

## **Canadian Women's History: A View From Atlantic Canada**

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“Bias of Prairie Politics” almost 40 years ago.<sup>37</sup> There are regional experiences, and there is a national experience; they are not (or at least not yet) mutually exclusive. Historians who would write ‘national’ histories of Canada must come to terms with both.

Papers like this one always conclude with platitudes, so let me reach new heights of scholarship by quoting someone else’s platitude. The historian I am about to cite, Walter N. Sage, has disappeared down the historiographical memory hole; he is so obscure today that his name doesn’t even appear in the index to Carl Berger’s *The Writing of Canadian History*. In 1937, as the chair of the UBC history department, he unsuccessfully urged the members of the Canadian Historical Association to consider a regional approach. His message, scorned a half-century ago, bears repetition:

Canada is...a federation of five cultural areas, each distinct, each possessing its own traditions, and each making its own contribution to the common whole. If Canadian historians are to present in the future a more balanced picture it is essential that they should keep the whole development of the nation and of the five cultural regions more constantly before them.<sup>38</sup>

JOHN HERD THOMPSON

37 This is the title of the last chapter of Morton’s *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1950).

38 W.N. Sage, “Geographical and Cultural Aspects of the Five Canadas”, Canadian Historical Association, *Annual Report* (1937), p. 34. I discovered a reference to this paper in the notes to Reid, “Writing About Regions”.

### Canadian Women’s History: A View From Atlantic Canada

DURING THE PAST TWO DECADES, researchers have produced an impressive body of writing on the history of Atlantic Canada, with the result that the authors of our national histories can no longer ignore the Atlantic region.<sup>1</sup> Yet not all topics have received equal attention from regional historians. Writing as

1 See, for example, John Reid’s recent review in this journal. John G. Reid, “Towards the Elusive Synthesis: The Atlantic Provinces in Recent General Treatments of Canadian History”, *Acadiensis*, 16, 2 (Spring 1987), pp. 107-21.

recently as 1983, Margaret Conrad noted that women in Atlantic Canada were “only beginning to emerge from the grey mists of neglect”.<sup>2</sup> Since 1983, progress, while promising, has been lamentably slow. Yet today, while many aspects of women’s experience in the past remain unexamined, some historians who are broadening their perspective beyond a centralist focus have made an attempt to accord to Atlantic women a place comparable to that given their fathers, husbands and brothers in recent historiography. Unfortunately, those attempts have generally been hampered by a continuing lack of published secondary sources upon which to draw. To discover the dimensions of the problem, we need look no further than the recent monographs and essay collections on the history of Canadian women. Women’s historians are peculiarly sensitive to the tendency toward biases in the literature, for women’s experience, like the regional experience, has too often been neglected or ignored. The extent to which they have overcome a centralist bias in their analyses can serve as a measure of the limited, if significant, progress toward the goal of rescuing Atlantic women from obscurity.

Two recent books on Canadian women in the period 1919 to 1945 deal effectively with Canada as a whole, including the Atlantic region. Over the past 15 years, Ruth Roach Pierson’s articles on women’s experience during and after World War II have become required reading in many Canadian history courses as well as providing source material for innumerable lectures. It is, therefore, a pleasure to see them, often in revised form, and supplemented with several new articles (one written with Marjorie Griffin Cohen) organized into a single monograph: *“They’re Still Women After All”: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986). Based on extensive research in the Public Archives of Canada, and drawing on diverse sources ranging from government directives and correspondence to popular women’s magazines of the period, Pierson presents a thoughtful and balanced discussion of the opportunities that were open to women and those that were closed to them. Focussing largely on women who joined the armed services, she analyses underlying assumptions behind recruiting posters, training programmes, magazine articles and advertisements. Taken together, the essays effectively demonstrate that the war brought no fundamental change in gender relations. At the same time, readers must wonder whether wartime experiences did, perhaps, bring some shift in attitudes among the women themselves. It was, after all, the wartime generation who raised the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s.

Veronica Strong-Boag’s *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1988) provides

2 Margaret Conrad, “The Re-Birth of Canada’s Past: a Decade of Women’s History”, *Acadiensis*, 12, 2 (Spring 1983), p. 156.

further evidence of the healthy state of women's history in Canada. Using a life course approach, Strong-Boag draws on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources, weaving material on women from across the nation into a tapestry that represents the shared experiences of Canadian women during the interwar period. Strong-Boag's book both enriches and complements Pierson's by providing the context within which women's experiences during and after World War II can be understood and evaluated. "In the 1920s and 1930s", she concludes, "women had to make their way in a world that, for all its appearance of innovation, remained committed to their sex's primary responsibility for the maintenance of family and home.... The implications of this fundamental allocation of responsibility touched every facet of female experience" (p. 217). The period was not without its own dynamic. A variety of technological changes and innovations affected women's physical environment. Professional child rearing, health care and even beauty experts intruded on women's lives. Yet many aspects of life did not change. Girls continued to be educated differently from their brothers, their experience limited and their horizons circumscribed. Opportunities for paid employment expanded, and young women of the middle class entered the workforce in numbers for the first time. But they suffered the same fate as had their working class sisters before them, finding themselves ghettoized into areas where pay was low and opportunity for advancement virtually non-existent. Marriage remained the idealized goal, and keeping house woman's primary occupation. Women were not without networks and support and the strength that those bring. And women were not without voices. Strong women, such as Agnes McPhail, continued to press for changes which would improve women's lives, and to work to change attitudes. Women could, and did, object to the barriers that were raised at each stage in their life course, but they had to cope with those barriers nonetheless.

Both these monographs focus on the general, rather than the unique or different. Thus, while Pierson notes that women war workers from the east and west were encouraged to relocate in central Canada, she does not consider the implications for the hinterland regions. Nor does she consider differential rates of participation in various wartime activities across regional, class, religious or ethnic groups. Strong-Boag, in contrast, does draw important distinctions between the experiences of rural and urban, rich and poor, immigrant and native-born women. The implications of differences within and among regions are not overlooked in her book, but discussion of such differences is peripheral to the main theme. She points out, for example, that, in 1931, New Brunswick farms averaged more machinery and fewer rooms and household appliances than those in Nova Scotia, and notes that this undoubtedly had implications for housewives' regimes (see p. 122). But those implications are not discussed.

Yet in neither case does the focus on women's shared experiences detract significantly from the relevance of the argument within the Atlantic context, for the documentation clearly demonstrates that information and correspondence

from the region were considered as carefully as documentation from the central provinces. Both authors make extensive use of popular magazines, but although these were generally published in central Canada, Roach Pierson and Strong-Boag are undoubtedly correct in the assumption that magazines with the widest circulations were read by women across the country. Moreover, the endnotes of each volume reveal the wealth of material in Canadian government documents and correspondence which deals with Maritime women's experience.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of those sources, both authors place the women of Atlantic Canada firmly within the broader picture.

With the publication of *Canadian Women: A History* (Toronto, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988) by Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson and Naomi Black, Canadian women's history entered a new era. Reformulating time periods and challenging old perspectives, the six women who coauthored this social history have provided a comprehensive, yet highly readable, synthesis of the historiography relating to Canadian women's past experience. Drawing largely on the secondary literature, they have also succeeded, where more experienced Canadian textbook writers have often failed, in achieving a regional balance. This is all the more extraordinary given the obvious limitations of the secondary literature. Compared to other fields, Canadian women's history is still in its early stages. The authors of this text have combed sources ranging from standard historical journals, essay collections and monographs through an impressive list of graduate theses to more esoteric journals such as the *Canadian Collector* and *The Beaver*. Thus, while the story of a little known Nova Scotian woman, Nancy Lawrence, who became a 'New Light' in the 1780s and, much to the distress of her Congregationalist parents, married a widower with three children because he shared her religious enthusiasm, is drawn from George Rawlyk's *Ravished by the Spirit*, the authors have also culled such nuggets as the story of Kate Andrews, who opened a private school "in the ample basement flat of her...commodious residence" in Liverpool, Nova Scotia, in the 1820s, from a 1942 edition of *The Maritime Advocate and Busy East* (pp. 103, 81). Their text is not without inconsistency or error, but, in the first three sections, at least, most limitations stem from the limitations of the secondary literature.

The final section is, in many ways, the least satisfactory. While the region's native women and black women are discussed in this section, no mention is made of Acadian women and Antonine Maillet, creator of the strong and outspoken Acadian women Pélagie-la-Charette and La Sagouine, is missing

3 Strong-Boag, for example, has used both a 1929 *New Brunswick Child Welfare Survey* and the 1920 report of the *Royal Commission on Wages, Hours of Labour and Work Conditions of Women in Industry in Nova Scotia* to good effect.

from the list of contemporary writers. Mrs. J.D. Ross, a New Brunswick woman who proved willing to go to heroic lengths to attend a meeting of her local Women's Institute, and Gina Vance, a Nova Scotian who coauthored an article about her experiences as a seafood plant worker, are both rescued from obscurity. Yet why was each of these women accorded an entire paragraph while the contribution of Senator Muriel McQueen Fergusson, who, throughout her professional and political career, quietly and consistently worked for the advancement of women, and who has continued, since her retirement, to provide encouragement and to lend her active support to any women's cause she believes worthy, is summed up in a single sentence? On a more general level, the discussion of the period since 1960 has a *parti pris* quality that means that the feminist movement is portrayed as dynamic and coherent and, above all, correct, while its opponents are discredited, if not dismissed, and the tendency in the final chapters to replace analysis and interpretation with moral judgements, however penetrating, seriously detracts from an otherwise scholarly text.

While all three of these books demonstrate that scholars can encompass the region without taking an explicitly regional perspective, other well-received monographs which examine Canadian women's past are less successful in this regard. Angus and Arlene Tigar McLaren's *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986), which has been assessed as a major new contribution to the history of birth control in Canada,<sup>4</sup> virtually ignores the Atlantic region on the grounds that very little is known about developments in the Maritimes. Similarly, Graham Lowe, in his monograph *Women in the Administrative Revolution: The Feminization of Clerical Work* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987), offers a general overview of the Canadian experience, but draws his examples almost exclusively from the head offices of companies based in Toronto, or, less frequently, Montreal. But women are not, in any case, the major players in Lowe's analysis of the feminization of clerical work. Rather, the book's most significant contribution lies in the author's explanation of the impetus underlying the administrative revolution which led to the birth of the modern office. And although the subtitle of Joan Sangster's book, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left 1920-1950* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1987), promises much, the author has concentrated primarily on Ontario and the West, "leaving the tale of socialist women in Quebec and the Maritimes to regional historians already working on similar projects" (p. 10). Such Maritime regional historians ought to follow Sangster's

4 See, for example, Colin D. Howell, "Back to the Bedside: Recent Work on the History of Medicine in Canada", *Acadiensis*, 17, 2 (Spring 1988), p. 193.

example and publish their own less than national findings with due haste.

In contrast to studies which purport to take a national perspective, other studies are deliberately limited to specific aspects of the Canadian experience. Claudette Lacelle's treatment of *Urban Domestic Servants in 19th Century Canada* (Ottawa, Environment Canada, 1987) deals with the experience of live-in servants in four cities. As Halifax is one of the four and an earlier article by the same author was an imaginative contribution to the study of working women in the pre-industrial period,<sup>5</sup> this study, by a gifted material historian, seemed to promise much. Yet, although the research is meticulous and the information provided invaluable, the book is disappointing, partly because of the inadequacies of the translation<sup>6</sup> and partly because of the limited purpose for which the book was conceived. Carried out under the auspices of Parks Canada, it is a report on research designed to assist in the restoration and interpretation of servants' quarters in historic houses rather than a historical monograph.

While monographs on Canadian women's shared experiences provide the context for the study of the experiences of specific groups of women, essay collections have been a more appropriate vehicle both for dealing with the diversity of Canadian women's experience in the past and for providing a regional perspective. Both *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History Volume 2* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1985), edited by Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, and *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (Toronto, Copp Clark Pitman, 1986), edited by Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, reflect the growth and development of the history of women's diverse experience. In *The Neglected Majority*, the editors "attempted a temporal and regional coverage" which would provide a glimpse of "some of the contours of what one day will be a comprehensive history of women in Canada" (p. 11). To achieve this goal, they chose articles which would, in their view, best reflect five major themes in women's history: the women's movement; women's work; ideology, culture and education; women and the family; and women's health and sexuality. *Rethinking Canada* was conceived with a somewhat different purpose in mind. The editors sought to design a book of readings that would complement a general text and therefore chose articles that would cover the entire course of Canadian history, while at the same time suggesting the range of female experience and the variety of approaches used to study that experience.

5 Claudette Lacelle, "Les domestiques dans les villes canadiennes au XIXe siècle: effectifs et conditions de vie", *Histoire sociale/Social History*, 15, 29 (May 1982), pp. 181-207.

6 For example: "Being interested in the everyday life of domestic servants means having to accept that at times, a wealth of documentation will not be available" (p. 41).

In both cases, the editors have attempted to achieve a balanced collection, despite the limitation of available sources; in only one case was an article written specifically for the particular book. Only one of the eight articles in *The Neglected Majority* has a Maritime focus. The editors have packed 17 articles into *Rethinking Canada*, but only two focus specifically on the Maritime experience. Still, two of the eight articles in the former collection and five of the 17 in the latter examine the broader Canadian picture without special regard to any region. The Maritime contributions include two articles by Margaret Conrad, one in each volume. "Recording Angels: The Private Chronicles of Women from the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1750-1950" points to the importance of diaries as a source for women's history in general and Maritime women's history in particular.<sup>7</sup> "Sundays Always Make Me Think of Home: Time and Place in Canadian Women's History" provides a view of a distinctive women's culture gleaned from diaries in which women recorded the events of their day to day lives. Conrad persuasively argues that women's concept of time and place differed significantly from that of their male counterparts, and, in consequence, that any real understanding of women's experience in the past requires a redefinition of those concepts.<sup>8</sup> Christina Simmons, in her article on Halifax's Jost Mission, studies one aspect of women's role in the Social Gospel Movement of the early 20th century. Middle class women provided poor working women with essential services, but, in their efforts to help, they also monitored and circumscribed the activities of their "poorer sisters".<sup>9</sup> The selections from the Atlantic region represent significant contributions to these volumes, and are indicative of the progress in research on the region's women that has occurred since the 1977 publication *The Neglected Majority, Volume 1*, when the editors could find no articles on the history of women in the Atlantic Region to include in their collection.<sup>10</sup>

More general collections of essays have less to offer the history of women in this region. It is disappointing to discover that a book with the promising title *Class, Gender and Region: Essays in Historical Sociology* (St. John's, Committee on Canadian Labour History, 1988), edited by Greg Kealey, contains only two essays which deal with women's experience, both on British Columbia.

7 Margaret Conrad, "Recording Angels: The Private Chronicles of Women from the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1750-1950", in *The Neglected Majority, Volume 2*, pp. 41-60.

8 Margaret Conrad, "Sundays Always Make Me Think of Home: Time and Place in Women's History", in *Rethinking Canada*, pp. 67-81.

9 Christina Simmons, "Helping the Poorer Sisters: The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945", in *ibid.*, pp. 157-77.

10 Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1977).



*Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989), edited by Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, contains articles explaining “the contributions of ethnic, socialist, and communist women to women’s politics” but few demonstrate the promised sensitivity to “the nature of Canadian federalism, regional differences, and the cultural duality that structure women’s political choices” (p. 12).<sup>11</sup> The essays introduce us to political activists in British Columbia, on the Prairies, in Ontario and in Quebec. But the voices of the women of the Atlantic Provinces are rarely heard. Linda Kealey does introduce her readers to the fascinating Sophie Mushkat, who surfaced first on Maritime platforms. But to whom was Sophie Mushkat talking from the platforms of Moncton and “other nearby locations” (p. 183)? Did she leave any female converts behind when she migrated to Alberta in 1910? It is also disappointing that Barbara Roberts, in her thoughtful article on the waxing and waning of women’s peace activism, has not told us more about the Nova Scotian activists who seemed able to maintain a consistent presence even during wartime troughs. Yet the editors of these collections, which will not satisfy those seeking an Atlantic regional perspective, have been limited by a paucity of secondary literature.

During the past decade, some fine models of regional histories of women have been produced. Quebec women have been well served by the publication of edited collections of essays by Micheline Dumont and Nadia Fahmy-Eid, monographs by Marta Danylewycz and André Lévesque and a general text authored by Le Collectif Clio.<sup>12</sup> The most significant recent contribution to the history of Ontario women has been made not by a historian, but by an economist. Marjorie Griffin Cohen’s *Women’s Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988) challenges scholars to develop new and broader perspectives in their analysis of economic growth and development. *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto,

11 Although the editors argue that scholars need to develop “a much-enlarged concept of politics”, they replace one narrow definition with another, defining politics as “all organized initiative by women to change the structure of society” (p. 11).

12 Micheline Dumont et Nadia Fahmy-Eid, eds., *Les conventines: l’éducation des filles au Québec dans les congrégations religieuses enseignantes 1840-1960* (Montréal, Boréal Express, 1986), *Maitresses de maisons, maitresses d’école: femmes, famille et éducation dans l’histoire de Québec* (Montréal, Boréal Express, 1983); Marta Danylewycz, *Taking the Veil: An Alternative to Marriage, Motherhood and Spinsterhood in Quebec, 1840-1920* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1986); André Lévesque, *La norme et les déviantes: les femmes au Québec pendant l’entre-deux-guerres* (Montréal, Les éditions du remue-ménage, 1989); Micheline Dumont, Michele Jean, Marie Lavigne et Jennifer Stoddart, *L’histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (Montréal, Quinze, 1982), translated into English (Toronto, Women’s Press) in 1987.

University of Toronto Press, 1990) by Joy Parr, which compares the experiences of female and male breadwinners in two Ontario towns, promises to prove equally innovative. The experiences of Prairie women have been recorded in an essay collection edited by Mary Kinnear, while Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro have compiled a book of articles on the women of British Columbia.<sup>13</sup> Jean Burnet, Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak and Varpu Lindstrom-Best have ensured that the experiences of Canada's immigrant women will not be forgotten.<sup>14</sup> But although the women of Atlantic Canada were not more silent, less notable, less active or less worthy than their western counterparts, there have, to date, been no scholarly monographs or books of essays that focus exclusively on the history of this region.

This is not surprising, as, with rare exceptions, the major research interests of the historians in the region who teach women's history lie in other areas. As a result, writers of general texts and university teachers who seek to include the women of Atlantic Canada in their books and courses have found few secondary sources on which to draw. The story of Maritime women's struggle for the suffrage is a case in point. The only published scholarly analysis which focuses specifically on Maritime women is found in a review article by Ernest R. Forbes,<sup>15</sup> which is probably read and cited at least as often as is the book that sparked the review. Serious interest in a regional perspective on the suffrage struggle is further evidenced by the attention accorded Elspeth Tulloch's overview of New Brunswick women's changing political and legal status during the province's first 200 years. Commissioned as a bicentennial project by the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *We, the Undersigned: A Historical Overview of New Brunswick Women's Political and Legal Status, 1784-1984* (Moncton, New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1985) is descriptive rather than analytical, although based on substantive research in both primary and secondary sources. In the absence of regional historians

13 Mary Kinnear, ed., *First Days, Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History* (Regina, Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1987); Barbara K. Latham and Roberta J. Pazdro, eds., *Not Just Pin Money: Selected Essays on the History of Women's Work in British Columbia* (Victoria, Camosun College, 1984).

14 Jean Burnet, ed., *Looking into My Sister's Eyes: An Exploration in Women's History* (Toronto, The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986); Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884-1939* (Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1988); Varpu Lindstrom-Best, *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto, Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1988).

15 Ernest Forbes, "The Ideas of Carol Bacchi and the Suffragists of Halifax", *Atlantis*, 10, 2 (Spring 1985), pp. 119-26.

producing their own monographs, the study of Atlantic women's historical experience remains the domain of gifted amateurs.

Yet the future looks bright. In the past, the occasional graduate thesis focussing on the history of women in the region has too often, like Mary Eileen Clarke's study of the Saint John Women's Enfranchisement Association, lain buried in university archives, unpublished and rarely read.<sup>16</sup> In recent years, however, increasing numbers of graduate students in the region have turned their attention to women, and, because of the new interest in women's history, they are finding ways to publish the results of their research. Michael J. Smith, a graduate student at Memorial University, has examined women's sporting culture in Victorian Nova Scotia. A book of essays recently published by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women includes an article dealing with women workers in St. John's, Newfoundland, coauthored by Nancy Forestell, currently pursuing graduate studies at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, and Jessie Chisholm, a graduate student at Memorial University. In the same volume, Ginette Lafleur has drawn on her graduate research for the Université de Moncton for her article on women workers in that city. And, in a forthcoming collection of essays on the history of Canadian law, Rebecca Veinott, a graduate student at Dalhousie, examines the issue of child custody and divorce in Nova Scotia.<sup>17</sup>

Nor are such articles the only new sources for the study of women in the Atlantic region. Published excerpts from women's diaries and other writings are a welcome addition to the growing body of women's history. The series of documentary collections begun by Beth Light and Alison Prentice in 1980 has, with the publication of *No Easy Road: Women in Canada, 1920s to 1960s* (Toronto, New Hogtown Press, 1988), edited by Beth Light and Ruth Pierson, reached its third volume. The editors of this series have consistently sought to

16 Mary Eileen Clarke, "The Saint John Women's Enfranchisement Association, 1894-1919", M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1979. It should be noted that Tulloch relied heavily on Clarke's thesis in discussing women's role in lobbying for extension of the franchise.

17 Michael J. Smith, "Graceful Athleticism or Robust Womanhood: The Sporting Culture of Women in Victorian Nova Scotia, 1870-1914", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23 (Spring/Summer 1988), pp. 120-37; Nancy Forestell and Jessie Chisholm, "Working-Class Women as Wage Earners in St. John's, Newfoundland, 1890-1921", in Peta Tancred-Sheriff, ed., *Feminist Research: Prospect and Retrospect/Récherche Féministe: Bilan et Perspectives d'Avenir* (Kingston, McGill-Queen's for the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 1988), pp. 141-55; Ginette Lafleur, "L'industrialisation et le travail rémunéré des femmes, Moncton, 1881-91", *ibid.*, pp. 127-40; Rebecca Veinott, "Child Custody and Divorce: A Nova Scotia Study, 1866-1910", in P. Girard and J. Phillips, eds., *Essays in the History of Canadian Law: Volume 3, the Nova Scotia Experience* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1990). Nor do these represent the only publications by graduate students in the field of women's history.

achieve a regional balance, selecting excerpts from writings of women across the nation to illustrate the changing pattern of women's lives.<sup>18</sup> Other editors have focussed on particular regions or particular women and have provided useful models for scholars in other regions. Western women's records of their lives have been preserved in books edited by Susan Jackel and Eliane Silverman.<sup>19</sup> And although neither woman is representative of her society, the published diaries of Elizabeth Smith and Henriette Dessaulles provide insights into the lives and struggles of women in Ontario and Quebec and raise questions applicable to women in other regions as well.<sup>20</sup> The women of Atlantic Canada were, as Margaret Conrad has suggested, inveterate 'scribblers', leaving behind a rich resource for historians. Three recent books offer, in the voices of the historical actors themselves, a peculiarly female perspective on the history of the region.

By far the best of these sources is *No Place Like Home: Diaries and Letters of Nova Scotia Women, 1771-1938* (Halifax, Formac Publishing Company, 1988), edited by Margaret Conrad, Toni Laidlaw and Donna Smyth, who have painstakingly transcribed and edited a portion of that rich body of literature. A comprehensive overview of the changing role and status of women in Nova Scotian society and carefully conceived introductions to each of the diarists provide valuable interpretive clues as guides for the novice, and then the diarists are allowed to "speak for themselves" (p. 4). The editors' own interpretive framework for analysing the diaries and their analysis of the diarists and their world are left to an "Afterword", a short final chapter, which, while suggestive, leaves the reader hungry for more. The concept of women's culture, we are told, "serves as a tool" to make researchers aware of "the unique experiences of women in various class and cultural contexts" as well as justifying the study of "the specific reality of women in Nova Scotia" (p. 299). But what was the specific reality of women in Nova Scotia? The editors do not say. This tentativeness was, perhaps, purposeful, for in the Introduction readers are invited to "bring their own experience to bear on the words of these Nova Scotia chroniclers" (p. 5). The risk is that non-specialist readers, left so largely to their own devices, will

18 The other two volumes in this series are Beth Light and Alison Prentice, eds., *Pioneer and Gentlewomen of British North America, 1713-1867* (Toronto, New Hogtown Press, 1980) and Beth Light and Joy Parr, eds., *Canadian Women on the Move, 1867-1920* (Toronto, New Hogtown Press, 1983).

19 Susan Jackel, ed., *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: Emigrant British Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1982) and Eliane Leslau Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier, 1880-1930* (Montreal, Eden Press, 1984).

20 Veronica Strong-Boag, ed., *A Woman with a Purpose: the Diaries of Elizabeth Smith, 1872-1884* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980) and Liedewy Hawke, translator, *Hopes and Dreams: The Diary of Henriette Dessaulles, 1874-1881* (Willowdale, Ont., Hounslow Press, 1986).

inevitably be struck more by the uniqueness than the commonalities among the diarists. Nonetheless, this detracts only minimally from the value of this book. *No Place Like Home* provides a unique and invaluable resource for the study of women in Atlantic Canada.

*One Woman's Charlottetown: Diaries of Margaret Gray Lord, 1863, 1876, 1890* (Hull, Que., National Museums of Canada, 1988), originally submitted by Evelyn J. MacLeod as an Honours thesis at Mount Allison University and subsequently published by the Canadian Museum of Civilization, is based on the experience of the wealthy and well educated daughter of a onetime premier of Prince Edward Island, Margaret Gray Lord, scarcely a representative of Island women of the period. Nonetheless, her diaries reveal a good deal about domestic routine, female friendships, motherhood, women's involvement in charitable work and social life on the Island. But although the diarist is a woman, neither women nor women's culture emerges as a significant theme in Evelyn MacLeod's commentary. The town itself and the changing nature of community during the 30 year period covered by the diaries are the subject. In *Whispers from the Past: Selections from the Writings of New Brunswick Women* (Fredericton, Goose Lane, 1986), the editor, Elizabeth McGahan, limits her comments to a brief introductory chapter. "These selections by English-speaking New Brunswick women", she concludes, "merely skim the surface of what awaits further cataloguing and research" (p. xxii). Unfortunately, the significance or broader implications of the various excerpts remain elusive, for the book lacks any clear analytical framework or overarching theme. These may be "women's reflections of ordinary life" (p. xv), but they do not provide the reader with a clear sense of what life was like for ordinary New Brunswick women during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

If Canadian women's history entered a new era with the publication of the general text, *Canadian Women: A History*, what is the next step? The question — whither are we going? — cannot be definitively answered. Certainly, Atlantic regional historians should produce one or two essay collections and a few monographs to bring us into line with the achievements of women's historians in other regions. At least one essay collection could be compiled at this stage. A number of articles, published in the last five years, demonstrate the breadth and depth of research in Atlantic women's history. Thus, for example, Sheva Medjuck, who has previously examined men's response to the cycle of boom and bust that typified Moncton, New Brunswick during the period 1851-71 has recently turned her attention to women's response.<sup>21</sup> Drawing solely on evidence in the

21 Sheva Medjuck, "Women's Response to Economic and Social Change in the Nineteenth Century: Moncton Parish, 1851 to 1871", *Atlantis*, 11, 1 (Fall 1985), pp. 7-21.

manuscript census records, she hypothesizes that women postponed or limited childbearing as a mechanism for dealing with the declining economy. Although her hypothesis needs to be more widely tested, Medjuck raises an important issue for historians of women, calling on them to put aside the debate about whether women were active or passive, and focus instead on attempting to understand “how women affect the historical conditions” (p. 20). In his investigation of divorce in early 20th century Nova Scotia, James Snell raises an intriguing question: why did women so often include marital cruelty in citing their reasons for seeking divorce when the members of the Nova Scotia Divorce Court so consistently proved reluctant to take cruelty into account?<sup>22</sup> Snell argues that in citing marital cruelty as grounds for divorce, wives were seeking “to encourage, even force husbands to recognize and accept” their own ideals about marriage (p. 32). This novel approach to the issue of marital cruelty in the divorce court ascribes to a group of particularly vulnerable women a perspective on marriage they may not have possessed. But certainly the history of divorce can, as Snell’s article suggests, provide insights concerning societal norms and values, and the ways in which women’s and men’s values and expectations differed.

In her analysis of the role of the fisherman’s wife in Newfoundland outports, sociologist Marilyn Porter argues that the kitchen, long considered central to women’s ‘private’ sphere, represented, paradoxically, the very ‘public’ centre of the community in the sense that the kitchen was the place where the community met, discussed issues and came to decisions.<sup>23</sup> She concludes that “the extreme sexual division of labour in Newfoundland communities has been combined with women’s vital and acknowledged economic contribution to the household economy, with the tradition of their vital role in settlement and with an ideology of egalitarianism” (p. 120). Margaret McCallum is also interested in the sexual division of labour, but her focus is on women’s place in the factory rather than in the home.<sup>24</sup> Through the use of numerous examples of management decisions and the responses of women workers to those decisions, McCallum effectively demonstrates that a strict gender division of labour was maintained in Ganong’s confectionary factory during the pre-World War II era primarily because “management and workers shared conventional assumptions that women’s role in production should be ancillary to that of men regardless of the skill required or remuneration earned” (p. 70). Although they approach the issue from very

22 James Snell, “Marital Cruelty: Women and the Nova Scotia Divorce Court, 1900-1939”, *Acadiensis*, 18, 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 3-32.

23 Marilyn Porter, “‘She was Skipper of the Shore-Crew’: Notes on the History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Newfoundland”, *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (Spring 1985), pp. 105-23.

24 Margaret E. McCallum, “Separate Spheres: the Organization of Work in a Confectionary Factory: Ganong Bros., St. Stephen, New Brunswick”, *Labour/Le Travail*, 24 (Fall 1989), pp. 69-90.

different perspectives, both Porter and McCallum raise significant questions concerning the role women themselves played in determining and maintaining a very clear sexual division of labour.

In her analysis of the first two generations of Dalhousie women, Judith Fingard found that women who attended university differed from non-university women in their higher mobility and lower marriage rates.<sup>25</sup> The second generation differed from the first in so far as second generation coeds were drawn from a greater variety of backgrounds and had more programmes to choose from during their university career. Dalhousie women shared with their American and Australian counterparts similar class origins, age profiles, undergraduate experiences and career patterns. But were their experiences similar to those of women in other Canadian universities? Fingard has provided a useful model that can serve as a framework for analysis of women's experiences at other Canadian universities. In my article on women petitioners in mid-19th century New Brunswick, I argue that historians need to reformulate old definitions of politics, broadening their perspective in order to take women's as well as men's political activities into account.<sup>26</sup> Were New Brunswick women more, or less, political than women in other areas? What role did women play in shaping Canadian political culture? Further studies focussing on non-traditional political activities could add a new dimension to our understanding of the inter-relationship between politics and society. In "Battles in Another War" Ernest Forbes explores the changing nature of the feminist movement in Halifax during the period from the 1890s through the 1920s.<sup>27</sup> From Social Gospel movement to war effort to suffrage reform, Halifax feminists were exceedingly active during the period. Whether as members of such organizations as the WCTU and the Local Council of Women or as supporters of organizations like the VON and Red Cross, Forbes paints a picture familiar in other settings. Women were the initiators of a wide variety of reforms later taken over by government. The debates within the movement were debates we have heard elsewhere. In this article Forbes has provided information on Maritime feminists that will be useful not only in re-evaluating the nature of the Maritime women's movement, but also in establishing a more accurate comparative framework.

25 Judith Fingard, "College, Career and Community: Dalhousie Coeds, 1881-1921" in Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, eds., *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education* (Kingston, McGill-Queen's, 1989), pp. 26-50.

26 Gail G. Campbell, "Disfranchised but not Quiescent: Women Petitioners in New Brunswick in the Mid-19th Century", *Acadiensis*, 18, 2 (Spring 1989), pp. 22-54.

27 Ernest R. Forbes, "Battles in Another War: Edith Archibald and the Halifax Feminist Movement", in *Challenging Regional Stereotypes: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton, Acadiensis Press, 1989), pp. 67-90.

Such articles, supplemented by the growing body of published and currently unpublished research by graduate students, provide a substantial pool from which an essay collection might be drawn. Moreover, in their articles on the history of women in the Atlantic region, researchers have raised questions that have applicability well beyond the region itself. On the national level, then, essay collections could now go beyond the general, to focus on specific themes in women's history. Thematic collections dealing with turn of the century feminists, women's past experience in the workforce, women and the law, educational opportunities for women, or women's political participation would all be enriched by inclusion of recent articles on the Atlantic region.

As successful women's history demands acknowledgement and recognition that women's experience is as significant as men's experience, the greater integration of women's history with men's history is to be sought, as well. A book such as *Youth, University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education* (Kingston, McGill-Queen's, 1989), edited by Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, which offers a fresh perspective on the history of higher education, already points the way to a more satisfying future. Tacitly acknowledging that the balance has not yet been righted, the editors have chosen three articles that deal exclusively with women's experience and not a single article dealing exclusively with men's experience. Four of the articles focus on the Atlantic provinces, one on the West, and five on central Canada, while the remaining three focus on the broader Canadian context. In his discussion of students at Memorial University, Malcolm MacLeod points out that by the 1928-29 academic year, women comprised one-third of Memorial's student body.<sup>28</sup> In 1938, women comprised 44 per cent of all entering students. Yet women students followed separate paths from their male counterparts. The majority were seeking teacher training and the high proportion of young women among entering students in 1938 can be explained by the absorption of the normal school into the university, women comprising, as they did, 60 per cent of those students. Moreover, with the expansion of professional programmes such as pre-meds and engineering, women declined significantly as a proportion of Memorial's student population. By 1948, women comprised only 22 per cent of Memorial's students, although they continued to be one-third of the students in the Arts Programmes.

In his study of the impact of World War I on Acadia University, Barry Moody discovered that, like their counterparts at other universities, women at Acadia walked separate paths from those of their male contemporaries.<sup>29</sup> But World

28 Malcolm MacLeod, "Parade Street Parade: The Student Body at Memorial University College, 1925-49", in *Youth, University and Canadian Society*, pp. 51-71.

29 Barry M. Moody, "Acadia and the Great War", in *ibid.*, pp. 143-60.



War I brought new opportunities as well as new challenges for university women. In the school newspaper, one student articulated what she viewed as women's new role. "As the European crisis is calling forth latent manhood", she wrote, "so also is it arousing true womanhood to duty and responsibility in the solution of world problems. The new social consciousness of women has been sharpened to an eager demand on their part to be of practical use" (p 152). Women at Acadia took up the challenge. As young men disappeared from their ranks, recruited for service overseas, women became the valedictorians, orators and gold medalists. The student newspaper had a female editor, the first in its 45 year history. And a significant number of the women who won pride of place within the university moved into non-traditional fields, becoming doctors, university professors, preachers and foreign missionaries. Further documenting university women's separate sphere, Diana Pedersen argues that the activities of the YWCA in the period between 1886 and 1920 represented part of a distinctive women's culture on college campuses. According to Pedersen, for more than three decades the YWCA was a "significant presence in Canadian colleges, shaping the religious and social life of a substantial number of women students" (p. 207), imbuing them with a spirit of Christian service and an impulse to moral reform.<sup>30</sup>

These articles are not entirely without flaws. Malcolm MacLeod might have provided a male/female breakdown in his discussion of Memorial students' economic backgrounds, Barry Moody should have been able to locate more sources for his fascinating discussion of the responses of young women and men at Acadia University to the Great War, and Diana Pedersen ought to have told us whether membership in the YWCA in the period before 1920 was proportionally higher at some universities. Nonetheless, the editors have gone beyond their stated goal, for this book not only serves "to acquaint readers with new and stimulating work in the social history of higher education" (p. xiii), but also acquaints them with new and stimulating work in women's history, in regional history, and in Canadian history as a whole. The approach can surely serve as a model for scholars working on a wide variety of historical themes, as well as for historians of women in the Atlantic region.

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30 Diana Pedersen, "'The Call to Service': The YWCA and the Canadian College Woman, 1886-1920" in *ibid.*, pp. 187-215.