

Mennonite Women's History: A Survey

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In recent decades historians have attempted to rewrite history from the perspective of the marginalized and powerless; to uncover the “underside of history.” Historians of the Mennonite church have also begun to turn their attention to this task. A number of significant works have recently been produced which deal with women as one group whose stories have not traditionally been deemed worthy of inclusion in history books. In surveying this body of writing on the history of women in the Mennonite church, it is apparent that a number of different perspectives and methods have been employed. This essay will survey the current state of literature on Mennonite women in the North American context.¹

The paper is organized into two major sections which reflect the two major methods employed in writing about Mennonite women: the biographical approach and the topical approach. Within each of these sections the material will be dealt with chronologically according to its date of publication.

The Biographical Approach

One of the most popular methods of recapturing Mennonite women's history is through the biographical approach. Sources such as diaries, letters and oral history lend themselves easily to a biographical format, particularly if the writers are not themselves skilled historians.² Furthermore, the style of biographical writing is often personally engaging and easily accessible to a wide readership. To date there are three volumes of stories about Mennonite women which have been collected; all three concentrate on women from the General Conference and Mennonite Brethren conferences. While employing a similar method, each collection is unique due to the emphases of the writers/editors.

Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women, edited by Mary Lou Cummings was published in 1978 and is the earliest collection of stories of Mennonite women. The women surveyed span both the nineteenth and twentieth century, and while the focus is on North American women, Mennonite women from the international community are represented. In the foreword to the book, Herta Funk states that the book "...deals with the underside of Mennonite history. Mennonite women's stories too have been forgotten, — neglected, not passed on."³ Making reference to a term found in Elise Boulding's book *The Underside of History*, Funk refers to *Full Circle* as a "necessary failure" in that the stories of women cannot be completely told.⁴

Cumming's purpose for reconstructing women's history is to encourage people in their walk with God. The women examined in the book are to serve as role models for contemporary Christians, particularly Christian women who have often been deprived of role models.⁵ The purpose of the book is not to try to define "Mennonite women's experience" but rather to provide glimpses of some aspects of this experience by looking at a number of exceptional women. The selection of biographies is thus diverse, but not representational of the Mennonite population; half of the women had some type of education after high school, and nine of the women had some official connection to the church, either by virtue of their occupation as missionaries or church workers, or through their marriage to a minister or missionary. The biographical approach in this book is used skillfully to maintain the reader's interest, and it provides vivid insights into the cycles of women's lives. The role of women as maintainers of family ties and as both spiritual and physical healers and nurturers is evident as a theme in many of the stories.⁶

There are, however, several drawbacks to using the biographical approach. Throughout the book the accomplishments of the women are viewed as achievements of the individual and of God — there is little reference to any larger women's movement or any context which would deepen the reader's understanding of the individual.⁷ An example of this lack of context is found in the biography of Florence Cooprider, a woman who graduated from medical school in 1914 as one of six women in a class with 106 men; no reference is made to the significant and documented struggles which early women doctors faced.⁸ Cummings makes the comment that she was "...impressed with the freedom from self-consciousness found in the biographies. These women were focused on God's will, and surprisingly, that left them free to be themselves — to rise above social expectations."⁹ She implies that for the truly committed Christian woman social expectations did not function as limitations and therefore inclusion of that context is unnecessary.¹⁰

Cummings states that this book is written not about saints but about real imperfect human beings,¹¹ yet the absence in most of the stories of any emotions that could be construed as negative (such as anger or frustration) belies this purpose. The book could have provided a more realistic picture of

the struggles of these women if more attention had been paid to the real, imperfect world in which these human beings lived.

In 1979, a year after *Full Circle* was published, Katie Funk Wiebe published her collection of biographies entitled *Women Among the Brethren*. It is a collection of the stories of fifteen women from the Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church. The life span of the women surveyed range from the early eighteen hundreds until the present, but the lives of the majority of women documented in this book spanned both centuries. As with Cummings' project, Wiebe edited the work of a number of different authors, who utilized information from archives, personal files, libraries and oral interviews.¹² The collection and editing of these stories was commissioned by the Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Literature. Wiebe explains in her preface that the Board undertook this project because they acknowledged that while "...we have a great heritage of courage, vision, sacrifice, and faith on the part of women, their stories have rarely been recorded so today's generation can read them."¹³ The purpose of this work of historical biography is to encourage Christians in their walk with God. Wiebe suggests that this book reveals that "God does not limit himself to the kinds of persons He uses to glorify himself. His ways are multitudinous."¹⁴ Wiebe remarks on the courage and vitality of the women examined, and their lack of self-consciousness. She states, "When they saw a task that needed doing and they knew they had the skills to do it, they didn't ask whose job it was. They simply moved in and did it."¹⁵ The assumption is that social role boundaries could be crossed by women who were committed to their work.

Wiebe goes on in her preface to state that women's contributions to the church have been different than men's contributions since women have not been part of the formal decision-making of the institutional church. She explains that women's contributions were often an extension of familial roles, "...feeding, caring, teaching children and young women, or looking after the sick..." as well as practicing "...hospitality, midwifery and teaching and missionary activities."¹⁶ Her book attempts to record the lives of very ordinary women. Many of the women she includes worked on farms with their husbands, and devoted themselves to raising their families; the stories often revolve around the birth of children, the nursing of the sick, the preparation of meals and other events which traditionally have been central to the routine of women's lives. Wiebe's biographical approach, like the biographical approach in Cummings' work, provides only a brief look at the wider context of women's lives in North America. The reader is given no indication as to whether Mennonite women were pioneers in certain activity, or simply performing tasks which were acceptable for women of that time and place.

The third volume of biographical sketches of Mennonite women was edited by Ruth Unrau in 1983. It is entitled *Encircled* and was written expressly as a sequel to the volume *Full Circle*. This volume was sponsored by

the Commission on Education of the General Conference Mennonite Church. Its purpose was expressly to "...collect the stories of thirty women who have made a significant contribution to the community and the church."¹⁶ Like the other biographical volumes, the writers utilized a variety of written and oral sources. While the explicit purpose of this book is to simply tell short stories about women in the church and is therefore not church history from a woman's perspective, Unrau acknowledges the need for a new type of church history: "We need history books written by women. Up to now, men have written history to meet their own needs and to satisfy their own curiosities. They have defined what women's roles in the church should be."¹⁷ Thus in this book there is not only an indication of the modest nature of the undertaking, but also at least some hint of what a more ambitious undertaking might encompass.¹⁸

As with the other biographical books, this volume is filled with the events of women's lives. One gets a feel for the multitudinous number of meals prepared, garments sewn and children raised and sometimes buried. The thirty women discussed in the book exhibit a wide range of occupations; women are included who were doctors, administrators, teachers, missionaries and church workers. Unrau follows the example of both Cummings and Wiebe in that she does not attempt to select a representative group of women. Unrau notes this fact, admitting that two thirds of the women studied were wives of ministers, and that the sample is not representative. As with the other volumes already considered, Unrau expressly attempts to avoid writing about these women as if they were saints. Unrau seems more successful in this task due to the type of details included within the biographies. She did not exclude women from the collection who had what some would call difficult personalities. Unrau writes about this as follows: "It may be easier for some of us to understand and love a woman who is human enough to feel and express hurt than to understand one who is too saintly to talk back."¹⁹ She is candid about recounting women's problems with anger and depression.²⁰

While this volume certainly celebrates the many achievements of women, there is also an awareness of how sexism has been operative in their lives. With few exceptions women were excluded from the ordained ministry in the Mennonite church. Unrau remarks on this and states that in the documents she examined she found no evidence that women were dissatisfied about their limited role.²¹ The biographies reveal that women did make significant contributions to the church, but Unrau is careful to note that women's avenues of service in the church were often routed through their husbands' positions of authority. The death of a husband meant the end of certain types of church work for their widows. Unrau does not specifically use the word patriarchy, but that is what she is describing when she refers to the traditional family systems where the line of authority was "firmly established from God to the husband to the wife" and when she warns that Mennonite women did not always experience a benign paternalism.²³ The suffering of women is not skimmed over; the biography of Susanna Nickel Schroeder, for example,

includes the observation that her husband's decision not to go to the mission field was a difficult one for her to accept, and that it bothered her for years.²⁴ The order of Mennonite society was seen as divinely ordained and it called women to be selfless and to sacrifice themselves for their husbands. Unrau comments at the beginning of one biography: "In an age when women's roles were limited to mother, nursing, and school teaching, many women sublimated their unusual energies and talents to unabashedly promote the careers of their husbands."²⁵

In comparison to the first two biographical volumes, Unrau seems to make more of an effort to contextualize the lives of the women discussed. The individuals are presented with some reference to the organizations which empowered them. Stella Shoemaker Kreider's biography, for example, mentions the painful demise of the Mennonite Women's Missionary Society.²⁶ The organizations mentioned are not strictly Mennonite, which is a tacit acknowledgement that some Mennonite women were influenced by the larger feminist movement. The biography of Sister Frieda Kaufman includes some information about the Mennonite deaconess movement, and it acknowledges that this movement was inspired by the presence of that institution in other denominations.²⁷ The Temperance Society²⁸ and the YWCA²⁹ are mentioned in other biographies, and one woman is recorded as having met the prominent feminist Carrie Chapman Catt.³⁰

The effort to contextualize women's lives is also seen in the area of education. For those who were able to seek higher education, conditions were sometimes difficult. Frieda Kaufman, for example, studied nursing at a time when there were few textbooks, and her biographer records that she copied three hundred pages of her teacher's lectures by hand.³¹ For many women, however, education was extremely difficult to obtain for family reasons. M'Della Moon's family thought "...that a woman's place belonged to *Kirche, Kinder, and Kochen* (church, children, and cooking)."³² Education for proficiency in a new language was a significant issue for many Mennonites as they emigrated to North America. Reference is made in at least one biography to the transition from speaking German to speaking English and the difference between education for men and women:

English classes were taught during winter evenings for the older men so that they could talk to their English neighbors and transact business in town. Such classes were not considered necessary for women because women, always accompanied to town by their husbands, didn't need English. Anna never became fluent in English.³³

Unrau's efforts to contextualize these women's lives provides the reader with biographies which are sensitive to the struggles which women faced in the Mennonite church.

In examining these three volumes, it appears that the biographical approach is very effective in presenting women's lives in a vivid and accessible way. The danger is, however, that the writers draw so close in empathy to the women studied that each fascinating person seems unique and autonomous.³⁴ This is a pitfall which Unrau in her book *Encircled* successfully avoids.

The Topical Approach

The earliest topical writing about Mennonite women in North America concerned the Mennonite Woman's Missionary Society of the Old Mennonite Church.³⁵ The two articles on this subject were written by Melvin Gingerich (then executive secretary of the Historical and Research Committee of the Mennonite Church) for the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* in 1963. The articles are written in a scholarly way, recounting the formation and demise of the Missionary Society. Detailed information is provided, using primary sources drawn from archival files and from correspondence which Gingerich conducted with several women who had been involved in the organization.

The purpose of the article is obviously to recount the history of the organization, and not to compare or contrast it to similar organizations in other denominational churches; yet Gingerich does state in his introduction that the formation of the Missionary Society by Mennonite women was undoubtedly influenced by other churches' women's groups. Gingerich does not make an attempt to set the struggle of the Missionary Society within the larger feminist context. However, his inclusion of a comment by Mrs. A. J. Steiner that "The women realized that there was danger that they might leave their proper sphere but...there was not one suffragette among them,"³⁶ suggests that the feminist movement was not a part of the issue here. There is some reflection at the end of the article, linking the events in the Women's Missionary Society to the conservative controversies which rocked the whole Mennonite church in the period of the 1920s.³⁷

An article with a broader scope and different emphases is found in the *Mennonite Quarterly Review* entitled "Women in the Mennonite Church, 1900–1930." The article was published in 1980 by Sharon Klingelsmith, then the assistant archivist at the Mennonite Church Archives. The article has a broad scope, examining women's lives from a number of different angles. Klingelsmith surveys Mennonite literature of the time, analyzing the implications of subordination which was inherent in the doctrine of separate spheres for men and women. Organizations within the church, such as publications, mission boards, and the emerging Sunday school movement are all analyzed according to women's participation in this period. Women's attendance at Mennonite educational institutions is also considered.³⁸

A major part of the article is devoted to the Women's Missionary Society, where Klingelsmith builds on the work of Melvin Gingerich. While Gingerich's goal was to place the Women's Missionary Society within the context of the turmoil within the broader Mennonite church, Klingelsmith's goal is to specifically address the conflict from the perspective of women's roles in the church, and she accomplishes this by using a limited biographical approach. Klingelsmith's view of the takeover is markedly different from Gingerich's, as she interprets the conflict to be taking place within the context of women's struggle for autonomous avenues of activity. Whereas Gingerich quoted a

woman dissociating herself from the suffragette movement, Klingelsmith documents a number of women who were explicitly working for women's rights and who, in the words of one woman, found the heavy-handedness of the mission board close to "woman oppression."³⁹

Indeed, throughout the article Klingelsmith attempts to situate Mennonite women within the struggle for suffrage and women's rights. The official positions of the Mennonite conference to suffrage are mentioned, and specific examples of how women were being affected by periodicals and speakers who were "pro-woman" are discussed.⁴⁰ Reference is made to other women's service organizations and to other relief efforts. She states that Mennonites were hesitant to join with other religious or secular organizations; some local sewing circles had worked through the Red Cross at some point, but the establishment of the Mennonite Women's Missionary Society helped them to direct the work themselves "...instead of tangling ourselves with the Red Cross."⁴¹

Another comprehensive attempt at describing Mennonite women is found in Elaine Sommers Rich's book *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness* published in 1983. Its publication was sponsored by the Women's Missionary and Service Commission of the Mennonite Church. Its express purpose is "...to make Mennonite women more visible, particularly in North America — to tell a story of God's faithfulness to them and of their faithfulness sometimes, by God's grace, to him."⁴² She states that the work of women has differed from the work of men, and both have been integral to the growth of the church.⁴³ The hope is expressed that the time will come when a volume about women's work will no longer be needed, a time when "...interpretive history will show an awareness of both men and women as 'essential actors on life's stage,' who together have brought about those developments of life and society that we call history."⁴⁴

The work attempts an overview of women's contribution to the Mennonite Church. The sources are largely archival, and this book represents the effort to organize a vast array of information into a form which is accessible and enjoyable for Mennonite women to read. The greater part of the book looks at women according to the roles they have performed; thus there are chapters entitled "Wives," "Mothers" and "Aunts." There are various chapters on women's work outside the home, including the categories of work within the home congregation, in educational systems, and in overseas and home Missions. There is also a chapter dealing with the Women's Missionary Society, and some comments on women in the contemporary Mennonite world. Many of the chapters contain something Rich calls "Exhibits," which are excerpts of primary documents from various time periods illustrating specific roles which women were performing; other chapters include case studies of women who performed certain roles in an exemplary way. The book contains a number of lists of women, such as those women active in the deaconess movement⁴⁵ and as leaders of women's organizations.⁴⁶ Although the book is organized topically, there is still a strong biographical element

within each chapter. The presence of footnotes is an obvious invitation for further research into subjects which are only briefly mentioned.

The primary purpose of the book seems to be to present information about women; the identification of trends and making generalizations about Mennonite women are left for the reader. This may be inevitable, considering the early stages of this type of research, although surprisingly little use is made of Klingelsmith's article. The book excels in asking questions rather than answering them. For example, in the chapter on "Wives" Rich begins by asking "What have Mennonite marriages been like? Do Mennonite wives have anything in common?"⁴⁷ or "Has the teaching of 'headship' sometimes been misused to justify tyranny?"⁴⁸

A clue to Rich's methodology is found in one of the concluding chapters where she discusses the two different views of women which exist in the Mennonite church. The first view is that God created men and women as equal partners who possess equal sorts of gifts; the second view is that women are created for a limited and subordinate role. She observes that many women have experienced both ways of thinking. She then asks "Which interpretation dominates?" After surveying the biographies presented in her book she states that "...one can conclude that the church has more often than not been an arena of freedom for Mennonite women."⁴⁹ Thus a clue to understanding Rich's book is her optimism about the church's treatment of woman. She then goes on to say, however, that "In cases in which women could not or did not exercise their gifts, whether the fault of the church or themselves, they were not heard of at all by others, and are therefore not included here."⁵⁰ In other words, she admits that only part of the evidence is visible. This lack of available data does not disturb her enough to challenge her optimistic view.

Indeed, the tone of Rich's book is generally celebratory and seldom critical of the Mennonite church. The chapter entitled "In the Home Congregation," for example, is concluded as follows: "For Mennonite women the local congregation has often been an area of freedom through which they have found much joy in service for Christ."⁵¹ There is some reference to the suffering of women in the primary documents; for example, Clara Eby Steiner, the widow of a prominent Mennonite pastor, comments on the loss of her public role after her husband died:

To be called upon to give it all up before I had reached 40 and just as the children were becoming less helpless...was crucifying to say the least. I felt that if only I would not have had to give up my husband and the work I had learned to love at the same time I would not have been so utterly forsaken.⁵²

Rich accepts this injustice in a resigned way, which is in marked contrast to the activity of Clara Eby Steiner herself, who became active in the Women's Missionary Society after her husband's death. After her discussion of the takeover of the Women's Missionary Society, Rich comments, "Because of their genuine concern for the church, these women felt that the Christian

thing to do was to acquiesce graciously. This they did, but it hurt, as a cross always does."⁵³ The implication of this statement seems to be that God placed this cross on these women, and it was their duty to accept it.

The lack of contextualization of women's roles within the larger Mennonite church and North American society in general is more obvious in a topical study such as this than in the biographies examined earlier. The discussion of the Sunday School movement is one example. Rich does not comment on the controversy surrounding the introduction of Sunday Schools into the Mennonite church and the role women may have played in that controversy, nor is there any reference to the larger Sunday School movement outside the confines of the Mennonite Church. The chapter on education seems to contextualize its subject by stating that many people were illiterate, but Rich does not even seem aware of the issue of gender as a category in looking at access to education. Admittedly, there is some attempt at contextualization in that the introductory paragraph situates the Mennonites within the Radical Reformation, and the chapter on the Women's Missionary Society does refer in passing to the influence other denominations had on this organization.⁵⁴

Rich's book is a valuable resource for future historians in that it is rich in primary research; however, its presuppositions about the role of women in the Mennonite church give the book a slant which renders the suffering of women less visible, and it suffers from a lack of contextualization of the women surveyed.

A very different approach to Mennonite women's history is seen in an article by Frank H. Epp and Marlene Epp. Entitled "The Diverse Roles of Ontario Mennonite Women," the article appeared in a Canadian collection of women's history published in 1986. The article attempted not so much to describe the diversity of women's roles within the Ontario Mennonite Church, as to explain this diversity through five avenues of investigation. First, the Mennonite ideology of equality of believers is contrasted with the ascendant biblical literalism which dictated the parameters of women's involvement in the church. Second, the economic activity of women is noted in relation to the immigration and settlement patterns of Mennonites in rural communities. Third, the isolationist tendency of Mennonites from the society around them is used as a category for understanding the conservative view of women's roles in the Mennonite church. Fourth, women's participation in the church through Sunday Schools and women's organizations is recognized. Finally, the urbanization trend of Mennonites and the influence of the feminist movement on the church are discussed. While fairly brief, this article raises important questions concerning the context of Mennonite women's history, both in terms of the Mennonite community and the larger Canadian society. The appearance of an article about Mennonites within a larger collection of women's history was undoubtedly formative in determining the inclusion of a broad range of contexts.

Jim Juhnke discusses "The Role of Women in the Mennonite Transition from Traditionalism to Denominationalism" in his short 1986 article in *Mennonite Life*. Juhnke situates women's struggles within the context of larger movements within the Mennonite church, such as Sunday Schools and Mission Organizations. He states that the progressive trend in the Mennonite church was significantly influenced by American liberalism and that this had a large effect on the role of women in the church; "motherhood" and the "home" became imbued with meanings quite foreign to more traditional Mennonite usage of the terms. Juhnke goes on to discuss the traditional separation of Mennonites from farm organizations, labor unions, and other "worldly associations." The refusal of many conservative Mennonites to support women's suffrage, he proposes, was because they advocated separation of Mennonites from any type of political involvement.⁵⁵ Juhnke also briefly mentions the takeover of the Women's Missionary Society. He seems to be taking issue with Klingelsmith's position, and supporting Gingerich's view, when he suggests that the takeover and subsequent decrease of women's autonomy was only a side effect of a broad sweep of bureaucratic changes which were taking place in the Mennonite church at that time.

The article "Women in Canadian Mennonite History: Uncovering the 'Underside'" by Marlene Epp, which appeared in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* in 1987, differs from all previous articles discussed in that it begins with a methodological discussion of women's history which grounds the work that she is doing. She suggests that all historical writing should have not only an objective, academic purpose, but also a purpose of enlightening the present.⁵⁶ Epp highlights some specific obstacles which Mennonite women historians need to overcome, such as the definition of research which excludes women's lives. Historians need to avoid the "great man" approach to history and should not substitute a "great woman" approach. Epp also suggests that Mennonite women's history is impeded by the hesitancy of many Mennonite women to be associated with a feminist cause. Yet Epp advocates the placing of Mennonite women's history within the broader context of women's history, suggesting that "Mennonite women may have more of a common perspective with non-Mennonite women than with Mennonite men."⁵⁷ Methodologically this article by Epp is also interesting in that it looks at Canada as a significant factor in understanding Mennonite women's experience. The effect of World War II on Canadians is the context for a discussion of Mennonite women's role, as well as immigration statistics of Mennonite women from Europe to Canada after the war.⁵⁸

Two articles in the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* explore the experience of Mennonite women in Winnipeg in the first half of this century; both Marlene Epp and Frieda Esau Klippenstein have utilized first person accounts of women who were involved in the Mennonite Girls' Homes. Epp, in her article entitled "The Mennonite Girls' Homes of Winnipeg: A Home Away from Home" continues her investigation of Canadian Mennonite women using the method outlined in "The Underside of

History." She places the Mennonite Girls' homes within the larger Canadian context; she observes that reformers from many parts of Canadian society were developing resources to help single women in large cities.⁵⁹ Utilizing a variety of written and archival sources, as well as a series of oral history tapes, Epp attempts to articulate what this particular institution meant for women. She does this by looking at the economic factors which prompted its development, the way in which it operated, and the types of activities it performed for women. Epp also attempts to locate her topic within the wider scope of Mennonite history, suggesting that the women who were supported by the Girls Homes functioned as the first wave of the process towards Canadian Mennonite urbanization.

Frieda Esau Klippenstein, in her article entitled "‘Doing What We Could': Mennonite Domestic Servants in Winnipeg, 1920s to 1950s," also contextualizes the Girls' Homes within the social and economic milieu of Canada and of the Mennonites. Besides outlining the function of the Homes, the article also looks into the attitudes and values reflected in the women's taped interviews.⁶⁰

The final work which should be mentioned is a recent project undertaken by Martha Smith Good at the Toronto School of Theology entitled, "Women in Ministry in the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec: Uncovering Their Experiences." The task which Good has set for herself is to explore the discrepancies between women's experience of pastoral ministry and the official policy of Mennonite organizations about that ministry. In this project Good clearly defines her own views of ministry which call for an equal recognition of the gifts given to both men and women. The method Good uses to research this thesis is an intense series of interviews with six women who are working within the Mennonite church in Ontario. The thesis provides an in-depth look at the actual life of female pastors within a certain segment of the Mennonite church.

Surveying the topical works, it is apparent that only the surface has been scratched in the field of Mennonite women's history. Topical studies have tended to focus on institutions which have accessible archival records, although recent articles have moved into less easily accessible areas.⁶¹ Since Mennonite women's lives have been largely spent in the private sphere, archival material may be limited and oral history will need to be utilized in future research efforts.

Conclusion

The biographical and topical writings surveyed here show a number of methods of doing history. On one thing they are united: invariably the works surveyed recognized the importance of pursuing women's history in that it is a facet of history which has been ignored. Where the works differ is over the significance of women's history to the larger work of history. Some of the works surveyed, particularly the first two biographical works and to some ex-

tent Gingerich's article, seem to suggest that women's perspective is merely a missing piece in the puzzle which, once researched, can easily be added to complete the picture. Other works, particularly Klingelsmith's article and the work of Epp in "Uncovering the Underside," suggest that women's history will change our understanding of the whole of history. These writers claim that there needs to be a re-evaluation of Mennonite history from the perspective of women.

Regardless of how significant they see the changes which women's history will bring, all of the works surveyed here contributed to furthering the exploration of a variety of sources for women's history. These sources include private papers, archival collections, Mennonite periodicals and literature as well as oral history. The collecting and organizing which these researchers have done will prove invaluable to subsequent researchers of women's history.

Notes

¹In this paper the term "Mennonite" includes those from the Mennonite Church, the General Conference Mennonite Church, the Mennonite Brethren Church and the Brethren in Christ. The term "Mennonite church" will be a term used to refer to all of these types of Mennonites, while "Mennonite Church" refers more specifically to the conference of that name.

²Some of the writings considered in this paper were written for a scholarly audience and are found in academic journals, while other resources are found in more popular mediums. In my research I found that the distinction between academic and non-academic writings was generally not significant methodologically; both made use of the biographical and topical approaches with varying degrees of expertise.

³Mary Lou Cummings, ed., *Full Circle: Stories of Mennonite Women* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1978), p. iii.

⁴*Full Circle*, p. iii.

⁵*Full Circle*, p. v.

⁶One example of this is the attention paid to the importance of maintaining family ties, *Full Circle*, p. 78.

⁷An exception to this is found in the biography of Ann Allebach where her involvement in the woman's suffrage movement is recorded, *Full Circle*, p. 5.

⁸*Full Circle*, p. 84.

⁹*Full Circle*, p. v.

¹⁰The emphasis in *Full Circle* on the individual's accomplishments in isolation from an analysis of a larger social context may at times reflect the woman's actual perception of her own situation. Ella Bauman also became a doctor in the early part of this century; she is quoted as saying "I never really thought much about what a 'woman' should do. My main concern was to know what God wanted me to do, and I knew he would help me to do it." Undoubtedly the faith of the women chosen for this book inspired them to transcend social boundaries; however, that transcendence was not always miraculously procured, but was the result of a great deal of struggle on the part of women, independent of whether they perceived it as such or not. *Full Circle*, p. 28.

¹¹*Full Circle*, p. vi.

¹²Katie Funk Wiebe, ed., *Women Among the Brethren: Stories of Fifteen Mennonite Brethren and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Women* (Hillsboro, Kansas: Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1979), p. ix.

¹³*Women Among the Brethren*, p. viii.

¹⁴*Women Among the Brethren*, p. x.

¹⁵*Women Among the Brethren*, p. ix.

¹⁶Ruth Unrau, *Encircled: Stories of Mennonite Women* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1986), p. 1.

¹⁷*Encircled*, p. 6.

¹⁸The first two biographical volumes considered in this paper had short two page prefaces, but Unrau's volume is an exception to this in that it has a six-page preface which outlines the purpose of the book and makes general observations about its content. The inclusion of a preface greatly adds to the clarity of purpose for the book.

¹⁹*Encircled*, p. 53.

²⁰See, for example, *Encircled*, p. 282.

²¹*Encircled*, p. 2.

²²*Encircled*, p. 113.

²³*Encircled*, p. 5.

²⁴*Encircled*, p. 108.

²⁵*Encircled*, p. 43.

²⁶*Encircled*, p. 189.

²⁷*Encircled*, p. 74.

²⁸*Encircled*, p. 107.

²⁹*Encircled*, p. 179.

³⁰*Encircled*, p. 138.

³¹*Encircled*, p. 76.

³²*Encircled*, p. 118.

³³*Encircled*, p. 292.

³⁴Diane Burfield, "Theosophy and Feminism: Some Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Biography," pp. 27-56 in *Women's Religious Experience: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, edited by Pat Holm (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 27. See this article for a brief but insightful discussion of the dangers of biographies.

³⁵Which is comprised primarily of Mennonites of Swiss descent, among the earliest Mennonites to migrate to North America.

³⁶Melvin Gingerich, "The Mennonite Woman's Missionary Society: II," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 37:3 (July 1963), p. 228.

³⁷Gingerich, p. 233.

³⁸Sharon Klingelsmith, "Women In the Mennonite Church, 1900-1930," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 54:3 (July 1980), p. 172.

³⁹Klingelsmith, p. 187.

⁴⁰Klingelsmith, p. 176.

⁴¹Klingelsmith, p. 175.

⁴²Elaine Sommers Rich, *Mennonite Women: A Story of God's Faithfulness, 1683-1983* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1983), p. 18.

⁴³Rich, p. 9.

⁴⁴Rich, p. 10.

⁴⁵Rich, p. 101.

⁴⁶Rich, p. 211-216.

⁴⁷Rich, p. 40.

⁴⁸Rich, p. 43.

⁴⁹Rich, p. 233.

⁵⁰Rich, p. 233.

⁵¹Rich, p. 100.

⁵²Rich, p. 196.

⁵³Rich, p. 203.

⁵⁴Rich, p. 188-187.

⁵⁵Jim Juhnke, "The Role of Women In the Mennonite Transition from Traditionalism to Denominationalism," *Mennonite Life* (September 1986), p. 19.

⁵⁶Marlene Epp, "Women In Canadian Mennonite History: Uncovering the 'Underside,'" *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 5 (1987), p. 90.

⁵⁷Epp, "Uncovering," p. 90.

⁵⁸Epp, "Uncovering," p. 93.

⁵⁹Marlene Epp, "The Mennonite Girls' Homes of Winnipeg: A Home Away from Home," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 6 (1988), p. 100.

⁶⁰Frieda Esau Klippenstein, "'Doing What We Could': Mennonite Domestic Servants in Winnipeg, 1920s to 1950s," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Vol. 7, 1989, pp. 145-166.

⁶¹A doctoral thesis currently being written by Gloria Redekop at the University of Ottawa will undoubtedly contribute to this area. She is researching the women's associations of both the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Canadian Mennonite Brethren over a hundred year period.