

Letter to the Editors

I work in a public library and since *CCL* circulates among the librarians it is often a long time before I see an issue. This is why I am writing about your Fall 1996 issue, now! The issue — on history— was of great interest and I enjoyed almost all of it. One exception was the review of the book ... *Martha Black: Gold Rush Pioneer* ...

According to the reviewer "The basic problem with the book is that Martha Black was neither particularly interesting nor really important" (106). This statement took my breath away. In addition to his negative attitude towards Martha Black, he also got some facts wrong. It was her father, not her husband, who owned a chain of laundries. Her first husband, Will Purdy, worked for a railway company and was often away from home. It is suggested that not only did these continuing separations weaken the marriage, it also gave Martha a taste for independence. The review states that she abandoned her children when she headed for the Yukon. In fact, she and Will left the children with her parents, rightly deciding that the initial journey would be too hard on them. When Will decided that it would be too hard for him and he would prefer Hawaii, Martha continued on, not with strangers, as the reviewer says, but with her brother and cousin. She gave birth alone in a log cabin in the middle of winter. She successfully started and managed a number of businesses and, when it was possible, she brought her children up to live with her. Mrs. Black was a success on many levels. As one of the first women in the Yukon who was not there just to pan for gold, she helped to settle the frontier. As the wife of the MP for the Yukon, she spoke enthusiastically for her adopted country, educating many about a place they knew little of. As the second woman elected to Parliament, at the age of 70, she proved again that a woman could serve her country in this capacity. Her interest in the flora of the Yukon led her to catalogue and mount all the plants she could find. The resulting display was so impressive that the Belgian government invited her to do the same for their country. As a businesswoman, a mother, a naturalist, a speaker, a politician, Martha Black made a difference. This is not the life of an uninteresting or unimportant woman. I only wonder that it took so long to write a biography about her.

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