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Moral Subjects: The Girls' Friendly Society, Empire, and Modern Girlhood in Canada, c.1920s

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Abstract

In 1875, Mary Townsend founded the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) to reinforce in young girls the qualities of self-control, purity, and their responsibility to become dutiful mothers and wives. By the 1920s, the Society had established itself across the British Empire and promoted imperial unity through emigration, social service, and missionary work. In white, self-governing dominions like Canada, the organization played a pivotal role in shaping young girls through social purity campaigns and educating members about their imperial responsibilities. In the face of rapid social change, the GFS represented a conservative counterattack to shifting definitions of morality, femininity, and womanhood during the interwar period. As an Anglican-affiliate, the organization was linked through a transimperial network of local diocesan branches and members. The spread of a social imperial ideology placed girlhood and motherhood at the centre of maintaining Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony. An examination of the Girls' Friendly Society in Canada reveals how nation-building and empire are informed by ideas of gender, race, age, sexuality, religion, and class.

Keywords:

Girls' Friendly Society – Canada – British Empire – feminism and imperialism – Modern Girl – 1920s – social purity – White Crusade – Anglican Church – female emigration – Empire Settlement – race and whiteness

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis examines the Girls' Friendly Society during the 1920s. The organization highlights the relationship between Canada and the British Empire, which was shaped by ideas about gender, race, age, sexuality, religion, and class.

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Introduction

In November of 1921, an article written for the Girls' Friendly Society's *Workers' Journal* – a monthly magazine produced in London, England and distributed to all branches worldwide – outlined the broad imperial objectives of the organization. In the article, E.C. Tait, an associate from the Southwark diocese in Britain, argued that the Girls' Friendly Society (GFS) acted like “bridge-builders” to promote unity and fellowship across the British Empire. Throughout the Empire, members were bound together by a sense of imperial duty to uphold and “share in the great work of the Society, the building up of the girlhood of the Empire into a noble womanhood.” As an Anglican organization, the keystone to the success of the GFS was the adherence by members to the group's “First Central Rule” – that all members were “borne of virtuous character.” For Tait, and other associates, the qualities of self-control and self-denial embodied by GFS members allowed them to “take part in the battle against impurity” and strengthen the pillars of friendship, sympathy, and cooperation which were vital to the spirit of the organization. The GFS functioned to unite girls of all ages, nationalities, ranks, and classes by the bond of prayer which “links them together like a golden chain.” In colonies and dominions like Canada, the young girls and women of the GFS were viewed as crucial to strengthening the foundation of the nation and Empire. Elaborating on the bridge-building metaphor, Tait declared that the over 1, 000 branches, and roughly 500, 000 members of the GFS, had stretched out their networks to become the “bridge that spans the world.”¹

¹ Library and Archives Canada (LAC), MG28-I349, Volume 132-133, Reel 1212, GFS *Workers Journal*, November 1921, 238. Various editions of the *Workers' Journal* state that the GFS had a membership over 500, 000 worldwide and more than 1, 000 branches/chapters across the Empire. It is hard to determine the accuracy of these numbers, due to insufficient records that could provide more concrete statistics.

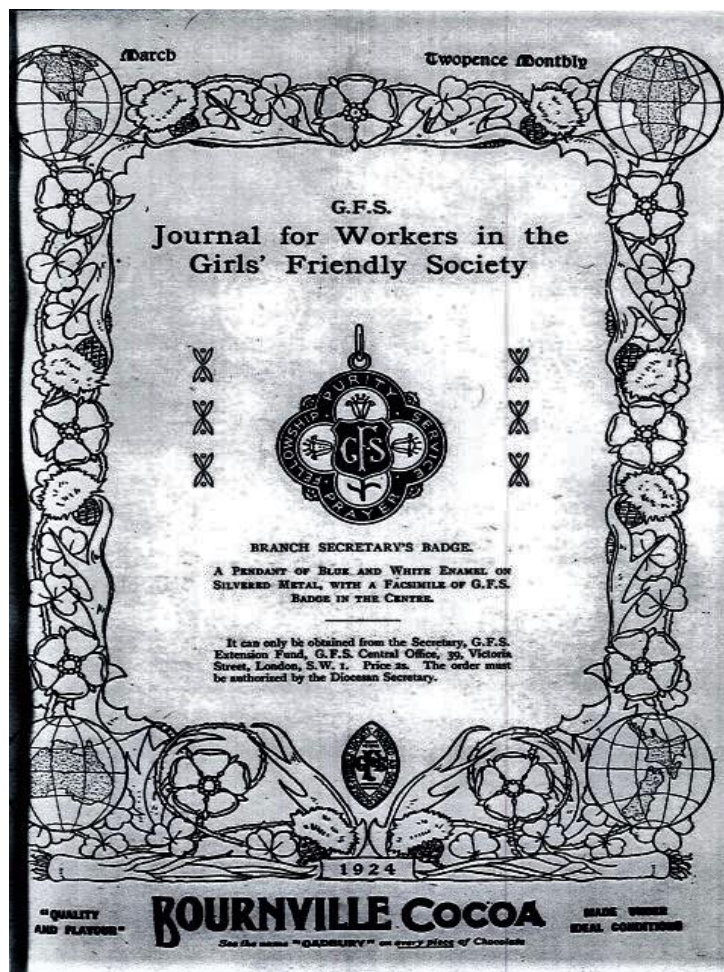


Figure 1. *Workers' Journal*, March 1924

The covers of the monthly *Workers' Journal* provided a striking visualization of how the Girls' Friendly Society viewed its role in society and within the Empire.² The magazine's contents and imagery routinely reinforced imperial connections and encouraged members to take a wider outlook. The GFS envisioned its organization operating beyond the metropole and to the overseas dominions. Outlined with roses, thistles, shamrocks, and leeks – the national emblems of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales – these symbols wove together an intricate pattern that connected four globes and illustrated the far reaches of British imperial control. Each corner depicted one of the four white, self-governing dominions. The GFS believed that Canada, South

² See, Figure 1. LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134 to 136, Reel 1213, *GFS Workers Journal*, March 1924.

Africa, Australia, and New Zealand were all linked by a common British heritage and sense of identity. In the middle of the magazine's cover was an image of the Branch Secretary's badge. A pendant of blue and white enamel on silvered metal with a large 'GFS' monogram, the badge placed the ideals of the organization as central values of imperial life and made a claim to women's contribution to the imperial mission. The four principles of fellowship, prayer, service, and purity were vital to the longevity and survival of the Empire. Other editions of the journal emphasized religious symbols, propaganda caravans, the opening of hostels in the colonies, and the upper-class women who led the organization such as Lady Cecilia Cunliffe and the Royal patroness, Princess Marie Louise. The use of imperial imagery was intended to reinforce the relationship between the women who promoted, supervised, and facilitated female emigration and the women who, it was hoped, would go forth and strengthen the unity of the British Empire.³

During the Imperial Conference of 1923 in London, representatives of the British and dominion governments defined the objectives of the imperial immigration policy as a "redistribution of the white population of the Empire in the best interests of the Empire as a whole."⁴ In the immediate aftermath of the Great War, there was a desire by British and Canadian officials to populate the Empire with white British men and women. By the early 1920s, the British and Canadian governments sought a solution to resolve lingering post-war issues such as labour shortages and increasing unemployment. The dominions offered new labour opportunities for Britain's unemployed workers and required more settlers for their ongoing efforts to populate and expand settlement in the Prairie West. The dominions and the British government agreed to provide greater assistance to British emigrants to encourage

³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134 to 136, Reel 1213, *GFS Workers Journal*, March-December 1924.

⁴ *Labour Gazette*, December 1926, 1198.

imperial migration.⁵ Following the conference, the British and dominion governments signed the Empire Settlement Act to promote emigration, especially to the white, self-governing dominions. Under the agreement, the dominions were required to provide financial assistance to British emigrants by offering reduced passage rates. The intention was to ease the economic burden for potential immigrants which allowed British workers to exploit the “great possibilities for overseas settlement.”⁶ Due to a post-war recession, the availability of British middle-class and well-educated ‘gentlewomen,’ impoverished by economic circumstances, created a surplus of labour. As more women rejected domestic service, British officials were concerned about the financial strain of high unemployment rates. Not only would female emigration alleviate economic pressures in Britain, but it would also help maintain Canada’s imperial connection.⁷ Ultimately, the potential of single British women to be wives and future mothers ensured that Canada was filled with the “right type” of female emigrant to maintain Canada’s sense of British identity.⁸

The high mortality rates caused by the Great War and the decades of colonial settlement created a gender imbalance in Britain and its settler colonies. Moreover, the demographic

⁵ Ian Drummond, *Imperial Economic Policy, 1917-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 133-34. See also, Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond, and John English, *Canada 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-2006*. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007).

⁶ *Labour Gazette*, December 1926, 1198.

⁷ A. James Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen: Genteel Poverty and Female Emigration, 1830-1914* (London: Croon Helm Ltd., 1979), 14. See also, Susan Jackel, *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), especially the introduction.

⁸ Sedef Arat-Koc, “From ‘Mothers of the Nation’ to Migrant Workers,” in *Not One of the Family: Foreign Domestic Workers in Canada*, edited by Abigail B. Bakan and Daiva Stasiulis, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 63. Similar arguments have been made in Barbara Roberts, “‘A Work of Empire’: Canadian Reformers and British Female Emigration,” in *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, edited by Linda Kealey (Toronto: Women’s Educational Press, 1979), 185-188; Suzanne Buckley, “British Female Emigration and Imperial Development: Experiments in Canada, 1885-1931,” *Hecate* (8) 1977: 26-40; Janice Gothard, “‘The healthy, wholesome British domestic girl’: single female emigration and the Empire Settlement Act, 1922-1930,” in *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, 72-95, edited by Stephen Constantine. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.).

realities of earlier immigration schemes challenged the desired ethnic composition of Canada. From 1896 to 1911, under the direction of Clifford Sifton, Canada encouraged farmers to establish homesteads across the Prairies. Despite efforts to reinforce a racial hierarchy, the immigration boom provided Canada with large numbers of male agricultural workers from ethnic groups such as the Ukrainians, Doukhobors, and Mennonites. These groups challenged the Anglo-Saxon dominance sought by those concerned with maintaining a culturally unified Empire.⁹ Particularly in western Canada, as the region became increasingly more diverse, various definitions of marriage and sexuality seemed to threaten the ideal Christian, heterosexual, monogamous household. Polygamy, common law partnerships, and unmarried men seemed to undermine the stability of Canada's colonization efforts.¹⁰ In response to the rapid immigration boom of the early nineteenth century, Canada and voluntary immigration groups enforced highly selective measures to control the country's population growth. The GFS sought to impose a model of family, lifetime marriage, and home life that was based on Christian and British values. As the head of the Society's Emigration Department, Ellen Joyce took a "wide imperial outlook" to emigration and social reform. Since the founding of the organization in 1875, Joyce was a central figure in the GFS and took an active interest in promoting female emigration across the Empire. She believed that British people were "entrusted with the evangelization of that vast part of the globe" and the "duty of fully populating the fringes of the huge Overseas Empire." British women were the "exponent of Purity" and the GFS "must focus its efforts to distribute its daughters under protection, where they can find their mate and help

⁹ Drummond, 134.

¹⁰ Sarah Carter, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation-building in Western Canada to 1915* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 4.

make homes, pure, happy, and Christian.”¹¹ The presence of white women on the frontiers strengthened the notion that Anglo-Protestant customs were vital for the reproduction of empire in the dominions.

Throughout the 1920s, Canada grappled with constructing a unique sense of national and cultural identity within the Empire. Decades of immigration had altered the ethnic composition of the burgeoning nation and new fears of American cultural influence through movies, music, and literature threatened to undermine British traditions that many believed were the foundation of the country. Historians have emphasized Canada’s development from colony to nation. By stressing a nationalist narrative, they often downplay the ongoing, concerted efforts of the British and Canadian governments as well as voluntary organizations to promote and maintain the political, social, and cultural hegemony of the British Empire during the 1920s. In the now-dated work, *The Sense of Power*, Carl Berger argues that since the 1880s imperialism and Canadian nationalism were interconnected ideas that shaped Canadian national identity. According to Berger, Canadians were “summoned to take up the imperial mission” and behave like British subjects by strengthening Anglo-Protestant traditions. Berger points out that groups like the Canada First Movement – a prominent group of Anglo-Canadian men – expressed a desire to maintain ties with the British Empire and pushed for greater imperial unity. Through economic co-operation and the hopes of strengthening imperial federation, Canadians obtained a more influential role within the Empire, while maintaining cultural and political ties to the metropole.¹²

¹¹ Mary Heath-Stubbs, *Friendship’s Highway: Being the History of the Girls’ Friendly Society, 1875-1925* (London: GFS Central Office, 1926), 76.

¹² Carl Berger, *Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 5.

There was a direct relationship between imperialism and social reform. In many ways, social reformers that advocated for greater imperial unity were guided by conservative presumptions about national and individual life. Imperial power depended on the health and stability of society overseas and at home. The foundation of national life was the promotion of an idealized conception of agriculture and family. Based on an outlook that viewed rapid urbanization and industrialization as problems, ‘social imperialists’ in Canada and Britain looked to create policies that reinforced Canada’s imperial character and British heritage. A fundamental aspect of imperialist thought was the belief that character, morality, and the construction of a healthy nation was shaped by following Christian and British traditions of self-sacrifice, self-control, and hard work.¹³

Berger’s analysis of imperialist thought, however, is limited to the intellectual inclinations of male members of the Canadian and British upper-classes. His focus on the Canada First Movement and its supporters ignores the significant contributions of women’s organizations, like the Girls’ Friendly Society, to the broadening of social imperialism. Since the 1990s, historians such as Adele Perry, Antoinette Burton, Anne McClintock, Lisa Chilton, Margaret Strobel, and Rita Kranidis have expanded the understanding of the relationship between gender, nation, and empire. Recent studies have emphasized how imperial discourse was intertwined with ideas of British culture, femininity, domesticity, colonial population growth, and civilization. White British women were viewed as ‘daughters of the empire’ and ‘mothers of the race.’ As such, their position as emigrant, as imperialist, as colonizer and as

¹³ Ibid, 260-262.

colonized illustrates how concepts of nation and empire revolved around and intersected with predominant ideas of gender, race, sexuality, class, and culture.¹⁴

Such studies also highlight the complexities of national identity, empire, and the wider imperial world. As Lisa Gaudet argues, the commitment to British imperialism in Canada is complicated by examining the role of female imperialist organizations. Like their male counterparts, women's organizations were committed to a broad imperial idea and engaged in the work of nation-building through the home, church, and community organizations. Elite women emphasized the need for female influence in education, public health, immigration, and moral reform work.¹⁵ In doing so, the Girls' Friendly Society helped expand the political and social influence of a certain class of women. Women were vital to the success of empire through their moral guidance in the home. Their reproductive labour was critical to secure future generations of imperial citizens. The household afforded some women an opportunity to assert female values within a patriarchal society by arguing that the nation and Empire benefitted from female influence in the public sphere. For many working-class women, however, the organization contributed to entrenching traditional, generally restrictive and inaccessible, gender hierarchies that stressed women's role as wives and mothers.

The Girls' Friendly Society illustrates the conservative foundations and complex gendered power dynamics of Canadian society during the 1920s. The organizations' principles

¹⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995); Rita Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s-1930s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Margaret Strobel, *European Women and the Second British Empire* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Lisa Gaudet, *The Empire is Woman's Sphere: Organized Female Imperialism in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, PhD dissertation, Carleton University (2001), 37-38.

often limited women's individual expression by prescribing a set of traditional conventions about an ideal womanhood. By highlighting their contributions to defining Canada's national identity, groups such as the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), the Girl Guides, and the Girls' Friendly Society become crucial to reinforcing an imperial ideology that emphasized women's reproductive labour and feminine virtues of thrift, service, and duty to preserve the British character of Canadian society.¹⁶

The history of the Girls' Friendly Society in Canada during the interwar period provides a unique perspective on the relationship between nation and empire. Not only does an analysis of the GFS challenge nationalist interpretations of Canada's past, but also provides insights into the objectives, and sometimes contradictory aims, of early women's organizations. Most studies of the GFS focus on its establishment and social work in Britain. These early works concentrate on the organizational structure and provide a quantitative analysis of the group. Historians have outlined the Society's growth and its social ideals that divided the GFS from other women's organizations.¹⁷ More recently, historians have provided a more comparative and transnational history that situate the views of the GFS in an imperial context. The focus, however, is on Britain, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia.¹⁸ These studies produce a clearer understanding of the GFS in Britain and its role in promoting an imperial agenda.

¹⁶ Ibid, 39-40.

¹⁷ Brian Harrison, "For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls' Friendly Society, 1874-1920," *Past & Present* 61 (1973): 107-138; Vivienne Richmond, "'It is not a society for human beings but for virgins': The Girls' Friendly Society Membership Eligibility Dispute, 1875-1936," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 20, no. 3 (2007): 304-327.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Dillenburg, "Girl Empire Builders: Girls' Domestic and Cultural Labor and Constructions of Girlhood," *The Journal of Historical Childhood and Youth* 12, no. 3 (2019): 393-412; Lisa Chilton, *Agents of Empire: British Female Migration to Canada and Australia, 1860s-1930s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Elizabeth Dillenburg, "'The Opportunity for Empire Building': The Girls' Friendly Society, Child Emigration, and Domestic Service in the Empire," in *International Migrations in the Victorian Era*, edited by Marie Ruiz, 456-479, (Boston: Brill, 2018).

The Society's efforts to promote imperialism through social service and cultural missionary work illustrates the ongoing influence of imperial thought in Canada. The recent work of imperial historians situates Canada's past within a continual process of renegotiation between the dominion and Britain, one dedicated to the preservation of British culture and the imperial mission. Phillip Buckner and others have critiqued the traditional colony-to-nation thesis that often downplays Canada's imperial past in favour of a nationalist narrative. They challenge the teleological assumption that the transition from colony to nation was linear and reinterpret Canada's place in the transatlantic British World.¹⁹ Unlike Berger's assessment that imperialism was a "casualty of the First World War," the interwar period witnessed a resurgence of imperial sentiment and rhetoric.²⁰

Few Canadian historians examine the contributions of the GFS in shaping ideas of nation and empire, especially during the interwar period.²¹ Through its involvement in emigration, social reform, and cultural missionary work, the GFS sought to instill models of lifelong monogamous heterosexual marriage and the ideal Christian family unit. In doing so, the Society reinforced a belief in the racial superiority of Canada's British Christian identity which was deemed essential to the nation-building process.²² John MacKenzie challenges historians who have made the "bald suggestion" that following the First World War, public opinion discounted

¹⁹ Phillip Buckner, "Introduction," in *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity*, eds. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 6-8. See also, *Empire, migration and identity in the British World*, eds. Kent Fedorowich and Andrew S. Thompson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

²⁰ Berger, 5.

²¹ The GFS has been included in a number of studies on empire and nation-building but are rarely the central focus. See, Lisa Gaudet, *The Empire is Woman's Sphere: Organized Female Imperialism in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, PhD dissertation, Carleton University (2001); Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Chilton, *Agents of Empire*; Kristine Alexander, *Guiding Modern Girls: Girlhood, Empire, and Internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017).

²² Carter, 8.

imperialism as a significant influence in society.²³ MacKenzie argues that interwar imperialists understood that empire had the power to regenerate the peripheries as well as the metropole. Imperial philosophy and propaganda generated a moral and racialized ideology that emphasized Britain's imperial mission. The British World was viewed as a union of the Anglo-Saxon race in Britain and the white dominions, linked by common institutions, language, culture, and traditions. This imperial unity was underpinned by a shared evangelical Protestantism and missionary impulse that the British Empire was ordained to bring the 'Kingdom of God' to 'inferior races' and had a duty to provide stability, justice, and social order to its colonies.²⁴

In magazines like the *Workers' Journal*, the Girls' Friendly Society produced and circulated ideas about marriage, courtship, and the home which highlighted a desire to reinforce traditional gender norms, racial hierarchies, and sexual relations. In the wake of social changes caused by urbanization, industrialization, and the ongoing efforts of Western colonization, the GFS emphasized purity, duty, and motherhood as the proper ideals of girlhood and womanhood. As an affiliate of the Anglican Church, the GFS believed that young, single, white women played an important role in the re-evangelization of the Empire. With less emphasis on Christian dogma, the Society believed that emigration, social service, and missionary work offered a practical approach to the spread of Anglo-Protestant values. Members of the GFS, as emigrants and workers, were integral in the push for social purity, imperial unity, and the redistribution of the British population throughout the various dominions. Close scrutiny of the GFS reveals an enduring commitment by Canadians to an imperial ideology and conservative moral principles that underpinned the social and cultural values of imperialist groups. Ultimately, the imperial

²³ John M. MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

work of the GFS illustrates the importance of categories of age, sexuality, gender, race, and religion in understanding the ongoing process of colonization, and the central role women played in maintaining Canada's British identity.

Historians also argue that the 1920s witnessed a decline in the social reform impulse of the 1880s and 1890s. The impetus of a social Christianity, which aimed to address problems caused by industrial capitalism, waned as religious institutions faced increasing apathy from clergy and church members. Historian David Marshall provides a cultural approach to understanding the role of the Protestant church in English Canada. Marshall contends that following the Great War, society witnessed an increase in secularization which replaced religious values and church control in favour of more scientific explanations. Churches dealing with civic welfare were supplanted by secular and state-funded institutions led by medical professionals and university-trained experts. The involvement of church institutions in education, social welfare, and reform was "superseded by concerns about good citizenship and the imposition of bureaucratic or state control."²⁵ Urban-industrial growth and the emergence of social science produced a new leadership of psychologists, doctors, and experts which gradually replaced a religious perspective in social reform. The new age of trained social scientists and a modern medical professionalism displaced the "old religiously based moralism" that underpinned Canadian social beliefs and values.²⁶

Such an analysis, however, ignores the contributions of philanthropic women's organizations such as the GFS that conflated ideas of good citizenship with a Christian-based morality. The growth of the Girls' Friendly Society during the 1920s illustrates the influence of

²⁵ David Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 7. See also, Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

²⁶ Cook, 5.

women's organizations with strong connections to the Anglican Church. Social service work within the church gave upper-class women more authority to insert their views about public welfare. The Society's campaigns for social purity during the 1920s, as well as its contribution to promoting female emigration, asserted that Christianity was central to the development of Canadian society and the survival of the British Empire.

Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau challenge the assertion that interwar Canada was marked by religious decline. According to Christie and Gauvreau, early interpretations have relied on evidence that provides an overly intellectualized and narrow definition of evangelical and spiritual experience. Instead, they argue that Protestant churches during the early twentieth century viewed social service work as a way to make religion more accessible to ordinary people and was the "greatest safeguard of Christianity."²⁷ During the 1920s, the Protestant churches worked to uphold their influence over social reform which was being challenged by the emergence of experts in the field of social science and psychology. Unlike other Protestant denominations, the Anglican Church was seen as the church of the British Empire and the "GFS seems to be in exactly the same position as the Church of England – always lagging a little behind progress."²⁸ The Anglican Church and the GFS were attached to conservative social norms about courtship, marriage, family, and domestic life. These ideas shaped its views about the future of women in society and pushed back against modern forces that led to the moral degeneration of society. The social imperialism of the organization was directed towards creating moral reform programs with the goal of improving social standards for future citizens of the Empire and the Anglo-Saxon race.

²⁷ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), xiii.

²⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, June 1921, 132.

In June of 1921, anonymous author 'A New Broom' argued in the *Workers' Journal* that the GFS "stands for the preservation of the ideals of a past generation...but also a set of conventions which are frequently inconsistent, are often not really essential to purity." The author highlighted how the GFS struggled to adapt to shifting cultural and social conventions following the First World War. Some younger members, like 'A New Broom,' saw the GFS as an overly conservative institution that was out of touch with the needs of young girls in an era of progressive change. Older GFS associates were accused by younger members of holding on to outmoded, Victorian ideas of dress, gender norms, and labour. For younger members, the GFS was clinging "blindly to past tradition." Members like 'A New Broom,' however, recognized that the "proper function of the GFS is conservative in character." In a time of modern changes, the GFS required an "intelligent and sympathetic discrimination amongst development of our age" to fulfill its conservative function.²⁹ As a women's organization, the Society played little to no part in the push for female suffrage during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Unlike the growing concern among liberal feminists and suffragists, the GFS never fully articulated a view about women's social and political situation. Marriage, motherhood, and reproduction were considered a dignified purpose, but not an issue of individual choice.³⁰

Despite changing attitudes towards women's role in society and their increasingly public presence, most GFS members continued to believe in the necessity of preserving conservative feminine ideals. Changes to economic circumstances and labour opportunities pulled more young girls away from the household and into large urban centres. With greater economic independence and social freedom, women emerged as a dominant cultural force through their engagement with consumerism as well as political and social reforms. The Society's commitment to its principles

²⁹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, June 1921, 133.

³⁰ Harrison, 120; Richmond, 305.

was a reaction to shifting perceptions of feminine character during the interwar period. The visible presence of young girls in urban environments and their engagement with a wide variety of commercial entertainments pushed groups like the GFS to reinforce the status quo that placed women as moral guardians of the home and society. Throughout the 1920s, the GFS took strides to adapt its message to attract young, single “modern” women and shape its ideals according to traditional gender conventions based on marriage, purity, and an emergent cult of domesticity.

The GFS demonstrated how modern progressive thinking and traditional conservative ideals merged in reaction to shifting definitions of modern girlhood. Modern ideas and realities did not simply replace traditional ways of thinking. The concern about the moral, spiritual, and physical well-being of white British women underscored how social Christianity empowered white middle- and upper-class women to shape public policy during the interwar years.³¹ Evangelism during this period gained traction as modern forces shifted the cultural paradigm. Enlisting the cultural prestige of the Anglican Church and articulating a maternal feminism, groups like the GFS expanded their sphere of influence through social reform.³² The GFS embodied a maternalist perspective that strengthened the links between social reform and the Anglican Church.³³ Steeped in ideas of parental supervision and the belief that the mother was a strong moral influence, the GFS reflected the idea that women possessed innate moral superiority over men which contributed to social well-being. The organization critiqued the claims of “more advanced feminists.” Rather than argue for suffrage and social equality, the GFS believed that “fine old traditions” of home and domestic life could be “fitly wedded to the new age.”³⁴ Often

³¹ Christie and Gauvreau, 77-78.

³² See, Sharon Cook, *“Through Sunshine and Shadow”*: *The Women’s Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995); Brian Heeney, *The Women’s Movement in the Church of England, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

³³ Christie and Gauvreau, 116.

³⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, May 1920, 68.

articulating a maternal, or social feminist perspective, the organization further entrenched the idea that the preservation of the home, the family, and social purity were central to reform efforts.³⁵ Like the principles of the GFS, public discourse surrounding modern youth was characterized by tensions between tradition and modernity. The apparent loosening of moral standards and waning of parental authority signified the disruptive qualities of modern progress. Youth embodied the structural changes wrought by modernizing forces as well as the prospects of the nation.³⁶

The Anglican roots of the Girls' Friendly Society demonstrate the importance of religion to ideas of nation, empire, and society. As a large imperial organization, the GFS was dedicated to instructing young women and girls in Christian values and beliefs. The GFS was a central organization to the expanding efforts of the Anglican Church and illustrates the significance of religious institutions across the Empire. Often seen as bastions of conservatism and traditional values, religion and religious institutions were important factors in the organization's views on colonial settlement and cultural imperialism in Canada.³⁷ With strong ties to Anglican clergy members in Canada and Britain, the GFS saw its organization as a "valuable handmaid to the Church" that exerted its influence over female members across the British Empire.³⁸

³⁵ John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Decades of Discord: Canada, 1922-1939* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 69. Much like the GFS, social feminism, a branch of maternal feminist thought, argues female values supplemented public life and gave women greater influence in a sexually segregated society, while maternal feminism argues that women's reproductive labour and moral superiority were an expression women's influence within the home. For an in-depth analysis on the differences between maternal and social feminism, see introduction to Monda Halpern, *And On That Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

³⁶ Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 12-13.

³⁷ Religion has often been marginalized or downplayed in studies of imperialism in Canada. See, *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, edited by Stephen Constantine, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Chilton, *Agents of Empire*; Buckner and Francis, *Canada and the British World*; Colin Coates, *Imperial Canada, 1867-1917* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1995); Alexander, *Guiding Modern Girls*.

³⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Vol. 134 to 136, Reel A 1213, GFS *Workers' Journal*, July 1922, 99.

The GFS emphasized service to community, home, and church which reinforced gendered structures that dominated their views about the proper development of young girls. Historian Ken Coates argues that despite a general belief in the separation between church and state, “the two arms of colonialism” worked closely as agents of social change and proponents of cultural imperialism.³⁹ The imperial Anglicanism of the GFS illustrates the power of the church as a cultural agent. Religious groups such as the GFS had access to social power and promoted the idea that the Empire was subject to moral governance. In doing so, the GFS provided ideological support to Britain’s ongoing imperial engagement.⁴⁰ As Hilary Carey suggests, emigration and imperialism encompassed a religious dimension that was actively promoted by church agencies like the GFS. For the Anglican Church and the GFS, imperial power was an ongoing process outside the boundaries of more overt forms of colonial administration. The Empire provided the opportunity to extend a transnational spiritual network and strengthen imperial loyalty.⁴¹

The Protestant Churches attempted to redefine its moral reform efforts in a wider context of transatlantic intellectualism and early twentieth-century interpretations of liberalism.⁴² Under a more socially active leadership, Protestant churches sought to incorporate reform organizations into the church-supported Social Service Council of Canada.⁴³ In 1920, the General Synod of the Anglican Church made the Canadian GFS an official member of the Committee for Social Service. As an agency of the Anglican Church, the GFS was able to extend its “sphere of

³⁹ Kenneth Coates, *Best Left as Indians: Native-White Relations in the Yukon Territory, 1840-1973* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991), 112.

⁴⁰ Hilary Carey, *God’s Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c. 1801-1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 5-6.

⁴² Thompson and Seager, 75; Christie and Gauvreau, xiii.

⁴³ Christie and Gauvreau, xiii.

usefulness” in “social and preventative work.”⁴⁴ Favouring social evangelism and popular engagement through social service work, the 1920s marked not only a resurgence of religious participation, but also an expansion of the Church into all aspects of social and cultural life.⁴⁵

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, evangelical thought was split between liberal and conservative camps. As conservative evangelical reformers, the GFS believed that Christian family units in which the mother exercised moral influence was central to its vision of social order.⁴⁶ The shifting cultural and social changes witnessed an increase in the visibility of white women’s bodies and sexuality which was amplified by mass consumerism and commercial entertainments. In response, the GFS sought to impose notions of morality and its own understandings of modern femininity. Proponents of social change had shifted the language from “reform” to “uplift” and targeted social structures of marriage, family, and gender divisions rather than explicitly about issues of suffrage, temperance, and labour reform. During an era of post-war uncertainty and a rising consumer culture, the GFS represented a “conservative counter-attack” as defenders of morality and the status quo.⁴⁷ Traditional values of life-long Christian marriage, domesticity, motherhood, and family dictated the Society’s approach to imperial girlhood which resonated with more conservative elements of society. Within the broader women’s movement, the GFS’ stance on morality was reflective of a broader conservative push during the interwar years that was steeped in traditional views on gender, class, race, nation, and empire.

⁴⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132-133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, September 1920, 167.

⁴⁵ Christie and Gauvreau, xii.

⁴⁶ Sharon Cook, “The Ontario Young Women’s Christian Temperance Union: A Study in Female Evangelicalism, 1874-1930,” in *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, eds. Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whitley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 301.

⁴⁷ Thompson and Seager, 75. See also, Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), especially Chapter 7.

Within the patriarchal hierarchies of the Anglican Church, women developed their own methods of expressing their faith and commitment to evangelizing their communities.⁴⁸ The dedication of the Girls' Friendly Society to the imperial mission provided a significant outlet for elite women to occupy new positions of social and political power. Despite being excluded from traditional positions of authority such as the clergy, GFS women engaged in a variety of church work. The Society's religious convictions underpinned its commitment to the social purity movement of the 1920s, fundraising for the construction of churches in the Canadian West, and missionary work to re-evangelize parts of the Empire. The organization linked their religious mission to the work of empire. As white, elite, Anglican women, their perceptions of missionary work on the Empire's peripheries were shaped by religion, class, gender, and race. Women's work as missionaries, teachers, nurses, and domestic workers maintained a sense of British identity and extended kinship networks in settler communities within Canada. Christian principles and evangelical work articulated the ideals of a common cultural sphere shared by Britain and English-speaking Canada. Emigrants sponsored by the GFS reinforced the Christian family unit in the dominions and helped populate the Empire with white Anglo-Protestant subjects.⁴⁹

By the late nineteenth century, women's organizations played a vital role in promoting the emigration of British women to the white settler societies. Julia Bush argues that the elite women who supported the expansion of the Empire were familiar with an imperial discourse that celebrated the work of male explorers, traders, soldiers, and settlers. By the twentieth century,

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whitley, "Putting Together the Puzzle of Canadian Women's Christian Work," in *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, eds. Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whitley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 7-9. See also, Brian Heeney, *The Women's Movement in the Church of England, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

⁴⁹ Myra Rutherdale, *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002), xxiii-xxiv.

however, the language of Empire reflected a shift in values.⁵⁰ Propaganda for the imperial mission made use of familial and maternal metaphors that provided new meaning for women who wished to contribute to the empire-building agenda. Upper- and middle-class women adopted the emergent vision of a familial British Empire to publicize and promote women's role in the imperial project. Groups such as the Primrose League (1883), the British Women's Emigration Association (1884), and the Victoria League (1901) advocated for women's practical work such as emigration and social welfare that complemented and built upon the achievements of their male counterparts. Central to their efforts was providing moral protection to single female settlers and workers, financing the construction of churches, supporting missionary work, and creating a broad network of overseas branches.⁵¹

The GFS was one of the earliest and most prominent women's organizations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that contributed to the growth of imperial sentiment. Unlike other organizations such as the Girl Guides that focused solely on building youth programs, the GFS developed as a hybrid organization that emphasized its role as both an imperial youth organization and emigration society. The Society's rise to prominence coincided with a concern for child welfare and emigration schemes. The GFS positioned itself as a youth organization that provided moral guidance from middle-class associates. Rather than strictly targeting and institutionalizing working-class orphans, the GFS believed it provided the structure and stability required to direct young girls into domestic service jobs. The placement of young girls into domestic service fulfilled the labour needs of the upper-class associates that ran the organization.

⁵⁰ Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000), 2.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3. Historians such as Julia Bush and Lisa Chilton have recognized that female imperial societies were connected to the broader gender-conscious social reform efforts of early feminists, however, many imperialist women were not vocal feminists or concerned with feminist agendas. As James Hammerton has shown, imperial female organizations like the GFS were often committed to a gendered separate spheres ideology. Chilton, 93.

Yet, despite its desire to compensate for a shortage of servants, the GFS believed that domestic service instilled qualities of self-control and discipline, essential to training future mothers.⁵²

The Society believed it could alleviate the social ills associated with urban poverty such as prostitution by preventing the moral corruption of young, mostly urban, working-class girls. Canada was viewed as a regenerative destination, freed from the social ills of urban poverty and an ideal location to strengthen the health of the Anglo-Saxon population. Removing young girls from the dangers of urban poverty to the seemingly more rejuvenating environment of the dominions would prevent the moral degeneration of the Empire as well as reinforce British traditions in white settler societies.⁵³ The organization's work with imperial emigration and youth programs sought to shape young girls into fulfilling certain roles in the colonial project. Motherhood and women's reproductive labour were vital to ensure colonial population growth, centred around the Anglo-Protestant household. Situated within the broader social purity and imperial movements, the GFS expanded its conservative vision through encouraging the movement of women beyond Britain and onto the peripheries.⁵⁴

The GFS in Canada and Britain illustrates how different elements of society reacted to social and cultural changes following the First World War. The Society's consistent membership numbers, its attempts to co-operate with other women's groups such as the Girl Guides and the Women's Auxiliary, and its strong relationship with the Anglican Church supported its vision for Canada and the Empire. A study of the GFS provides a more complex understanding of the relationship between gender, empire, and nation. The ideas that circulated between the GFS at

⁵² Elizabeth Dillenburg, *Constructing and Contesting "the Girlhood of Our Empire": Girls' Culture, Labor, and Mobility in Britain, South Africa, and New Zealand, c.1830-1930, PhD Dissertation*, University of Minnesota (2019), 85.

⁵³ Bacchi, 105.

⁵⁴ Dillenburg, *Constructing and Contesting "the Girlhood of Our Empire,"* 86.

the metropole and the dominions helped shape the class, gender, and racial thinking of the Canadian branches. Associates and members were encouraged to think imperially and take seriously their responsibilities as women of the Empire. The GFS sought to instruct and guide British women in their role as imperial citizens based on a sense of Christian duty and obligation to establish families and households. Modern imperial girlhood was at the centre of their efforts to assert British cultural hegemony in Canada. Moreover, the Society's connections to the Anglican Church and its British origins challenges assumptions about the transition of Canada from colony to nation. The development of Canada's national identity was a transimperial and fluid process that was impacted by external forces, especially British influences. The Anglican foundation of the GFS and commitment to an imperial ideology indicated an impetus to reinforce the white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant image of Canada's national character in the interwar period.⁵⁵

The organization's negotiation between modernity and conservatism in the 1920s underscores the dynamic processes of colonization and imperialism that were constantly being renewed and reinforced. A study of the GFS stresses the intimate connection between imperialism, emigration, nation, and social reform during the interwar period. Rita Kranidis notes that to represent the white dominions as "already colonized and appropriated spaces" ignores the active "infiltration and acculturation" of the colonization process.⁵⁶ The Society's rhetoric on purity, and its efforts to supervise and regulate young, often working-class women illustrated the various forms of power exerted over their lives. The anxieties about modern girlhood, changes in sexual expression, and the future of a Christian British Empire were brought to bear on the lives of young British women throughout Canada and the Empire. Groups such as

⁵⁵ Gaudet, 235.

⁵⁶ Rita Kranidis, "New Subjects, Familiar Grounds," in *Imperial Objects: Essays on Victorian Women's Emigration and the Unauthorized Imperial Experience*, ed. by Rita Kranidis (London: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 12-14.

the GFS demonstrate the ways in which women were actively involved in shaping imperial discourse, debates around Empire, and projects of imperial social reform.⁵⁷ The Society's literature, actions, and pageantry contributed to the ideological "production" of the British Empire.⁵⁸ Articles in the *GFS Workers' Journal*, official committee minutes, reports on empire education, church records, and newspapers all reveal how ideas of nation and empire were deeply embedded with concepts of gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and age.

The position of the Girls' Friendly Society in the Anglican Church, its views on motherhood and gender relations, and its contributions to emigration work and social purity campaigns expand our understanding of women's role in the process of nation-building and empire. In the 1920s, imperialism allowed for assertions of feminine agency and power in relation to men as well as women and colonial peoples. As imperial subjects, women occupied a complicated cultural position. The GFS illustrates the complex relationship between imperialism, feminism, and cultural missionary work during the 1920s. Jane Haggis has argued that the emphasis on a singular female subjectivity has fostered an inability to effectively address power relations within the context of empire and colonialism. The historical subject of 'woman' is fragmented by examining the subtleties of colonial social relations, which are mitigated by categories of race, class, and sexuality.⁵⁹ The upper-class women that ran the organization did not openly challenge the patriarchal structures that underpinned the imperial mission. As early imperial supporters, the Society often ignored the advocacy of other early feminists for civil rights and social equality. Rather, the GFS focused on extending a maternalist perspective that

⁵⁷ Clare Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1.

⁵⁸ Burton, *Burdens of History*, 7.

⁵⁹ Jane Haggis, "White women and colonialism: towards a non-recuperative history," in *Gender and Imperialism*, ed. by Clare Midgley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 48-49.

defined feminine virtues of motherhood, self-sacrifice, and service to others which supported its evangelical ideology of domesticity. By articulating a distinctive form of empire that outlined the appropriate roles of white women, the GFS blurred the lines between patriarchal authority and the possibilities that drew women to actively engage with the imperial social mission.⁶⁰

In many ways, women were both colonizer and colonized. White Anglo-Protestant women were viewed as agents of empire essential for the continuation of British cultural superiority in the colonies and dominions. Yet they operated within the gendered constraints that characterized the conservative response to changes in society. Many young emigrants were subjected to the impulses of elite women that hoped to reinforce their own claims to cultural and imperial authority. British women's position as national and imperial bodies placed single emigrants within the confines of dominant gender ideologies prescribed by elite men and women. The women that emigrated were subject to control and regulation based on their class status. While many exercised some power due to their ethnic and racial backgrounds, single female emigrants were commodified for their potential as wives and mothers. As a class and population, British women, as emigrant and emigrator, participated in the imperial project in a myriad of official and unofficial ways.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Midgley, *Feminism and Empire*, 121-122. For more on the debates about the connection between feminism and imperialism, see also, Julia Bush, *Edwardian Ladies and Imperial Power* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2000); Rita Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); The collection of articles in *Gender and Imperialism*, ed. by Clare Midgley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) tackle the subject in various locations and in different ways.

⁶¹ Kranidis, 12. Himani Bannerji reminds historians of the importance to continually investigate, interrogate, and critique "not only what is conventional to critique, namely narrations and constructions rooted in patriarchal colonialism and imperialism, but also to nationalisms—to the forms and ideologies in which resistances have been imagined and projected." See, Himani Bannerji, "Politics and the Writing of History," in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, eds Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 288.

Chapter 1: “Within the bounds of a protecting friendship”: Empire, Girlhood, and the Girls’ Friendly Society in Britain and Canada

In 1875, Mary Townsend founded the Girls’ Friendly Society in Britain to influence working-class girls and young women by providing social spaces and building a sense of community for members. Townsend was a well-known British philanthropist and the wife of Conservative member of British Parliament, Frederick Townsend. Prompted by Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Winchester and influential social reformer, the central aim of the GFS was to show the value of a “strong positive and conservative element” that was the basis for an orderly society.⁶² Townsend believed that there was a need for an organization that operated at the local parish level and extended empire-wide to protect young girls from moral temptation. Since the 1870s the growth of urban industrial centres in Britain and dominions like Canada led to increasing concerns over the adverse effects of city life. As more single, working-class women migrated into the city, social reformers worried that the lack of family influence over young girls led to immoral behaviour. Fears over problems created by industrial capitalism such as moral, racial, and social degeneration merged with the organization’s views on emigration as well as national and imperial life.⁶³

Townsend and the other founding members, such as the wife of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Catherine Tait, believed that the association of young working-class girls with other ‘respectable’ young girls provided the opportunity for training in religious principles and domestic duties, as well as protected them from the dangers of urban environments. The Society’s objective was to create a maternal relationship between upper-class Anglican

⁶² Mary Heath-Stubbs, *Friendship’s Highway: Being the History of the Girls’ Friendly Society, 1875-1925* (London: GFS Central Office, 1926), 4.

⁶³ Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 125.

‘associates’ and the working-class ‘member.’ Assuming a parental role over young members, GFS associates provided moral guidance and support to working-class girls.⁶⁴ The aim of the organization was to reinforce the structure offered in home life by functioning as a substitute family for young girls travelling alone in the cities as well as for those that chose to immigrate overseas. Through community organization and the “spirit of friendship,” the GFS championed a standard of purity that shaped the lives of young women and girls.⁶⁵

The Society’s membership categories reinforced class hierarchies that placed elite women as authority figures over working-class members. Associates were from the upper classes of society and occupied leadership roles in their local branches. Middle- and upper-class women enjoyed a considerable amount of local autonomy to run the branches according to the guidelines outlined by the Central Office of the GFS in London, England. Local associates hosted lectures, dances, and social gatherings that were designed to promote a sense of community among working-class girls and strengthen their relationship with upper-class associates. Additionally, associates were nominated for important positions on the Society’s central committee. Long-standing associates were considered for various roles such as imperial representative, department heads, and imperial correspondents. These positions were influential in shaping the direction of the Society and spreading its principles throughout the Empire. Working-class girls were categorized based on their age group either as ‘candidates’ – girls aged 12 and under – or ‘members’ – girls aged 12 and over.⁶⁶ When an associate or member married, she was required to give up their membership. The idea was that when a young girl married, she had successfully transitioned from girlhood to womanhood and no longer required the guidance of the

⁶⁴ Brian Harrison, “For Church, Queen and Family: The Girls’ Friendly Society, 1874-1920,” *Past & Present* 61 (1973), 109.

⁶⁵ Heath-Stubbs, 4.

⁶⁶ Dillenburg, “*the Girlhood of Our Empire*,” 88.

organization. As a result, GFS membership numbers fluctuated from year to year. In 1913, membership reached its peak with 39, 926 associates and 197, 493 members throughout the British Isles.⁶⁷

All members and associates were required to adhere to the central object that formed the basis of the Society's ideals about womanhood. The GFS believed that the organization was able "to unite for the Glory of God, in one fellowship of prayer and service, the girls and women of the Empire, to uphold Purity in thought, word, and deed." The mission statement of the Society was reinforced by central rules that facilitated the conduct of associates and members. Central Rule I stated: "All those who join the Society must have borne a virtuous character and must promise to uphold the object of the Society...those failing to bear this witness in life and conduct to forfeit their card." Central Rule II outlined the religious background that was required for membership. Associates were required to be communicants (a baptized and active member) of the Anglican Church, while members were allowed to join the organization from other Protestant denominations.⁶⁸

Associates were paired with working-class members to offer advice and companionship. Working-class women were often encouraged by their local associates to take on domestic service, nursing, and teaching professions. These types of occupations were promoted as the ideal forms of female waged labour. Decades of segmented labour markets that blocked women from male-dominated industries led to the feminization of certain occupations.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, the GFS was attractive to many working-class members because it offered numerous social benefits that included access to cheap housing, evening clubs, and education and training. By 1885, the

⁶⁷ Harrison, 109.

⁶⁸ The Society's object and Central Rules were found on the front page of every edition of the *Workers' Journal*.

⁶⁹ Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1988), 51.

GFS had established 821 branches and operated roughly 300 lodges and hostels across England.⁷⁰ These amenities were designed to place young, unsupervised girls under the constant surveillance and protection of the organization. Clubs, lodges, and hostels were central to the social work conducted by branch associates. They were created with the purpose of securing the preservation of purity among young working-class members.⁷¹ By organizing constructive recreation and providing moral guidance, GFS associates hoped to protect young women and girls from the temptation of urban industrial environments and direct them into appropriate employment situations.⁷² The GFS hosted candidate classes, dances, and tea parties to attract young girls “within the bounds of a protecting friendship while they [were] still young and susceptible to influences.”⁷³

In September 1919, Central Secretary of the GFS in Canada, Ethel Campbell, described the reasons for the Society’s formation and the necessity of its ongoing work. She wrote that the Society’s “raison d’etre [was] preventative work” and the “value of such work to the community and to the nation [was] beyond question.”⁷⁴ Despite claims of being able to take “fresh views,” the elite women of the GFS adhered to traditional and conservative understandings of femininity.⁷⁵ The GFS believed these ideals were essential to the success and continuation of the British Empire. Associates like Campbell argued that the “girls of to-day [were] the mothers of to-morrow.” The future of the nation and Empire rested in their ability to “attain the highest possible standard of womanly character.” Rather than wait for young women and girls to be tempted into prostitution or become morally corrupted by inappropriate sexual behaviour, the

⁷⁰ Harrison, 109-111.

⁷¹ Richmond, 308.

⁷² Marjorie Kohli, *The Golden Bridge: Young Immigrants to Canada, 1833-1939* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2003), 334-335.

⁷³ LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, The Girls’ Friendly Society by Miss Ethel Campbell, 6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷⁵ Heath-Stubbs, 12.

GFS aimed to inculcate members with ideals of “true womanhood.” Prevention, not rescue work, was the only way to ensure the spiritual, physical, social, and moral development of young girls. Unlike other women’s organizations that focused on rehabilitating so-called ‘fallen women,’ namely prostitutes, the Society believed that inspiring young girls to uphold traditional values of female character prevented a descent into moral corruption. According to Campbell, the GFS would “prefer to place a fence around the top of the cliff, rather than wait at the bottom with an ambulance.”⁷⁶

As part of the Society’s efforts to regulate the sexual activity of young women, Central Rule I imposed the greatest conditions on new members by stressing middle-class views about single women’s virginal status. Articulated in terms of a women’s “virtuous character,” the GFS believed that modesty and chastity were essential feminine qualities. The GFS argued that when a “girl forfeits her card because of the loss of virtue... a fall from purity should be a humiliation, a sorrow, and an occasion for prayer.” Drawing from a parable of St. Paul, the *Workers’ Journal* reminded young readers that “if one member of the body suffers, all the members suffer with it.”⁷⁷ The loss of her virginity, even without her consent, was viewed as lowering the standards of womanhood and other members of the organization. The GFS believed that a women’s unblemished character was a sign of devotion and self-sacrifice to her future husband.⁷⁸ This emphasis on virginity and virtue helped fix middle- and upper-class ideals about marital attraction that centred on a monogamous, loving, heterosexual household and benefitted some, mostly elite, women.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, The Girls’ Friendly Society by Miss Ethel Campbell, 7.

⁷⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, May 1922, 69.

⁷⁸ Richmond, 311.

⁷⁹ Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 127.

At times, the GFS was sympathetic to the plight of some young, often working-class, girls and targeted young men who were the cause of “all this disgrace and suffering.” It was critical of ‘fallen men’ who played a part in perpetuating the “black crime” of sexual assault and rape. The organization argued that men who behaved “offensively anti-Christian and aggressively pagan” retained their social status, and “holds his head high,” which served to reinforce the patriarchal structures of female sexual subordination.⁸⁰ Yet, despite recognizing the problematic issue of male sexual violence, the GFS emphasized women’s responsibility to remain chaste and uphold their feminine character. “If some girls, in spite of their privileges, yield to a semi-animal life,” one *Workers’ Journal* article stated, “there are many who are white—almost as white as the Angels of God.”⁸¹ White, middle-class feminists and reformers were concerned for the sexual exploitation of working-class women; however, groups like the GFS drew upon a powerful association of morality, gender, and citizenship with race, reproduction, and sexuality.⁸² These connections articulated a fixed, but unstable, sexual meaning that stressed procreation within the family unit.⁸³

In its articles and periodicals, issues about middle-class female respectability, motherhood, and the need for moral households overshadowed the organization’s concerns about male sexual violence. The GFS regularly emphasized the need for improving the “moral tone” of households, which had the power to shift “public opinion on such questions.”⁸⁴ Since women were the moral protectors of the home, the GFS shifted the responsibility for moral uplift onto mothers, who had the capacity to influence the actions and behaviour of young men and women.

⁸⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, May 1922, 69.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 69.

⁸² Dubinsky, 166-167.

⁸³ Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 6-7.

⁸⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, May 1922, 69.

In emphasizing women's moral nature and purity, the GFS reinforced outdated sexual politics that required the preservation of a double standard of sexual modesty and the instant condemnation of women who fell outside prescribed ideals of sexual behaviour.⁸⁵ Rather than redress sexual wrongs committed by privileged men, the GFS adhered to middle-class notions of female sexuality and a young woman's behaviour. The GFS' moral stance imposed a social code on working-class girls that stressed female dependence rather than the lived reality of the poor, labouring classes.⁸⁶

Beginning in early 1919, however, debate emerged about the viability of maintaining such a restrictive rule. The Society's leadership raised questions about the benefits of Central Rule I to the organization. The increasing independence and mobility of working-class girls in urban environments meant that less people were available to vouch for the sexual conduct of potential members. Past employers, for example, often lost contact with former female employees, especially those working domestic service jobs. Associates were worried that shame, fear of exposure, and access to the Society's benefits would encourage a young woman to lie about her sexual status. The Society was dependent on a girl's honesty about whether she upheld a "virtuous character" or not. Unless a potential member confessed to a sexual transgression or became pregnant, it was difficult for the GFS to ascertain a candidate's "true character" and reinforce the rule.⁸⁷ Some Central Council associates believed that strict adherence to such a rule jeopardized the function of the GFS in society and ultimately, would lead to a decline in membership numbers.

⁸⁵ Dubinsky, 127.

⁸⁶ Walkowitz, 133. As Vivienne Richmond notes, the GFS' relationship between social purity and feminism emphasizes the different facets of the early women's movement and illustrates how patriarchal structures were reinforced not only by men, but some women.

⁸⁷ Richmond, 309.

Central Rule I was scrutinized for the limitations it placed on the sexual status of potential members. Long time Central Council members such as “Mrs.Papillon” argued that the chastity of young girls could not be guaranteed and should be abandoned as a requirement for membership.⁸⁸ Papillon argued that investigating a young girls’ past behaviour was too difficult, distasteful, and violated their privacy. For members like Papillon, any mistake in admission would appear to undermine the objective of the Society. Moreover, some associates argued that the central rule did not align with ideas of Christian forgiveness and ignored the plight of a ‘fallen women.’ While the broader women’s movement was dedicated to removing patriarchal distinctions between respectable and ‘fallen women,’ Central Rule I operated to reinforce those categories.⁸⁹ The debate caused some GFS leaders to resign over the issue. Nonetheless, the organization continued to insist that the rule was vital to the preservation of purity and the social reform efforts of the Society. By deciding to impose the prerequisite of chastity, the GFS took a morality-based viewpoint and used social purity to police the sexual activity of young women and girls.⁹⁰

By the end of 1919, the GFS faced increasing criticism from clergymen and younger associates over Central Rule I. They argued that the rule presented purity as a negative trait rather than promote a positive approach to morality, which was the objective of the organization. The conservatism of the GFS led to a decline in membership by early 1920, which prompted the organization’s leadership to address the problem. The result was a change to the wording of Central Rule I that reinforced the Society’s commitment to its purity mission and aligned with its emphasis on preventative work. In January 1920, the *Workers’ Journal* printed an article that

⁸⁸ Harrison, 118.

⁸⁹ Richmond, 311.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 305.

outlined the changes. The adapted rule read: “all those who join the Society must have borne a virtuous character, and must promise to uphold the object of the Society by the witness of their lives.” Under Central Council president Gertrude Champion, the Society believed the new rule placed the ideals of Christian purity as a positive attribute to uphold. Rather than focus on a “fall from purity, as evidence by a girl giving birth to a child,” the new wording reflected a “positive” approach that emphasized the importance of purity as an ideal and “inspiration of life.” GFS branch leaders hoped the changes would bolster membership numbers by presenting an “ideal of perfect purity... instead of reproof, and maybe condemnation, of sin from outside.” As one GFS writer suggested, the Central Rule now “presses upon Associates and Members that they form a great Fellowship – workers together with God in a great crusade...that by united service they may go forward in the fight.”⁹¹ The GFS believed that with proper instruction and the right influence, young girls would be a cultural force to re-establish moral purity and regenerate modern industrial society.⁹²

The Society’s focus on social reconstruction shifted from questions about the problems of industrialism to a wider array of issues about child welfare, social purity, female immigration, juvenile delinquency, and issues of divorce and birth control. The debates around Central Rule I illustrated the ongoing work of the GFS in the social purity movement. The strict adherence to the ideals put forth by Central Rule I created class divisions based on age and gender. Traits such as modesty, chastity, and self-sacrifice were to act as modes of control over young working women’s lives. Regardless of a young members age and amid a multitude of voices about female sexuality, GFS associates were self-appointed moral guardians. The growing distance between working girls and parental, church, and state control challenged traditional assumptions about the

⁹¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, January 1920, 5.

⁹² Joan Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 31.

‘proper sphere’ of girlhood.⁹³ Utilizing a rhetoric that positioned associates as a maternal authority, the GFS believed in the “importance of the children to the nation.” By surrounding young women and girls with the “highest Christian influences,” they could be “trained up” to the “highest type of womanhood – purity of life, faithfulness, service for others and prayer.”⁹⁴

Through its efforts to promote social purity, the GFS attempted to identify common attributes among women during the interwar period. However, the organization’s rigid beliefs about femininity and womanly character established clear hierarchies between the upper-class reformers of the GFS and potential working-class members. The apparent challenges to the institution of marriage, evidenced in rising divorce rates and changes to sex education, threatened the Society’s conservative foundation. In particular, the scientific field of sexology reflected the changes in ideas about sex and sexuality. Sexologists promoted ideas of birth control and contraception that brought new understandings of female sexual desire. Although typically promoted within the confines of marriage, sexology seemed to create a new model of sexuality premised on a women’s active engagement with sexual intercourse for pleasure rather than reproduction.⁹⁵ People such as Havelock Ellis argued that fertility control led to the reduction of unwanted births and the achievement of more selective reproduction. Rather than promote “race suicide,” birth control could be used eugenically to encourage the reproduction of morally and racially fit British stock.⁹⁶ The GFS, however, further entrenched its ideals about chastity, purity, and feminine character.⁹⁷ The GFS believed that sexual activity outside the confines of marriage led to the moral decline of society. Women were to remain chaste and

⁹³ Tamara Myers, *Caught: Montreal’s Modern Girls and the Law, 1869-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 3-4.

⁹⁴ LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, The Girls’ Friendly Society by Miss Ethel Campbell, 14.

⁹⁵ Richmond, 316.

⁹⁶ Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 22.

⁹⁷ Richmond, 316-318.

exemplify a modest character rather than engage in frivolous sexual expression. While the organization supported the idea of selective reproduction, it viewed the preservation of purity as essential to the process of securing ‘proper British stock’ for the Empire.

The Girls’ Friendly Society was based on an ideology of what historian Barbara Roberts has called social imperialism. Moral reform and the survival of the British Empire were intimately connected ideas. The strength of the British Empire relied on the preservation of its Christian character in which young women and girls were a civilizing force to be safeguarded. Moreover, women’s reproductive capacity was vital for providing the Empire with a future generation of loyal British subjects. Roberts argues that the cornerstone of the nation was the family unit, one in which the wife and mother played a central role in building a moral Canadian nation. Through emigration, the GFS hoped to import ideals of Victorian middle-class domesticity to eliminate moral degeneration in Canadian cities.⁹⁸

The organization’s goal was to “band together a vast company of women to uphold the standard of purity,” in Britain, as well as their overseas possessions. Branches across the Empire adhered to a central object: “To unite for the glory of God, in fellowship of prayer and service, the girls and women of the Empire, to uphold purity in thought, word, and deed.”⁹⁹ Unlike other groups such as the Salvation Army or the Young Women’s Christian Association, the GFS believed that prevention rather than moral rescue work was crucial to maintaining ideals of girlhood and womanhood. The Society imposed a strict and selective process to ensure that

⁹⁸ Barbara Roberts, “‘A Work of Empire’: Canadian Reformers and British Female Emigration,” in *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s*, edited by Linda Kealey (Toronto: Women’s Educational Press, 1979), 185-188. See also, Janice Cavell, “The Imperial Race and the Immigration Sieve: The Canadian Debate on Assisted British Migration and Empire Settlement, 1900-1930,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 3 (2006): 345-367.

⁹⁹ LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, The Girls’ Friendly Society by Miss Ethel Campbell, 4.

Canada received virtuous and morally sound women of British origin.¹⁰⁰ Potential emigrants were vetted by local branch associates or clergymen. Letters of introduction outlined a member's work experience, marriage status, and date of membership. Efforts to provide working-class British women with better economic opportunities were secondary to the concerns of female reformers which rested in safeguarding the future of the British 'race' in Canada. For women's organizations like the GFS, feminist demands such as the right to vote and broadening labour opportunities were usually superseded by their imperial interests.¹⁰¹

By the 1880s, the GFS had spread its influence across the Empire to India, Ceylon, Australia, South Africa, and Canada. Under the patronage of Queen Victoria and supported by Anglican clergy, the organization boasted that "together in bonds of prayer and mutual helpfulness over 500, 000 women and girls, of all ages and of all ranks of society, throughout the civilized world" formed the largest women's organization.¹⁰² By the end of 1882, there were twenty five GFS branches organized across Canada, including Toronto, Montreal, Fredericton, London, and Ottawa. Parochial diocesan branches had formed to "preserve purity, not merely by the outward aids of help and protection, but by endeavouring to awaken in the minds of women... the inestimable value of purity." The GFS hoped to engage in the "good work of aiding their sister-women to live pure and useful lives."¹⁰³ By stressing emigration as a way to alleviate urban poverty, the GFS viewed imperial girlhood as essential to maintaining racial superiority in the colonies and providing for the future security of the Empire.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Roberts, "A Work of Empire," 188.

¹⁰¹ For a similar argument about Canadian female reformers, see Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred?*.

¹⁰² LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, The Girls' Friendly Society by Miss Ethel Campbell, 3.

¹⁰³ *Friendly Leaves*, June 1883, 138.

¹⁰⁴ Dillenburg, *Constructing and Contesting "the Girlhood of Our Empire,"* 85.

In 1884, the Canadian GFS signed a treaty with the parent society and was officially recognized as a national organization. While the Canadian GFS operated independently in social service and church work, it adhered “conscientiously to the same general principles and methods” established by the “GFS in the Motherland.”¹⁰⁵ The Canadian GFS adopted the central rules of the organization and worked to establish close ties with branches in England. The foundation and national consolidation in Canada formed the “last link in the chain” in the GFS’ imperial network.¹⁰⁶ The organization’s close affiliation with the parent society in Britain helped the growth of the GFS in Canada by facilitating emigration. By 1911, the Canadian GFS had expanded to thirty-nine branches, mostly in central Canada, and reported an increase in membership to 1,000 young girls.¹⁰⁷

The leadership of the Canadian GFS was indicative of the type of woman the Society attracted to its membership. Individuals with knowledge of the wider British world and with an Anglo-Protestant heritage were drawn to the Society and brought their experiences into its development. The movement of the organization’s top members throughout the Empire helped shape and entrench imperial sentiment in the upper echelons of British and Canadian society. In 1847, Bessy Victoria Thomas Kersteman (Wood) was born in Colombo, Ceylon where her father, William Kersteman, owned large coffee plantations. Her grandfathers were Lieutenant-Colonel Kersteman and Reverend Sir John Godfrey Thomas, Vicar of Bodiam in Sussex. She was the niece of Sir George Grey, the former governor of New Zealand, the Cape of Good Hope, and member of the Queen’s Privy Council. Raised and educated in England, Wood moved to Toronto and married Samuel George Wood, a well-known Toronto lawyer. After her marriage,

¹⁰⁵ LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, *The Girls’ Friendly Society* by Miss Ethel Campbell, 5.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰⁷ *The Globe and Mail*, 10 November 1911, 5.

she began her work in consolidating the Canadian GFS and was elected president of the Central Office in 1884, a position she held for twelve years.

According to the *Churchman* newspaper, Wood's "somewhat wide geographical experience and good ancestry have tended to produce and accentuate the wide sympathies and comprehensive views, the womanly tact and graceful bearing" that characterized her social service work.¹⁰⁸ The *Churchman* article reinforced the belief in the innate superiority of British culture throughout the imperial world. Woods' experience on the peripheries of empire strengthened her position as an imperial woman, which exemplified the national and imperial vision of the Girls' Friendly Society. Elite women like Bessy Wood, and other GFS leaders such as later president Adele Nordheimer, represented the class values of imperialist women. Influential upper-class women emphasized that domesticity and the moral character of British women were essential to imperial rule and the British civilizing mission.¹⁰⁹ It was because of their ethnic background and the belief that white women possessed civilizing qualities that the GFS played a crucial role in sustaining the Empire.

In her examination of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire, historian Katie Pickles argues that the middle- and upper-class women of patriotic and imperial organizations derived their membership and sense of loyalty from their support for Britain. In many cases, the sympathies of members and their bloodlines originated from a Loyalist tradition and heritage that was dedicated to maintaining Canada's imperial connections.¹¹⁰ Adele Nordheimer, for example, was a member of Toronto's high society and president of the Canadian GFS during the 1920s. Her father was a successful businessman in Toronto, her mother Edith Nordheimer was the first

¹⁰⁸ *The Churchman*, Vol. 71, June 9, 1885, 928.

¹⁰⁹ Bush, 5-6.

¹¹⁰ Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 22.

president of the IODE, and her maternal grandfather, D'arcy Boulton, was a member of the Family Compact in Upper Canada. Nordheimer's family heritage and her own class status exemplified the leadership of the Canadian GFS which ultimately shaped its views about emigration, women, and society. The Canadian GFS, along with other groups like the IODE, asserted its preference and support for British women to solve the problem of populating the dominion. The GFS was rooted in Christian morality and loosely connected with eugenicist ideas. The survival of British traditions relied on the emigration of appropriate British stock.¹¹¹

In Canada, groups like the IODE supported the imperial project and often deferred to British organizations such as the Girls' Friendly Society, and in doing so, reinforced cultural hierarchies within the Empire. The IODE, however, was viewed as distinctly Canadian and was hindered by its reverence for British institutions and culture.¹¹² The GFS positioned itself as a superior imperial organization, more readily attuned to matters of the Empire. Members of the GFS were encouraged to have a "world outlook" that was steeped in its understanding of the wider British world.¹¹³ Branches in Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, Ceylon, and the West Indies enabled the GFS to "pass [their] Members when they go Overseas into the society of friends and ready helpers." In August 1923, one GFS speaker noted that "the mere fact of these outposts must give to you a fresh outlook and a world vision."¹¹⁴ The GFS aimed to influence and educate young girls and women about employment and marriage opportunities overseas and within Canada. Emigration, then, was an important mechanism that allowed the GFS to cover

¹¹¹ Ibid, 63.

¹¹² Ibid, 17-18.

¹¹³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, GFS *Workers' Journal*, August 1923, 4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 4.

“the earth with their daughter branches” and brought “the loyalty of their work and service... into thousands of homes... in all parts of the world.”¹¹⁵

The imperial background, family heritage, and class status of women like Wood and Nordheimer highlighted how certain GFS members were influenced by their imperial connections which guided their views about women’s place within the Empire. Historian Adele Perry argues that examining the connections of a wider imperial world answers more complicated questions about ideas of marriage and intimacy, race, and the gendered history of empire.¹¹⁶ As the GFS spread throughout the Empire, the missionary and emigration experiences of its members helped shape an imperial ideology in dominions like Canada. At imperial conferences hosted by the GFS, members from South Africa, Ceylon, Australia, Canada, and the West Indies exchanged ideas about the needs of their specific colonial settings. As early as 1905, the GFS representative in Jamaica argued that it was near impossible to start the “GFS amongst the natives.” Despite the apparent need for GFS influence among “young respectable girls,” the lack of a significant “upper white class” hindered the successful organization of GFS branches.¹¹⁷

The GFS believed that civilization emanated outward from imperial metropolises to the peripheries such as Canada; however, within these frontier regions, imperial sentiment was often reconfigured and circulated back onto the metropole. The presence of white women on the peripheries contributed to an understanding that they were agents of the British civilizing mission and custodians of the race. The Society’s fixation on sexuality underpinned its preoccupation with the moral and physical protection of white women and, by extension, the

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 5.

¹¹⁶ Adele Perry, *Colonial Relations: The Douglas-Connolly Family and the Nineteenth-Century Imperial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 15-18.

¹¹⁷ LAC MG28-I349, Volume 88, Reel A-1188, Imperial Committee Meeting Minutes, 1905, 6-7.

white race.¹¹⁸ White female emigration and principles of domesticity were vital to establishing colonial representations of authority, reinforcing imperial power, and maintaining a social order based on British cultural values. The importation of British females to colonies such as Canada bolstered cultural norms of family, domesticity, and the racial and social hierarchy of the Empire.¹¹⁹

Young British women corresponded to categories of a racial hierarchy that placed the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ as morally, culturally, and socially superior to non-British immigrants and the so-called ‘child-like’ races.¹²⁰ GFS hostels, clubs, and lodges were ideal locations for ensuring compliance with a gender and racial hierarchy. The organization promoted policies of moral regulation and surveillance that emphasized self-control, Christian domesticity, and middle-class standards of femininity. Through moral guidance and education, white British girls were informed of their responsibility to the empire and the race. The survival of the Empire depended on ability of young girls to avoid falling to immoral behaviour, and direct their reproductive labour towards raising civilized and healthy children for the nation.¹²¹

The GFS drew on an imperial ideology of race that had long infantilized non-British peoples and incorporated the management of white youth into the imperial civilizing project. Since the early twentieth century, Britain’s imperial agenda expressed the dual interests of governing colonial subjects and advancing the civilizing narrative of the white race.¹²² Through

¹¹⁸ Ruth Roach Pierson, “Introduction.” in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, edited by Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 8-9.

¹¹⁹ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, “Between Metropole and Colony,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 17. See also, Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* (London: Routledge, 1995); *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities*, edited by Antoinette Burton (London: Routledge, 1999).

¹²⁰ Fiona Paisley, “Childhood and Race: Growing Up in the Empire,” in *Gender and Empire*, ed. by Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 242.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 244.

¹²² *Ibid*, 241.

an imperial discourse that stressed the values of white motherhood and missionary impulses, girlhood was vital to the reproduction of empire and British traditions in the dominions. Young white British women were encouraged to see themselves as crucial to an imperial imperative in places such as Canada.¹²³

From 1896 to 1911, rapid settlement expansion and increased immigration produced concerns about the racial composition of the dominion and the need to safeguard the white race. In an article for the *Winnipeg Tribune*, British sociologist Leo Chiozza Money argued that the “white races were in danger of being swallowed up” in the “vast dominions of the British Empire.” He stated that “white prestige cannot be maintained by arms alone.” According to Money, if the white race and the Empire hoped to survive, “there is only one real possession of territory...and that is to people it.”¹²⁴ The GFS responded to these racial concerns by emphasizing the need for more emigration and social control in Canada. The Society’s gendered views on emigration situated young British women as essential to strengthening the moral tone of colonial settlements and maintaining a desired racial composition in white settler dominions. Women’s reproductive capabilities placed greater emphasis on their desirability to populate the peripheries. As child-bearers, British women were responsible for ensuring appropriate colonial population growth and the survival of the white population throughout the Empire. Imperial organizations such as the Girls’ Friendly Society adhered to patriarchal principles that outlined gender prescriptions, cultural knowledge, and racial membership. Children, and in particular

¹²³ Ibid, 241. See also, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenged of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Chapter 13 for concerns about a “White Canada.”

¹²⁴ *The Winnipeg Tribune*, 30 October 1925, 2.

young girls, had to be instructed about their value to the race in which the family and domestic life were crucial to learning imperial duty and service.¹²⁵

In June of 1923, at an imperial conference in London, England, overseas representatives exchanged views that reinforced the importance of female emigration to white colonial societies. In places such as Canada and South Africa, the “presence of a child-race with more primitive moral standards” added to the “responsibility of work amongst girls.” According to Margaret Cropper, the Central Representative for South Africa, women and girls in the country districts suffered from loneliness. These girls benefitted from the sense of community and spiritual stimulus that the Society provided its members. Cropper argued that the GFS women were “up against the questions of the native races.” Moreover, a “high moral standard” was difficult to uphold in the peripheries because of the “mixture of races.” In teaching young girls “at home,” the GFS should emphasize the ideals of a pure, wholesome, and unselfish girlhood that was desirable for white settler communities. “A responsible girlhood,” Cropper stressed to other dominion representatives attending the imperial conference, “would realize something of the seriousness and sacredness of life... a pure girlhood would look forward to motherhood or spinsterhood with the conviction that the God-given powers of creating new life were a sacred trust that must not be tampered with or debased.”¹²⁶ By encouraging its members to travel overseas and engage in missionary work throughout Canada, the GFS took part in a broader imperial impetus that aimed to strengthen Canada’s white Protestant population and culture by disseminating British ideals of home, family, and morality. Women’s power rested in her ability

¹²⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 84.

¹²⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, August 1923, 6-7. For a brief assessment of the GFS in South Africa, see Cecillie Swaisland, *Servants and gentlewomen to the golden land: the emigration of single women from Britain to Southern Africa, 1820-1939* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1993).

to reproduce and contribute to the continuation of British stock in white dominions such as Canada.

In June 1923, at an empire-wide Anniversary Week conference in Britain, GFS associates and members were told to “think of your Society to-day as a world organization for girls awakening to the possibilities of life.” The “world call” of the organization was a “call to trained and disciplined service” in which the GFS was a “great training ground for character and intelligence.” On 30 June, at a GFS rally held at Albert Hall in Manchester, the Bishop of Sheffield and GFS President Lady Cecilia Cunliffe addressed members from across the Empire including Canada. Cunliffe told members that the responsibility of British women to spread the ideals of the Empire rested outside the borders of Britain. The “call to world service” for women operated in a “limited sphere.”¹²⁷ The organization believed that women’s influence in the world was premised on their maternal instincts and gendered assumptions that British women’s “gifts and powers” were restricted to a sphere of domesticity.¹²⁸

These ideas are summed up in a poem written for the GFS’ Anniversary Week celebrations: “The reason firm, the temperate will, Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill; A perfect woman, nobly planned, To warn, to comfort, and command.”¹²⁹ By sending British women to the “world outside,” equipped with GFS ideals, they “placed the home in the place of honour, and gave to those all-important things, the home, marriage, and the family, the place assigned to them by God.” A cult of domesticity underpinned the Society’s assumptions about women’s place within the broader imperial mission. Households under the direction of good British women were “the centre of order, the balm of distress, the mirror of purity.”¹³⁰ Members

¹²⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, August 1923, 5-6.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, 21.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, 21.

willing to emigrate to places like Canada needed to have education, training, and moral strength to establish good British homes. Yet the ‘perfect woman’ embraced ideals of purity, service, and her future as household manager. Women’s ‘call to world service’ was to impart Christian values in other parts of the Empire through marriage and the establishment of their own households.

By 1924, the Girls’ Friendly Society created a curriculum for young candidates and members that was designed to educate them about the empire and overseas opportunities. Associates were encouraged to utilize team games and pageants to illustrate the fellowship between the Society in Britain and in the “other Overseas Dominions and Sister Societies.” Pageants reinforced the bonds of empire by having young girls act out and embody the dominions. For example, the GFS used a play written by Una Norris, a member of the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. Entitled “The Flag of the Free: A Pageant of the Union Jack and the Flags of the Dominions,” the event was intended to give young girls an introduction to the history of the dominions. Taking on the voice of ‘Britannia’ and Canada, GFS members acted out the relationship between the mother country and the dominion. The member playing ‘Britannia’ stated: “See! Canada our first Dominion fair, carries her flag to greet her Motherland.” Canada responded: “We bring thee, Britannia, our Mother, the flag of Canada, with pride and joy, Unsullied have we kept thine Empire Flag.”¹³¹ The pageants hosted by the GFS reinforced the idea that Canada was a self-governing dominion but maintained a strong connection to the Empire. By creating “specialized educational work,” the GFS sought to generate “intercourse between individuals at home and individuals in the Dominions and Dependencies.”¹³²

¹³¹ LAC, MG28-1349, Volume 227, Reel A-1192, Empire Education Committee – Request for Lecture, 1924-1928, 14. See, Figure 2.

¹³² Ibid, 2.



THE DOMINIONS AND THEIR FLAG BEARERS,

Figure 2. "Dominions and their flag bearers." Taken from Una Norris, "The Flag of the Free"

The GFS used other methods to highlight the importance of British women in the dominions. Educational games provided young girls with an imperial education and knowledge about the conditions and expectations of the dominions. Young candidates were encouraged to understand the demands of overseas travel and situate themselves as future wives and mothers within the broader imperial landscape.¹³³ Team games promoted friendship among young members and were designed to illustrate the benefits of emigration by educating girls about life overseas. One game, for example, divided members into groups that represented the dominions. One member played the role of the girl "who has to go abroad overseas." Each dominion group was required to name its country and give an account of the "emblematic flower or leaf or flag" representative of its dominion. The girl travelling overseas was directed along a particular trajectory. From the outset, she was described as emigrating to her brother's farm in Canada,

¹³³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, *GFS Workers' Journal*, March 1924, 42-43

where she became engaged to an engineer who was moving to New Zealand for work. In the meantime, her younger sister was preparing to replace her on the farm in Canada, where she was taken to a GFS lodge upon arrival, and “married from there.”¹³⁴

The potential for marriage and motherhood were important factors in the Society’s emigration schemes. These types of educational games contributed to the assertion that women would provide the dominions with a high proportion of white British women which enabled the reproduction of Anglo-Protestant values through domestic life. Young British women were valued for their reproductive labour and viewed as cultural influences in the dominions. In white settler colonies, imperial girlhood was intimately connected to a maternal project that focused on raising and protecting the future generation of imperial citizens. Women’s duty to reproduce became increasingly intertwined with middle- and upper-class reformers’ preoccupation with imperial and national survival.

By the mid-1920s, the Canadian GFS had increased its membership to approximately 2,000 members across the country. Compared to the parent organization in Britain, Canadian associates found organizing a cohesive social reform and emigration policy difficult. Unlike Britain’s larger population and more clearly defined class structure, the Canadian GFS had fewer elite women to draw in their ranks and fill leadership roles.¹³⁵ Canada’s geography often impeded attempts to form new branches and keep in touch with associates and members. The large travelling distances, regional differences, and poor communication infrastructure hindered efforts to organize and extend the influence of the Canadian GFS into new regions. In places like Quebec, the Society’s Anglican roots and focus on British emigration limited its ability to gain support outside of Montreal’s Anglo population. Due to its weaker economy, the Maritimes were

¹³⁴ Ibid, 42-43.

¹³⁵ Gaudet, 225-227.

usually transition points that acted as ports of arrival for new emigrants travelling to more popular destinations such as Toronto and homesteads on the Prairies. Moreover, the Society competed for members with other, often less restrictive, women's organizations such as the IODE, YWCA, and the Anglican missionary society, the Women's Auxiliary. The IODE, for example, was seen as a distinctly Canadian patriotic organization that promoted similar ideals of imperial unity and the superiority of British culture, while the YWCA was a non-denominational organization that allowed for a wider membership in the Christian community.¹³⁶ The obstacles the GFS faced in Canada meant that the organization was strongest in the towns and cities of Ontario. Cities such as London, Hamilton, Niagara, and Toronto had the most numerous branches. By the 1920s, the Society took a greater interest in expanding the organization's influence to rural settlements, especially in the West.

Yet despite geographic limitations and competition from other groups, the GFS took a unique approach to social service and imperial work. Many GFS members were affiliated with other women's organizations in Britain and Canada. Bessy Woods (first president of the GFS) was elected as vice-president of the National Council of Women of Canada and Ellen Joyce (head of emigration) was the founder of the influential British Women's Emigration Association. As the "handmaid of the church," the GFS carried out its practical and spiritual work by hosting educational and instructive meetings for girls, providing financial aid for missions and church building across Canada, as well as supporting emigration schemes aimed at populating the country with British women of good Christian character. These connections gave GFS women significant authority within a larger imperial women's movement.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Pickles, 17.

¹³⁷ Gaudet, 228.

Nonetheless, the conservatism of the Society reinforced traditional gender conventions and racial attitudes. The organization promoted ideals of service and purity which situated women's responsibility within the household and the family. Emigration would provide dominions like Canada with morally-sound white women and provide the country with proper British stock. The social service and emigration work enabled the upper-class women to raise their social status by capitalizing on concerns over racial degeneration and the fight against immorality. The commitment to empire placed a premium on women's traditional duties. Women's reproductive labour, virtues of purity, and an obligation to domestic life were needed to guarantee the moral and physical health of future generations.

Chapter 2: “To make and keep white our public”: Moral Regulation, Youth, and the Modern Girl

On 17 February 1922 the *Vancouver Daily World* declared that “flapperitis [was] a menace to social purity.” The newspaper argued that “well-bred and educated girls” were taking the “initiative in cheek-to-cheek dancing, midnight automobile frolics, and other carryings on” rather than the personification of purity, modesty, and refinement.¹³⁸ Within an expanding consumer culture, women were encouraged to participate in a wide array of fashion and beauty products. Advertisements targeted women as new consumers of commodities that focused on leisure and fun. Due to greater economic independence and along with technological changes in entertainment, urban working-class girls turned to more sociable pastimes such as dance halls and penny theatres which took them away from family and home. On 14 July 1923, the *Vancouver Sun* published an article that outlined an address by the Bishop of Norwich at a festival service for the Girls’ Friendly Society at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, England. In his sermon, the Bishop condemned the “flashy flappers” that tried to “attract the attention of young men... bringing out all that is worst and unmanly.” The Bishop of Norwich admonished the flappers for their apparently promiscuous behaviour that seemed to urge young men to act on their desires. He suggested that it was also young girls “who could do more than anyone to help young men keep ‘straight’.”¹³⁹ Young working women’s engagement in new amusements and mass consumption led social commentators to lament the fact that many youths in general, and girls in particular, preferred “pleasure and autonomy to domesticity and deference.”¹⁴⁰ Outside

¹³⁸ *Vancouver Daily World*, February 17, 1922, 6.

¹³⁹ *The Vancouver Sun*, July 15, 1923, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Alexander, 4-6.

the scrutiny and control of parental supervision, modern girlhood and youth leisure time were viewed as potential threats to social stability, class and gender norms, and moral conduct.¹⁴¹

In 1926, Mary Heath-Stubbs' book, *Friendship's Highway*, celebrated the work of the Girls' Friendly Society. Heath-Stubbs was the official historian for the GFS and praised the organization for its dedication towards maintaining an ideal of girlhood and womanhood across the Empire. Written for the Society's Golden Jubilee, she argued that the GFS was "capable of renewing its youth like an eagle, of taking fresh views, of developing along new lines" to meet the needs of "modern girlhood."¹⁴² According to Heath-Stubbs, the modern girl "persists and is to be found everywhere."¹⁴³ The 'girl' was central to the aims of the Girls' Friendly Society and became more critical as the visible presence of women and the female body in advertising campaigns, department stores, and other social environments became increasingly apparent. As a modern visual culture intensified in the context of mass consumerism, the female body was increasingly sexualized. For the GFS, the image of the Modern Girl was a contentious subject that helped shape its views on girlhood, nation, and empire. Conflated with concerns over a flapper lifestyle, modern girlhood represented an ambiguous public apprehension about the declining influence of traditional sources of sociocultural reproduction represented by family, church, school, community, and workplace.¹⁴⁴ The moral regulations and purity campaigns implemented by the Girls' Friendly Society contributed to an impactful, but often contradictory, public discourse that infused ideas about age, race, class, and gender with issues of moral reform, social purity, and world responsibility.

¹⁴¹ Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 3-4.

¹⁴² Heath-Stubbs, 12.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 138-139.

By the 1920s Canadian cities had expanded in size and population which led to a massive shift in urban demographics and changes to industrial society. Advancements in technology facilitated the rise of mass consumerism and altered the way people consumed goods from cosmetics to commercial entertainment. The availability of mass-marketed products and emergent cultural shifts in music, movies, and clothing signified a transition into a new modern era. The notion of modernity represented not only a time period, but a shift in consciousness that signified a new faith in progress, science, and technology. Moreover, the act of being modern was shaped by rapid changes to social environments, spectacles, and images. The daily interactions of people with modernity brought about changes in the way they understood social relations and presented challenges to traditional constructs of gender, sexuality, class, and race.¹⁴⁵

Historian Jane Nicholas argues that the figure of the Modern Girl represents a complex position in the production of modern femininity.¹⁴⁶ Defined by mass-marketed fashion such as short skirts and cosmetics, new representations of modern girlhood were visual cues of challenges to established gender and class values.¹⁴⁷ As such, the image provided young working women with new opportunities for an independent sexual identity and sense of freedom. Often conflated with portrayals of 'flashy flappers,' the Modern Girl represented the fear over women's changing roles in relation to the community, the home, and the nation. Depictions of the Modern Girl became the embodiment of a young womanhood that was increasingly shaped by popular culture and commodity consumption.¹⁴⁸ The emergence of this image in the 1920s helps explain

¹⁴⁵ Jane Nicholas, *The Modern Girl: Feminine Modernities, the Body, and Commodities in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 12. See also, Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 6.

how and why the Girls' Friendly Society responded to social changes driven by an emergent modern, urban consumer culture. Within debates about modern consumer practises, social and gender norms, and cultural changes, girlhood embodied a threat to traditional social conventions and the problems of urban, industrialized societies. The GFS hoped to show the value in "keeping old things new" by directing its reform efforts to influence how young girls interacted with an expanding consumer society.¹⁴⁹ By emphasizing purity and pushing for appropriate leisure activities, the GFS hoped young girls recognized the significance of motherhood and domestic life to their communities and public welfare.

GFS leaders stressed that women needed a greater influence in social service work in the church and community. In doing so, they contributed to the production of prescriptive, and often contradictory, representations of the Modern Girl. In January 1920, GFS diocesan lodge Superintendent Leakey wrote that the "girl is our objective... she is a creature at once lovable and irritating, fascinating and repelling, enthusiastic and apathetic, responsive and indifferent, clinging and independent, affectionate and callous – in fact, a bundle of contradictions."¹⁵⁰ Some women had carved out public spaces, in particular for the white middle- and upper-classes, to challenge gender conventions in areas such as education, labour, and community service. The Modern Girl, however, was envisioned as a less mature and self-centred category of youth.¹⁵¹ As historian Carolyn Strange argues, it was not the work that single women were engaged in, but the perceived immoral social conditions of city life that prompted responses from those concerned about the moral consequences of interwar modernity.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Heath-Stubbs, 26.

¹⁵⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, January 1920, 2.

¹⁵¹ Nicholas, *The Modern Girl*, 10-11.

¹⁵² Strange, 4.

Modern girlhood represented the benefits and problems of interwar cultural transformations. For GFS associates like Leakey, young girls required “guidance on the present state of the world,” especially in matters of sexual health, prostitution, and divorce. Yet given proper instruction and education, young women and girls signified a chance to bring the Empire and nation into “accord with Christian morality.”¹⁵³ The “girl of to-day” was more self-reliant, showed greater independence, and had become a “more useful member of society.”¹⁵⁴ However, the apparently rebellious nature of modern girlhood displayed “less-attractive characteristics” in its desire to “throw off” parental control, their “exaggerated wish” for liberty, and an “aping of masculine ways.”¹⁵⁵ The image of the Modern Girl represented a departure from feminine ideals and seemed to violate the norms of women at a marriageable age. Young, single working girls were charged with cultural meaning about modern femininity and became indicative of the impact of modern society on the family and home.¹⁵⁶ “If the girl of to-day and the girl of the past could only be put into a bag and shaken up together,” one GFS member argued, “I think we should get something like a perfect young woman.”¹⁵⁷

By the early-twentieth century, Canadian and British youth spent an increasing amount of leisure time apart from their families. Young women increasingly embraced an ideology of mass consumption and expressed new cultural forms through their style, fashion, and involvement in new mixed-sex environments that left young men and women unsupervised.¹⁵⁸ Within these heterosocial spaces, women were able to challenge the dominant cultural construct of femininity, at least to an extent. Young women, it seemed, enjoyed greater social freedom in the streets, in

¹⁵³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, April 1920, 53.

¹⁵⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, June 1920, 84.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 84.

¹⁵⁶ *Strange*, 5.

¹⁵⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, June 1920, 84.

¹⁵⁸ Cynthia Commachio, “Dancing to Perdition: Adolescence and Leisure in Interwar English Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no.3 (1997), 2.

clubs, through organized entertainments and new commercial amusements such as cinemas and dancehalls. Women's active engagement with new mixed-sex spaces and commercial entertainments helped shape an emergent youth culture expressed through leisure activity. As such, modern leisure and modern adolescence became the focus of critiques that entwined youth development with larger issues of citizenship, national health, and modern progress.¹⁵⁹

The Girls' Friendly Society, meanwhile, attempted to reconfigure a Victorian ideology that envisioned an ideal womanhood premised on a moral and social sense of duty. In May 1920, GFS author H.J. Hensman argued in the *Workers' Journal* that womanhood was "at the cross roads." She contended that the "new age of womanhood should not be diverse, but rather the child grown to full stature, uplifted, glorified...not marred by squalid sex antagonism or egotistical self seeking." For Hensman and the GFS, "when dealing with the larger family... it would not conduce to civic welfare if we introduced what would practically be a neuter sex, namely, a class of women who abjured domestic life in favour of public activities."¹⁶⁰ Middle- and upper-class women of the GFS rejected ideas that young, working-class girls benefitted from greater independence and economic freedom. By directing young girls into proper social environments, the Society defined appropriate cultural forms of modern femininity and girlhood.¹⁶¹

The Girls' Friendly Society used its lodges and clubs to promote a social purity agenda and strengthen its efforts towards providing safe and supervised recreational activities. These activities formed a core aspect of the ideological and community work that was part of the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 2.

¹⁶⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, May 1920, 68-69.

¹⁶¹ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 6-7.

Society's efforts to provide religious and moral education to young girls.¹⁶² For example, the Society was connected with the Girl Guide movement to instill proper Christian values of purity, fellowship, prayer, and service that it believed formed the basis for imperial citizenship in young girls. Beginning in 1909, and formalized in 1910, the Girl Guide movement emerged at the turn of the century as one of the most influential youth organizations. The movement envisioned a new generation of young female citizens that followed a traditional set of behavioral norms within new social conditions. Recognizing the social gains modern women had achieved, proponents of Guide activities argued that women's responsibility as public citizens was based on their traditional maternal roles.¹⁶³ Much like the Girl Guides, the GFS hoped to instill in young girls the values of traditional femininity and locate girlhood as an important step towards motherhood. Using the rhetoric of imperial citizenship and moral purity, British and colonial girls were burdened with the responsibility of producing and maintaining the Christian character of the nation and empire. Imperialist organizations like the GFS sought to reaffirm women's traditional roles as mothers, caregivers, and household managers by emphasizing domestic life and responsible womanhood.¹⁶⁴

The organization worked closely with the Girl Guides to promote interconnected ideas of womanhood and imperial citizenship. On 16 June 1920, Lady Marguerite Trustram Eve, Director for the GFS Girl Guides, opened a conference in London, England with a speech that outlined the necessity of a joint effort between the Girl Guides and GFS branches. Born in Canada and the wife of a British aristocrat, Trustram Eve believed the ideals of the two organizations were fundamentally the same. She argued that the Great War caused the "gates of girlhood" to be

¹⁶² Alexander, 120.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 46.

¹⁶⁴ Strong-Boag, 28.

“opened to the running stream” of modern life and that the Society “must strengthen the banks.” Trustram Eve recognized that “girl-life” had changed due to the war. The “Guides with their up-to-date ways” appealed more readily to the Modern Girl and could be grafted on to the “deep roots and tradition” of the Girls’ Friendly Society. Working towards similar goals of instilling the young girls with ideas of temperance, self-control, discipline, and domestic training, the Guide companies organized by the GFS emphasized the spiritual and religious value of both organizations. The Girl Guide’s organizing principles formed a “practical religion; it is the skeleton, the framework” for the religious teaching of the Girls’ Friendly Society. As such, GFS Guide companies differed from other Girl Guide branches. The joint aims of the Society and Girl Guides was to teach modern girls to be a “true woman,” and to do so, the GFS believed, “religion is the rule.”¹⁶⁵

Unlike other Girl Guide companies, those organized by the GFS stressed that purity was critical in developing the mind, body, and spirit of modern girls. As one secretary of the GFS remarked, “the deeper side of a girl’s nature is recognized as needing encouragement and help to develop, so that she may be made the ‘perfect woman nobly planned,’ body, mind, spirit, strong and satisfied.”¹⁶⁶ The organization argued that “an active not merely a negative purity” was expressed through Guide principles and the Society’s central rules. The GFS maintained that “women are citizens, and girls hold the future in their hands.” By providing the modern girl with a religious foundation based on purity and true womanhood, the “roots of the tree deep down in the strength of God” would allow “the top branches...to grow in the fresh air of life to-day.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, August 1920, 146-147.

¹⁶⁶ *The Canadian Churchman*, “Beside the Home Fires,” December 30, 1920, 872.

¹⁶⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, August 1920, 146.

As part of an emerging antimodern rhetoric, the Girls' Friendly Society believed that the Girl Guides provided young women with clean and supervised recreation while emphasizing women's role as imperial subjects.¹⁶⁸ Urban growth was increasingly connected to ideas of physical and moral degeneration. Medical experts and social reformers argued that urban environments were responsible for the growth of disease, crime, and vice, which led to a decline in public and national health.¹⁶⁹ Girl Guide activities pulled many young working-class girls away from urban amusements associated with the apparent social ills, and that hampered the proper training of young girls. The project of building a healthy and moral nation was intimately connected to ideals of "character." The ambiguous definition of character was seen as the foundation of social order and crucial to maintaining gender and class formations.¹⁷⁰

On 30 December 1920, one GFS Guide company leader wrote in the *Canadian Churchman* newspaper that "woman was primarily a spiritual being, the strength of whose soul-life rests on being in touch with God through prayer, with others in a fellowship of service." The promotion of a spiritual and religious life was central to notions of proper womanly character, which "gives depth and power to the splendid guide training."¹⁷¹ As class distinctions became increasingly visible in urban spaces, youth organizations began to advertise their programs towards working-class girls. The disciplined structure of Girl Guide programming promoted by the Girls' Friendly Society was designed to reinforce the benefits of cleanliness and order as a standard for modern, civilized mothers and domestic managers. Young girls learned to keep a

¹⁶⁸ For arguments about antimodernism in Canada, see Alexander, *Guiding Modern Girls*; Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queens' University Press, 2009); Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

¹⁶⁹ Valverde, 134.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 104.

¹⁷¹ *The Canadian Churchman*, "Beside the Home Fires," December 30, 1920, pg. 872.

tidy camp and, by extension, a clean home which created a healthier society and a stronger nation.¹⁷²

The Girl Guide movement and the Society's social purity campaigns focused on the young women and girls of the Empire. Both organizations hoped to impart social conventions that were informed by traditional assumptions about class, gender, and race. The GFS worked with the Girl Guides to appear as though the organization could take a modern approach to prepare its members for the transition from girlhood to the responsibilities of womanhood. However, much like the Girl Guides, the GFS adhered to gendered conventions that were often limiting for young girls. The Society's *Worker's Journal* and conference minutes emphasized that the future for young women was to become mothers and household managers. Supported by a rhetoric that combined imperialism, national degeneration, and racial superiority, modern girlhood was critiqued and celebrated. While young girls were seemingly preoccupied with pleasure-seeking activities, the GFS believed that with proper guidance, young girls represented the future of the nation and empire. Young members were reminded of the GFS motto: "Bear Ye Another One's Burdens." The Society's motto was intended to reinforce in members that the "joy of life lies in doing service for others."¹⁷³ In the context of empire, the future domestic and maternal contribution of young girls was critical to the Empire's "moral pre-eminence."¹⁷⁴

According to the GFS, morally-sound white women of British descent had an imperial responsibility for civilizing and raising the moral tone of the colonies and dominions.¹⁷⁵ The organization emphasized the preservation of purity as the key to restoring Victorian ideals of

¹⁷² Valverde, 123.

¹⁷³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, April 1920, 59.

¹⁷⁴ Judith Rowbotham, *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 196. See also, Cynthia Comacchio, *Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

¹⁷⁵ Michelle J. Smith, *Empire in British Girls' Literature and Culture: Imperial Girls, 1880-1915* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

womanhood, saving the family unit, and restoring the morality of society. According to the Salisbury diocesan president, “morality [was] in jeopardy.” The president’s report lamented the rising cases in divorce courts, lower marriage rates, and the “very prevalent tone of opinion” that expressed a “condonation of immorality.”¹⁷⁶ Young women and girls were actively shaping a new discourse about female sexuality, one based on their engagement with popular culture and attempts to assert their independence. These developments appeared to undermine the structure of the family unit and, for the GFS, emphasized the moral degeneration caused by modern progress. Moreover, the organization stressed that changing public opinion was directly related to the increasing public presence of women in society. Unlike other women’s groups focused on rescue work, the GFS urged preventative work as a more important and effective strategy for ensuring the proper development of young girls.¹⁷⁷

The reaction of the GFS to modern girlhood demonstrated a heightened awareness of female sexual expression. The organization’s views on purity and moral behaviour were mobilized to maintain the status quo on appropriate feminine behaviour by targeting women’s bodies. In 1920, a Christmas address delivered by the president of the Southwark diocesan branch remarked that the “great need for a campaign against impurity” testified to the “devastating tide of immorality” among “women and girls of the present day.” The visibility of the female body, rising divorce rates, and a changing public opinion that “applauds the birth of a child under any circumstances,” underlined the Society’s demands for moral regulation of women’s sexuality. Unlike representations of the Modern Girl that appeared to demonstrate a

¹⁷⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, May 1920, 69.

¹⁷⁷ Valverde, 17. See also, Sharon Cook, ““Do not... do anything that you cannot unblushingly tell your mother””: Gender and Social Purity in Canada,” *Social History* 30, no. 60 (1997): 215-238; David Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973); Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

free and liberated female body, the Society imposed values that restricted women's ability to dictate their sense of femininity and sexual expression. The evangelical rhetoric of the organization took a conservative stance by implying that women were not in control of their own bodies. Associates such as the Southwark president stressed to young members that their "bodies belong to God" and that "misuse, neglect, or destruction of the body [was] injuring God's property."¹⁷⁸

The Society's attempts to regulate the leisure time of young girls were crucial to efforts to reassert the authority of long-standing social institutions. Traditional places of moral education, such as the church and the family, were being challenged by new, alternative forms of leisure activity such as cinemas, penny theatres, and dancehalls. At the turn of the century, moral and social reform movements in Canada and Britain redefined ideals of purity. Women's groups such as the YWCA and the GFS took an active interest in the protection and supervision of single working women living in or travelling to urban spaces. Working on a voluntary basis, these organizations believed that women outside the protection of the family influence were unprepared for the temptations of urban living. The social purity movement operated as an unofficial network of organizations that aimed to uplift the moral tone of society. Led by church people, educators, doctors, and social workers, largely drawn from the upper-classes, a loose coalition of men and women targeted working-class communities to provide an impetus for the moral regeneration of society, the family, and individuals. The GFS argued that it had a social responsibility to control urban environments to avoid the moral corruption of young girls. The Society stressed that the operation of its clubs, hostels, and lodges functioned as a surrogate parent to lonely girls in large cities such as Toronto.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ LAC MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, December 1920, 212.

¹⁷⁹ Pivar, 178.

By February 1920, the organized Protestant churches such as the Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian denominations launched the “Forward Movement” to reinvigorate church intervention in the community. Church leaders hoped the movement would remind the public that the church was still the “most powerful and beneficent agency for promoting the cause of morality and religion.”¹⁸⁰ Protestant Churches wanted to generate enthusiasm for church work and increase membership numbers that were in decline since the end of the Great War. In Britain and Canada, a major feature of the Forward Movement campaign was to express an urgent need to organize church members at home and abroad, as well as generate a passion for social service.¹⁸¹ The GFS played a significant role in the Anglican Church’s Forward Movement efforts. The organization believed that the Anglican Church had done more to “enrich and strengthen mankind” and was an “inspiring force that makes life progressive.”¹⁸²

The socially-conservative nature of the Forward Movement created new authority positions for upper-class women in the Anglican Church. An emphasis on world responsibility and social reform was mixed with more traditional tenets of the Anglican Church. Conservative organizations like the GFS were increasingly concerned with matters of class, race, and nationalism.¹⁸³ The Society argued that women were destined to play a prominent role in the future of the world. On 23 June 1922, at a GFS service held at Holy Trinity Church in Toronto, Reverend R.L Sherman told members that “young women... in the world today more than ever before... must either strengthen the ideals of civilization or lower them.”¹⁸⁴ The renewed impetus of social evangelism within the Anglican Church provided the organization an opportunity to

¹⁸⁰ *The Province*, February 7, 1920, 20.

¹⁸¹ Allen, 138.

¹⁸² *The Province*, February 7, 1920, 20.

¹⁸³ Allen, 139.

¹⁸⁴ *The Globe and Mail*, 23 June 1922, 18.

exert its influence. The proper education of youth, in particular young women, was necessary for the future of British civilization. The GFS promoted social purity campaigns as a way that “women can exercise their special gifts for the benefit” of national and imperial health.¹⁸⁵ These campaigns, however, were marked by class distinctions. While upper-class women were required to guide young members, the burden of maintaining white Anglo-Protestant ideals shifted onto young, working-class women.

The Anglican Church, like other Protestant denominations, was increasingly anxious over the changes in modern society. In September 1920, Anglican Bishop of Ottawa Charles Roper, argued that the urban centres of Montreal, Winnipeg, and Toronto faced “new problems brought about by the new psychology that the war produced.”¹⁸⁶ Unless social service organizations like the GFS took action, shifting cultural norms and social structures would undermine Christian civilization.

In a speech at the GFS Imperial Conference, Bishop Roper noted that the Anglican Church in Canada was a “highly-organized self-governed Church” that presided over local and provincial diocese. In the same month, the GFS in Canada was officially incorporated into the Council for Social Service under the General Synod of the Anglican Church, which controlled and regulated the social reform efforts of affiliated organizations. The co-ordination and centralization of power in the Anglican Church provided a sense of unity in missionary and social service work in a “land of tremendous differences.” In dominions like Canada, decades of immigration had created a more diverse and less homogenous population. The GFS and Roper believed that the Anglican Church provided social stability and was a strong reminder of Canada’s British origins. Roper addressed issues of urban reform, class and gender division, and

¹⁸⁵ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, May 1920, 68-69.

¹⁸⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, September 1920, 165.

immigration that were at the forefront of church social service work. According to Roper, the GFS was a “great humanising agency” that was doing “great humanising work in isolated places, and amongst lonely settlers, in developing the spirit of friendship, and breaking down the social barriers” that made women’s life difficult. In places such as Ottawa and Toronto, the GFS took an active role in organizing a force of “women street police” to help supervise and protect young girls. In rural communities, where women were “surrounded by peoples of foreign tongues, chiefly from Central Europe,” the GFS provided English-speaking women with a sense of familiarity and met the “needs of the girls of the Empire” by hosting teas, dances, and other social gatherings at its lodges and clubs.¹⁸⁷

In April 1920, *Society’s Workers’ Journal* published an article by Captain T.F. Watson, a prominent supporter of the organization and member of the National Society of Conservative Agents in Britain. He argued that “the measure in which all that is highest and best in our national life is reflected by those who scatter everywhere...depends largely upon women.” According to Watson, the “thousands of young women in all parts of the Empire, with the same high ideals, based on simple spiritual and wholesome human understanding, can raise the whole tone of moral and social life.” Watson feared the influence that rapid international travel and expanding commercial interests were having on the character and ideals of young men travelling abroad. In response to Captain Watson’s article, a ‘GFS Associate of fifteen years’ wrote that the GFS was a “society which claims to stand for Purity” and “cannot allow its Members to remain in ignorance.”¹⁸⁸ Associates were necessary to educate young members about the moral pitfalls and ‘social evils’ that included venereal disease, prostitution, and divorce. Anxiety about the health of the population and declining birth rates in English Canada led to greater need for

¹⁸⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, September 1920, 165-166.

¹⁸⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, April 1920, 53.

education about external threats to the Anglo-Saxon race. Eugenically, and in terms of national health, the GFS believed venereal disease and prostitution led to the ‘pollution of the race’ and undermined social reform objectives.¹⁸⁹

Through “clean knowledge,” the GFS could “keep girls from evil” and from “questionably obtained” knowledge about the world around them. For the GFS, the “ideals of wedded motherhood and wifedom must radiate.” The ability of British women to fulfill their obligation to create moral households and raise future generations of imperial citizens reflected “the ideals and standards worthy of our Church and Empire.” Not only would a proper moral education bring the girlhood of the Empire in accord with the Society’s views about Christian morality, but by offering a guiding hand through “pleasant friendship,” young girls would realize their direct and indirect influence over civic welfare.¹⁹⁰ British women had a moral influence over young men which enabled the organization’s leadership to claim greater responsibility as imperial citizens.

The GFS based its ideas about sexual attraction around socially conservative understandings of courtship and marriage that were founded on a sense of Christian morality. Social purists in the GFS aimed to construct a more positive view of healthy sexual subjectivity. The GFS denounced excessive and vulgar displays of sexuality, but also encouraged virtuous heterosexual relationships between young men and women. The organization’s opposition to well-meaning attempts to suppress sex education was centred around the way knowledge about sexual attraction and proper models of intimate relationships was acquired by young girls.¹⁹¹ The duty of GFS members was to uphold a “high standard of purity,” not only for themselves, but for

¹⁸⁹ Bacchi, 104. See also, Carol Lee Bacchi, “Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada’s English Speaking Suffragists,” *Social History* 11, no. 22, (1978): 460-474.

¹⁹⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, March 1920, 37.

¹⁹¹ Valverde, 68.

other young women, and especially young men.¹⁹² The organization recognized that there was a double standard of morality that placed greater emphasis on women's moral conduct rather than on their male counterparts. Young members were held accountable for their social conduct and given the responsibility of securing a moral society. While the GFS called the moral conduct of men into question, the impetus for moral reform was placed in the hands of women.¹⁹³

GFS members were deemed essential to spread ideals of appropriate sexual relationships and feminine behaviour, which resulted in the proper moral conduct of their male companions. A woman's actions and words, even their looks, could influence others to conform to appropriate behaviour. The GFS believed that a "look of disgust instead of a smile at an improper jest" or simply refusing to partake in "low amusements or bad talk" demonstrated higher ideals of feminine behaviour. Young women were held accountable for urging their "men friends" to adopt the high standards of life espoused by the GFS. The Society believed that impurity would be "eradicated by men and women fighting it hand and hand," so long as, the "same standard of morality is acknowledged and upheld for men and women."¹⁹⁴

Lectures on moral uplift and social purity were designed to draw women closer to church organizations and the practical imperatives of social Christianity. The status of white British women as members of the Empire afforded modern imperial girls a position to "proclaim to the world, not so much in words as in conduct, which means more than mere actions" but "one's outlook on and attitude towards life."¹⁹⁵ On 19 May 1925, at a GFS rally at Christ Church parish Hall in Toronto, editor of the *Workers' Journal* Victoria Hensman told members that "nothing

¹⁹² LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, December 1920, 217.

¹⁹³ The debates around Central Rule I from Chapter 1 support similar claims. While the GFS was concerned about the morality of young men, its efforts were squarely focused on the sexual, moral, and social conduct of young women. Rather than directly challenging the patriarchal structures that protected young men, the GFS argued for greater emphasis on the virtues of home and domestic life.

¹⁹⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, December 1920, 217.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 217.

but rock bottom Christianity is going to see the world through these difficult times.” Hensman believed the GFS imparted its members with “an individual vision of love and sacrifice.”¹⁹⁶ Younger members were encouraged to exemplify the desired qualities of modern femininity and to see themselves as contributing to a larger imperial mission that valued British women’s moral superiority. Whether shaping public policy “through their men-friends,” or directly engaging in “raising the standard of life” through church social service work, young girls were deemed crucial to ideals of purity and the social regeneration of the nation and the Empire.¹⁹⁷

In May of 1920, the GFS encouraged local branches to host meetings, lectures, and events with the aim of spreading GFS propaganda on morality, public life, and the role women played in securing a healthy nation. Working in conjunction with women’s groups, such as the Mother’s Union and the White Cross League, the GFS sought to “rally the girls” and train young people to act “rightly in matters of sex relationship.” According to one Anglican Bishop, girls and women were “guardian angels of the home” in which Christian models of monogamous marriage was the foundation. The GFS expressed a viewpoint that “a Christian country” should be founded on principles of purity, marriage, family, and domesticity which were vital to the success of the nation and empire. Temptations from the “impulses of the body” and challenges to a Christian standard of marriage seen in rising divorce rates endangered the stability of family life and “were the worst enemies of national welfare.”¹⁹⁸ Social purity pamphlets referred to the old crusades in which men fought for the “honour of the Cross” and argued that the new purity crusade would rely on women to educate public opinion on the “need of a White England, and the importance of upholding a high standard of life and conduct.” GFS associates used gendered

¹⁹⁶ *The Globe and Mail*, 19 May 1925, 16.

¹⁹⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, April 1920, 53.

¹⁹⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, November 1920, 203.

analogies that associated its social purity efforts with the religious crusades in the Middle Ages. Men had fought in the old crusades, but “it was the women who sent them out and buckled on their armour, and that women can again inspire men to knighthood in such a cause.”¹⁹⁹

Officially dubbed the “White Crusade,” the GFS sent out a preliminary circular that appealed for the “need of such a crusade to make and keep white our public, social, personal, and private life... in short, that the only way to keep England white is to keep England in touch with God.”²⁰⁰ The GFS was concerned with the apparent rise of prostitution created by urbanization and industrialization since the early 1900s. Furthermore, in the dominions, the GFS were increasingly apprehensive about the potential for sexual relationships between white Anglo-Protestant settlers and non-Anglo-Saxon colonial subjects. Starting in early 1920, the White Crusade was launched by the GFS to promote social purity among associates and members across Britain and in the white, self-governing dominions. The White Crusade lasted for only a few months between 1920 and 1921. The campaign aimed to disseminate the values of Christian purity as essential for a “clean England... an England which ‘breathes’ whiteness – breathes it in, and breathes it out!”²⁰¹ The GFS believed that only Anglican values of Christianity were central to the restoration of morality which was necessary to preserve national health. Modern conditions created the circumstances for the rise of experts that were helping shape new views on morality, marriage, and sexual intimacy. However, the GFS argued that “mere morality in compartments and chunks” was weakened by a lack of Christian principles. What the Empire needed was “good people” that scorned the “idea of being out for a merely moral ideal” and who recognized the “need of re-evangelization.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, May 1920, 74.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

²⁰¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, March 1921, 53.

²⁰² LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, May 1920, 73.

Evangelical groups like the GFS had no pretensions about problematic issues of race, gender, and ethnicity during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like many Canadians, they agreed with the sentiment that the Empire represented the high ideals of civilization which were steeped in racialized notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Yet, it would be unfair to judge these women by modern understandings of race, gender, and ethnic equity.²⁰³ According to historian Sharon Cook, Canadian evangelicals believed their efforts towards Christian charity and their assimilative programs of Canadianization were attempts to include, rather than exclude, non-Anglo-Saxon groups in the privileges and responsibilities of being a British subject. Canada's British heritage, Anglo-Saxon ideals, social conventions, and institutions were seen as superior to non-Anglo-Saxon modes of interaction, but aimed to include most races, ethnic backgrounds, and Christian denominations through their social activism.²⁰⁴

However, such an analysis ignores the ways that race, and racism shaped the lives of white British women. Definitions of whiteness were constructed within various locations and spaces as well as produced by discourses and material relations. The social construction of whiteness was historically, culturally, politically, socially, and economically linked to unfolding patterns of dominance in the context of colonial white settler societies.²⁰⁵ For example, a *Workers' Journal* article suggested that "it was not in the interest of the race or of women" to permanently work in certain fields of waged labour that could cause "injury to herself and the race."²⁰⁶ Not only were the daily material conditions of white women structured by race, but their sexuality and gender signified their cultural value through models of white womanhood.

²⁰³Sharon Cook, "Through Sunshine and Shadow," 103.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 107.

²⁰⁵ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993), 6.

²⁰⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, November 1920, 202.

Ideas of sexual hygiene, nation, and empire were intimately connected with notions of race and racial preservation. The evangelical and religious symbolism of the White Crusade drew upon long-standing tropes about light and purity that were associated with constructions of whiteness. For the GFS, the languages of hygiene, Christianity, and purity were mobilized to reinforce a type of colonial modernity which signified a threat to sexual terrains of whiteness.²⁰⁷ Likewise, the Society's motto to 'Bear Ye Another One's Burden' echoed the imperial sentiment that stressed the 'white man's burden' to bring civilization to colonial subjects. By highlighting the social processes involved in the construction of whiteness, the seemingly normative and structured invisibility of whiteness was reworked and positioned alongside modes of racism, race difference, and the racialized practises that operated to shape white women's identities.²⁰⁸

Recent studies have shown the importance of whiteness as a field of historical inquiry. In their attempts to outline the significance of such an analysis, historians emphasize national interpretations of whiteness as a social construct.²⁰⁹ Canadian historians often collapse the racial concepts of whiteness and Britishness into a singular analytical category. As such, the two terms operate as synonyms in the development of racial categorization in Canada. Even more recently, historians have examined whiteness as a mode of subjective identification that developed as a transnational phenomenon which shaped global politics. As Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds argue that the continual reassertion of whiteness emerged from an anxiety over the alarming loss

²⁰⁷ Antoinette Burton, "Introduction: The unfinished business of colonial modernities," in *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities*, ed. by Antoinette Burton (Routledge: London and New York, 1999), 5.

²⁰⁸ Frankenberg, 6-7.

²⁰⁹ See, David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991); Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993); *The Construction of Whiteness: An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Race Formation and the Meaning of a White Identity*, edited by Stephen Middleton et al. (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2016); Katerina Deliovsky, *White Femininity: Race, Gender and Power* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2010)

of control and power.²¹⁰ Issues of family formation and sexual relations were foundational to the cultural groundwork of colonial projects. Policies of marriage and ideas of intimacy produced skewed gendered dynamics that were subject to racialized effects intended to differentiate between colonial ‘Others’ as well as to “keep potentially subversive white colonials in line.”²¹¹

The White Crusade launched by the Girls’ Friendly Society provided imperially-minded women with an internal structure to regulate the sexual activity of modern girls across the Empire. By emphasizing Christian morality, the GFS and their supporters reinforced notions of white womanhood that were tied to imperial and colonial development. Heterosexual monogamous marriage was key to the construction of a healthy nation and empire which was dominated by representations of white, Protestant, Anglo-women, and the ideals of modern femininity. The organization’s stance on sexual excess, moral degeneration, and the decline of empire was premised on a series of assumptions about the superiority of British people. The GFS elaborated on its racial views through a series of images and prejudiced examples drawn from across the Empire. In the 1920 Christmas edition of the *Workers’ Journal*, the GFS produced an illustration that reinforced its racial attitude towards colonial subjects. Young, white girls stood in stark contrast to colonial people of colour. British girls were represented as standing hand in hand with angels and dressed in all white which signified their purity, religious commitment, and civilized behaviour. Meanwhile, young people of colour were shown as unguided, uncivilized, and non-Christian.²¹²

²¹⁰ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenged of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2-4; See also, Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992).

²¹¹ Stoler, 13-14. See also, Margaret Strobel, *Gender, Sex, and Empire* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1993).

²¹² See, Figure 3. LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, December 1920.



'IS THAT YOUR PRESENT TO THE KING?'
 (From *A Little Princess*, by A. M. Tennant. A. R. Mowbray & Co., 7s. 6d. net.)

Figure 3. *Workers' Journal*, December 1920.

Evangelical reformers such as the GFS organized their racial attitudes around the belief that decades of 'civilized' sexual habits and Protestantism contributed to the moral superiority of British people and their descendants. For the GFS, race was not strictly a biological construct, but formed through centuries of tradition and imperial rule.²¹³ The organization's identity as white, middle-class Anglican citizens was characterized by the idea that the British were civilized, white, and Christian whereas non-white colonial subjects were uncivilized, dark, and heathen. The GFS believed it had a moral obligation to spread its ideals across the Empire. By sponsoring missionary work, funding church building, and promoting social purity in the white

²¹³ Valverde, 107.

self-governing dominions, the GFS produced an evangelical discourse of light and darkness that contrasted civilized and uncivilized peoples.²¹⁴ In doing so, the organization not only marginalized non-white colonial subjects, but defined acceptable forms of whiteness.

On 17 June 1920, the Bishop of Ottawa Charles Roper delivered a sermon to the GFS at St. Paul's Cathedral in the "Empire's capital." Representatives from every diocese in England, Scotland, Ireland, the dominions, as well as India, Ceylon, and the Far East, congregated to observe a day of intercession and thanksgiving as part of the GFS' anniversary celebrations. According to the Bishop Roper, the GFS represented an organization within the communion of the Anglican Church whose "work has spread among the English-speaking people over all the world, within the boundaries of the Empire." Based on their imperial experience, GFS associates were placed into "more extensive and more intimate contact than before with the conditions under which girls must live their lives, face their responsibilities, and fight their battles."²¹⁵

Bishop Roper recognized that the young girls and women across the Empire were exercising greater freedom of mobility either by choice or due to economic pressure. Preoccupied by a "spirit of freedom" and adventure, girls and women were exposed to the "dark sides of modern life." By launching the White Crusade, GFS members were encouraged to actively engage with young girls and urge upon them the importance of self-regulation. The protection of Christian moral and social conventions provided barriers which defended the ideals of liberty and character. Roper argued that girls and women could "move freely and safely, and claim what modern life can offer them in adventure... in recreation, in literature, in pictures, in

²¹⁴ Rutherforddale, 29.

²¹⁵ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, July 1920, 106-107.

companionship, in dress, in dancing, in all that young life needs in order that it may be free and happy and sane and good.”²¹⁶

The GFS advertised and spread awareness about its efforts to launch a “life-long battle” against social vices. According to a *Workers’ Journal* article, the White Crusade was an effort “to make and keep white our public, social, private, and personal life.” The author called on all branches of the GFS across the Empire as well as other evangelical groups to co-operate in a campaign to offer their “prayers, efforts, and personal example” to combat impurity and “unstraight dealing in all forms” which were “responsible for much of the personal, domestic, social, national, and international strife.”²¹⁷ The GFS promoted the idea that its task was to shed light on questions of sex and sexuality. Proper moral education would protect modern girls from the corrupting influence of indecent sexual knowledge that was obtained through popular literature and modern amusements.

In January 1921, E.H. Clarke, a GFS Diocesan secretary, argued that “present day low standard of morals” was the “outcome of a definite lack of teaching.” Victorian ideals were viewed as outdated and repressive. Clarke, however, argued that “God has made the attraction of sex for sex the most powerful of attractions, and its influence the mightiest influence in the world.” For the “great mass of young people,” there was no escaping the “false teachings... abound in newspapers, magazines, and works of fiction” and “flared forth from theatres and music halls.” Clarke shared the opinion of the GFS that men and women were opposite, but complementary forces that influenced one another. She contended that there was intellectual, moral, social, and to some extent, spiritual differences between the sexes; however, the “masculine and feminine, [were] the two eyes of humanity” necessary, not only for the

²¹⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, July 1920, 108.

²¹⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, December 1920, 212.

continuation of the race, but also for the “progress of thought, the purifying of motives, and effective uplifting of high ideals.”²¹⁸

In March of 1921, Rev. Canon G.E. Frewer gave an address to the GFS about the necessity of the White Crusade. According to Frewer, overt displays of sexual attraction were “one of the easiest things in the world to send a momentary thrill through an audience by the description of horrible ‘phases’ of impurity.” The sensationalism that characterized cinemas, dance halls, and literature was corrupting modern girlhood by imparting false information about the “mystery of sex attraction and sex relationship.” For Frewer, the “new-fangled device called Sex Instruction,” demanded the production of literature “in the interests of Christian purity” which was “something far higher than mere ‘eugenics’.”²¹⁹ According to GFS associate E.H. Clarke, the apparent lack of self-knowledge, self-control, and self-reverence displayed by the Modern Girl led “surely and certainly to race suicide.”²²⁰

The Society’s understanding of race suicide was informed by the prevalence of the pseudo-science of eugenics, which had impacted ideas of social control and reproduction. Supporters of eugenics believed that morally unfit people were reproducing to the detriment of society. Concerns over motherhood overlapped with questions about racial reproduction and childrearing methods. Advocates of eugenics argued that the preservation of the Empire required intervention through the selection of ‘superior’ individuals to regain the moral and physical characteristics essential to building a strong nation and continuing the ‘imperial race.’²²¹ While

²¹⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, January 1921, 12.

²¹⁹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, March 1921, 54.

²²⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, September 1921, 197.

²²¹ Janice Cavell, “The Imperial Race and the Immigration Sieve: The Canadian Debate on Assisted British Migration and Empire Settlement, 1900-1930,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 34, no. 3 (2006), 351-352. Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, edited by Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 97.

the GFS never explicitly supported the eugenics movement, the organization shared similar concerns as other social commentators over changing ethnic demographics, pretensions about modern social problems, and national degeneration. The application of stringent ideals of marriage, sexual intimacy, and strict control over immigration was crucial to the improvement of social conditions, as well as the prevention of social vices.²²²

At a mass meeting of GFS branches held in London, England, “representatives of the young womanhood of the Empire” referred to the White Crusade as a “movement that had for its object the promotion of the purity and honour of the womanhood of England – and not of England only, but of the whole Empire.” According to the chair of the meeting, it was impossible to dissociate the efforts of the GFS from their “sister nations and the inhabitants of those great dependencies” and “consequently anything that affected the Motherland must of necessity affect the whole Empire.”²²³ The conference continued to remind GFS members that the Empire stood on the “threshold of a new world” and that women played a “prominent part in the new order of things.” While the self-governing dominions were viewed as “sister nations,” the GFS saw the position of British women as influential agents in shaping morality. The ideals of womanhood held by citizens of the British Empire were “largely formed by those of the women of the great capital of the Empire.”²²⁴ During the meeting, Brigadier-General N.F. Jenkins questioned whether “this new civilization” would develop into “something clean, fresh, and beautiful.” Jenkins stressed to the GFS that a “great responsibility rested upon the women and girls of the

²²² For an in-depth analysis of the connection between social reform and the eugenics movement in Canada, see Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada*; Valverde, *Age of Soap, Light, & Water*.

²²³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, January 1921, 17.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, 17.

Empire... to proclaim to the great city, and through it to the whole Empire, the fact that they held ideas of honour and purity based upon the perfect life of Christ.”²²⁵

According to the GFS, the moral mission of the White Crusade transcended national borders and was central to its imperial objectives. In Canada, the GFS were aware of the need for such a campaign. At a dominion council meeting, Adele Nordheimer argued that the Society’s work was “bigger and broader than merely grouping little girls into classes to interest them in missions...the Girls’ Friendly is tackling the so-called social evil in the only scientific way.” Attempting to draw a correlation between the organization’s religious commitment and modern sex education, Nordheimer stressed that for “two thousand years women’s modesty and reticence” was critical in keeping a “girl’s soul white.”²²⁶ In an address to the GFS Imperial Committee, Lord Meath praised their work in connection with “imperial ideals and of the importance to the Empire of every girl being trained thoroughly in all work connected with the home-life, so that she may be competent to carry the influence of a good woman into the farthest limits of the Empire.” Through a “strong, simple, and pure” home and family life, men, women, and children were able to perform and exercise their responsibilities as citizens in Canada and the British Empire.²²⁷

The GFS hoped the White Crusade would inspire women to recognize their influence in the home. Captain T.F. Watson argued that women stood “side by side with men” by setting a standard of domestic life. The household was seen as the “nursery of the nation’s ideal” which was determined by the “quiet influence and wise teaching” of women who maintained a “moral and Christian home.” Watson argued that women’s ability to control and maintain such an

²²⁵ Ibid, 17.

²²⁶ The Globe and Mail, 28 November 1916, 8.

²²⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 88, Reel A-1188, Colonial/Imperial/Overseas Committee Minute Book no.2, 125.

undertaking could build an “ideal of the child in the home to-day” which became the “standard of the woman or man in the community tomorrow.” Moreover, Watson conflated the notion that the Christian household was fundamental to the foundation of a strong national life with the imperial civilizing mission. He contended that “progressive and aggressive agencies” like the GFS were the “very real leaven in the lump of human society.” Ultimately, just as the home was vital for the moral tone of the nation, the “character of a Christian empire” such as the British Empire, shaped the “child-members of the world family.” As a more advanced and civilized people, British citizens were responsible for moulding the character of the “awakening nations.”²²⁸ By October of the same year, the *Workers’ Journal* printed a speech delivered given by a diocese president at GFS meeting hosted in Manchester, England. The speaker believed that “the vision of a Pure England; the vision of an England of happy homes; of the time when a white man’s word and a white woman’s honour are revered through the world” demanded the Society’s attention and guidance.²²⁹

On 4 October 1921, the Council of Social Service of the Church of England in Canada passed a proposal that supported the White Crusade efforts of the GFS to promote purity in the home and in individual life.²³⁰ The Anglican Church in Canada hoped to restore the “zeal of ancient crusaders” to inaugurate the White Crusade and enlisted all organizations to host meetings and addresses across the county.²³¹ The GFS utilized imagery that tended to be militaristic and medieval with paternalistic language that emphasized white as good and non-white as evil.²³² Based on a sense of Christian duty and service, one GFS supporter inquired: “If

²²⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, February 1921, 29.

²²⁹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, October 1921, 224.

²³⁰ *Edmonton Journal*, October 4, 1921, 7.

²³¹ *Windsor Star*, October 3, 1921, 9.

²³² Cook, “Through Sunshine and Shadow,” 95.

God be for us who can be against us?” For the GFS, the White Crusade was a moral conflict between the “forces of good and evil.” It was a spiritual struggle against impurity in a “war for the Cross... fighting for the Kingdom of God” and reinforced the belief that the Anglo-Saxon race was pivotal in shaping society and maintaining social purity. According to one *Workers’ Journal* author, in the fight against the “enemies of God who are trying to usurp His Kingdom...white is the symbol of purity.”²³³

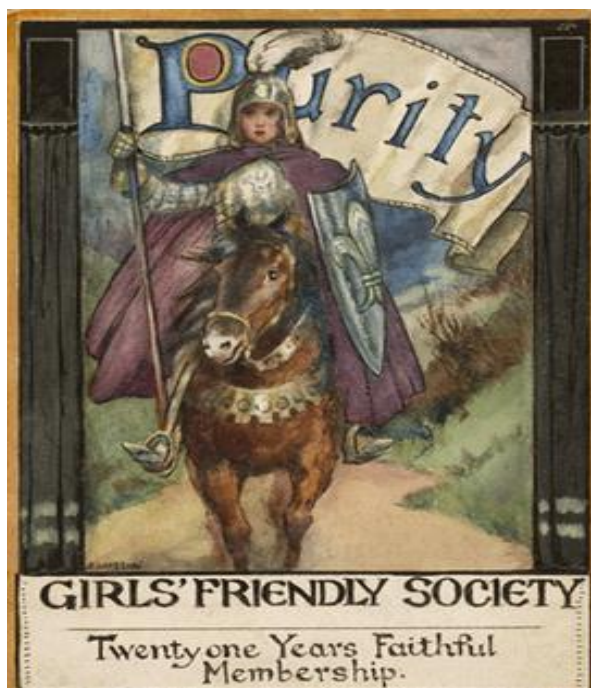


Figure 4. “Purity,” <https://girlsfriendsociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-history/>

To protect the “vision of a spotless purity of womanhood,” future generations needed to be handed the “torch of Purity” and to “light it afresh at the Sacred Fire...as comrades in a mighty fellowship” throughout the Empire.²³⁴ The GFS advocated for the reformulation of Christian morality and the imposition of social purity among youth. In its magazines, pamphlets, and membership cards, the Society printed images that visually reinforced the idea that women

²³³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, December 1920, 217.

²³⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, August 1920, 124.

were crusaders in defense of a moral and pure society. Under the banner of purity, white women were fighting against the depravity of social vices caused by modern society.²³⁵ As one GFS promoter argued, the public needed help “realizing to what an abyss of evil” was being created by modern society. In the “fight against Sin, the World, and the Devil,” GFS workers were obligated to “feel [their] responsibility to the youth of the nation, and to arm them, as far as we can, with the Armour of Light...in that armour is the virtue of Purity.”²³⁶

In Canada, the lasting effects of the White Crusade were evident in the Society’s criticism of beauty pageants. In 1927, Canadian GFS president, M. Morris, appealed to Toronto’s Local Council of Women, as well as the National Council of Women, to take action against the contests. In their resolution, both the GFS and the Toronto Local Council declared that these contests were “bad because they put a premium on the physical appearance, rather than on character and the true ideals of womanhood.”²³⁷ Female reformers argued that the focus on physical appearance would lead to moral corruption and distract white women from their roles as mothers and wives. Ultimately, the protests of the Girls’ Friendly Society were unsuccessful. Such criticisms, however, illustrate the ongoing advocacy that white British women were vital to the moral education of future imperial citizens. By regulating white women’s sexuality, the GFS aimed to secure the reproduction of Canada as a white nation by bolstering Christian British families and traditional ideals of womanhood.²³⁸

The GFS were aware of the impact interwar commodity culture was having on modern concepts of femininity. The Modern Girl was subject to an emergent discourse that focused on

²³⁵ See, Figure 4.

²³⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, May 1920, 69.

²³⁷ *The Toronto Daily Star*, February 24, 1927, 2.

²³⁸ Patrizia Gentile, *Queen of the Maple Leaf: Beauty Contests and Settler Femininity* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2020), 61.

the visibility and display of the female body. Advertisements, magazines, and mass consumption intensified the ways women experienced modern femininity. On the one hand, the Modern Girl was a key aspect in producing the modern body which was centred around youthful appearance and sexuality. On the other hand, the increasing visibility of the modern female body exposed women and young girls to criticism over the performance of their bodies. The shift in the visual scene of modern female subjectivity merged with anxieties over race, age, gender, and class at a national and global level.²³⁹

Social and religious forces campaigned to reimpose women's traditional roles to safeguard the reproductive labour of white female bodies and secure national and imperial 'health.' While many promoted beauty pageants as a means to re-establish hegemonic ideas of femininity, whiteness, and middle-class respectability, these ideas conflicted with the notion that the moral superiority of white British women rested in their character.²⁴⁰ The Canadian GFS expressed its objection to the visual display of the modern female body through efforts to prohibit beauty contests, a perspective that was representative of more conservative elements of Canadian society. Beauty pageants were viewed as a sign of cultural laxity that enabled young, white, able-bodied women to forge public identities based on notions of pleasure, attention-seeking, and heterosexual desire.²⁴¹

Through a trans-imperial circulation of publications, racial knowledges, people, and ideas, the GFS utilized language and images that reproduced an ideal form of whiteness throughout the British Empire. Steeped in a belief that Canada's Anglo-Protestant heritage was a

²³⁹ Jane Nicholas, "Beauty Advice for the Canadian Modern Girl in the 1920s," in *Consuming Modernity: Gendered Behaviour and Consumerism before the Baby Boom*, eds. Cheryl Krasnick Warsh and Dan Malleck (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 182-183. See also, *Contesting Bodies and Nation in Canadian History*, eds. Patrizia Gentile and Jane Nicholas (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

²⁴⁰ Gentile, *Queen of the Maple Leaf*, 60.

²⁴¹ Nicholas, *The Modern Girl*, 124.

validation of white British cultural superiority, the GFS' White Crusade illustrated an idealized form of whiteness for British women – one that was centred on middle- and upper-class and highly gendered views about marriage, family, and sexuality. While historians have expanded our understanding of how female imperialists carved out new spheres of power by arguing for the need of white women in colonial spaces, the GFS' social service work during the interwar years highlights the desire to reaffirm the imperial civilizing mission. It is difficult to determine the success of the GFS' White Crusade. The young girls that were the focus of the campaign left little to no record of how, and in what ways, the White Crusade impacted their daily lives. Articles produced by the organization typically celebrated social purity work to reinforce elite women's claims over moral regulation and assert their own social status. Nonetheless, it invoked a call to arms within the Anglican Church and imperialist groups like the GFS to continue the consolidation of Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony in white settler colonies like Canada. The apparent cultural and moral superiority of British people was the foundation of the Society's representation of women in the Empire. The relationship between the parent society and other colonial branches informed racial productions which pivoted on class and gender-based assumptions about colonial peoples. As such, the GFS in Canada and Britain bolstered a discourse rooted in a series of interconnected ideas about domesticity, femininity, and whiteness.

The Society's concerns for morality and purity illustrate the objectives and views of elite members that underpinned their efforts to assert control over the direction of modern girlhood. In both Canada and Britain, the production of social purity discourse enabled the strategic creation of a space for the GFS to exercise power and surveillance over women's bodies. For the GFS and its supporters, modern mass consumerism and progressive feminism threatened definitions of imperial whiteness that were premised on British conceptions of social order, civilization,

Christianity, industry, separate spheres, and domesticity.²⁴² In centring ideas of purity at the forefront of public consciousness, the GFS reinforced the gendered perception of the domesticated, virtuous white women as an important actor in the civilizing mission of the Christian imperial family. As such, the lives of GFS members were often regulated by their association to race and racial preservation. The Modern Girl became the central figure in which the GFS expressed their concerns and anxieties about the impact of modern progress. The Society's work with the Girl Guides to control the leisure time of young working-class girls emphasized its desire to provide safe and supervised activities, which were intended to educate members about their proper place in society.

Upper- and middle-class white women asserted that they had a responsibility to train the future generations in their duty as mothers of the race and imperial citizens. Purity campaigns such as the White Crusade outlined ideal models of femininity for white British women, while at the same time producing definitions of national and imperial identity. The GFS' White Crusade highlights a social conservatism and an uneasiness with modern girlhood's engagement with society as well as perceived attacks on their subjective and gendered views of whiteness as a social category. The construction of femininity and womanhood was marked by the transmission of gendered cultural practises that emphasized women's domestic power as "guardian angel of the home," their reproductive capacity, and moral leadership in society. By policing morality among young girls, the GFS helped contextualize and reaffirm that the construction of a strong Canadian nation and imperial federation depended on a large population and the proper mix of racial, spiritual, moral, physical, and political citizens.²⁴³

²⁴² Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 211-212.

²⁴³ Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law and Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 123.

Chapter 3: “Our ever expanding Imperial sisterhood”: Race, Gender, and Female Emigration

In August of 1921, at an Imperial and Overseas Conference for the Girls’ Friendly Society in London, England, High Commissioner for the Dominion of Canada Sir George Halsey Perley commended the GFS for its “excellent work” in establishing “Hostels Overseas and providing introductions for girls...to take up work in the Colonies and to make a home for themselves in a new land.” He told the GFS that “Canada, as in all parts of the Empire...wanted just as many of British stock as they could get.” Perley reminded GFS members that “every woman who migrated to the Colonies was doing her bit to strengthen the Empire to-day and in the future.” For Perley, “respectable young women who were willing to do household work” would find employment as well as the “prospect of having a home of their own.”²⁴⁴ For those concerned with female emigration, economic opportunities were connected to the potential for women to establish their own households in the dominions and provide the country with the ‘right type’ of British stock.

The Girls’ Friendly Society encouraged women to seek out employment in the dominions to alleviate the financial and social burden of Britain’s surplus female population. In 1918, the *Final Report of the Dominions Royal Commission* provided details about the viability of colonial migration and the sex imbalance in England and the white, self-governing dominions. Launched by the British government, the report determined that women outnumbered men in Britain, while in dominions like Canada, men outnumbered women. According to the commission, the high death toll during the Great War and decades of colonization efforts led to demographic shifts. Britain’s surplus population, in particular young single women, were desired in all parts of the

²⁴⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, August 1921, 166-167.

Empire, but the GFS stressed the importance of sending them to the white, self-governing dominions.²⁴⁵ As Perley remarked, in Canada these “girls” found they were “still members of the British Empire and under the same flag, and that they sang ‘God Save the King’ with the as much vigour as they did at home.”²⁴⁶ Young women were encouraged to immigrate to the dominions because places like Canada offered a sense of familiarity that was based on a shared British culture. As ‘daughters of the empire,’ British women would inculcate Canadian homes with ideals of “respectable Britishness” as well as provide and train future citizens for the Empire.²⁴⁷

A year earlier, the Bishop of London noted that many young woman “might make new homes in Canada.” Emigration served the purpose of keeping the country “British, Christian, and Church” by starting “British Christian Church homes.”²⁴⁸ In the dominions and in Britain, the GFS responded to women’s increasing mobility that resulted from greater financial freedom gained by improving labour opportunities. Using the catch words of the time, the organization stressed the necessity of building proper homes.²⁴⁹ The GFS believed they were “ready to help modern girls in modern ways” by appealing to their sense of responsibility and duty to the future of the Empire as ‘mothers of the race.’ Articles in the *Workers’ Journal* appealed to young members that their “first responsibility” was to their womanhood. “A pure woman, like an honest man,” one associate argued, “is the noblest work of God.” By emigrating to the white dominions like Canada and creating their own households, GFS members were “working for the future of the British Empire.”²⁵⁰

²⁴⁵ *Dominions Royal Commission*, Final Report (London, 1918), 230-239. Kranidis, *Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration*, 15.

²⁴⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, August 1921, 166-167.

²⁴⁷ Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 79.

²⁴⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, June 1920, 89.

²⁴⁹ Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, 189.

²⁵⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, October 1921, 225.

The organization's various magazines and journals, such as the *Workers' Journal*, were the "natural link between the Central Organization and Branches and Members throughout the world."²⁵¹ The circulation of magazines throughout the British Empire reinforced the cultural bonds and provided a sense of unity between by transmitting shared values. GFS members in Britain and recent immigrants to the dominions had access to these materials which helped produce a homogenous identity strengthened by the operation of hostels and lodges. While the Society's literature was the 'natural link' that connected the parent society and overseas branches, its network of women and hostels was central in reinforcing the Society's ideals. The Girls' Friendly Society hoped that local branch meetings educated young women about life in the dominions and inspired them to emigrate. It emphasized a sense of adventure, new employment opportunities, the potential for marriage, and the possibility of creating their own home that was afforded by colonial life. In the words of GFS founder Mary Townsend, the Society's imperial representatives, linked branches, and emigration networks assisted in "keeping Colonial Societies in touch with the new developments of our ever expanding Imperial sisterhood."²⁵²

For the women of the GFS, the social mission at home was linked to the sense of mission overseas.²⁵³ As an empire-wide Anglican affiliate, the social, religious, and political work of the organization was intimately connected to its imperial relationships with the parent society in Britain, the church, and the central councils in the dominions. The GFS largely confined its efforts to colonies where an imperial identity was firmly entrenched, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Female emigration groups were concerned with the reproduction of British

²⁵¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, August 1920, 125.

²⁵² LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 88, Reel A-1188, Colonial Committee Meeting Minutes, 10.

²⁵³ Alan L. Hayes, "Repairing the walls: church reform and social reform, 1867-1939," in *By Grace Co-Workers: Building the Anglican Diocese of Toronto, 1780-1989*, edited by Alan L Hayes (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1989), 73.

stock as well as British culture in the colonial setting. The GFS developed programs to manage and protect the “right sort of woman” that met the imperial ideal. Emigration, missionary work, and the moral protection of white women were central to the female imperialist agenda.²⁵⁴ By providing supervised passage and using its network of overseas hostels, the GFS attempted to regulate the movement of young women and keep emigrants within their sphere of influence.

The elite women who volunteered for the GFS promoted selective methods that reinforced their patriotic and racial prejudices. They emphasized that the domestic abilities, reproductive labour, and moral character of British women were essential to imperial rule and the British civilizing mission in colonies. The imperialist aims of the GFS were to strengthen the connection between Britain and white settler dominions.²⁵⁵ The idea of matrimonial colonization was the most persistent rationale to justify female emigration. For the GFS, contemporary feminist concerns with improving women’s social position were overshadowed by a conservative ideology that emphasized traditional gender roles for women as wives and mothers.²⁵⁶ While the GFS was an organization run by women for female members, it largely ignored feminist movements that campaigned for women’s suffrage. Instead, the GFS utilized an ideological rhetoric of feminine responsibility, British motherhood, and Anglo-Saxon Christian ideals that restricted the lives of many young emigrants.²⁵⁷

In December of 1920, an article titled, “Blurred Ideals,” written by GFS associate Maude Trist, outlined the difficulties in discussing the “ideals of existing moral subjects,” the growth of ideals in society, and how they influenced the views of young girls on marriage, courtship, and sexuality. According to Trist, it would be “impossible to expect to reconstruct or create ideals in

²⁵⁴ Bush, 3.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, 5-6.

²⁵⁶ Hammerton, *Emigrant Gentlewomen*, 188

²⁵⁷ Richmond, 311.

a week's Crusade." While the White Crusade was effective at raising awareness about moral decline, she argued that ideals took shape in young girls from early childhood and derived from their interaction with parents, siblings, teachers, and peers. In modern society, the influence of cinemas, plays, and literature contributed to the "gradual and unconscious growth" of a child's "philosophy of life."²⁵⁸

The Society believed its hostels and lodges offered young girls protection from the moral corruption that was associated with city life and commercial entertainments such as cinemas and dancehalls. Ideals such as honesty, truth, and personal cleanliness were shaped by the "nature and environment" of the daily life of youth. According to Trist, the changing tone of public opinion about family and marriage, evidenced in declining birth rates and increasing divorce cases, reflected a sense of crisis about social and racial degeneration. The most challenging aspect of social service work among modern youth, and the central concern of Trist, was how young girls were educated about imperial values, self-sacrifice, proper courtship, and their responsibility to motherhood.²⁵⁹ Marriage, family, and imperial citizenship were intimately connected. The GFS viewed monogamous heterosexual marriage as the foundation of a strong family unit. Premised on traditional gender roles, the Society's maternalism towards young girls and demands for dutiful motherhood acted as a central strategy in the politics of nation and empire.²⁶⁰

The sense of missionary zeal and imperial duty provided the impetus to establish an emigration network that linked local branches and aimed to build a sense of Anglo-Protestant community in dominions like Canada. Operating under the mandates of British and Canadian

²⁵⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, December 1920, 216.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 216.

²⁶⁰ Cynthia Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family, Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 91. See also, Davin, 87-92.

emigration policies, the GFS used their influence to support young women and girls emigrating overseas. During the Imperial Conference of 1923, British and dominion representatives defined the objectives of an imperial immigration policy (called the Empire Settlement Act) as a “redistribution of the white population of the Empire in the best interests of the Empire as a whole.”²⁶¹ The act was passed to provide assisted passage to young working-class women willing to immigrate to the colonies as domestic servants, teachers, and nurses.²⁶²

In Britain, the Girls’ Friendly Society was “closely allied” with the Society for the Oversea Settlement of British Women (SOSBW), which formed the official government branch that controlled female emigration.²⁶³ The SOSBW was part of an imperial strategy to aid the migration of women throughout the Empire. While the SOSBW was the central organizing structure, it relied on the domestic and overseas networks constructed by the GFS. The Society was responsible for nominating, commending, and offering supervision in the colonies. Through the management of women’s labour in domestic service, nursing, or as teachers, the SOSBW and the GFS hoped to strengthen the bonds of empire by emphasizing the potential for marriage and the creation of households in the dominions. Like the SOSBW, the GFS recognized that a gender imbalance existed in the colonies and in Britain. Emigration was viewed as a way to stabilize the populations as well as reinforce connections between the metropole and the dominions.²⁶⁴

Immediately following the war, the Canadian government expected immigration numbers to return to their pre-war levels; however, the anticipated influx of British immigrants

²⁶¹ *Labour Gazette*, December 1926, 1198.

²⁶² Gothard, 72.

²⁶³ London School of Economics, Fawcett Library (LSE), 5GFS.02.225, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, December 1928, 201.

²⁶⁴ Bonnie White, *The Society for the Oversea Settlement of British Women, 1919-1964* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), 2; see also, Brian Blakeley, “The Society for the Overseas Settlement of British Women and the Problems of Empire Settlement, 1917-1936,” *Albion* 20, no. 3 (1988): 421-444; For brief examinations see, Chilton, *Agents of Empire*; Rebecca Mancuso, “Work ‘Only Woman Can Do.’”

did not materialize. The Canadian government had placed labour restrictions on potential female emigrants which were designed to encourage the migration of domestic servants, teachers, and nurses. British women's growing disenchantment with paid domestic labour and the lack of other economic prospects produced an unenthusiastic response to initial emigration schemes.²⁶⁵ In Canada, the GFS worked within new government bureaucracies created during the interwar period. In 1919, the Canadian government created the Canadian Council of Immigration of Women for Household Service (CCIW) to act as a unified national body to direct efforts in promoting women's immigration. The CCIW was comprised of delegates appointed by the provinces and various women's reform groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), and the Girl's Friendly Society. The CCIW set out the primary objectives of the organization: undertake the supervision of existing hostels for the reception of immigrant household workers; establish, control, and supervise new hostels; control and administer federal financial grants.²⁶⁶

Members of the CCIW insisted that government-funded hostels should provide "at all times a place of rest between change of position, when out of work, home-sick, or in need of advice."²⁶⁷ A network of hostels and matron supervision was founded in eight major urban centres across the country including St. John, Montreal, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Calgary, and Vancouver. The intention of the hostels was to provide a "safe social life" for newly-arrived immigrants and prevent the decline of a woman's moral and social respectability.²⁶⁸ Much like

²⁶⁵ Gothard, 73.

²⁶⁶ *Labour Gazette*, March 1921, 387.

²⁶⁷ *Labour Gazette*, March 1921, 388.

²⁶⁸ LAC, RG76, Volume 116, File 22787, Part 16, Minutes of A Conference of the Canadian Council of Immigration of Women, February 27-29, 1928, 25.

their SOSBW counterparts, however, the CCIW relied on the pre-existing social networks created by imperial organizations such as the GFS. In June 1920, Canadian Immigration representative J. Robson met with the Society's Central Head of Migration Department Ellen Joyce. Robson assured the GFS that "any established and authorised emigration society" was entitled to have their own members "consigned to their own oversea societies." Robson noted that the GFS' emigration and hostel work was allowed to continue "on condition that representatives...met their clients at the point of arrival in Canada."²⁶⁹ In larger cities and towns, where young girls in search of employment were "far removed from home influences," the GFS "formed to supply...friendly help and sympathy in a systematic way."²⁷⁰

Following the guidelines of the CCIW, the GFS operated additional hostels in Calgary, Kelowna, Toronto, Montreal, and Hamilton.²⁷¹ GFS clubs, study circles, and lodges operated to provide British and Canadian girls healthy and safe recreational activities that were supervised by upper- and middle-class women. The GFS organized social events, picnics, and teas which reinforced their sense of British identity and community. Recent emigrants used the hostels as social centres to create emotional support networks and hostel supervisors fostered a British atmosphere to ease their transition.²⁷² On 3 June 1919, in a letter to the Canadian Imperial Correspondent Ethel Hay, the Canadian GFS president, Adele Nordheimer stressed that the GFS in Canada "must be ready to meet & help the new girls when they start to arrive from England again." Nordheimer was concerned about a lack of housing for young girls that was a "great

²⁶⁹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers' Journal*, June 1920, 87.

²⁷⁰ *The Globe and Mail*, October 18, 1883.

²⁷¹ For an analysis of Montreal hostels see, Barbara Roberts, "Sex, Politics and Religion: Controversies in female immigration reform work in Montreal, 1881-1919." *Atlantis* 6, no.1 (1980): 25-38; Elizabeth Kirkland, "A Home away from Home: Defining, Regulating and Challenging Femininity at the Julia Drummond Residence in Montreal, 1920-1971," *Urban History Review* 34, no. 2 (2006): 3-16. Barbara Roberts, "Ladies, Women and the State: Managing Female Immigration, 1880-1920," in *Community Organization and the State*, edited by Roxana Ng, Gillian Walker, and Jacob Muller (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), 112-113.

²⁷² Barber, "Sunny Ontario for British Girls," 68-69.

problem” and partly responsible for a decline in GFS workers for the Canadian branches.²⁷³ For example, in places like London, Ontario the GFS reported, that by the end of 1918, only thirty five women were members of local branches, which had declined significantly from the seventy members in 1909.²⁷⁴ The lack of immigration due to the war and competition from other women’s organizations was stifling the growth of the GFS in Canada by the early 1920s. Young girls and churchwomen preferred the activities of the YWCA which operated its own system of hostels with less restrictions and seemed to “take the best workers.”²⁷⁵ Nordheimer believed that the post-war resurgence of emigration from the British Isles was crucial to the Society’s success in Canada. Both the British and Canadian GFS recognized that “young English women” comprised the majority of their registration lists. By bolstering membership numbers in the dominions, the GFS reinforced the “strong links between the Church of England in the Old Country and the Church in Canada.”²⁷⁶

Hostels provided lodging for recent emigrants as well as centres to educate young girls about the value of the Society’s ideals. Nordheimer believed that taking over the well-known Women’s Welcome Hostel would make an “ideal lodge” to receive GFS members and “strengthen our Society in a practical way that would count in gaining interest and members.”²⁷⁷ In November 1920, the GFS purchased the Women’s Welcome Hostel building at 52 St. Albans Street in Toronto. The hostel had long served “the purpose of welcoming immigrant women to Canada, providing them a home centre in the city, and putting them in touch with their environment.”²⁷⁸ An ideal GFS lodge/hostel was a “refining influence” that allowed young girls

²⁷³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Mrs. Hay from Adele Nordheimer.

²⁷⁴ Diocese of Huron Archives, Huron University, St. Paul’s Cathedral Fonds, GFS Easter Report, 1918.; Easter Report, 1909.

²⁷⁵ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Mrs. Hay from Adele Nordheimer.

²⁷⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, January 16, 1926, 4.

²⁷⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Mrs. Hay from Adele Nordheimer.

²⁷⁸ *Toronto Star*, November 2, 1920, 10.

to “discover the pleasure of masking a house bright with cleanliness and comfort.” While GFS matrons recognized that modern girls demanded greater independence and freedom to engage in commercial amusements, they believed that the “Church atmosphere” of GFS lodges was the best method of “encouraging the corresponding sense of responsibility and self-respect” required to “keep up their reputation.”²⁷⁹ The Society argued that the extension of clubs, lodges, and hostels would “conquer evil and bring out the best in the lonely or troubled girl” by “building up of body, soul, and spirit.”²⁸⁰ Young girls using GFS accommodations, such as the 52 St. Albans lodge, were required to attend daily services and church service every Sunday. On 10 June 1921, a report from the Anglican Church in the diocese of Toronto stated that the “spiritual care” of the “18 girls, mostly under 21” living in residence was “carefully looked after” in GFS lodges.²⁸¹

The creation of a network of residences for working-class girls was designed to direct their leisure time into activities that enabled the smooth transition to marriage, motherhood, and the reproduction of Christian families.²⁸² Evangelical Christian values underpinned the function of GFS lodges and hostels. In August 1921, one GFS Associate wrote, that “if we cease to divide work into ‘secular and ‘religious’ we may find that we do religious work the whole time.”²⁸³ The GFS adopted an increasingly positive tone in its evangelical approach to purity and mortality. Rather than condemn the apparently ‘sinful’ actions of members, the organization focused on preventing immoral behaviour by stressing Christian purity as the “backbone of life.”²⁸⁴ GFS associates believed that “providing a friendly welcome and safe surroundings” for

²⁷⁹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, August 1920, 137-138.

²⁸⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, March 1922, 43.

²⁸¹ General Synod of the Anglican Church Archives, Journal of the Incorporated Synod of the Diocese of Toronto of the Church of England, Session 69 (Toronto: Parker Bros. Limited, 1921), 211.

²⁸² Jennifer Henderson, *Settler Feminism and Race Making in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 188-194.

²⁸³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, August 1921, 178.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 183.

working-class girls and young women “going to a new home” was crucial for the “preservation of purity by means of a protective friendship.”²⁸⁵ The Society’s hostel matrons, associates that supervised and ran the building, hoped to exert their maternal influence over vulnerable young women which would revitalize society based on Christian principles. Associates operated hostels as social centres and hoped to befriend recent emigrants by creating a welcoming and familiar space. They could guide young girls into appropriate recreational activities as well monitor the behaviour and relationships of members, especially with men. Hostels performed the function of surrogate parent and acted as a temporary replacement for a single emigrant women’s family. By providing save and supervised housing, middle- and upper-class women hoped to prevent the moral downfall of working-class girls.²⁸⁶

Hostels, lodges, and club houses were the frontlines for combating immorality, protecting emigrants travelling overseas, and educating young girls in their responsibilities.²⁸⁷ In September, a GFS *Workers’ Journal* article written by E.H. Clarke, claimed that the nearly “300,000 cases of venereal disease under treatment” in metropolitan areas exemplified the “immorality and vice” of a post-war society which was the result of an “utter lack of teaching to young children on the true meaning of sex and life... on the real preparation for marriage and parenthood.” The large number of cases of venereal disease in urban areas was used as evidence for continuing social issues such as prostitution. Moreover, the falling birth rates among English-speaking families was the product of “people who must be using marriage and its privileges without undertaking its responsibilities.” Clarke believed that many British and Anglo-Canadian women were utilizing methods of birth control, which was limiting the number of children. In

²⁸⁵ LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, The Girls’ Friendly Society by Miss Ethel Campbell, 11.

²⁸⁶ Pivar, 177.

²⁸⁷ Strange, 58.

particular, she argued that “there are few ways in which...women can serve their country better than by upholding the high standard of Christian marriage.”²⁸⁸

The Society believed that hostels established wider imperial kinship networks by offering single female emigrants travelling alone a familial and safe environment. It viewed overseas branches as part of a larger imperial family which provided a sense of familiarity to young girls moving abroad and guaranteed their safety and moral protection. By fulfilling the traditional role of providing emotional and material support, the familial atmosphere of hostels became a primary mediator of British identity in Canada.²⁸⁹

However, the GFS had long-standing issues with the commendation system. Since the early 1900s, GFS associates in Canada complained about the ineffective use of commendation letters by their British counterparts. Letters of introduction were often incomplete and tracking the movements of female emigrants from Britain and across Canada proved difficult. In June of 1906, at a GFS Colonial Committee meeting, Toronto Diocese representative Beatrice Whitley reported the difficulty that the Canadian GFS experienced in “tracing girls.” Whitley argued that the main issue was the lack of commendation papers sent by linked branches in England. Many commendation records lacked details about a young girls’ occupation, employer, and often with “very insufficient addresses.”²⁹⁰ By the 1920s, the Canadian GFS continued to report issues with insufficient commendations. The Canadian Central Council reported that the GFS worker “who meets boats at Quebec had met 220 members, of these only 97 were commended” through the Central Office in Britain.²⁹¹

²⁸⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, September 1921, 197-198.

²⁸⁹ Ross McCormack, “Cloth Caps and Jobs: The Ethnicity of English Immigrants in Canada 1900-1914,” in *Ethnicity, Power and Politics*, eds. Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando (Toronto: Methuen, 1981), 43.

²⁹⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 88, Reel A-1188, Colonial Committee Meeting Minutes, June 1906, 19.

²⁹¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 89, Reel A-1189, Overseas Committee Minutes Book No. 3, 1925-1955, 3

For the GFS, commendation was intended to play a major role in providing supervision of a young women's movement as well as offer protective friendship for GFS members travelling abroad. These letters were designed to place GFS' emigrants in touch with local branches overseas and notify Canadian associates when and where young emigrant women were travelling. Commendation records provided Canadian branches with an emigrants' name, future address, occupation, home associate, age, port of arrival, and other details that helped identify and track young women. Commendation letters were written by clergy or GFS associates to sponsor members and preceded emigrants travelling overseas. These letters prompted GFS members in Canada to meet the young women at their destination and provide suitable lodging. Moreover, commendation letters were passed between British and Canadian branches to ensure that selected emigrants upheld the character standards set by the GFS.

On 6 November 1920, Ellen Joyce wrote an article for the *Workers' Journal* that demanded associates "aid applicants in filling up the forms, and that the testimonial will be given with special regard to the fitness of the applicant...for duly representing the standard of the Society."²⁹² Candidates were often young, longstanding members of the organization in Britain and selected based on their employment record as domestic servants, Sunday school teachers, or nurses. Each selected candidate was required to adhere to the Central Rules of the GFS, in particular Central Rule I, which gave Canadian GFS associates a sense of a young women's character. Commendation records frequently described GFS emigrants as excellent members, very good candidates, or a "real fine conscientious girl."²⁹³

The Society's *Workers' Journal* printed stories to reinforce the inherent value of "friendly protection through commendation." For example, the story of Mary Brown circulated

²⁹² LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, December 1920, 219.

²⁹³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 70, Reel A-1198, Commendation Register Canada No.15, 1919-1923, 9.

between the GFS branches in England and Canada. Mary Brown was commended by her local British associate and was travelling by steamship to meet her cousin in America. As she prepared to leave the steamship, she was halted by the ship's officers that prevented her from departing with a young man. Confronted by the possibility of being prevented from leaving the port, Brown exclaimed that she was "commended to the Girls' Friendly Society" which prompted a GFS representative to step forward and vouch for her safety. The officer stated that "no other organization... could have gotten you off this ship to-night but the Girls' Friendly Society."²⁹⁴ Stories such as Mary Brown reflected the Society's ongoing concern over the morality of young girlhood and were designed to reinforce the importance of the GFS to emigration work. The idea behind commendation letters was to place GFS emigrants in touch with local branches and provided a sense of familiarity in a new environment by keeping young women within the organization's sphere of influence. Such follow-up work was not meant to "interfere with the personal liberty and independence" of immigrant women, but to "safeguard the best interests of the women."²⁹⁵ The supervisory role of follow-up work was intended to create a network of morality police across the country, allowing middle-class reformers to regulate Canadian society.²⁹⁶

Despite efforts to create a functioning system of commendation, the GFS often struggled to track the movements of young women. For example, Katie Hughes was commended by the GFS in Britain for employment as domestic servant in Vancouver. On 20 January 1920, Hughes was commended by her local associate "L. West" to the Society's Canadian reception worker Ellen Reeve Elton. While Hughes was intended to arrive in Halifax and travel over land to her

²⁹⁴ LAC, MG28-1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, *The Girls' Friendly Society* by Miss Ethel Campbell, 12.

²⁹⁵ LAC, RG76, Volume 116, File 22787, Part 16, *Minutes of A Conference of the Canadian Council of Immigration of Women*, February 27-29, 1928, 338.

²⁹⁶ Valverde, 126.

place of employment in Vancouver, she never arrived at the original address. On 7 October 1920, the GFS was able to “trace... Katie Hughes through her mother,” who supplied a new address for Hughes. She was working for a new employer and “apparently K. Hughes has been in service in different places in Canada.”²⁹⁷ While the GFS in Canada was eventually able to locate Hughes, her case demonstrates the difficulties associates had in performing follow-up work. Young women often diverted from their intended destination in search of other employment or a preferred destination. According to Alice Hubbard, a GFS diocesan president, there were “many difficulties and temptations for young English women abroad.” Hubbard argued that because of the “consequence of carelessness at home,” vulnerable young women “lose the help and friendly interest” of GFS branches overseas.²⁹⁸ For the GFS, the safe-passage and supervision of young girls travelling aboard was crucial to ensure that emigrant women were not confronted by the perceived dangers associated with overseas travel.²⁹⁹

The Society drew extensively from newspaper reports that reinforced the potential for seduction and sexual violence which threatened the safety of unsupervised single women. The ongoing prevalence of a white slavery discourse was a central aspect of the Society’s desire to provide lodges and accommodations for young single working-class women travelling overseas. As Mariana Valverde argues, prostitution was central to reform efforts and symbolized the moral corruption of urban vice. Prostitution underscored the visibility of women’s active role in commerce and sexuality, which challenged idealized notions of feminine morality. As such, prostitution became a key terrain through which regulation and public policy was discussed.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 70, Reel A-1198, Commendation Register Canada No.15, 1919-1923, 17.

²⁹⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134-136, Reel A-1213, GFS *Workers’ Journal*, November 1923, 161.

²⁹⁹ Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 59.

³⁰⁰ Valverde, 79.

Since the 1900s, ongoing concerns over prostitution ignited a moral panic over a “white slave trade.” Social reformers suggested that innocent, young white women, often unemployed domestic servants, were being drawn into sexual slavery. The anxieties over white slavery assumed that without proper guidance and preventative training, women were placed beyond the reach of social reform efforts.³⁰¹ A 1902 *Globe and Mail* article reflected the panic surrounding young, unaccompanied women arriving overseas. In places such as Toronto, “being a point [for] female immigrants...it is the duty of women citizens...to secure the desired protection for their sex.”³⁰² Supervised boarding homes took the place of single emigrant women’s families and hoped to exert their feminine and maternal influence over seemingly vulnerable young women. By providing comfortable and affordable housing, middle- and upper-class women hoped to prevent the moral downfall of working-class girls.³⁰³

Despite a lack of evidence that young women were being coerced into prostitution, the fears and language of a ‘white slave trade’ persisted in the newspapers well into the 1920s. On 3 June 1927, the *Windsor Star* reported that “proprietors of houses of ill-fame” used “modern methods” of automobile rides, presents, and “lucrative employment on the other side as lures... to seek out virtuous but credulous maidens.” Once the “complacent girl” arrived abroad, “ignorant of the country’s laws... and without money, they soon found themselves reduced to a condition that amounted to slavery.”³⁰⁴ Often arriving late at night at Toronto’s Union Station and other ports of arrival, many believed that female emigrants, unaccompanied and unfamiliar with the city, were susceptible to being coerced into prostitution. In a move to combat urban vice and the threat of sexual slavery, GFS associates organized the work of the Girls’ Protective

³⁰¹ Ibid, 49.

³⁰² *The Globe and Mail*, September 27, 1902, 20.

³⁰³ Strange, 58.

³⁰⁴ *Windsor Star*, June 3, 1927, 34.

Officers or “Women Street Patrols” to provide moral surveillance in urban centres. GFS street patrollers ensured that young girls were directed to appropriate boarding houses that offered programs to protect against “pernicious effects... on the average girl,” which “when combined with loneliness and constant work, too often ends in general deterioration, mental and moral.”³⁰⁵

Young female British emigrants were considered vital to the future of the nation. As such, they were subjected to a variety of regulatory measures grounded in concerns over moral degradation of Canadian society.³⁰⁶ By carefully supervising women’s movement and activity, the GFS aimed to safeguard a young women purity which would become the foundation of her future family.³⁰⁷ By early 1921, the Canadian GFS secured an effective system to combat the movement of women of “uncertain character,” which was considered a “real menace” to Canadian society.³⁰⁸ On 18 January, Canadian GFS Field Secretary Vera Martin argued that the GFS lodges and hostel helped “improve the tone of the neighbourhood” and through letters of introduction, the GFS ensured that young single girls, unaccompanied in urban environments, were “falling in with friends of the right sort.”³⁰⁹

By the spring of 1921, the social anxieties caused by the white slave trade panic combined with an emergent discourse about the international traffic of women that were directed away from the dominions. In particular, the GFS targeted Mormon missionary activity in Britain as a threat to the organization’s imperial objectives. Groups like the Victoria League, the BWEA, and the GFS portrayed Mormon recruiting agents and missionaries as moral deviants that desired

³⁰⁵ LAC, MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, *The Girls’ Friendly Society* by Miss Ethel Campbell, 18.

³⁰⁶ Arat-Koc, 65.

³⁰⁷ Cook, ““Do not... do anything that you cannot unblushingly tell your mother,” 229.

³⁰⁸ LAC, RG76, Volume 116, File 22787, Part 16, Minutes of A Conference of the Canadian Council of Immigration of Women, February 27-29, 1928, 25.

³⁰⁹ *The Globe and Mail*, January 18, 1921, 8.

to obtain a harem of wives. British women were being ensnared into Mormon polygamous practises and redirected away from colonial destinations to Utah.³¹⁰

In March, the GFS used the apparent Mormon threat to justify their ongoing efforts to provide supervised hostels and protected travel. At a GFS Colonial Committee meeting held in London, England, Mary Williams argued that young British girls were falling out of the GFS' sphere of influence. She believed that more attention be drawn to the "very grave present danger" of renewed activity "of the Mormon propaganda" in Britain. Williams contended that British women taken out in parties of emigrants as settlers and servants, which fell under the auspices of Mormon supervision, were "not heard of again."³¹¹ Young British women were being drawn away from their potential to redistribute the British population in the dominions and bolster the creation of Christian households across the Empire.³¹² According to the editor of the *Workers' Journal*, Veronica Hensman, the "insidious nature of the present proselytizing campaign" was devised with the "result that credulous girls were attracted from their homes" and absorbed into the tenets of Mormonism.³¹³ GFS propaganda aimed to raise public awareness about the dangers of Mormon campaigns, and to ensure that "girls know the facts" that "polygamy does exist among them, and that it is not looked upon as a vice."³¹⁴

The Society's attacks on Mormon propaganda joined with British and Canadian newspaper coverage that actively sought to demonize "Mormon proselytizing agents."³¹⁵ Newspapers argued that the male Mormon missionaries in England were the "wolf in the fold" and hoped to divert the "English surplus" of women to stabilize the "Utah deficit."³¹⁶

³¹⁰ Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 51.

³¹¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 88, Reel A-1188, Colonial/Imperial/Overseas Committee Minute Book No.2, 74.

³¹² Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 51.

³¹³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 132, 133, Reel A-1212, GFS *Workers' Journal*, March 1921, 51.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, 51.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, 51.

³¹⁶ *The Kemptville Weekly Advance*, February 23, 1922, 3.

Sensationalized stories recounted the entrapment of young British girls and reported attempts to rescue them from the Mormon Church. For example, a 1922 article in a Canadian newspaper, the *Kemptville Weekly*, outlined the efforts of a Scotch clergyman to fight a “pitched battle with Mormons” for women “carried into Salt Lake City.” According to the clergyman, of the nearly “twenty thousand girls [that] have emigrated to Utah...not one of those girls has ever returned.” Through the “deadly cunning of the Mormon missionaries,” the “girl convert is powerless” and, once in Salt Lake, “escape from the city is impossible.”³¹⁷ Stories such as these reinforced the Society’s concern for young female emigrants and were used to strengthen its desire for greater control over emigration work. Mormon recruiting agents presented a challenge to its vision of the British Empire and the role of British women as imperial subjects by indoctrinating young girls with improper moral standards and redirecting away from colonial destinations.

In Canada, Mormons had a tenuous relationship with the state and society. In places like Alberta, Mormon settlers were seen as industrious farmers that had helped settle the American West. Their successful agricultural practises fit the design of the Canadian government to establish homesteads and colonize the Prairie West. C.B. Sissons noted in the *Winnipeg Free Press* that “Mormons on the whole are a hard-working and clean-living people, successful in agriculture and in business.”³¹⁸ From 1896 to 1911, Mormons fleeing anti-polygamy laws in the United States emigrated to Canada during the Western immigration boom. Under the leadership of Charles Ora Card, Mormon’s established agricultural communities in places like Cardston, Alberta and spread throughout the Prairie provinces. By the 1920s, there was roughly 9, 000 Mormons living in Canada, largely in Alberta. However, despite their practical skills, racial background and relatively small population, Mormons were frequently marginalized by society.

³¹⁷ Ibid, 3.

³¹⁸ *Winnipeg Free Press Evening Bulletin*, November 12, 1927, 12.

Their marriage customs allowed for polygamous relationships which exacerbated fears over the social and moral fabric of the nation.³¹⁹

The apparent vulnerability of white women heightened the Society's awareness to perceived threats in sustaining a white settler society. Polygamy presented a challenge to normative standards of a respectable white British community. Heterosexual monogamous marriage, as opposed to polygamist relationships, was essential to the reproduction of Christian and British households. While Mormon families appeared to value the home as central to community life, polygamy did not conform to an Anglo-Protestant understanding of domestic relations. The seemingly excessive sexual practises that polygamy represented, evidenced by the husband's multiple partners, undermined the idea of an intimate, companionate monogamous relationship between husband and wife. By imposing Anglo-Protestant standards of marriage, the GFS supported a vision of family that was viewed as the foundation of a strong and morally healthy nation.³²⁰

For the GFS, the polygamous practises of Mormons presented a threat to young female travellers as well as the British Empire. The organization was quick to draw on a familiar rhetoric that demanded the protection of vulnerable female emigrants from social evils. Polygamous marriage was described as a form of tyranny and slavery for women which opposed the democratic values that were represented by Christian monogamy.³²¹ Unlike the loose morality associated with Mormon polygamy, the GFS saw Christian British households and monogamous marriage as the foundation of a moral and civilized nation. Within a heterosexual monogamous relationship, white Anglo-Protestant women were able to engage in a level of

³¹⁹ Carter, 44.

³²⁰ Hammerton, "Gender and Migration," 172.

³²¹ Carter, 42.

independence and freedom based on their moral superiority as mothers and wives. Not only were Mormon polygamist ideals a threat to the foundations of a moral social order based on British Christian households, but their emigration efforts meant the continued scarcity of marriageable women of good, honest, British stock. The supposed Mormon problem lured seemingly naïve young girls away from colonial destinations like Canada that required Britain's surplus population and indoctrinated them with improper ideas that undermined the British Empire.³²²

In Canada the GFS contributed to a colonial discourse that insisted on the superiority of Christian British households as the cornerstone of social order and national morality. Heterosexual monogamous marriage played a critical role in the formation of Canada's British identity and was an influential tool in shaping ideas of gender and race across the country. Through missionary work and a network of emigration hostels, the dominant Christian churches and associated organizations imposed life-long monogamous marriage as the ideal model of domesticity in colonial settings.³²³ As historian Adele Perry has shown, the emigration of white women into colonial spaces was an imperial and social act. The ongoing process of colonization demanded the assertion of a specific form of white dominance. Efforts to promote emigration to Canada was a racialized and gendered process that hinged on entrenched notions of 'desirable' and 'undesirable' emigrants, and 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' cultural practises. The GFS promoted and reinforced the transmission of Canada's British identity through marriage, family, and emigration was aimed at consolidating control and maintaining unity in a white settler society. The emigration of white women into Canada would provide a future generation of

³²² Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 51.

³²³ Carter, 3-6.

imperial citizens and ensure the reproduction of Christian British values.³²⁴ Polygamy, for example, was deemed an undesirable and illegitimate cultural practise that subverted Anglo-Protestant traditions. The Society argued that the polygamist practises of the Mormons threatened to destabilize British cultural hegemony by enabling varied marriage and religious customs.

Canadian newspapers circulated stories from former Mormon wives that detailed the nature of polygamous marriage and the ill effects of polygamist relationships for and women and society. On 24 March 1922, Marion Williams, a former wife of a Salt Lake polygamist, warned that “Mormons were criminals because they were polygamists, and that their false doctrines debauched men, wrecked homes, and sent women into the streets.” Travelling across Canada, Williams declared that “if the Mormons are allowed to go on unchecked... their poisonous fangs” would spread “destruction everywhere.”³²⁵ At a meeting in Red Deer, Alberta she argued that Mormonism was polytheistic in which polygamy was a “sacred and fundamental part” of their community system. According to Williams, the patriarchal household of Mormons differed from the traditional Christian family unit. While a Mormon father was head of the household, Williams argued, “what the father had was not a family, but a tribe.”³²⁶ The language used by Williams resonated with GFS members and associates in Canada and Britain. The polygamist practise of Mormons merged the Society’s assumptions about the cultural customs and marriage practises of other marginalized colonial subjects. Polygamous marriages were deemed primitive, uncivilized, and morally corrupt. While Mormon settlers were industrious and successful

³²⁴ Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 134-135. See, Chapter 6 on the importance of white women to colonial discourse.

³²⁵ *Brantford Expositor*, March 24, 1922.

³²⁶ *Red Deer Advocate*, July 13, 1923, 4.

labourers, their values clashed with the type of society the GFS and others hoped to forge in the white, self-governing dominions. The polygamous challenge to the Society's vision for a monogamous Christian dominion prompted GFS to bolster its efforts in promoting emigration.³²⁷

The organization believed Christian morality was the backbone of a strong and united Empire. The organization worked with the Anglican Church and other church affiliated groups to strengthen the Christian influence in Canada. The British Empire was a Christian empire. The establishment of British Christian homes provided stability and a source of moral guidance in settlement efforts overseas. The GFS had a duty to educate young girls about their moral obligations to strengthen the Empire by spreading British values to the dominions. By immigrating to white, self-governing dominions like Canada, young girls would reinforce white communities and demonstrate the moral superiority of British people. Moreover, through their reproductive labour, young British women ensured the growth of white Anglo-Protestant populations in Canada.

London Diocesan Secretary L. Mainprice argued for the "great need of education among women" to prepare for life overseas. She believed that education about the living and employment conditions of the colonies was vital to the greater interests of the British Empire as well as GFS work in areas such as economics, migration opportunities overseas, and imperial and mission fields. Young girls and women were required in a "new country" to be strong in "their principles and religion" because "it is largely left to women to develop the moral and spiritual standard." According to Mainprice, by promoting ideals of imperial citizenship to young girls, the GFS was "thus expanding and deepening our work, and at the same time sharing in the

³²⁷ Carter, 83.

great part our Empire” by demonstrating their “responsibilities to our own people, to the child-races, and in the Society’s ideal of fellowship and prayer.”³²⁸

Throughout the 1920s, the GFS in Canada were strong supporters of missionary work. Its hostels and lodges in Toronto, Ottawa, Windsor, and Montreal frequently hosted guest speakers from across Canada to discuss missionary efforts of the Anglican Church. Not only would greater emigration allow for Branches to “flourish in all parts of the British Empire,” but enable the GFS to extend their work into “wider aspects, such as missionary enterprise.”³²⁹ Members were active in the mission field in places such as Hay River, Northwest Territories and Alert Bay, British Columbia. Speakers such as Catt, a hospital staff member at the Aklavik mission in the Northwest Territories, outlined the conditions of northern missions in Canada and the needs of mission hospitals in places like Aklavik.³³⁰ The GFS provided funds for the construction of churches, educational resources, and hospital supplies for Anglican missions throughout the Canadian West. The GFS provided items such as washing machines to the Gordon’s School in Qu’Appelle, furnishings at chapels at Alert Bay on the British Columbia coast, and the Grenfell Mission for “Eskimo work” in Labrador. Moreover, local branches of the Canadian GFS supported missionary efforts by “signing on” for “far away field of work among Indian children” to form GFS branches.³³¹ By forming local branches at Indigenous missions and funding mission schools, the GFS was explicitly involved in attempts to “civilize” and Christianize Indigenous communities. Missionary work provided white GFS associates an opportunity to regard themselves as cultural mediators within the gendered sphere of empire. As white women, the

³²⁸ LSE, Fawcett Library, 5GFS.02.225, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, December 1928, 201.

³²⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, January 16, 1923, 6.

³³⁰ *The Toronto Daily Star*, April 30, 1926, 24.

³³¹ LAC MG28 – 1349, Volume 223, Reel 1-1191, *The Girls’ Friendly Society* by Miss Ethel Campbell, 13.

Society's missionary workers projected culturally specific ideals of domesticity and family life that was part of the colonial project.³³²

The Society, however, demonstrated little concern for the plight of Indigenous people in Canada. Articles in the *Workers' Journal* and committee minutes say little about the conditions of Indigenous communities and focus on the efforts of the organization to support Anglican missions. The GFS generally adhered to a belief that Indigenous peoples were part of a 'dying race.' The presence of other controversial ethnic groups, lack of economic competition, and geographic isolation contributed to the absence of Indigenous groups from public discourse.³³³ The distance between the Central Council in Toronto and the missions presented an unclear picture of actual conditions on the missionary field. Instead, the Society emphasized the need to redistribute proper British stock across the Empire to bolster the white population. The GFS maintained racialized assumptions that were connected to its enthusiasm for the Empire and preserving Canada's British heritage.

At a GFS conference on Empire Education, Reverend Stacy Waddy spoke about the religious duty that "women of the race" have to British people living overseas. According to Waddy, appropriate "home surroundings build character" and British people living in Canada were "hungry" for "old traditions." As wives and sisters, members of the GFS were crucial in helping the "pioneers of the race."³³⁴ In rural settlements of the Prairie West, the GFS hoped to keep settlers in touch with British traditions by extending the influence of the Anglican Church and bolstering Anglo-Protestant communities. Gladys Pott, chairperson of the Society for the Oversea Settlement of British Women, echoed the sentiments of Rev. Waddy about the

³³² Rutherforddale, 103-105.

³³³ Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd, 1982), 12.

³³⁴ LSE, Fawcett Library, 5GFS.02.225, Conference on Empire Education, 3-4.

importance of the Society's work overseas. In the dominions, the GFS played an important role in the "welcome provided by overseas Branches, in hostels, in clubs and ready-made friends" which enabled the "right distribution of women throughout the British Empire." She alluded to a "sense of duty which was the foundation of empire-building." Potts reminded young women willing to emigrate to Canada that "if any of them wished to do any good... they had got to remind themselves and them continually of this duty – duty to themselves and duty to that great heritage handed down to them from their forefathers."³³⁵

The Society stressed the ongoing need for more women to travel into the Prairies and Northwest regions of Canada. The demographic imbalance demanded an influx of young women of a marriageable age. Due to decades of encouraging agricultural settlement as part of Canada's colonial project, men outnumbered women in the West. In Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, the gender imbalance exacerbated the demand for future 'mothers of the nation.'³³⁶ The GFS was critical of the number of young single men that had travelled west to establish homesteads. Young bachelors were portrayed as an undesirable social problem in rural communities. Without the influence of stable family life, young men were considered a source of lawlessness as well as a danger to respectable young women. For groups like the GFS, the unmarried male posed a potential threat to the heterosexual order which was already pressured by concerns over polygamy. The emigration of young British women addressed the marriage needs of single men on the Prairies. As farmer's wives, British women provided for the economic needs of the rural household economy, as well as promoted social stability through the establishment of British families.³³⁷ The GFS believed its hostels and lodges were crucial links in

³³⁵ LSE, Fawcett Library, 5GFS.02.225, *GFS Workers' Journal*, December 1928, 200-201.

³³⁶ Marilyn Barber, "Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada," *Canadian Historical Association*, Booklet. 16 (1991), 15.

³³⁷ Carter, 82-83. For similar arguments see, Chapter 6 of Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*.

facilitating the movement of female emigrants. Often nothing more than an inadequate wood structure, the GFS believed its hostels provided the necessary comforts for young girls travelling to remote settlements on the frontier.³³⁸ At a meeting of GFS members, Correspondent Secretary Peterson, read letters from young female members that praised GFS homes and lodges that “protect and help the girls who go to the lonely parts of the great northwest, and to British Columbia.” By providing a home away from home, the GFS lodges were a “beacon light of the northwest” and uplifted the moral tone of “far away towns.”³³⁹



Figure 5. “Firs lodge of Girls’ Friendly Society.” Mathirs Photo. c1910. University of Alberta Libraries

Given the imperial sentiment behind the Society’s emigration programs as well as its Anglican affiliation, the GFS was focused on reinforcing British traditions in regions with large Anglo-Protestant populations such as Ontario and the Prairie West. Outside the operation of hostels in Montreal and the reception of recent emigrants, the GFS had little concern for

³³⁸ See, Figure 5.

³³⁹ *The Globe and Mail*, November 10, 1911, 5.

developing its social service work in Quebec. In French Canada, social reform fell under the control of the Catholic Church which was the dominant influence over ordinary French Catholics.³⁴⁰

In urban centres like Toronto and Ottawa, the GFS was concerned with the movement of women who faced the moral temptations of city life. The emphasis was on promoting domestic service as a viable means of employment to inculcate ideas of domesticity and training for household management, which provided Ontario with a greater number of trained English-speaking, future mothers. Canada was a preferred destination for many women that chose to take on domestic service positions. The GFS had commended roughly 2, 500 potential domestic servants to local Canadian branches.³⁴¹ Across the country, competition for immigrant domestics was driven by the constant shortage of Canadian females willing to enter household employment. To alleviate the so-called “servant problem,” emigration was promoted as a viable means to fulfill middle-class demands for domestic labour. Middle- and upper-class women’s own concerns with finding domestic servants influenced their promotion of household work.³⁴² Grace L. Morrow, a writer for the *United Empire* newspaper, lamented the difficulties of obtaining trained domestic servants, noting “women of all nations now prefer industrial to domestic work.”³⁴³ “Housewives with an income which could pay several maid-servants in England,” she explained, “are glad to secure one decent Irish immigrant girl.”³⁴⁴

³⁴⁰ Thompson and Seager, *Decades of Discord: Canada*, 60.

³⁴¹ This number is a rough estimate calculated from the GFS’ Overseas Committee Minutes from 1905-1919. Due to the Great War restricting immigration and the bulk of emigration work being taken over by the respective governments, the Society’s emigration numbers are difficult to determine. Nonetheless, this example reinforces the fact that Canada received the many women from Britain as domestics or otherwise.

³⁴² Ruth A. Frager and Carmela Patrias, *Discounted Labour: women Workers in Canada, 1870-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 98.

³⁴³ LAC, RG76, Volume 115, File 22787, Part 15, “Harassed Housewives of the Empire,” by Grace L. Morrow in *United Empire*.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

By the 1920s, there was a worldwide and concerted effort to promote and professionalize domestic service, which helped facilitate emigration schemes and increase job placements in the dominions.³⁴⁵ Domestic training provided working-class girls with a level of education and experience that uplifted domestic service to a professional standard. Domestic science programs were designed to elevate the status of the private sphere and women's labour within the household.³⁴⁶ The Society's hostels and lodges were used to provide domestic training to young girls in the hopes of improving their chances for employment and standardizing the profession. By running "model boarding-houses," the GFS arranged for the "training of young girls for domestic employment" by creating household science classes. The 'ideal lodge' was one based on the ideals of purity, prayer, and Christian fellowship. Domestic service prepared young women to assume the role of motherhood. Through efforts to educate young modern girls in their duty to engage in self-respect and modesty, the GFS hoped to train young working-class girls in the virtues of motherhood. Tied to domestic science training, the GFS emphasized the colonial responsibility of imperial girlhood to race regeneration.³⁴⁷

As active participants in the social purity movement, the GFS were more concerned with protecting the purity and virtue of single, young British women rather than alleviating the poor working conditions and exploitation of domestic servants.³⁴⁸ Hostels and their middle-class

³⁴⁵ For in-depth analysis on domestic servants, professionalization, and emigration efforts, see Genevieve Leslie, "Domestic Service in Canada, 1880-1920," in *Women at Work: Ontario, 1850-1930*, eds. Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith, and Bonnie Shephard. Toronto, 71-125. Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974; Marilyn Barber, "The Women Ontario Welcomed: Immigrant Domesticity for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930," in *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History, Volume 2*, eds. Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff. Toronto, 102-121; Marilyn Barber, "The Servant Problem in Manitoba, 1896-1930," in *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History*, edited by Mary Kinear, 100-119. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1987, McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1985; Sager, Eric W. "The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871-1931," *Social Science History* 31, no.4 (2007): 509-537.

³⁴⁶ Halpern, 54.

³⁴⁷ Henderson, 194.

³⁴⁸ Arat-koc, 60.

matrons established a supervisory system to ensure that domestic servants did not seek other kinds of work or enter immoral relationships with men. Domestic servants, faced with unemployment and the potential for homelessness, forced many women into prostitution to maintain a standard of living.³⁴⁹ By suggesting motherhood, domesticity, and moral self-regulation as the solution to the problem of the unprotected, indifferent working-class immigrant girls, the GFS reinforced the imperial imperative that the women's 'body, soul, and spirit' was essential to the future of the race.

Emigration to western Canada differed from the schemes put forth in central Canada. While the Society was stigmatized for being an organization that focused on domestic servants, the GFS worked, albeit with little success, to widen its reputation by recruiting more women from other occupations such as teaching and nursing.³⁵⁰ As GFS Imperial Secretary Beatrice Whitley expressed, the "Western Prairies are admitting nurses as they are admitting teachers, irrespective of Eastern Canada."³⁵¹ The Prairies provided new labour opportunities compared to the emphasis on domestic service in central Canadian cities. Moreover, the growth of non-Anglo-Protestant communities raised concerns about the longevity of traditional British customs by those with imperial sympathies.³⁵² Regardless of their occupation, the reproductive labour of women was deemed critical to the success of colonial development and the survival of the Empire. The presence of white women in rural communities, especially in the more ethnically diverse western regions, provided the opportunity to stimulate proper colonial population growth.

³⁴⁹ Valverde, 126.

³⁵⁰ Richmond, 306.

³⁵¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Ethel Hay from Beatrice Whitley, 112.

³⁵² Joy Parr, *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 147.

The Society believed that British women's, waged and non-waged, labour was central to the development of western Canada. Feminized occupations such as domestic service, teaching, and nursing contributed to the cultural missionary work promoted by the Anglican Church and the GFS.³⁵³ In the western provinces, the emigration of British women bolstered white communities on the frontier regions of Canada and contributed to the spiritual welfare of isolated Anglican settlers. The absence of male pastors and lay workers afforded women new opportunities to extend their ministry by reaching out to Anglican settlers, especially women and children. Their voluntary service as Sunday school teachers and missionaries provided for the spiritual welfare of a rural areas, especially in outlying districts on the Prairies.³⁵⁴

The GFS believed that there was great need for religious education on the Prairies. Decades of emigration prior to the Great War and the rapid expansion of settlement left the Anglican Church weakened on the western frontier of Canada. The lack of clergymen meant there were fewer church workers available to provide religious services to Anglican diocese. The disparate structure of the Anglican Church in western Canada meant that most dioceses were not self-supporting. They relied on financial support and voluntary work from English missionary societies as well as the highly organized church in Britain and central Canada.³⁵⁵ Since the 1900s, the GFS had supported the Archbishops' Western Canada Fund (AWCF) to purchase blocks of land for the construction of churches across the Prairies. The AWCF was organized in Britain by the church and relied on representatives to manage the funds donated by missionary

³⁵³ The Society's commendation records suggest that women travelled to Canada to work in a wide variety of occupations other than domestic service, namely as nurses and teachers. While domestic service remained the primary occupation, it is important to highlight the various, albeit limited, employment opportunities available to British women, especially on the Prairies.

³⁵⁴ Marilyn Barber, "The Motor Caravan Mission: Anglican Women Workers on the Canadian Frontier in the New Era," in *Changing Roles of Women within the Christian Church in Canada*, eds. Elizabeth Gillan Muir and Marilyn Fardig Whitley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 221.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 221.

church groups like the GFS.³⁵⁶ By the end of the 1920s, the GFS contributed to the purchase and construction of over 50 church sites in the mostly in the dioceses of Qu'Appelle and Calgary.

The shortage of Anglican clergymen on the Prairies enabled women to assume authority traditionally reserved for male members of the Anglican Church. Many women who engaged in religious work were well-educated and trained teachers. Their work in missions and as Sunday-school teachers provided them an opportunity to travel as well as a sense of independence. However, women worked for little pay and reinforced patriarchal church practises. Most women were subordinate to male clergy and operated in spheres of work that were founded on traditions of religious voluntary service such as home visits and as Sunday-school teachers.³⁵⁷ For example, the GFS supported motor-caravan missions to spread religious education to remote communities and carry out the ministry of religious education.³⁵⁸ Motor-caravan programs were designed to extend women's work in social service and moral reform. Visits to Prairie districts carried religious education to scattered settlements often deprived of church services. Run by two volunteers, GFS caravans toured the Prairies and sought out isolated households. The intention of caravan missions was to remind 'lonely' female settlers of their civilized heritage and their importance as bulwarks of the white race. Social interaction with caravan women provided female settlers, whose daily contact was with white men and non-white people, a sense of companionship members of the same gender and race.³⁵⁹

GFS associates, such as Eva Hasell and Winifred Ticehurst, drove across the Prairies "to do Sunday-school work among the scattered children." They argued that the "lack of funds" for

³⁵⁶ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter Canon C.W. Vernon to Lady Bertha Dawkins, 158.

³⁵⁷ Marilyn Barber, "The Motor Caravan Mission," 220.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 220.

³⁵⁹ Chilton, *Agents of Empire*, 107.

caravans had hindered the work of British missionaries. Hasell appealed to the GFS in Britain for support: “The Church in Western Canada is poor... keeping back the development of [religious] work.” She believed there was a “very great need” for religious educational work on the Prairies. Many “English emigrants’ children did not even know the story of our Lord’s life,” which required an increase of church influence.³⁶⁰ Hasell and the GFS were convinced that religious education gave children and women a moral foundation essential to the character of a future generation of citizens. By building hostels and operating caravan missions, the GFS assured the continuation of British traditions on the Prairies. These buildings would provide a permanent location to exert the moral influence of the Anglican Church and extend the network of the GFS to remote rural communities.

Since the spring of 1919, the Girls’ Friendly Society insisted that there was an important demand for a hostel in Regina, Saskatchewan. The hostel would act as centre for the spiritual welfare of British settlers as well as meet the urgent accommodation needs for female British teachers, nurses, and other women emigrating to the western provinces. On 24 March, Archdeacon Dobie of Regina reached out to the Society’s Canadian Representative Ethel Hay about the purchase of a site for the proposed Princess Patricia Hostel in Regina. Dobie anticipated that there would be a great need for a “hostel such as the GFS had in mind.”³⁶¹ The GFS hoped they could sell the lands purchased through the Archbishops Western Canada Fund to finance the construction of the hostel. On 1 September 1919, Laura Sawbridge wrote to Chair of the GFS Imperial Committee Kathleen Townend about the “intentions of the GFS Imperial Committee with regard to the proposed Princess Patricia Hostel in Regina.” Sawbridge was the

³⁶⁰ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 134 to 136, Reel A-1213, *GFS Workers’ Journal*, March 1922, 36.

³⁶¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter from Archdeacon Dobie to Ethel Hay, 33-34.

sister of a prominent Prairie clergyman, Reverend J.E.B. Sawbridge, and maintained a strong connection to the GFS and the Anglican Church. She had discussed with the Archdeacon of Qu'Appelle the possibility of carrying out the hostel scheme and the need to bring "girl teachers" in "close touch with their Church."³⁶² The building of the hostel in Regina would supplement the religious and educational training that was being provided by Girls' Normal Schools and the motor-caravan missions in Western Canada.

On 13 February 1920, in a letter to the Central Representative for Canada, Ethel Hay, one GFS associate argued it was a "scandal that the Church had no hostel in that district... to meet the tide of emigration amongst women for which the GFS is making preparations."³⁶³ With the increased efforts towards promoting emigration to Canada's Prairie West, the GFS grew increasingly concerned with the lack of accommodations for young girls travelling overseas and across the country. The expected influx of young girls and women made the erection of hostels in places such as Saskatoon, Calgary, and Regina "more and more urgent."³⁶⁴ On 28 July 1920, the Imperial Secretary Beatrice Whitley was informed by Reverend George Exton Lloyd that a proposed GFS hostel was to become a "Centre for the Women's side of Church of England life" that would inspire teachers, nurses, and other women as missionaries.³⁶⁵ The GFS recognized that a constant flow of British women was a "glorious opportunity...for keeping Canada British and Christian."³⁶⁶

Lloyd was an influential imperialist that established the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf program to sponsor the emigration of British teachers to Canada. Lloyd emigrated from Britain

³⁶² LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter from Laura Sawbridge to Kathleen Townend, 62-64.

³⁶³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Ethel Hay, 89.

³⁶⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Ethel Hay from Beatrice Whitley, 112.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 113.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 112.

to Canada in 1881, and by 1922 served as the Bishop of Saskatchewan, and dedicated most of his life to expanding recruitment for British teachers. He believed that the Anglican Church represented the foundation of Britishness in Canada. Imperial progress and the advancement of Christianity were central to his mission work among white settlers. Lloyd, as with the GFS, was devoted to the idea of keeping Canada British and Christian.³⁶⁷ On 18 November 1920, he contacted the GFS about the desperate need for a hostel in Regina to accommodate his efforts. Lloyd was surprised by the “out flow of immigrants...especially young women, girls and little children.” He told the Society’s Canadian Representative, Ethel Hay, that he “could easily place 500 teachers in the schools...if he only had them at hand.”³⁶⁸

The GFS supported Lloyd’s emigration scheme by providing financial assistance and nominating its own members who were experienced schoolteachers. For example, on 26 March 1925, Kitty Neate was commended by the GFS to become a music teacher in Neelin, Manitoba. Neate was “an educated member” that had been teaching music in Egypt for two years and was travelling to live with her mother and father in Canada. She was described as a “well taught and very good” GFS and church member.³⁶⁹ Not only did Neate, and teachers like her, have experience teaching in the peripheries, but she was also an ideal candidate for settlements in Canada. Female teachers were often well educated and seen as “living links of Empire” who could transfer British values to western settlements. The emigration of young, single female teachers would provide the region with future British wives and mothers which were deemed essential for creating British Christian homes and reproducing the race. Through the

³⁶⁷ Marilyn Barber, “Nation-Building in Saskatchewan: Teachers from the British Isles in Saskatchewan Rural Schools in the 1920s,” in *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity*, eds. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 222.

³⁶⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Ethel Hay, 89.

³⁶⁹ LSE, Fawcett Library, 5GFS.04.71, Commendation Register: Canada, 129.

establishment of their own homes and their interaction with white and non-white settlers, British female teachers could instill concepts of domesticity that were closely connected to the moral order of British society and civilization.³⁷⁰

By 1923, the GFS was struggling to build the Princess Patricia Hostel. The sale of the proposed church site was hindered by a decline in land value. In a letter to Canadian Representative Ethel Hay, Canon Beale (who managed the Archbishops' Western Canada Fund) believed that "everything was so stagnant after the War," but expected land values to increase. Beale assured the GFS that eventually the sale of land will begin "to develop in Western Canada... and [its] site should then sell for a good figure."³⁷¹ Likewise, the Bishop of Qu'Appelle wrote GFS president Cecilia Cunliffe expressing the "deep appreciation of the splendid efforts of Girls' Friendly Society...to assist the Church on the Prairies." The Bishop lamented that "depressions, and other things have seriously interfered" with plans to construct the hostel. He told Cunliffe that the site purchased from the hostel had not been sold and doubted the sale would "cover all that his Diocesan Fund [had] spent on the taxes of the ground."³⁷²

The money that the GFS invested in the Archbishops' Western Canada Fund was mismanaged by Western clergy. By the end of the 1920s, the GFS in Britain and Canada had little idea about the development of its land purchases. On 29 November 1928, GFS associate Mary Harvey wrote to Imperial Secretary Caroline Mytton inquiring about the church sites and the Princess Patricia Hostel. Mytton responded that many of the "sites were sold or abandoned." Her efforts to contact "respective clergy" had led her to believe that in "Canada they seem to

³⁷⁰ Barber, "Nation-Building in Saskatchewan," 221.

³⁷¹ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Ethel Hay from Canon J. Beale.

³⁷² LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter from the Bishop of Qu'Appelle to GFS President Lady Cunliffe.

have forgotten the GFS.”³⁷³ Despite the connection between western clergy and the Anglican Church in Britain, the efforts of the GFS were largely ignored. The distances between the western diocesan representatives and the GFS in Britain and central Canada limited the abilities of the organization to effectively manage its own funds and missionary projects.

Ultimately, the Princess Patricia Hostel was a failure. In 1929, at a meeting with the British Imperial Secretary Caroline Mytton, the Canadian President Mary Glassco noted that she “did not know that the English GFS had ever bought any sites to build Canadian Churches.” In response, Mytton lamented the use of the Archbishops’ Western Canada Fund to purchase land. Funds raised for the hostel were never attributed to the GFS and often mismanaged by the Anglican Church. Rather, the GFS in Britain believed the “Canadian Church behaved very shabbily to the GFS.”³⁷⁴

Despite setbacks and organizational limitations on the Prairies, hostels and lodges were critical to the emigration and moral reform work of the Girls’ Friendly Society. They were designed to provide for the religious education of British settlers as well as regulate the movement of women. The GFS actively sought to populate the nation with white, respectable, working-class women and situated its work in a larger impetus to re-evangelize the Empire. Driven by fears of non-British immigration and alternative forms of community, marriage, and religion, the GFS believed that “Christian grace and influence” for women, girls, and children of Canada was essential for the nation’s development.³⁷⁵ The Society’s imperial missionary rhetoric places analyses of race, gender, religion, and sexuality at the centre of nation-building processes.

³⁷³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Mary Harvey from Caroline Mytton.

³⁷⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Miss Dumaresq from Miss Mytton, 133.

³⁷⁵ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter from Laura Sawbridge to Kathleen Townend, 62-64.

While British women were encouraged to seek employment in places across Canada, the GFS stressed that emigration would provide better chances for marriage and the establishment of their own households.

The GFS held to the conviction that the role of white women in the development of white settler societies was central to colonization and the nation-building project. By acting as models of “good housewives” and “fit mothers,” young female emigrants would ensure the longevity of British cultural dominance in Canada and maintain the prevalence Anglo-Protestant traditions.³⁷⁶ The GFS was a crucial partner of the Anglican Church in providing for the “spiritual needs of our scattered people” in the Prairie West.³⁷⁷ Prominent clergymen on the Prairies, such as George Lloyd, utilized their close ties to British missionary societies to provide a steady stream of trained Christian teachers and Anglican workers. In central Canada, domestic servants faced stringent moral regulations and were encouraged to emigrate to alleviate middle-class labour demands. On the Prairies, female labour, especially as teachers, was viewed as a vital component of the Society’s cultural missionary work.³⁷⁸ British female emigrants reinforced a racialized and gendered imperial agenda as well as assuaged fears over moral and racial degeneration by bolstering Christian ideals of family, purity, marriage, and domesticity. Young single women were viewed as cultural missionaries. They were encouraged to emigrate as teachers, nurses, and domestic servants to provide Canada with an influx of future mothers and to establish Christian households which bolstered the moral and ethnic composition of Canada’s imperial citizens.

³⁷⁶ France Iacovetta and Marlene Epps, “Introduction,” in *Sisters or Strangers? Immigrant, Ethnic, and Racialized Women in Canadian History 2nd Edition*, edited by France Iacovetta and Marlene Epps (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 86-87.

³⁷⁷ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter from the Bishop of Qu’Appelle to GFS President Lady Cunliffe.

³⁷⁸ Barber, “Nation-Building in Saskatchewan,” 222.

Conclusion

In the conclusion to her history of the Girls' Friendly Society, Mary Heath-Stubbs declared that the "Society had proved itself adaptive in almost every way." According to Heath-Stubbs, the organization was able to meet new social conditions because "its framework has stood the test of the years."³⁷⁹ The organization's social service and emigration work, however, highlights the need to reassess the idea of progress and social change. With the rise of mass consumerism, new technology, and competing cultural paradigms, the forces of modernity and tradition operated simultaneously in Canadian society during the 1920s. For the GFS, the image of the Modern Girl was a complicated figure that required protection and guidance which raised concerns over the regulation over heterosocial spaces. By emphasizing the value of social evangelism, the GFS claimed to meet the needs of the modern girl. Young, single working women were seen as more self-reliant and independent than women in earlier decades; however, the GFS insisted that women's responsibility to the Empire was the reproduction of Anglo-Protestant values, through childbearing and the household. The purpose of social purity campaigns like the White Crusade stressed the importance of domestic life and white motherhood. As future mothers, GFS members were taught to see themselves as moral guardians of the house that would provide Canada and the Empire with loyal British subjects and ensure a healthy national life.

The support for empire education, social purity campaigns, hostels, and emigration schemes illustrated the desire of the Girls' Friendly Society to bolster Canada's British heritage and culture. Emigration and the protection of emigrants was deemed vital to the reproduction of the race and a British social order based on moral conduct, domesticity, and Christian values.

³⁷⁹ Heath-Stubbs, 184.

Throughout the 1920s, more single women joined the emigration movement as networks of friends and relatives expanded across Canada. Commendation letters demonstrate how the network of GFS hostels and kinship ties enabled greater mobility for British women within an imperial context. The Society's overseas hostels provided a system of supervision, guidance, and protection to single female emigrants. For many GFS emigrants, Ontario and the West were the preferred destinations for employment and increased the potential for marriage opportunities. GFS emigrants were viewed as cultural missionaries that would bring British civilization to the ongoing settlements efforts in Canada. By establishing good, Christian British homes, young female emigrants ensured that the prosperity of the nation and empire was secured through their reproductive and domestic labour.

By the late 1920s, however, the GFS in Canada and in Britain succumbed to wavering enthusiasm for empire and social reform among its members. By 1931, the membership numbers had dropped across the Empire to fifty eight percent of its peak in 1913.³⁸⁰ In Canada, the GFS never fully integrated into Canadian society and relied on recent emigrants to bolster its ranks. Even as Canada continued to reinforce its British origins, the GFS was viewed as out of touch with contemporary political and social trends. The decline of the GFS coincided with shifts in the political unity of the British Empire. The Imperial Conference in the autumn of 1926 began the process of decentralization across the Empire. Rather than move towards greater imperial control, dominion and British representatives put forth the concept of a British Commonwealth. Dominions were united through a common heritage and allegiance to the Crown but were autonomous nations with equal status to Britain. Canada's development as a dominion with political autonomy culminated in the Statue of Westminster in 1931.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Richmond, 317.

³⁸¹ Thompson and Seager, 49.

Canada's changing political status within the Empire gave impetus towards a new cultural nationalism. The promotion of Canadian artists, literature, and music aimed to distinguish a uniquely Canadian identity that was separate from British ideals.³⁸² On a tour to inspect the church sites purchased by the Society on the Prairies, GFS representative K. Woods noted that Canadians, in particular Western Canadians which who were less ethnically and racially homogenous, did not "look too friendly on what they call 'English' Societies."³⁸³ For Canadians, the organization appeared as English rather than British, which isolated the GFS from expanding colonial definitions of Britishness. Despite the regional differences and a rising Canadian cultural nationalism, the GFS did little to create a distinctly Canadian outlook and adhered policies outlined by the parent society in Britain. The lack of flexibility and inability to meet changing cultural paradigms contributed to the decline of the GFS in Canada.

Moreover, the conservative ideals of the GFS were increasingly seen as out of touch with modern social realities. Women's suffrage and increased economic freedom due to higher wages led many young working-class women to resent the moralizing tone of GFS activities. Competition from other youth organizations like the Girl Guides produced a stark contrast between modern youth programs and Victorian organizations like the Girls' Friendly Society. Larger, more influential groups such as the Women's Auxiliary overshadowed the GFS in social service and missionary work, which lessened the importance of the GFS' work with emigrants and within Anglican Church. At a 1929 Imperial Committee meeting, Canadian president Mary Glassco stated clearly that the GFS was not making progress in Canada, the "chief reason being that the Women's Auxiliary (WA) takes upon itself all the missionary work of the Church and...

³⁸² Ibid, 159.

³⁸³ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Miss Caroline Mytton from Miss K. Woods.

professes to provide for the needs of young women and girls.” The Canadian Anglican Church increasingly relied on and favoured the social service work of nationally organized groups such as the WA and the Anglican Young People’s Association. Despite the Society’s previous attempts to work with these groups, the shift from empire to commonwealth and growing distaste among young women for social purity left “the GFS with no power.”³⁸⁴

The Society’s inability to open new lodges, such as the Princess Patricia Hostel in Regina, as well as its difficulties to maintain existing hostels, was indicative of its waning strength over social reform and emigration work. As the decade progressed, hostels run by the Girls’ Friendly Society began to close in Canada. In Montreal, Toronto, and Kelowna, hostels shut down their operations due to declining numbers of workers and emigrants. On 22 October 1928, the GFS president in the diocese of Montreal reported that its Montreal hostel was closed because of new immigration regulations. Newcomers were required to utilize government-run hostels rather than ones operated by voluntary organizations.³⁸⁵ Likewise, the Railway Agreement Act in 1925 gave more control to private companies to recruit from “non-preferred” countries in Central Europe to meet labour demands.³⁸⁶ The shift towards tightening hostel regulations and a tolerance for a more varied immigrant population gave the GFS less influence in controlling immigration. The GFS emphasis on supporting British women as preferred immigrants fell out of step with government policy. Regardless, by 1930 and the economic collapse of the Great Depression, unemployment numbers increased which prompted the government to stop all emigration schemes. The earlier Empire Settlement acts were dismantled, and even British subjects were barred from entering Canada to lessen competition for available

³⁸⁴ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 89, Reel A-1189, Overseas Committee Minutes Book No. 3, 1925-1955, 45.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁸⁶ Knowles, 141.

jobs.³⁸⁷ In a letter to GFS Central President Lady Bertha Dawkins, A.T. Dumaresq argued that based on the experience with the Regina Hostel, the organization's money and efforts were wasted, which "[did] not encourage one to make, or promote, any future efforts on behalf of Canada."³⁸⁸

A study of the GFS produces a double bind that limits an understanding of the impact the organization had on individuals. Source material in archives requires historians to read, not only 'against' but 'with the archival grain' to reveal the multifaceted responses to modern changes in the 1920s.³⁸⁹ Records substantiate the claims made by the elite women who controlled and organized GFS committees, local branches, and imperial conferences. On the one hand, the system of commendation that tracked emigrants could have provided more details about the lives, occupations, and experiences of young women. The ineffective use of commendation, however, failed to outline the experience or movement of GFS members travelling overseas. On the other hand, the lack of information demonstrates that female emigrants were active agents in shaping their own lives in Canada. The women nominated and supervised by the GFS resisted the traditional conventions that formed the basis of the organization. Rather than adhere to the values imposed by upper-class women, young girls and women pursued their own vision of a modern femininity—whether in their career, marriage, or social activities.

Nonetheless, the GFS' sense of imperial mission and responsibility for modern girls, as emigrants or otherwise, underlines the gendered power dynamics that shaped many women's lives. Imperial girlhood was commodified by elite women as a means to extend their influence in the political sphere. The GFS claimed responsibility for shaping, guiding, and educating young

³⁸⁷ Bothwell, Drummond, and English, 246.

³⁸⁸ LAC, MG28-I349, Volume 223, Reel A-1191, Canada, 1918-1934, Letter to Lady Bertha Dawkins from A.T. Dumaresq, 151.

³⁸⁹ Perry, *Colonial Relations*, 3.

girls on their duties as future mothers and wives of the empire. The emigration of women was a central part of the GFS' objective to maintain Canada's British cultural and social order as well as safeguard the longevity of a Christian British Empire. As a white, self-governing dominion, Canada was a central destination for GFS emigrants. The movement of young, single white women would assert British cultural hegemony and bolster the white population. Young GFS members were educated about opportunities for employment as teachers or domestic servants in the dominion.

The economic prospects for GFS members were often attached to the ideas that young British women were obligated to create households of their own. While the GFS' emigration program enabled many women to travel safely and facilitated their passage overseas, hostels and lodges operated as a mechanism of moral regulation. Fears over white slavery and non-British marriage customs provided the impetus for the GFS to ensure that its members arrived at their intended destination as well as trace their movement throughout Canada. By increasing the population of white women of marriageable age, the GFS believed that their members were central to the ongoing colonial project and played a vital role in the imperial civilizing mission. The GFS' enthusiasm for imperial projects highlights the socially conservative evangelical rhetoric employed by female imperialists during the 1920s. Their promotion of social purity and emigration merged to form a discourse that strengthened the links between the racial duty of imperial motherhood and the civilizing mission in the dominions. As future 'mothers of the race,' young single women and girls were seen as builders of Empire providing Canada with Christian British wives. The GFS associated the movement of women with the development of

white settlement which empowered some British women to see themselves as architects of the imperial project.³⁹⁰

An examination of the GFS demonstrates how certain women responded to their changing status within the Anglican Church and society. For elite imperialist women, the British Empire acted as an organizational unit to exercise a considerable amount of power over the conduct and mobility of imperial girlhood. Seen as crucial to the survival of the Empire and future generations of imperial subjects, work with young girls was viewed as the domain of elite philanthropic women. The Society's purity campaigns, and emigration schemes were supported by the elite British and Canadian men, in the government and the Anglican clergy, who believed that social service work was the responsibility of women. The GFS' ability to maintain and establish empire-wide networks allowed for the movement of people and ideas that aimed to strengthen the British Empire as global force. In Canada, the GFS sought to reinforce the dominance of British culture and social institutions. Despite regional challenges, the GFS attempted to entrench their organization throughout the dominion. Young white British women were viewed as cultural missionaries that would exert their influence over the society and reinforce an imperial understanding of British women's moral superiority.

The status of the Girls' Friendly Society within the Anglican Church highlights the power of religious institutions in propagating imperial sentiment. Anglican groups like the GFS extended imperial ties through their support of missions, social service work, and church building objectives. The connections between the GFS in Canada and Britain allowed for the circulation of an imperial ideology that stressed the necessity of women as a civilizing force. The GFS demonstrates the persistence of traditional gendered and racial prescriptions that idealized

³⁹⁰ Hammerton, "Gender and Migration," 174.

the British Christian household based on heterosexual monogamous marriage. The organization's wide-reaching social, missionary, and cultural efforts during the 1920s emphasizes the lingering desire to strengthen Canada's position within the British imperial world and underlines the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, religion, and age are critical to understanding the nation-building process.

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