

Labour

Journal of Canadian Labour Studies

Le Travail

Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes



A Scholarly Tribute to Bettina Bradbury, Feminist Historian of the Family: A Roundtable Discussion

Introduction

Magda Fahrni

Volume 74, Fall 2014

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1060928ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Fahrni, M. (2014). A Scholarly Tribute to Bettina Bradbury, Feminist Historian of the Family: A Roundtable Discussion. *Labour / Le Travail*, 74.

PRESENTATION / PRÉSENTATION

A Scholarly Tribute to Bettina Bradbury, Feminist Historian of the Family: A Roundtable Discussion

Introduction

Magda Fahrni

ON 26 MAY 2014, at THE ANNUAL MEETING of the Canadian Historical Association held at Brock University in St. Catharines, five of Bettina Bradbury's former PhD students spoke before an overflowing room, one in which the crowd spilled out into the adjoining hallways. The occasion was a Round Table sponsored by the Canadian Committee on Women's History/Comité canadien de l'histoire des femmes (CCWH-CCHF) and organized to mark Professor Bradbury's retirement from York University this past summer. The panellists had been asked to speak about Bettina Bradbury's impact on their own scholarly work – research, supervision, or teaching; their presentations gave the people assembled in the room, many of them Bettina's colleagues and students, the opportunity to reflect upon her long and important career as a feminist family historian.

Bettina Bradbury's scholarly work needs no introduction. Her first monograph, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (McClelland & Stewart, 1993), transformed our understanding of the Industrial Revolution in Québec and Canada and was awarded numerous prizes, including the Canadian Historical Association's John A. Macdonald Prize and the Harold Adams Innis Prize. Her most recent book, *Wife to Widow: Lives, Laws and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Montreal* (University of British Columbia Press, 2011), is similarly impressive; as Michel Ducharme recently noted in the pages of *Histoire sociale/Social History*, *Wife to Widow* "est déjà



Bettina Bradbury, 2014.
Photograph by Liz Martin

un ouvrage incontournable de l'histoire du Bas-Canada.”¹ It was awarded both the Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française's Prix Lionel-Groulx – Fondation Yves St-Germain and the Canadian Historical Association's Clio-Québec Prize. Bettina Bradbury is, in addition, the author of numerous articles and book chapters on topics related to families, women, and gender in nineteenth-century Québec and Canada and across the British Empire more broadly.

Throughout her career, Bettina made teaching and supervision a priority, and in 2011 she was the recipient of York University's Faculty of Graduate Studies Teaching Award. She has supervised a large number of M.A. and PhD theses, first at the Université de Montréal, then at York. This round-table at Brock involved five of her former PhD students: two from the Université de Montréal and three from York. Dominique Marshall (PhD Université de Montréal, 1990), Mary Anne Poutanen (PhD Université de Montréal, 1996), Liz Millward (PhD York University, 2003), and Jarett Henderson (PhD York University, 2010) gave papers; the round table was chaired by Magda Fahrni (PhD York University, 2001) and Bettina herself was given a few minutes at the very end of the session in which to respond to the papers.

1. Michel Ducharme, “Wife to Widow: Lives, Laws, and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Montreal by Bettina Bradbury (review),” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 46, 1 (2013): 225–227.

The texts that follow are revised versions of the papers given at Brock. Dominique Marshall sets the ball rolling by reflecting upon what she learned from Bettina about graduate supervision and about the practices and processes of informal learning and apprenticeship about which university professors, somewhat paradoxically, do not speak (or write) very often. Mary Anne Poutanen's contribution to this round table focuses upon the impact of Bettina's published work on her own research and, more precisely, on the ways in which Bettina's explorations of the household economy have allowed Mary Anne to understand both residential prostitution and women's tavern-keeping as particular forms of family economies in nineteenth-century Montréal. Liz Millward reflects upon what she learned as a PhD student in Women's Studies under Bettina's supervision. Liz's forced initiation into the world of archives, and Bettina's insistence upon the importance of historical context and empirical detail, irrevocably shaped her study of women in imperial airspace in the interwar years. Moreover, through working with Bettina, Liz came to understand key concepts employed in Women's Studies, such as patriarchy, in historically grounded and historically specific ways. Finally, Jarett Henderson examines what he calls Bettina's "imperial turn," that is, her recent work on imperial families, inspired by the feminist literature on gender and empire. He insists upon the continuities between her earlier work on Montreal's working families, for which she remains, perhaps, best known, and her more recent explorations of gender and family in the Cape Colony, New Zealand, Australia, and Québec.

Bettina Bradbury is portrayed, in these four reflections, in various lights: as a mentor, a model, a guide, a sounding-board, a gentle prodder. She also emerges from these accounts as an active practitioner of her craft, a historian who continues to wrestle (and to enjoy wrestling) with historical problems, with sources, and with words. That she has clearly transmitted her passion for history to the scholars gathered here is a testament to her role as a supervisor who gave generously of her time and ideas.