

Editors

NOTE ON THE COVER ART:

Located in Christchurch, New Zealand, the Kate Sheppard National Memorial honours the struggle of New Zealand women to obtain the vote, the first women in the world to do so on 19 September 1893. Margriet Windhausen completed the monument for the 100th anniversary of the event. Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) leader, Kate Sheppard (1848-1934), led the petition campaign for women's suffrage. See more at www.christchurchartgallery.org.nz/Publications/1997/PublicArtInChristchurch/KateSheppardNationalMemorial/"

Introduction to Labouring Feminism Thematic Cluster

Ruth Percy, University of Toronto, cluster co-ordinator and editor, conducts research on working women's engagement with feminist ideas. A forthcoming article considers representations of gender in labour fiction and the fluidity of the labour movement.

On the weekend of 29 September-2 October, 2005, an international conference on "Labouring Feminism and Feminist Working Class History in North America and Beyond" held at the University of Toronto drew almost 300 feminist labour scholars. The aim of the organizers, Franca Iacovetta, Rick Halpern, and myself, was to bring together a wide range of scholars to share research, debate theory, engage in dialogue across generations, and ponder the past, present, and future of feminist and gender labour history. We also wished to highlight the research of younger scholars and projects that centred immigrant, racial/ethnic, and transnational subjects. Despite our best efforts, the final program was not as racially diversified as we had hoped it might be,

though it was gratifying to be able to welcome several historians working on Latin American, African American, and immigrant workers. We were pleased with the multi-generational profile of our participants: they included undergraduates (who were taking a seminar with me and incorporating conference papers into their major research paper) as well as graduate students, recently completed PhDs, and established and senior scholars from North and South America, Europe, and Australia. Senior scholars mingled with graduate students and animated discussions moved from the seminar room to the lobby, courtyard, restaurant, and party. The energy and enthusiasm exhibited during the four days certainly indicated that, contrary to pessimistic claims about labour history's decline, feminist labour history is alive and kicking.

The sample of peer-reviewed articles that appear here capture some of the conference's central themes and concerns. Together, they address issues of ethnicity, race, community, masculinity, the state, and the gender and spatial dynamics of labour protest and labour movements.

The first four articles deal with Canada. Rhonda Hinthner's "'They Said the Course Would Be Wasted On Me Because I Was A Girl': Mothers, Daughters, And Shifting Forms Of Female Activism in the Ukrainian Left in Twentieth-Century Canada" re-situates the subject of women on the ethnic left by highlighting the importance of multi-generational female networks as well as generational differences between radical mothers and their daughters in twentieth-century Canada. Male chauvinism, she shows, did not deter the first generation of women from playing critical roles in their radical community (a familiar pattern), and they passed on an important legacy to their daughters. Still, this younger generation of Canadianized women had a more ambiguous relationship to the male-dominated Ukrainian left and many of them moved away from it as they became active in the post-1945 feminist and peace movements and other non-ethnically specific social movements.

Portuguese workers have only recently received serious attention in Canadian labour history, thanks to scholars like Susana Miranda. In "'An Unlikely Collection of Union Militants': Portuguese Immigrant Cleaning Women Become Political Subjects in Postwar Toronto" she adopts a multilayered approach to Portuguese cleaning women in late twentieth century Toronto, viewing them as women, mothers, transnational subjects, community builders, and as immigrant workers with an ambiguous relationship to the state. Focusing on a dramatic 1984 strike, she draws out its broader significance, using newspaper reports to reveal both widely held assumptions about these supposedly submissive women and how their actions on the picket line - where they admonished both employers and the Canadian state for refusing to accord them the same rights as Canadian workers - challenged not only the racial-ethnic stereotypes but the myth that Canada is a benevolent nation to immigrants.

Jennifer Stephen's "Balancing Equality for the Post-War Woman: Demobilising Canada's Women Workers After World War Two" even more explicitly brings "the state" into labour history while also demonstrating the value of theoretically informed approaches that integrate class, race, and gender analysis. She revisits the subject of the Canadian state's wartime mobilization of "womanpower" but with a view to also explaining the less well-known state policies designed to train and to place women in "appropriate" jobs for the post-war era. Her work points to the contradictions between the labour bureaucrats' pre-occupation with clerical work for women and the grim employment realities of immigrant and low-skilled women in need of industrial jobs.

Cynthia Loch-Drake's "'A Special Breed': Packing Men and the Class and Racial Politics of Manly Discourses in Post-1945 Edmonton, Alberta" reflects the increasing importance of feminist-infused gender analyses of masculinity to labour history. She scrutinizes the meat-packing plants of post-war Alberta, documenting how the difficulty and dirtiness of the work helped shape

a "rough tough" masculine workplace culture that, in turn, fuelled an aggressive union militancy. Workplace dynamics, she notes, reinforced white male privilege, permitting white male workers, including white ethnic workers, to engage in racial taunts against newer immigrants of colour and otherwise assert their superiority.

Many of the conference participants were American historians, several of them specialists of immigrant and racialized subjects. With a focus on African American models, Laila Haidarali's "'Is It True What They Say about Models?': Modelling African American Womanhood On the Eve of the Civil Rights Era," also reflects a conference concern with disrupting the boundaries of labour history and its usual subjects. In considering the class, gender, and racial dynamics of the African American modelling industry, she argues that modelling offered women from a marginalized group the possibility of genuine mobility. In addition, she discusses the meanings attached to these models' bodies and Ebony magazine's promotion of race-positive images.

Our final two papers take us beyond North America. In "Missing Women: Recovering and Replacing Female Activists in Australian Labour History," Cathy Brigden addresses female activism by considering women in labour councils and federations in Australia. She maps the impact of women activists in the Victorian Trades Hall Council and explores how the use of separate organizing strategies resulted in an increased female presence in unions. She applies the insights of feminist social geography to heavily masculine spaces such as the union hall, where, she argues, women used spatial segregation to create a gendered space in order to increase their voice and agency.

The final contribution, a Community Voices feature by Michele Johnson entitled "Women's Labours in the Caribbean," is an activist-oriented piece that suggests how educators in classrooms and the wider community can teach the history of the Caribbean through women's physical, emotional, and cultural labours. In her overview

of the colonial era, she shows that the male-female dichotomy proved almost as definitive as the slave-free one; in the post-slavery years, the white-black dichotomy and racial hierarchies remained embedded in Caribbean society. While long subjected to a system of triple oppression, Johnson concludes, Black Caribbean women were critical family and community builders.