in when I come from school. That bloody old house... you take in two cords of wood and I don't know if the old man ever slept from the

[117]Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV: Television and the Family Ideal in Postwar* America (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press,1992): 187.

> cold. But it was mostly good times. I was never hungry. To me that is good.

Dreams and Desires

Jerry and Sandra Sawatzky both grew up in modest houses which were described as "small bungalows." Sandra's family has farmed in the Plum Coolee region for generations and Jerry's dad worked in a local grocery store. Yet even before they were married, both Jerry and Sandra dreamed of owning and living in a stately nineteenth - century home, similar to those which they had seen in nearby communities such as Winkler, Plum Coulee and Morden. Explaining their love of century homes, the Sawatzky's offered the following comments

> Where that love for old houses came from, I am not sure. Even before we got married I would get older furniture and did some refinishing myself….. When I was growing up I saw a nice piece of furniture, so you strip that down and redo it and it looked nice in an old house…. These big old houses. It just kind of developed. *J.Sawatzky*
>
> I don't know where it started with the old homes. We both just have a love for the character of old homes… turn of the century style. *S.Sawatzky*

The Sawatzky family home symbolizes the fulfillment of a personal vision which has been in the heart of both its owners since long before they were married. Both Jerry and Sandra Sawatzky possess a strong appreciation for the stateliness of nineteenth - century residential prairie architecture and as a result, have spent a large portion of their resources over the past thirteen years restoring their rural home to its original 1909 grandeur.

The meaning of the Sawatzky's home is completely enveloped in the huge expenditure of energy and resources required to fulfill this residential dream. As mentioned in a previous section of this paper, at times this undertaking appears to have been the source of significant conflict for Sandra: on the one hand she intensely dislikes the everyday turmoil of home renovation, but on the other hand, she also takes comfort in the finished result. This sentiment was echoed in the following quote. When asked to describe her feelings about the "meaning of home", Sandra responded:

> What is home? It is lots of words I guess. It is a place to relax and yet you do different work. Like you know… kind of your own cave and comfortable…. but lots of work.

Interestingly, Jerry's description of home was quite different, focusing upon the "house as a mirror of (him)self"[118] rather than the amount of work required to complete the restoration :

> What is home? It is a reflection of *you*....and the people that live there. It is a place of security and comfort and connections with the people with you.

The origin of the Sawatzky's dream home was unique. Initially discovered in the small town of Plum Coolee (approximately sixty kilometers from the Sawatzky's present home), it had been virtually abandoned. In the words of Sandra Sawatzky:

> We came across a house driving down the highway near Plum Coolee. And there it was.. right on the highway! So we said, well, we have this yard..... and that house would be perfect. I had never seen a house like that there. I had just never seen it.
>
> We looked at it and said "Wow... this really has cool lines, but it is a ton of work! It was in pretty bad shape. It needed a new roof and everything – once the rain started coming in.

The do-it-yourself renovation of this 'dream home', while clearly a labour of love, has taken up a tremendous amount of time. "*The Project*" is a "dream come true" for both Sandra and Jerry, yet the narration of this story reveals glimpses of priorities and tensions which may not otherwise be revealed. The very fact that the renovation has been given a name speaks to the degree to which it has become a living part of their household. Because Jerry is a high school teacher and Sandra works part-time at the local Rona store, '*The Project*' has been researched and completed mostly on weekends and evenings. By necessity, it has become very much a part of their daily responsibilities, nurtured to almost the same degree as their own children. As Sandra explained:

> I go to auction sales all the time looking for turn of the century pieces. I spend a lot of hours looking for things because I love the history and love to bring that in.

Yet one cannot help but notice the overriding sense of patriarchy which seems to be present in the Sawatzky's recollections of their house restoration despite the commonality of their dream. Sandra's participation and reading of the events was consistently narrated in terms of domesticity (priority of kitchen completion, sewing curtains, decorating), while Jerry referred to

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[118] This phrase forms part of the title of Clare Cooper Marcus's 1997 landmark study of the meaning of home entitled *House as mirror of Self: Exploring the Deeper Meaning of Home.*

Sandra as a "helper", whose decorating fantasies would require the intervention of none other than Santa Claus:

> She is a helper. I don't like painting. We just filled this in here a little while ago for knickknacks or whatever. She would like to have Santa Claus and throw all kinds of beautiful things in. *J. Sawatzky*
>
> We did the kitchen right away. We have done a lot of work. To me it seems like the decorating, like the extras are the last thing. I sewed a lot of the curtains. *This is just The Project: Our Dream.* We kind of made this. You know, we moved it. It is ours. *S. Sawatzky*

Figure 41: View of original exterior of Sawatzky home, original house being moved , view of existing exterior, , view of renovated kitchen

Sandra's comment that "knickknacks" would soon be displayed on a recently completed powder room shelf once again indicates the importance of material culture in the personalization of space. Further, the centrality of the kitchen in a rural prairie household is revealed in both her previous statement that the kitchen was the first part of the house to be renovated, as well as via the comment below:

> This is also like a sort of central hub here. We meet here in the morning and everybody gets ready for their day. You come home and they look in here.

Lastly, the following "blow-by-blow" description of a typical day in this busy five person household aptly illustrates the ways in which everyday activities bring a sense of meaning to home. Sandra Sawatzky explained:

> I'm working, you're working... meals are crashing... everybody is cleaning up.... Go up and do this, do that. So every evening we work. Kids go to bed, we finally get to sit down and turn on the TV. And then we say..."Okay, this is a good place."

In this instance, the fact that this is largely a 'do-it-yourself' project also speaks to the pragmatic nature of prairie culture where self-reliance is the norm. The meaning of home, therefore, is

perceptible not only within the physical changes to the house itself, but is also embedded in the Sawatzky's justifiable pride in the self-accomplishment of their lifelong dream.

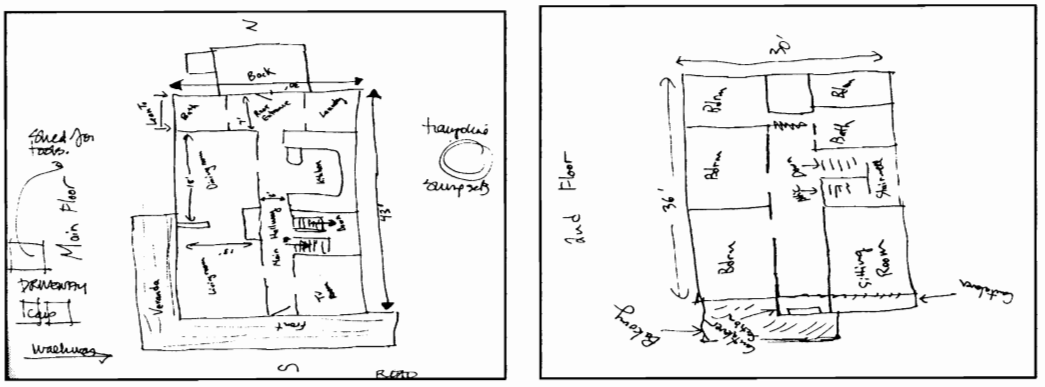

Figure 42: First and second floor plans of Sawatzky home, drawn by Jerry Sawatzky

Family Values

The essence of Linda Hesselwood's home was revealed before we had barely sat down at the dining room table. Within the first five minutes of the interview, Linda spoke the following three sentences:

> She was *not* raised to this. (in reference to another interviewee who had not grown up on a farm)
>
> How would you like your only grandchild to live in Madrid?
>
> Oh, I'm a farmer's wife. I used to work in the bank and then I started having my children.

Although seemingly totally unrelated, upon reflection, these three sentences quite neatly summarized Linda's feelings about her prairie life: the importance of extended familial relationships, the significance of everyday farm activities, and her standing as a woman in rural Manitoba society. As our discussion continued, it became apparent that all three of these comments exposed important feelings which, in turn, also contributed to the design decision-making and decoration of her MacGregor farm home. However, Linda very simply stated the most significant in this regard a few moments later:

> The thing I enjoy most (about this house) is the family gatherings.

Indeed, it was the importance of family that dominated a majority of the narrative that day and which, in turn, resided within the spaces of Linda's home. Within the context of her parents' death and her position as the eldest child in the family, the following quote speaks to the importance of her home as the physical base of family unity as well as the seriousness with which she takes this position:

> Now that my parents have both passed away, this is where the rest of my family is going to come home to. I am the oldest of five. You know…. It doesn't hurt… it just bonds families.

The importance of her home as a site of family bonding was further explained in terms of the proximity of her children and the way in which she organizes space for Christmas dinner:

> Like our children are all nearby. I am very thankful you know. Now there are sixteen of us in the family… we have sixteen at the table for Christmas and sometimes twenty-something. We had a buffet last Christmas and we ate here as far as we could and another table her and another table in the living room.

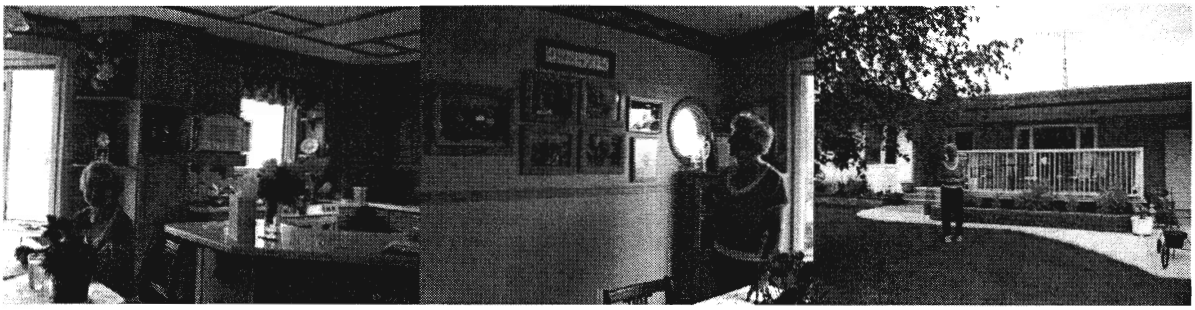

Figure 43: Linda Hesselwood in kitchen, view of Million Dollar Wall, view of exterior of house

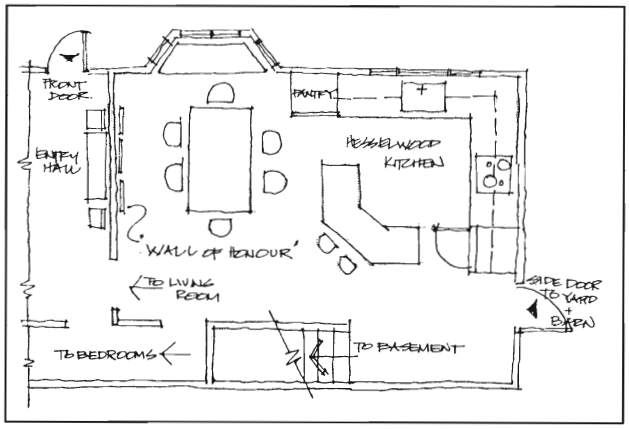

Figure 44: Floor plan of Hesselwood dining room and kitchen

Yet the most evident representation of the importance of family in the design of the Hesselwood home was the creation of the "Million Dollar Wall", located just behind the dining room table and pictured above. As Linda remarked:

> Like here, for instance, my husband refers to this as his "Million Dollar Wall" because of all the family pictures. It is our own family things... our family pictures.... and little design things that I make it our own.

Because Linda's deepest pleasure as a homemaker and "farmer's wife" is to cook and bake for her family and friends, the centre of the Hesselwood home is the kitchen and adjacent dining area.

> I spend most of my time in the kitchen. I love to cook and bake. I love to entertain here. You know, those kinds of things.
>
> I would describe home as a place where I spend time with my husband and my family and it's where I like to have group dinners whether it is family or friends.

Sitting just in front of the 'Million Dollar Wall', and able to clearly read the sign above them which states "All Because Two People Fell in Love", all visitors to the Hesselwood home would have the opportunity to see and enjoy these family photos and other momentoes. Indeed, with these images permanently adjacent to the dining room table, the extended Hesselwood family are actually present at every meal, regardless of whether they are physically at the table or not.

Aside from the reference to the material culture of "little design things that make it our own", referring to this wall as the "Million Dollar Wall" also speaks to an economic factor; suggesting that it is family that is the treasured investment in this household rather than physical space or expensive furniture. In a later comment about the generous size of her sister's home, Linda remarked that: "they live in a 2200 sq. ft. carriage home – it is ridiculous!" - a statement which further emphasizes this priority.

As was the case with a majority of homes such as this which were built in the late 1960's, the kitchen preparation area and dining room table are open and form a single common space. Similar in design to the Eichler homes of California[119], in those early years when her children

[119] Annmarie Adams' informative article "The Eichler Home: Intention and Experience in Postwar Suburbia", *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture V*, 1995: 164 – 178 is an excellent reference source for further information about the Eichler Homes and women in postwar suburban America.

were young, Linda Hesselwood assumed the typical role of wife and mother whose central command post was the kitchen sink. Although her children are now fully grown with families of their own, Linda continues to negotiate the spaces within her home through this traditional role of homemaker: one in which she has years of experience and in which she continues to feel valued.

While the kitchen/dining room space revealed the most obvious physical manifestation of family, Linda's reading of the home through the importance of nurturing family was also evident in other parts of the house. The very fact that she was comfortable with newborn calves being birthed just inside her back door vestibule and bathed in the family bathroom is clear testament to this sentiment.

Although not specific to the notion of family values, also of interest during this interview was Linda's mention of growing up in an "Eaton house":

> I know a couple of years ago they moved the house that I grew up in – and it was an Eaton house. So when my mother was alive, and she has only been gone five years, saw the house that was home. So anyway, then we went to where they had moved it and asked if they would mind giving us a tour. Well, it was so neat to see some of the things that you remember of your childhood.... They kept the old tub in the bathroom!

In addition to its important reference as a source of childhood memories, the previous comments validate the popularity of mail-order homes in this part of Canada during the 1930's and their continuing desirability today.

Immigration and Adaptation

Although the greatest period of immigration to Manitoba was the early twentieth century, the Wieberdink-Blankvoort family did not arrive from Holland until 1971. Like prairie immigrants before them, the decision to farm and raise dairy cows in Manitoba was taken somewhat by chance. As Antoinette recounted, Harry Blankvoort and Antoinette Wieberdink-Blankvoort originally came to St. Cloud, Manitoba to work as social workers and dairy farmers on a farm for boys who were in trouble with the law:

> He got a job offer to come to work here in St. Cloud where a Dutch man was establishing a dairy farm home for boys and Harry, of course, being a farmer and social worker, got his immigration papers very quickly. And he just took a one way ticket and I finished my term and I said "I will come and have a look..." and it was just simply because the job happened to be in Manitoba that we ended up here. *A. Wieberdink-Blankvoort*

Also in keeping with first settlers, this couple's early life in Canada was difficult, particularly for Antoinette:

> So the first 10, 15, 20 years were so difficult, and as a new immigrant coming into a new country! And for me the experience to be farming... that took all your energy and strength just to keep going. And you are building on your existence, your farm, your business, yourselves. I had very little in common, I thought, with all the people around me, because we lived such different lives.

As was also the case for most early residents, they began their Canadian experience living in a very humble dwelling, eventually building their current house in 1994. Antoinette's commentary continued with the following

> It (the old house) was a very old. It was lathe and plaster and it was all rough lumber. So when we moved here we tried to fix it up but it was just beyond fixing. If you really wanted to make it livable then all new windows, all new doors, all new floors and there was no insulation of course. There was newspaper if you were lucky. And so you couldn't heat it properly. It was a terrible old house, and at the time it was built... so the rafters were all still rough.

With the arrival of their two daughters, Antoinette and her husband could no longer manage in their first dwelling and decided to build a new house on the site of the old structure. Although this initiative did not take place until they had been in Canada for twenty - three years and had adapted socially to Canadian culture, it is through an analysis of the following narrative regarding the floor plans for this new house that one can read the significance of their Dutch heritage in their design decision-making. For example, the decision to create an open floor plan was very much based upon their European backgrounds:

> I think some of the influences are not to do with living here. They are from my European background because I lived 20 some years in Holland where my ideas came from. I hate to chop up houses here... where you come in and you have the breakfast room.... and from our European background we are so used to this open concept.... that was kind of what we felt we wanted. Of course we never owned a house (in Holland)

but my parents had very nice homes. But there was always an open concept. And so - no walls in the main living part – the great room.

The strong desire for a large veranda, the inclusion of a very small (2 ft. x 6 ft.8 in.) washroom at a rear entrance, the opening between office and living room, were additional design details firmly grounded in the Dutch house- building tradition. In the words of Antoinette:

> And a veranda, we always wanted a veranda. My husband said "I don't care what kind of house that you put, but I need a veranda" and I agreed.
>
> As well, we have this little bathroom here. I think having this is very much a Dutch thing ….it is very small.
>
> I was shocked that he even wanted something like that office opening. But I remember at home we would have that between the kitchen and the living room.

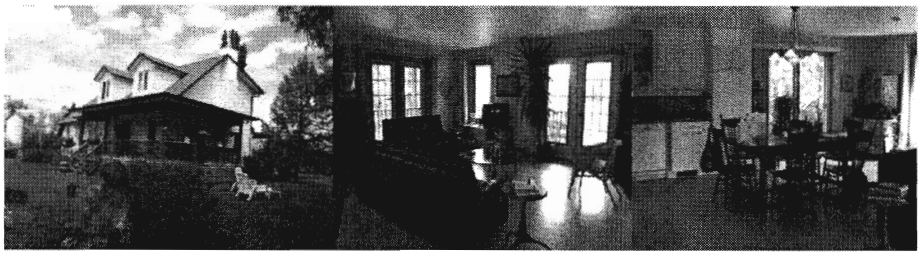

Figure 45: View of exterior of Wieberdink-Blankvoort home, views of open living room and dining room

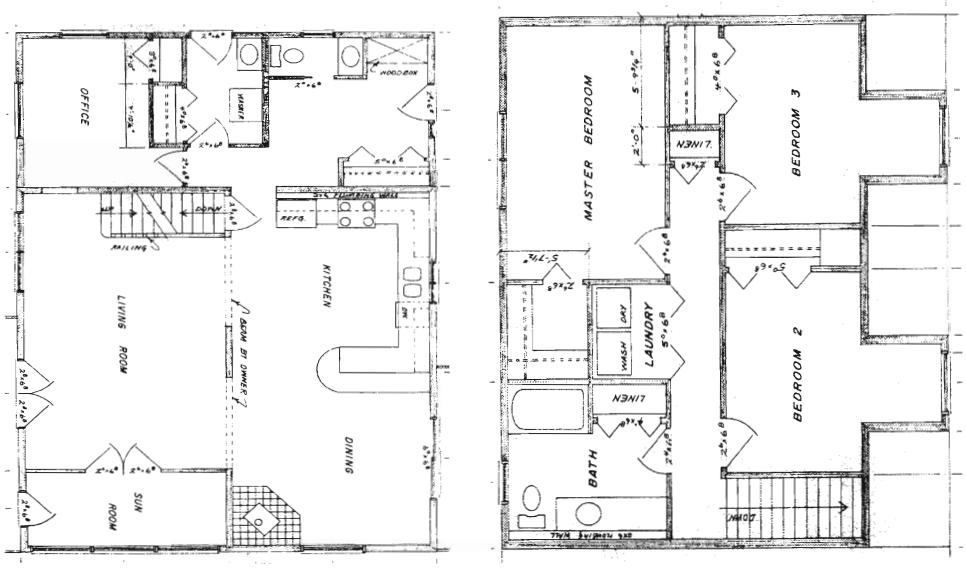

Figure 46: First and second floor plans of Wieberdink-Blankvoort home

One could also argue that Canadian residential building traditions were a design influence: most notably the inclusion of a large exterior veranda and dormer windows which were typical to a vast majority of the pattern book houses constructed on the prairies during the early twentieth century. While the veranda, in particular, may also have been a residential building tradition in Holland, as Figure 47 illustrates, Harry Blankvoort's childhood home[120] did not have one.

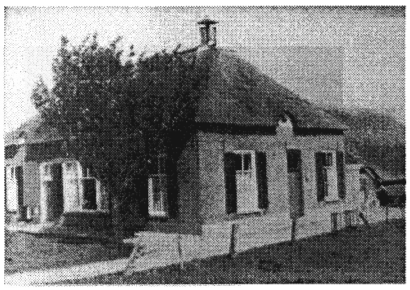

Figure 47: Blankvoort family home: Zalk, Holland constructed in1870

Regardless, the strong desire to include a veranda in the construction of their Manitoba farm home may have been at least partly as a result of a childhood memory of a Dutch building vernacular, as well as proximity to the many farm houses in Manitoba with both dormers and generous verandas.

At times Dutch building traditions have rubbed up against Canadian residential design customs in a negative way. In this regard, the following story is very revealing, suggesting that even simple design decisions can affect the degree of acceptance of immigrants into typical Canadian communities:

> We have a sink in all our bedrooms. That's from Holland I would think. To me, because you use this to do all your stuff and you don't need to tie up the bathroom. You only go to the bathroom for the toilet and to do your shower....and particularly with two girls! I think our plumber, he shook his head.... because we had a local MacGregor plumber. And he said to a girl who now became a friend of mine "They have a G-d damn sink in every room... you should see what is going on there!" And I thought, no... this is just very simple and it makes such logical sense to me.

[120] Although this photograph of their farm home was taken in 1965, the Blankvoort family continues to live in this dwelling and farm in Zalk .

One has to wonder how much of a setback the plumber's observations were to the integration of the Blankvoort family into MacGregor society. Luckily, the gossipy plumber's reading of this house as one which was extravagant seems to have been overturned: Antoinette became a close friend of the woman to whom this remark was whispered.

The importance of decorative accessories as a source of meaning was also evident in Antoinette's home, both as a symbol of her European heritage as well as in terms of her new life in Manitoba. An antique wall clock (which, in Holland many years earlier, had been stolen and replaced) was displayed prominently on the kitchen wall bringing enormous meaning to both her and her husband:

> My clock... my mother's clock! It was my great aunt's who lived in Bussum. She had the most beautiful antique clock – it was a dream and it was assessed to be a very valuable clock. And it was stolen and replaced with this clock. Oh you know, to me that clock was always a little bit of "oh that damn clock"! My husband has so many negative feelings about that clock. So I said I will take it and I will put it up!

And yet at the same time, although occupying a space not quite as significant as when she first arrived in Canada thirty years ago, Antoinette's collection of dairy cows remains a symbol of her Canadian life as a dairy farmer:

> When we got our dairy farm I got two antique salt and pepper shakers and so I put them on a little ledge shelf and it grew. So now I have this collection and friends would bring them. And when I see them it brings back memories. Well I am certainly not ready to part with them. They are still on display but they moved from upstairs to downstairs.

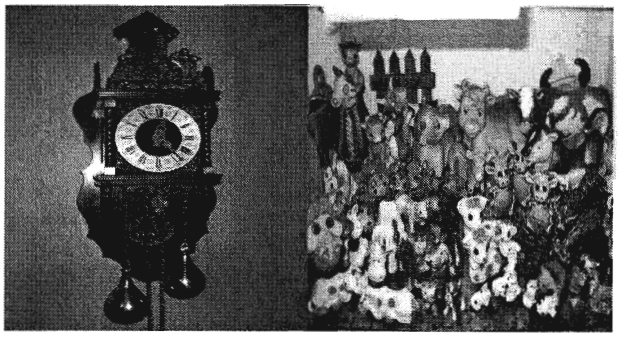

Figure 48: Antique clock and cow collection

Perhaps the relegation of the dairy cow collection from the ground floor to a less visible location in the basement is a fitting symbol of Antoinette's complete integration to Canadian life. Like her decorative accessories, she is a blend of both worlds. In her own words:

> When I think of home I am probably the most screwed up person to talk to because of the fact that we are immigrants into this country. When I am in Holland I say Canada is home. So, in the end they are both home. I always describe myself as a very well rooted flourishing plant that is rooted in two different pots. Yet this for sure, this house is my home.

Chapter 5: Thoughts and Conclusions

The stories in the previous chapter have provided first - person evidence of the ways in which everyday experiences shape the meaning of home. Intangible in their narrative form, the symbolism of objects and events have been read in terms of their transference to physical space.

None of the interiors I have written about in this document could be termed beautiful or successful from the perspective of name-brand[121] architecture. Indeed, when I look back at the images inserted throughout its pages, I wonder if the residential spaces pictured could be considered examples of architecture or interior design at all. For the most part, there seems to be no sense of the ordered and poetic in the built form that I have that been preaching about to students for over twenty years. But if this is neither architecture nor design, then what is it? Maybe it does not have a name - at least not one that has anything to do with the beauty and grace of well- designed space.

Nevertheless, there is still something about all of this which continues to speak to me, despite (or perhaps because of) the lack of sophistication and categorization. Whether the voice that speaks is named Architecture or Design, however, is debatable. In the end, perhaps it doesn't matter what it is called. What does matter, however, is that these places (and millions of others just like them) exist and bring enormous meaning to those who live in them. This is why we call them home.

In the succinct words of Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling: "Home is: a place/site, a set of feelings/cultural meanings, and the relations between the two." [122] To rephrase (and editorialize somewhat), 'home' has nothing to do with formal aesthetics, and everything to do with what goes on, in and around a particular site.

In terms of this study, the place(s)/site(s) are the prairie homes of five Manitoba women. As I reflect back upon the stories told by study participants and try to draw conclusions, for the most part, Blunt and Dowling's rather hard-edged definition still seems inappropriate. Rather, as

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[121] Deborah Berke, "Thoughts on the Everyday," in *Architecture of the Everyday,* ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 222.
[122] Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *home* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 2.

mentioned in Chapter Two, it is Bachelard's poetic evocation of the intimacy of 'home' that best reflects the dominant sentiment amongst participants.

But beyond this, what conclusions can be drawn about finding meaning in the everyday design of these prairie interiors? What are the findings in this study that add to current scholarly discourse and maybe even turn current wisdom upside down?

After struggling with this question for several weeks, perhaps not surprisingly, the answer came in the words of another Canadian prairie resident, songwriter Connie Kaldor. In the lyrics to her song about a tiny town called Love, Saskatchewan,[123] she writes: "So when you are heading into Love, don't expect a four lane highway". [124]

In other words, 'meaning' in a Manitoba rural home is not sleek, contrived or direct. The 'eurekas!' are few and far between. Answers will not *be* found in any celebrated design solution, but rather in the steady routines, historical accounts and ordinary utility of everyday decision-making. They are responses that are as predictable, mundane and rooted to the land as a two- lane prairie road.

By its very definition, therefore, there are no revolutionary conclusions that come from a study of everyday interiors such as this. Instead, the conclusions, like the architecture of the everyday, take the form of a more considered analysis: one which is less concerned with a momentary wave of architectural heroics, and more with a quiet yet enduring understanding of both the broad common themes applicable to the prairie and the personalized, local experiences which affect design decision-making. The wisdom is found precisely in the lack of heroics.

The understanding that meaning is found at *two* levels (at both the broad cultural level and the personal level), and that both levels of meaning contribute to the interior design and use of the spaces of the house, for me is a new realization. While this concept may be applied to all architectural and design decision-making, themes particular to the common rural prairie culture (namely farm heritage, patriarchy, prairie pragmatism and frugality, material culture) make these findings unique. To be sure, material culture, or the collecting of objects for display is common

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[123] Love, Saskatchewn is a village with a population of approximately 104 people , north- east of Prince Albert. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love,_Saskatchewan Retrieved, November 18, 2009.
[124] Connie Kaldor, *Love, Saskatchewan,* 2009. Downloaded from http://www.cbc.ca/radio2/programs/r2drive/2009/11/10/connie_love.html November 17, 2009.

in both urban and rural households. Nevertheless the type of collections displayed (e.g. dairy cows, quilts, antique farm implements) is clearly representative of a traditional rural culture and the personas of these particular home-owners. The same can be said for the passing down of heritage furniture pieces – in and of itself, this is not a practice unique to rural prairie culture. However, the origin and style of many of these pieces and even entire dwellings (e.g. the Sawatzky's Century home or even Linda Hesselwood's childhood Eaton Pattern Book home) speaks to a specific history, tradition and regionalism not found in other locales. As anthropologist Kenneth Ames notes in a review of Grant McCracken's book *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities,* the value of the 'displaced meaning' of collected objects is to evoke and protect ideals from a previous reality in order to help sustain hope in the face of a present day reality and a future orientation. [125]

Only Antoinette Wieberdink-Blankvoort's reading of her home presented a slight variation to the previous discussion. Although her narratives were also replete with references to the broad cultural themes of patriarchy, pragmatism and frugality, her status as relatively recent immigrant to Manitoba resulted in a slightly different reading of her home. Several aspects of her design decisions (e.g. sinks in every bedroom and an open concept ground floor) were a reflection of her (and her husband's) Dutch childhood amalgamated with standard Canadian house designs (e.g. the inclusion of a family room in her home). This blend of contemporary solutions with ideas inherited from another country is reminiscent of strategies of assimilation which were typical of the early - twentieth century immigrants to rural Manitoba who came before her. It is interesting to speculate about whether Antoinette's teenage children will continue the Dutch traditions of their Canadian childhood home, or rather, like so many children of immigrants, this aspect of their Dutch heritage will give way to traditional Canadian residential design choices.

The fact that I chose to interview women for this study also brought particular significance, in that my conclusions are largely based upon the way gender affected the reading of the home.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the lives of prairie women have historically been centered upon labour: both inside and outside of the house. Their role in sustaining this agrarian economy has

[125] Kenneth L. Ames. " Review: How Culture Shapes consumption in the Modern World," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No.2 (June 1989): 408.

consistently been undervalued and ignored: only recently has it become the focus of attention, predominantly for feminist scholars. Perhaps it is therefore not surprising that this historical tradition of patriarchy was an undercurrent in almost every narrative and certainly in almost every decision related to housing choices and interior design decision-making. During the course of my interviews, not one woman spoke of her contribution to decisions around the business aspects of farm management (traditionally the domain of the male partner). However, all of them mentioned their husband's approval or commentary with regard design decisions around the home (traditionally the domain of the female partner). As expressed by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, "Gendered expectations and experiences flow[ed] through all ....social relations and their materialities, and gender is hence critical to understanding home."[126]

Second wave feminists such as Betty Friedan have argued that the home is an oppressive place for women. In terms of this study, and notwithstanding previous comments, the scent of domination seems to be mediated somewhat: perhaps as a result of the changing times, perhaps because the concerns of these women participants are not reflective of the urban middle class feminists, or perhaps because rural women themselves do not seem to want to change the existing balance of power. It may also be that rural women have employed more discreet ways of exerting their influence: such as utilizing indirect strategies such as persuasion to exert their authority. While I do not suggest that this is a long-term solution to alleviating their under-appreciated status, perhaps it is a strategy which works in at least the short-term.

The second tier of meaning was found at the personal, emotional level, and was tied to design decisions or particular objects specific to a study participant's home. Through a further analysis of their life stories, it became evident that profound sentiments (identified as grief and loss, love and protection, dreams and desires, family values and immigrant roots) formed the basis for each specific woman's individual reading of the spaces within her home. This meant that, as a result of individual life stories and resultant design decisions, each woman's entire home could be read as the embodiment of a particular emotion.

In Chapter One of this study I asked the following four questions:

> In what way do everyday activities, relationships and objects, in their very banality physically shape and bring meaning to the concept of home?

[126] Blunt and Dowling, *home* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), 15.

> To what extent does the design and decoration of the spaces, under these seemingly bland roofs, affect these most intimate of relationships?
>
> Is it possible that people's relationship to their own home can also be a factor in the foundational structure and pattern of their own lives and their relationships with other people?
>
> Is it possible that the opposite is true: that personal relationships shape the physical structure of the home?

Reflecting upon the answer to the first question, I believe that the "activities, relationships and objects" that shape the home do so as a result of the two theatres of interaction previously described in Chapter Four and in the preceding paragraphs of this Chapter: the social/cultural and the personal/emotional. The 'concept of home' is therefore shaped by both the wider cultural context of the Manitoba prairie, as well as the unique life experiences and memories of each individual.

The evidence provided in the case studies in Chapter Four also provides answers to questions two and three. The most intimate relationships, such as that of Sandra and Jerry Sawatzky have been significantly affected by the ongoing restoration of their heritage home, just as the inclusion of a large veranda on the exterior of Antoinette Wieberdink-Blankvoort's home is an expression of her relationship with her husband and the commonalities of their immigrant experience. The pattern of Roberta Stone's life has changed dramatically as a result of her relationship with her family room: just as Linda Hesselwood has made relationships with other people, and particularly those with her family, the central purpose of the design of her home.

Lastly, in response to question four, the changing yet loving relationship between Hazel and Nelson Olson is evidence of how a personal relationship can change the physical structure of home. The renovation of a bedroom to a sewing room is an excellent example of the alteration of an interior space to accommodate changing life patterns. On a larger scale, the inevitable consequences of life transitions, conveyed in all of the participant's stories, has resulted in changes to either the use of space or to the physical structure of each of the participants' homes.

Over the past several years there has been a growing body of research into the idea of home. Key concepts have been investigated through many different lenses of enquiry ranging from the

historic to the feminist. This enquiry has also taken place at many different scales ranging from the intimate to the transnational. Because of the interdisciplinary and complex nature of the term 'home', several of the researchers who have contributed to this body of knowledge are from disciplines such as geography, architectural history, anthropology, sociology and environmental psychology. Missing from this list is research from the perspective of the interior design professional. This is where my contribution may be of some value.

This report contributes to the growing body of research through its specific focus on five Manitoba rural interiors and the ways in which the design decisions of the women who occupy these spaces have contributed to their understanding of the meaning of 'home'. Listening to their stories, in turn, offers unique insights into the ways in which the ordinary or the everyday in rural Manitoba becomes extraordinary. Specific examples reveal how meaning is not found in a prescribed architectural formula, but rather in the unselfconscious and genuine aspirations of ordinary people. From a domestic perspective, the stories of these five Manitoba women form a collective narrative of the rural prairie cultural landscape, as well as of the spirit and determination of the women who have helped to create it.

Summary

I don't know if Roberta Stone, Linda Hesselwood, Hazel Olson, Sandra Sawatzky or Antoinette Wieberdink-Blankvoort know how to skate, or if Gordie Howe has ever put up wallpaper, but I do know that they have more in common than one might think.

Gordie Howe was on the ice for six decades and, in the words of my husband, "always showed up to play." No fanfare, no tricks, no heroics. Just skating, passing, moving economically, anticipating. It was the routine movements of playing the game of hockey that made him great. And, of course, along the way, he managed to score nine hundred and seventy-five goals.[127]

Roberta Stone, Linda Hesselwood and the other remarkable women of this study have also been "on the ice" for several decades. They, too, have "always showed up to play": driving combine, mothering, painting, baking or volunteering in their local community. Along the way they have also created interiors which are enduring, filled with personal meaning and which are

[127] http://www.hockeydb.com/ihdb/stats/pdisplay.php?pid=2378 Retrieved November 19 2009.

the physical representation of a rural culture of modesty, pragmatism and tradition. Once again, no fanfare, no tricks, no waste, no “capital A architecture” or “capital D design.”

In their own settings, both Mr. Hockey and the individual women of this study are at home. In both instances, the seemingly ordinary has exposed the remarkably extraordinary.

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Figure 16: Farm house bedroom, 1903: Douglas G. Wetherell and Irene R. A. Kmet, *Homes in Alberta: Building, Trends and Design 1870 – 1967* (Edmonton, Alta: The University of Alberta Press, 1991): 37.

Figure 17: Farm house parlour, 1910: Peter Ward, *A History of Domestic Space: Privacy and the Canadian Home*. Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 65.

Figure 18: Ad for pianos: *The Nor'West Farmer*, March 1929, p. 44. University of Manitoba Archives.

Figure 19: Ad for piano lessons: *The Country Guide*, May 01, 1929: University of Manitoba Archives.

Figure 20: Ad for pattern book house: *The Nor'West Farmer*, July 05, 1929, p. 30. University of Manitoba Archives.

Figure 21: Aladdin Homes pattern book house plan: *Country Squire Magazine, December 1, 1928.* University of Manitoba Archives.

Figure 22: Four Square House from Radford's Pattern Book: Peter Ennals and Deryck W. Holdsworth. *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling over Three Centuries,* (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 201.

Figure 23: Eaton's Mail Order House: Peter Ennals and Deryck W. Holdsworth. *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling over Three Centuries,* (Toronto, Ont.: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 210.

Figure 24: Cover of Eaton's Pattern Book: Les Henry. *Catalogue Houses: Eaton's and Others*, (Saskatoon, Sask. Henry Perspectives, 2000), p. 13.

Figure 25: Photo of Eaton's Pattern Book Four Square House: Les Henry. *Catalogue Houses: Eaton's and Others*, (Saskatoon, Sask. Henry Perspectives, 2000), p. 47.

Figure 26: Example of Small House Design: Annmarie Adams and Pieter Sjipkes. "Wartime Housing and Architectural Change, 1942 – 1992." Canadian Folklore Canadien 17, No. 2 (1995), 12 – 29.

Figure 27: Ioana Teodorescu *Ottawa Citizen* article https://communities.canada.com/ottawacitizen/blogs/designingottawa/archive/2009/02/22/cmhc-small-house-designs-did -you-build-one.aspx

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Figure 28: Aerial view of MacGregor Manitoba: Google Map

Remainder of photos: Author's collection.

Figure 29: Aerial view of Winkler, Manitoba: Google Map
Remainder of photos: Author's collection.

Figure 30: Images of Roberta Stone and her home: Author's collection.

Figure 31: Images of Hazel Olson and her home: Author's collection.

Figure 32: Images of Sawatzky family home: Author's collection and collection of Jerry and Sandra Sawatzky.

Figure 33: Images of Linda Hesselwood and her home: Author's collection.

Figure 34: Images of Antoinette Wieberdink-Blankvoort and her home: Author's collection.

Figure 35: Child's bedroom, Sawatzky home: Author's collection.

Figure 36: John Deere combine: Google Images. New John Deere 70 deere.com
http://images.google.ca/images?hl=en&source=hp&q=John+Deere+combine&gbv=2&aq

Figure 37: Drawing of family room floor plan and images: Author's collection.

Figure 38: Drawing of living room floor plan and images: Author's collection.

Figure 39: Images of examples of carvings and paintings: Author's collection.

Figure 40: Images of Hazel and Nelson Olson and their home: Author's collection.

Figure 41: Images of Sawatzky home: Author's collection.

Figure 42: Floor plans of Sawatzky home: Drawn by Jerry Sawatzky, Winkler Manitoba, June 2009.

Figure 43: Images of Linda Hesselwood;

Figure 44: Kitchen and dining room floor plan: Author's collection.

Figure 45: Images of Wieberdink-Blankvoort home: Author's collection.

Figure 46: First and Second Floor Plans: Architectural drawings of Wieberdink-Blankvoort home. Loaned to author, June 2009.

Figure 47: Blankvoort family home, Zalk, Holland: Collection of Harry Blankvoort, MacGregor Manitoba. Accessed via email November 2009.

Figure 48: Images of clock and cow collection: Author's collection.

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