

**University of Guelph
Department of History**

Major Paper Presentation



Student: Marissa Gareau	Date: Thursday, May 4, 2017
Time: 5:00 pm	Place: MacKinnon Extension, Rm. 2020

Title:	Fabric Consumption, Sewing, and the Rural Household Economy: Christina McLennan's Diary, Glengarry County, Ontario, 1881-1888
---------------	---

Abstract:
<p>Christina McLennan (1836-1928), a farmwoman in Glengarry County, Ontario, kept a diary from 1860-1922. This study applies a microhistory approach to Christina's diary focusing on the years 1881-1888. It analyzes how she directed the production of clothing for her household of six children, sewed garments, and purchased fabric, ready-made clothing and accessories. While historians have examined women's work and rural consumption, very little scholarship has been devoted to understanding the connections between home sewing, the household economy, and local merchants, craftsmen and industries. Christina's very detailed entries combined with other primary evidence, provide a rare opportunity to examine the nature of these connections in a transitional period when women relied on factory-made fabrics more so than homespun cloth and when ready-made clothing was not yet widely available. Christina purchased a variety of fabrics and sewed a combination of everyday and luxury garments suggesting an interest in frugality and fashion. "Pin money" earned by selling eggs and butter in local general stores, provided Christina with income to purchase fabrics. She acted as what Margaret Kechnie called "a risk absorber" as her egg and butter income and frequent sewing provided her family with a sense of security as it stretched the family income. While sewing consumed a lot of her private time, Christina relied on her immediate family, kin, neighbours, and local craftsmen, like tanners, weavers, and tailors to assist in making clothing for her family. This suggests that sewing was not solely an independent task, but rather a communal one. Christina demonstrated a larger degree of independence than historians usually credit farmwomen, as she moved in and outside the household and engaged in the larger economy and public places. This study demonstrates Christina's importance to the rural household economy and encourages future research on consumption, home sewing, and rural society.</p>

Advisor: Catharine Wilson	Chair: Kevin James
Committee: Catherine Carstairs	