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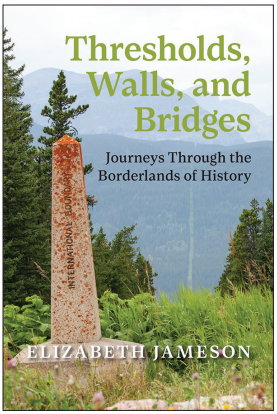

THRESHOLDS, WALLS, AND BRIDGES: JOURNEYS THROUGH THE BORDERLANDS OF HISTORY

by Elizabeth Jameson

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Introduction

On a hot Albuquerque summer morning, I hugged my brother and sister-in-law goodbye, piled into my overloaded Toyota with my son Daniel and our cats, Sweetie Pie and Simon, and drove north away from home. It was June 26, 1999. After ten years at the University of New Mexico in the beautiful desert Southwest, I was headed to a new job at the University of Calgary as the Imperial Oil-Lincoln McKay Chair in American Studies. The essays in this book were originally presented as the public Chair's Lectures I offered annually, except when I was on leave. They chart an intellectual, professional, and personal journey that began that hot June day in New Mexico.

Our drive north followed the east slope of the Rocky Mountains, where I have spent most of my adult life and where much of my research as a historian has centered. As I drove through the high plains of Wyoming and Montana the landscape appeared seamless, the changes subtle and gradual. I mused about geography and ecosystems, about barriers like the Shield, the Mississippi River, and the mountain ranges that slice the continent vertically while our borders cut it horizontally into three nations, constructed through political borders and nation-building policies; constructed, too, in popular and historical imaginations.

My musings got interrupted for several hours at the Coutts, Alberta, border station while I dealt with Customs and Immigration Canada—getting the car inspected; producing the legal papers to bring Daniel across the border; showing my work visa, his student visa, and the documents proving I had a job. Daniel dutifully lugged my framed doctoral diploma to demonstrate that I was qualified for my new position. The Immigration Officer was less interested in the certificate I had brought from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, certifying that I had properly cleaned the iris rhizomes in the trunk that I had hopefully dug up and brought from my Albuquerque garden. Nor was he interested in the international vaccination papers I had for the cats. "I can tell you care about your animals," he said. "I don't need to see them."

I figured he was tired. Hauling two reluctant felines in their carriers in the back seat for three days didn't strike *me* as exemplary pet care. The previous night, in fact, Simon had clawed a hole in the bottom of the box springs at our motel in Great Falls and had to be pried forcibly from his hiding place that morning.

We were finally cleared to cross the border, cats, rhizomes, and all, to continue through a landscape a lot like the one we had been travelling. But now the road signs flashed the speed limit and the distance to Calgary in kilometres. The convenience store in Fort Macleod sold Smarties, not M&Ms, and measured my gas in litres, not gallons.

Our brief sojourn in Coutts with Customs and Immigration Canada brought us to the threshold of a new nation, a new community, a new university and junior high—to the threshold of so much that had only been hinted in the highway signs and gas pump. Some of what I had brought with me proved useful; some simply didn't work anymore. The irises didn't make it through their first Alberta winter. Truly traumatized by his confinement in the despised cat carrier, Simon spent a lot of the first six weeks in our new house in the laundry room ceiling, coming out at night to eat and use his litter box, before he slowly re-emerged.

At times I shared his urge to withdraw while I acclimated. I felt uprooted, partly because I didn't know the histories of Calgary, Alberta, or Canada. I hastily read Canadian history texts, though I remained much more secure with the American history I had learned since elementary school.

Some of what I had learned in three decades of teaching remained useful. My University of Calgary students raised new challenges about what it meant to teach American history to Canadians. As I came to view history from north of the 49th Parallel I began to probe national borders, their borderlands, and comparative histories.

Geography and ecology aside, I had not expected Canada to be like the United States. I had gotten a useful caution from my Canadian colleague Jeremy Mouat, who taught me this joke:

Question: What is the difference between a Canadian and an American?

Answer: The Canadian knows there is a difference.

I was, if anything, defensively determined to prove that I knew I was a guest in another country. It was 1999. I am a native Texan. Alberta is oil country, and I grew up across Galveston Bay from the Texas City oil refineries. George W. Bush was clearly gearing up for a presidential campaign.

I did not know how my new neighbors viewed U.S. politics or U.S. investments in Alberta oil, and I did not want my new colleagues to think all Texans are alike. I was overly concerned to prove I was not an ugly American and underprepared to interpret what had and had not crossed our boundaries.

I had been asked at my job interview how I felt about moving across a border. I answered truthfully, but too glibly, "I've been crossing them all my life." Growing up in the *other* U.S. Borderland, crossing the Rio Grande for family vacations in Mexico, living for a decade in New Mexico, I was, like most Americans, more preoccupied with the Mexican border than with Canada, even though my father had lived in Montreal for a few years as a young boy and his father, the grandfather I never knew, was buried there.

As a historian, I had first focused on the Canadian border through the international journeys of miners and their families. I had followed people and social movements across international boundaries but had not focused centrally on the international politics that propelled those journeys or that selectively opened and closed national borders. The historical and human significance of border-crossing had not yet compelled my attention, even though, like all North Americans of non-Indigenous descent, my ancestors had crossed international borders to bring my family to the United States, and even though I grew up with a grandmother who emigrated from London in 1913. Our move to Canada brought new reflections on the process of border-crossing, of transplanting oneself, of learning and adapting to a new culture.

My transnational journey was easier than most. I moved from an English-speaking nation to an Anglophone province. I was an employed professional whose skills were welcomed. To my gratified surprise, the application form for my work visa awarded historians the top possible points for occupation. Along with dentists. As I reflected on my own acculturation process, I remained aware that for most immigrants it was a much more difficult transition, impelled by much more difficult circumstances, and without the economic security and support that brought me to Canada.

Vacations in Mexico notwithstanding, the borders that I had pushed and breached were more socially constructed than national. Boundaries of race, class, and gender marked the social landscape of Galveston, the city on a barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico where I was born and spent my first eighteen years. My mother had crossed the boundaries of gender as she entered medical school there in 1945, and then as she practiced

psychiatry until her retirement at age eighty. My father was a veterinarian who violated the tenets of White Southern Manhood by supporting his wife through medical school and then "letting" her practice medicine. First, however, she had to pay the state of Texas $50 to remove her "disabilities as a woman" so she could be licensed to practice medicine and to prescribe narcotics. Dad challenged the boundaries of race in a segregated town as he worked for African American Civil Rights, served as Co-Chair of the County Bi-Racial Commission, ran for the Galveston School Board on a school integration platform, and got elected even though he was a Yankee and had lived on the island for less than two decades. My parents raised us to believe in racial equality. But race remained uncomfortable for me, and worse for African Americans. For Whites in segregated Texas, liberal values were a choice, and White privilege an unescapable fact.

I arrived during my mother's second year in medical school. A blonde Jew with a Scottish name in a Christian culture, born to parents who already defied the racial and gender boundaries of the world I entered, I often viewed that world from the social margins, inescapably aware of my racial and class privilege, of religious difference, and of the ways my mother threatened gender norms. Not quite fitting in, I developed a social radar that continued to serve me as I left the South for college and graduate school, and as I entered a male-dominated profession. Those experiences nourished my interests in social history, the histories of social movements, of women and gender, labor, and people of color. Their histories took me beyond the histories of states and nations, to histories of social relationships, of daily acts and grassroots movements that had changed cultures and made history. I had not confronted how profoundly the histories of place and nation rooted my identity until the histories I knew no longer fit the place I lived.

Since 1999 I've explored borders, both national and social, and the borderlands where social and national differences are clarified and sometimes bridged. The ways I have thought about the United States, Canada, our relationships, our borderlands, and our histories have all changed during my decades in Canada. They changed as my perspective shifted north of the 49th Parallel, and as events changed the ways that the border operated and mattered to us all.

Those unfolding reflections sometimes provided context, sometimes subtext for my Chair's Lectures. One of the gifts of the Imperial Oil-Lincoln McKay Chair was the opportunity it offered for public engagement, and I looked forward each year to meeting audiences that

included the Calgary public, undergraduate and graduate students, and colleagues, including Canadian and American historians. With the exceptions of my U.S. history colleagues and some American graduate students, the audiences were predominantly Canadian. I tried to pick topics that would interest both professional historians and the lay public. The lectures covered expanses of time, topics, and geography. Their historical terrain ranged from the gold camps of the California gold rush to northwest Alaska, where the U.S. government tried to "civilize" Alaska Native hunters by turning them into reindeer herders, to Canadian women's North Dakota homesteads, to New Jersey cities rocked by 1960s race riots. They expressed my interests in social movements, the connections of daily lives and private acts to social change and history, and the boundaries that divide people and buttress unequal relationships of power. They were prepared for Canadians unfamiliar with American history and may therefore seem at times to explain the obvious for American readers. They were also prepared to engage public audiences as well as historians and seldom address professional theoretical debates.

My work bridged academic and public audiences and discourses and, increasingly, bridged the histories and professions of two nations. During my years at the University of Calgary I became active in the Canadian Committee on Women's and Gender History and the Canadian Committee on Labour History. I belonged to the Canadian Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, the Labor and Working Class History Association, Pacific Coast Branch - American Historical Association, and the Western History Association, and served all these organizations in various elected positions, except the American Historical Association. Finding that my Canadian colleagues were much more familiar with U.S. scholarship than Americans were of theirs, I embarked on a mission to introduce American historians to Canadian colleagues and their work. Two conferences I helped organize at the University of Calgary contributed to that effort: Unsettled Pasts: Reconceiving the West through Women's History (June 2002) and Directions West (June 2012). Further opportunities to encourage cross-border conversations came when I was elected President of the Pacific Coast Branch – American Historical Association (PCB-AHA) for 2004–2005 and President of the Western History Association (WHA) for 2014–2015. I appointed the program committees and selected the conference themes for those years. The 2005 PCB-AHA conference program focused on borders and borderlands. Its theme, "Dancing on the Rim," spoke to the challenges and rewards of connecting

history across national borders. The theme of the 2015 Western History Association conference, "Thresholds, Walls, and Bridges," was an invitation for participants to address the challenges and possibilities of histories that respect and bridge differences of race, class, gender, and nation, and the limits and possibilities inherent in how we conceive history—how it is made, who makes it, and why it matters.

The three architectural structures of the WHA conference theme were metaphors for historically constructed power, difference, and possibility. Thresholds connoted the complex mixtures of adventure, curiosity, anticipation, and fear that can arise when standing on the brink of entering a new culture or of meeting people different from oneself—standing poised between the known and comfortable and something unknown and new, potentially exciting or dangerous. Walls evoked national borders and social boundaries that have, historically, served both to exclude and protect, that have erected unequal power relationships, and that have also sometimes signalled differences demanding respect. Bridges represented the possibilities for seeing beyond national and social differences, for recognizing humanity and forging productive connections with people on the other sides of "walls," the other sides of social and national divides.

These architectural metaphors also furnished the title of this book. They represent both episodes in a personal journey and my intention as a scholar and a teacher to make humanity visible not only across time, but also across nations and social differences. At the end of my teaching career, they represented some of what I had learned during my years in Calgary as a border-crossing historian and as my historical lens expanded beyond the boundaries of the United States.

As I prepared the essays for this book, I edited the original lectures as little as possible. Mostly I made necessary changes in verb tenses, changing the present tense to past tense as the present from which I had spoken faded into recent history, or changed place references from "here" to "Calgary" or "Canada." A few of the stories and the scholars I quoted appeared in more than one lecture, partly because they had had a formative influence on my thinking, partly because they had proved effective in conveying a concept to a public audience, and partly because the audience changed over the years, and I couldn't be certain that everyone shared the old references. They are also occasionally repeated here to maintain the original lecture material, because readers, as well, may choose not to read every essay, and because these stories chart the ways that formative texts and experiences spoke to me as circumstances and my intellectual

perspective changed. The repetitions in chapter 13 were intentional. It was written as my presidential address to the Western History Association, as I stood on the brink of retirement. I delivered it twice during the 2015–2016 academic year, as the capstone of my service to the WHA, which had been my intellectual home for over thirty years, and as my final Chair's Lecture before I retired, the summation of my professional career.[1] I purposely included some material as a kind of shorthand to evoke memories of the intellectual journeys that had charted the trajectory of western women's histories.

I always prefaced my lectures by saying "Since you can't see my footnotes, I like to acknowledge the authors whose work I use; so today I thank . . ." For this volume, I eliminated those opening paragraphs and recreated my reference notes, which reflect the scholarship I used when writing each lecture. I have occasionally added a source published since I spoke, but for the most part have simply documented the sources I used at the time. Following each essay, I have provided brief notes about significant scholarship published since I wrote my lectures, or that I did not use or cite in the lecture. Neither time nor scholarship stand still, however, so these historiographic updates will already be outdated by the time this book goes to press. Consider them invitations to explore further.

I divided the essays into sections that reflect connected themes as my work and my acculturation process both developed. For historians, context is crucial—the contexts of the histories we record, and the contexts that influence our questions, choices of topic, and interpretations. Introductions to each section provide some of those contexts. I wrote in my 2016 lecture: "The historical threshold at which I always stand is the present moment, halfway across the line from the past that shaped my world to the future I want my grandchildren to inherit." Some of these essays responded to such "present moments." They were inspired by contemporary events. Where appropriate, I reflect in hindsight on what happened next.

Because my lectures cover different times and two nations, a note on terminology may be useful. The preferred terms for racial ethnic groups have varied over time and places.[2] In Canada, for instance, the preferred terms for Indigenous people are First Nations or Aboriginal. In the United States, the preferred terms are Native American or American Indian, except in Alaska, where the preferred term is Alaska Native, and Hawaii, where the preferred terms are Native Hawaiian, Indigenous Hawaiian, Kānaka Maoli, Aboriginal Hawaiian, or simply Hawaiian. The preferred

term for Americans of African descent has changed during my lifetime from Negro to Black to African American. And there have been many preferred terms for people of Spanish/Mexican/Mestizo descent: Spanish American, Mexican American, Ethnic Mexican, Hispano/a/x, Hispanic, Nuevo Mexicano/a/x, Californio/a/x, Tejano/a/x, Chicano/a/x, and Latino/a/x. I try to use the terms by which people prefer to call themselves as I write, or by which they preferred to call themselves in a particular historic context. I sometimes use Indigenous or Native Peoples to connote all the Indigenous people of North America. I apologize for any mistakes; my intent is respectful. I choose to capitalize all racial ethnic terms, including White, to mark them all equally.

Finally, a note on spelling. I have learned over time to use either Canadian or American spelling, as appropriate. That's more difficult for a book that explicitly crosses the U.S.-Canada border and which I hope will interest readers in both countries. Because the lectures were originally written for Canadian audiences and because the University of Calgary Press is publishing the book, I very carefully used Canadian spelling in the original manuscript. But the press preferred American spelling, perhaps because Canadians are more used to the alternate spellings. So, Canadian readers, please just imagine the "u" in labo(u)r, neighbo(u)r, etc., and know they were there in the original draft.

This book is part scholarship, part memoir. They are inescapably connected. The Women's Liberation Movement insisted that the personal is political. In my experience, the professional is also to some extent personal. I have described history as an ongoing conversation between the past and present, recognizing that the present moment continues to change, and with it the questions we bring to the past. Recognizing the historian's place in this conversation requires honesty, awareness, and caution. I do not think that as historians we can or should abstract ourselves out of our scholarship. Who we are and what we value affects the subjects and questions that engage us. It is more honest to be transparent about those influences than to pretend they don't exist. When I began doing women's history in the early 1970s, for instance, I knew from experience that domestic work was an important topic to explore. I did not, however, assume that domestic work was unchanging or held the same meanings for all women in all times and cultures.[3] Personal experience can help frame questions and conceptual categories, but only evidence should determine conclusions.

I offer my reflections as a border crosser in the same spirit, as those experiences informed my scholarship and the topics I chose to present to Canadian audiences. From the moment I crossed the border at Coutts, I wrestled with the question of national identity and slowly developed an identity and loyalties that span two nations. I became a Canadian Permanent Resident in 2003, but because I held a Chair in American Studies and was often asked to comment on U.S. politics and events, I delayed applying for Canadian citizenship until I retired. I became a dual citizen in 2017.

The journey begun in 1999 brought me to a place where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, a site traditionally known as Moh'kins'tsis to the Blackfoot, Wîchîspa to the Stoney Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i to the Tsuut'ina. In the spirit of reconciliation, I acknowledge that I occupy the traditional territory of the Blackfoot confederacy (the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani First Nations) as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation and Îyâxe Nakoda (Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations), a territory that is also home to the Otipemisiwak Métis Government, Regions 5 and 6. As a non-Indigenous newcomer, I acknowledge the difficult histories that enabled my claims to the land I inhabit. I celebrate and respect all those who seek truthfully to examine those histories, to find paths to reconciliation and good ways to live together in this place I have come to call home.

Calgary, Alberta
Treaty Seven Territory

NOTES

1 Although I retired on June 30, 2017, I was on a final research leave during the 2016–2017 academic year, so my 2016 Chair's Lecture was my last. Rather than doing a final lecture in 2017, I hosted a conference, "Torches Passed and Present," featuring some of the graduate students with whom I had worked at the University of New Mexico and the University of Calgary. I discuss that event in Chapter 14 of this volume.

2 I use the term "racial ethnic" because both race and ethnicity are cultural constructs. Who belongs in which category has changed over time and cultures. "Irish" or "Jew," for instance, were at times considered racial categories in the United States. The term "racial ethnic" was coined by Evelyn Nakano Glenn. See Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17:3 (1985): 86–108.

3 I discuss how I first came to think about women's domestic histories in my 2012 lecture, "Are We There Yet?: Personal and Historical Reflections on Women in Higher Education."