



Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties (Studies in Gender and History)

Valerie J. Korinek

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Originally launched in 1928, by the 1950s and 1960s nearly two million readers every month sampled "Chatelaine" magazine's eclectic mixture of traditional and surprisingly unconventional articles and editorials. At a time when the American women's magazine market began to flounder thanks to the advent of television, "Chatelaine's" subscriptions expanded, as did the lively debate between its pages.

Why?

In this exhilarating study of Canada's foremost women's publication in the 50s and 60s, Valerie Korinek shows that while the magazine was certainly filled with advertisements that promoted domestic perfection through the endless expansion of consumer spending, a number of its sections - including fiction, features, letters, and the editor's column - began to contain material that subversively complicated the simple consumer recipes for affluent domesticity. Articles on abortion, spousal abuse, and poverty proliferated alongside explicitly feminist editorials. It was a potent mixture and the mail poured in - both praising and criticizing the new directions at the magazine.

It was "Chatelaine's" highly interactive and participatory nature that encouraged what Korinek calls "a community of readers" - readers that in their very response to the magazine led to its success. "Chatelaine" did not cling to the stereotypical images of the era, instead it forged ahead providing women with a variety of images, ideas, and critiques of women's role in society. Chatelaine's dissemination of feminist ideas laid the foundation for feminism in Canada in the 1970s and after.

Comprehensive, fascinating, and full of lively debate and history, "Roughing it in the Suburbs" provides a cultural study that weaves together a history of "Chatelaine's" producer's, consumers, and text. It illustrates how the structure of the magazine's production, and the composition of its editorial and business offices allowed for feminist material to infiltrate a mass-market women's monthly. In doing so it offers a detailed analysis of the times, the issues, and the national cross section of the women and, sometimes, men, who participated in the success of a Canadian cultural landmark.

Winner of the Laura Jamieson Prize, awarded by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women

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