“Canadian House Keeping” in *Canada’s History*

Excerpts from *The Female Emigrant’s Guide* by Catherine Parr Traill

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Catherine Parr Traill emigrated from England with her sister, Susan Moodie, in 1832.[[1]](#footnote-1) Upon doing so, she was forced to learn the new ways of life in Canada, known as the New World at the time, by trial and error since there were no guidelines for the duties of a settler’s wife.[[2]](#footnote-2) Parr Traill, having lived in Canada for twenty-two years by the time her book *The Female Emigrant’s Guide* was published, decided to compose a guide for wives and daughters whose husbands and fathers were new settlers to the land, as she too experienced overcoming hardships with no instructions.[[3]](#footnote-3) This book of guidelines entailed recipes (using native food sources), how to properly furnish a home, the significance of knitting, and many other useful tactics and advice to succeed as an emigrant woman in Canada. Through these excerpts of Parr Traill’s *The Female Emigrant’s Guide* within the periodical, *Canada’s History*, we can understand the difficulties women must have faced, having the same expectations of keeping a home in a completely different world than what they were used to; however, among these complications, we can also dissect the joy and hope that could be found by following Parr Traill’s advice, and a sense of security and safety in Canada that may not have been present in the emigrants original home.

Life in England, as well as other established and colonized countries at the time, was significantly different than the settler’s life in Canada. Parr Traill explains the importance of modesty and simplicity in furnishing a log house, as the comfort of the home far exceeded the desires of intricacy, and the “showy” items, one may have acquired from England, wouldn’t match the rustic elements of the home.[[4]](#footnote-4) In Parr Traill’s section of “Maple-sugar”, she mentions that women’s roles in colonized societies didn’t include the hard work of extracting maple sugar, never mind “under-brushing” or “burning fallows”, which can be seen as an indirect warning of the different expectations of a woman in Canada.[[5]](#footnote-5) The enjoyment of good-tasting beer and traditional dinners in England became a past memory, instead, the art of brewing the beer yourself, and acquiring a taste for squirrel was something Parr Traill advised for a better way of life in Canada.[[6]](#footnote-6) Parr Traill includes guidelines to hardships that women wouldn’t even imagine facing, yet through her suggestions, could eventually find hope.

“Yet let not the heart of the wife despond. It is only the first trial; better things are in store for her”. [[7]](#footnote-7) Through each of the excerpts from Parr Traill’s book, her guidance brings forth a light at the end of the tunnel. As insignificant as it may seem, Parr Traill includes a section of making “maple sugar sweeties” - a “cheap treat for the little ones”, which can remind the women that they will be able to bring joy to their children even through their poverties.[[8]](#footnote-8) By brewing your own beer, Parr Traill explains that not only will you be able to provide your husband with a cold beverage in the summer heat, you will be replacing the whiskey, diluted by water, at a cheap price, possibly even cheaper than buying it in your previous homeland.[[9]](#footnote-9) Parr Traill goes on to explain how even though squirrel may not be a delicacy in England or other colonies, it is a plentiful and healthy food source in Canada which can provide comfort to women who initially may find it inferior on the dinner table.[[10]](#footnote-10) These optimistic passages were soothing to the women who didn’t know what to expect in their new home, and were greatly supported since Parr Traill had experienced contentment and security through her advice.

Settlers in Canada were generally honest people because they had risked everything they had by coming to this new land. They shed their own blood, sweat, and tears to make it a survivable home for them and their families, which created a safe and secure environment that may not have been attainable in a country where there is wealth and greed.[[11]](#footnote-11) In the excerpt “Furnishing a log house”, Parr Traill explains how every piece of furniture, counter, seat, and shelf is made with one’s own hands, which can allude to the pride someone would have - not feeling the need to steal from others.[[12]](#footnote-12) Through knitting and making maple syrup, Parr Traill mentions that these items can be sold for a currency of up to two shillings and three pence, which can provide a family with the consolation that there is the opportunity of financial income and security.[[13]](#footnote-13)

These excerpts were brought forth in the periodical, *Canada’s History 97,* under the title “Canadian House Keeping” quite recently in 2017, which has significance of its own.[[14]](#footnote-14) In Canada today, emigration of families continues, and Parr Traill’s advice on how to make a home as a new comer to this country is still a relatable topic for some. However, most women today aren’t forced to survive or make a home in the complete wilderness, which through these extracts from *The Female Emigrant’s Guide,* readers of this document can understand the shock Parr Traill and many other women must have gone through to make a desirable home for their families while emigrating; so much so, that Parr Traill didn’t want any other woman to experience what she did in the process.

1. “Canadian House Keeping: The Female Emigrants Wife by Catherine Parr Traill.” *Canadas’s History 97,* no. 4 (August 2017): 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Ibid., 52.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Ibid., 52-53.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid., 52.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Ibid., 53.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Ibid., 52.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Ibid., 53* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Ibid., 51.* [↑](#footnote-ref-14)