

"Old Ontario" Through the Lens of Feminist Scholarship, 1970s-1990s

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ABSTRACT

This article explores a number of themes in feminist historical writing in Ontario history. It points to the different genres in which such work first appeared, assesses how feminist work has expanded or altered our knowledge of various periods and themes of the existing literature, and examines the contributions made by feminist historians to new areas of research. It concludes with a discussion of areas yet to be considered and suggests possibilities for new feminist frameworks for Ontario history.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore un nombre de thèmes dans les écrits historiques féministes dans l'histoire de l'Ontario. Il souligne les deux différents genres dans lesquels cette sorte de travail a d'abord fait apparition, évalue comment le travail féministe a élargi ou changé notre connaissance des différents thèmes dans la littérature, et étudie les contributions faites par les historiennes féministes dans de nouveaux domaines de recherche. L'article finit avec une discussion sur des domaines qui n'ont pas encore été considérés et suggère des possibilités pour de nouveaux cadres féministes pour l'histoire de l'Ontario.

"What," I was asked by *Atlantis'* editors, "has been the impact of feminism on Ontario history?" As this essay will explore, feminism has inspired three, possibly four, generations of historians to ask questions about women's position in the province over the course of the last two hundred and eight years (my dates begin with the creation of the colonial state of Upper Canada).¹ This essay does not intend to be exhaustive or completely inclusive of all the fine work that has been done in Ontario women's and gender history.² I explore significant areas and studies and then conclude with a discussion of new directions, whereby we might continue the feminist project of understanding Old - and New - Ontario.

Radical and liberatory political movements helped shape the types of questions that were asked and the theoretical frameworks that were deployed by feminist scholarship beginning in the 1960s. At the same time, the development of graduate programs in many Ontario institutions outside of the large and well-established ones at the University of Toronto and Queen's University. Moreover, not all work in Ontario women's history has come out of traditional history departments. Feminist scholars housed in departments, centres, and schools of women's studies, education, sociology, criminology, and law have made substantial contributions, often

pushing the field in new theoretical, empirical, and epistemological directions.³ Thus, the structural advantages of being in a heavily-populated province, with a relatively large (and I admit this in *particular* is now relative) system of well-funded post-secondary education have played their role in bolstering the field's development.

Until the 1980s much of this scholarship appeared in the form of document collections, articles in edited collections, and in a number of journals (Light and Parr 1983; Light and Pierson 1980; Light and Prentice 1980; Prentice and Trofimenkoff 1985; Trofimenkoff and Prentice 1977). The textbook *Canadian Women: A History* (Prentice et al. 1988 and 1996) synthesized much of this scholarship. The University of Toronto, McGill-Queen's, McClelland and Stewart (now Oxford University Press), and the Women's Press have also published important studies that ranged over a variety of topics and were informed by feminist insights into the nature of power and resistance (Backhouse 1991; Frager 1992; Houston and Prentice 1988; Iacovetta 1992; Parr 1990; Sangster 1989).

Nevertheless, as late as 1990 it was relatively easy for even a graduate student to amass a collection of Ontario women's history monographs. By the middle of the decade, though,

the number of monographs in the area had expanded significantly, particularly with the launching of the University of Toronto Press Gender History Series.⁴ Book-length studies provide not only the very obvious advantage of easier accessibility and higher visibility than articles scattered in journals, they also make possible greater depth and breadth. Lynne Marks' prize-winning *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, for example, not only tells us much about the gendered dimensions of religion in women's and men's lives, it also makes substantial contributions to our understanding of small-town life in late-nineteenth-century Ontario. To be sure, the genre of the monograph is no guarantee that such work will live up to such standards; we have all suffered through books infected by tunnel-vision. However, in the case of Ontario women's history, it has brought increased sophistication, a finessing of the historical record, that links this scholarship to other aspects of the province's history.

What, then, has feminism done for Ontario history? How might the outline of various periods and processes look once the insights of feminist historiography have been applied? For one, it has taught us much about the role women played in modernity of the 1880s to the 1920s, decades in which the province became increasingly industrialized, urbanized, attracted a number of non-British immigrants, and saw a number of social movements form: the rebirth of temperance, labour and leftist organizations, social reform, and woman's suffrage and woman's rights, to name some of the best-known.

After twenty-five years of feminist scholarship, it would be almost banal to observe that many of these processes involved women in a number of ways: as paid workers in the province's factories, as petitioners for the prohibition of alcohol, as strikers, as writers for left-wing papers, and as organizers of groups such as the Toronto Women's Literary Society. Moreover, these developments also affected women's lives. More young women moved from rural areas and small towns or stepped from the gang-planks of steamers, either to make a living in urban centres or to work as domestic servants in jobs vacated by Canadian-born women. Other women would also find work within the province's expanding public and high school system, rapidly becoming part of one of the largest (outside of domestic service)

groups of female workers in the province. Middle-class women saw an increased scope for voluntary action and many seized the opportunity to work for causes that ranged from overseas missions to slum cleanup and sex education in the province's schools. A few also benefitted from the opening - one might say prising - of professions such as medicine and higher education to women. And some of these women, mostly from the middle class, would come to conclude that the problems they faced as women would only be resolved with the provincial and federal franchises.

These are but some of the contributions that feminist historians have made to our understanding of the 1880s-1920s period, arguably the most-studied area in Ontario history. Much of the earlier work on this period has been critiqued (generally fairly) for its lack of attention to ethnicity and race, both as relationships that created differences between women and different experiences for those women who were not of British descent. For the latter group, racial and ethnic identities, when combined with gender and class, were social locations that might allow them to assume either power or, at the very least, influence over other women and subaltern men. Furthermore, it is not unfair to suggest that earlier work on 1880s-1920s made implicit assumptions about the national character of provincial developments; Ontario women were at times placed at the core of modern Canadian nation-building. Subsequent scholarship has shown these developments to be more regionally-specific.⁵

The period between the wars has not yet attracted as much work, although there are some studies that deal with a variety of issues: women's participation in a number of political parties, their activism on the left, changing conceptions of motherhood and the role of the state in reproduction, women's unpaid labour and family roles in Northern Ontario resource communities, and the spectacle of the Dionne quintuplets (Arnup 1994; Commachio 1993; Forestell 1996, 1999; Kealey and Sangster 1989; Little 1998; Sangster 1989; Wright 1994-/95). Joy Parr's important study, *The Gender of Breadwinners*, has also shown how, from the 1920s to the 1950s, gender and class relations together formed the lives and identities of working-class women and men in southern Ontario towns. Furthermore, a number of feminist scholars

are now turning their attention to the post-Second World War period; witness a recently-published collection of essays that covers a range of topics, from girl gangs, consumption, and the remaking of immigrant families to the activism of the province's rural, Aboriginal, and Francophone women (Parr 1995). Such work has demonstrated that the notion of women's quiescence before the events of the 1960s has been a false one and undermined, if not overturned, the "June Cleaver" image of the late 1940s and 1950s. It has also provided historians of that period with a more complex and nuanced portrait of social, economic, and political changes.

The period that remains mostly untouched is that of the "pre-Confed" era - or anything prior to the 1880s. To be sure, a number of studies have been published over the past six years that have addressed women Loyalists, elite Upper Canadian women and their families, women's paid and unpaid labour, and the gendered dimensions of various aspects of Upper Canadian society (Errington 1995; McKenna 1994; Morgan 1996; Potter-MacKinnon 1993). And several important studies in educational history have demonstrated the gendered dynamics at work in colonial schooling (Curtis 1988; Prentice and Houston 1988). Nevertheless, in contrast with the twentieth century, few feminist historians are attracted to the study of colonial society.⁶ The unfortunate result is a truncated and somewhat skewed understanding of both changes and continuities in gender relations over the course of the nineteenth century. This paucity of studies of women's experiences and the dynamics of gender relations may leave many with the impression that the early to mid-nineteenth century has more to do with roughing it in the bush and responsible government than the formation of a society shaped by the relations of gender, class, ethnicity, race, and religion (although even a cursory look at the scholarship for this period south of the border or across the Atlantic should suggest otherwise).⁷

While feminist work in Ontario history has been influenced by international literature in the fields of women's and gender history, it has also shared many of the interests and methodologies of social historians. To no small extent the similarities can be attributed to the strong presence of socialist-feminist historians in the field, many of whom have integrated work on women and gender with scholarship on labour and the left (Frager

1992; Iacovetta 1992, 1999; Kealey 1989; Sangster 1989). As the number of studies of women's participation in paid labour demonstrates, Ontario feminist historians tend to emphasize the material basis of women's lives. This scholarship also has focused on conducting empirically-grounded research that restores women's voices to the historical record. Furthermore, the search for women's agency has been a central concern of many Ontario feminist historians. Even those who would not, perhaps, see Marx as a central influence have made much of women's own attempts to shape the direction of their lives and society (Brouwer 1990; Cook 1995). Those who have focused on provincial institutions and structures, such as the state, the law, and the courts, have not denied the creation of gendered hierarchies in and through them. However, they have also alerted us to women's attempts to manoeuvre and negotiate power relationships within them (Backhouse 1991; Iacovetta 1992; Sangster 1993, 1999).

Finally, while feminist historians in Ontario, like their counterparts elsewhere, first turned their attention to Anglo-Celtic middle-class women, working-class women have been the subjects of a thriving part of the literature⁸ and were the subject of the first major essay collection, *Women at Work: Ontario*. The pioneering collection of essays on women and immigration in Ontario edited by Jean Burnet, *Looking Into My Sister's Eyes*, offered descriptions of the experiences of women from various immigrant groups, their vital and creative contributions, as Burnet put it, to these groups' adaptation to North American life (1986, 4). Following these lines of inquiry but at the same time broadening and deepening their analytical framework, scholars such as Franca Iacovetta, Varpu Lindström-Best, Ruth Frager, and Marlene Epp have told us much about immigrant women's experiences. Their research has also called attention to the ways in which gender, class, and ethnicity were interlinked in Ontario society (Epp and Epp 1986; Epp 1997; Frager 1992; Iacovetta 1992; Lindström-Best 1988). One exception, though, has been Irish women. Despite the number of studies of nineteenth-century Irish immigrants that exist and that range from family migration patterns to the ubiquitous Orange Lodge, we have few studies of Irish women in their own right. Nor, although it cannot be subsumed under the category of

immigration, has much attention been paid to the dynamics of language, culture, and ethnicity in the lives of women from the province's Francophone community.⁹

While much ink has been spilt over British women immigrants (Barber 1980, 1986; Hopkins 1986; Parr 1986; Smith and Sullivan 1995), there have been few attempts to explore how their identities were moulded by ethnic and racial positions and identities, still fewer attempts to theorize about these women's class and racial locations and subjectivities. Those who study Anglo-Celtic middle-class women could benefit from the theoretical and epistemological insights generated by scholars of working-class and ethnic minority women, as well as international work in both colonial history and the formation of whiteness as a racial category.¹⁰ It has become *de rigeur* to state that the subjects of one's research are white and middle class but these relationships are presupposed, used descriptively and not analytically, with an assumption of their objective location in the province's social structure. Historians also need to see such relationships as ongoing processes, identities, and subjectivities that were historically contingent and forged, performed, and contested in particular contexts.

If such theorizing is lacking for Anglo-Celtic women, we lack much basic, indeed rudimentary, empirical research for the history of Native women in Ontario. Until quite recently feminist historians of this province have overlooked or discounted the experiences of Native, Black, and other racial minority women. In contrast with scholarship in Western Canada and British Columbia, work on Native women in Ontario tends to be more fragmented. Unlike the historiography of Euro-Canadian women, it is difficult to construct anything more than a sketchy and often anecdotal narrative of Aboriginal women's lives after colonization. To be sure, Aboriginal women have often written their own histories of their lives, work, and activism, particularly since the 1960s (Castellano and Hill 1995; Corbiere and Hardy 1996; Solomon-Gravel 1996). And a few feminist scholars have examined a number of discrete topics, ranging from Gretchen Green's insightful (and, I believe, much neglected) study of the lives of Molly and Catharine Brant (1989) to Sangster's recent work on Aboriginal women and the province's

criminal courts (1999). In general, it seems that Aboriginal women's history in Ontario has suffered from the overall lack of attention to Ontario Native history. While the situation has changed somewhat over the last ten years, in narratives of the province's past Aboriginal peoples often vanish from the historical landscape after the War of 1812 and the establishment of missions.¹¹

The lack of material is even more striking in the case of Black women's history. We have, it is true, the fragments of a "field" that suggest future possibilities: Shirley Yee's study of women in the Black community of mid-nineteenth-century southern Ontario; Dionne Brand's oral histories of Black working women, 1920s-1950s; Agnes Calliste's work on the state and Caribbean women's immigration; and, most recently, Jane Rhodes' study of Mary Ann Shadd and the Black press (Brand 1991; Calliste 1993, 1993/94, 1996; Rhodes 1997; Yee 1994). The introduction of Brand's *No Burden to Carry* provides scholars with a broadly-based narrative of Black women's lives in this province, from the mid-nineteenth-century to the 1950s. Yet there is a great need to know more about the details of these women's lives, the construction of the gendered meanings of "race" in Ontario society and the negotiation and contestation of such meanings.

Themes such as class, ethnicity, and race have linked feminist history to other topics: the growth of cities, the creation of an industrial labour force, immigration to the province. Other scholarship has also helped carve out new areas of inquiry in Ontario historiography. The family as the overall context for women's lives has been taken quite seriously in colonial scholarship, largely because of the political, social, and economic importance of family in Upper Canadian society: elite, middling, and plebeian women were all embedded in familial structures and depended on family (sometimes for better, many times for worse) for their livelihood, social position, and identity (Errington 1995; McKenna 1994; Potter-MacKinnon 1993). For urban reformers in turn-of-the-century Toronto, the lack of family for single women gave rise to numerous concerns about social, economic, and racial crises, concerns that found expression through the social reform movement's strategies and initiatives (Kealey 1979; Pederson 1986, 1996; Strange 1995).

Closely linked to family history are, of course, the histories of medicine, birth control, and abortion. An earlier wave of feminist research demonstrated how the medical profession sought to carve out a space for itself in nineteenth-century Ontario by eliminating women healers and midwives (Biggs 1983), while simultaneously lobbying against the admission of women to medical training and licensing (de la Cour and Sheinin 1986; Strong-Boag 1979). Wendy Mitchinson's research has shown the various ways in which the medical profession sought to regulate women, particularly middle-class women, with implications not just for their visit to the doctor's office but for their participation in society at large (1991). In the twentieth century context, Katherine Arnup and Cynthia Comacchio have examined the various campaigns aimed by the medical profession and the state at mothers, the former groups intent on creating modern, scientific childrearing techniques that would build better babies for Ontario. Where sources permit, these historians have also attempted to gauge women's responses to these campaigns (Arnup 1994; Comacchio 1993). Through their work on birth control and abortion, feminist historians have also shed light on both the state's desire to control women's reproductive capacities and women's struggle to gain some measure of autonomy over their fertility (Dodd 1983, 1990; McLaren and Tigar McLaren 1986).

From debating the extent to which the medical profession seized control of processes such as childbirth or stigmatized abortion, the literature has moved to examine the regulatory power of the state and voluntary institutions, particularly from the earlier twentieth century to the present. Influenced by Michel Foucault's insights into the modern state's processes of surveillance, discipline, and creation of the categories of normal and deviant, various scholars have examined the workings of the early psychiatric profession, the courts, and social welfare institutions and provisions, such as Mother's Allowance. They have teased out the gendered dimensions of their activities and, in particular, their implications for women's lives, both in larger cities and in small-town and rural Ontario (Burr 1995; Little 1998; Sangster 1993; Stephen 1995; Strange 1995). Such scholarship has also shown that gender was not the only factor that determined which women

would confront the gaze of the magistrates, the doctors, and the welfare inspectors. Women's experiences of such regulation were moulded by materially-based relationships of power and dominance, such as class, ethnicity, and race. However, as various studies have demonstrated, these bodies did not always behave in predictable or monolithic ways; chivalric notions of gentlemanly behaviour might result in the acquittal of women who committed murder (Strange 1992). Feminist historians also have not abandoned their search for agency, let alone the desire to retrieve women's voices (no matter how filtered through various discourses they might have been). For example, Iacovetta's study of Italian and immigrant women has demonstrated how they deployed their own notions of family in the face of would-be assimilative state and voluntary organizations' policies (1992).

Karen Dubinsky's pathbreaking work on men's sexual violence toward women, as well as other, more ambiguous crimes such as seduction, has revealed the extent of sexual assault in what once was thought to be staid - and safe - rural and small-town Ontario. She also read against the grain of court records in attempts to tease out the meanings of sexual pleasure and danger, as women attempted to navigate between the rigidities of being "maidenly girls" and "designing women" (1993). Notwithstanding such studies, our understanding of the place of sexuality, either in Ontario women's lives or in society generally, is still fairly rudimentary. Much of our knowledge of the meanings of sexuality for many women in the province's past has been gained through the case files of the state, the medical profession, and voluntary organizations (Dubinsky 1993; Mitchinson 1991; Strange 1995; Valverde 1991). Recent work on the post-Second World War period has demonstrated how heterosexuality came to be defined as the norm and integral to the democratic process, specifically through discourses produced by institutions such as the national media and, at the local level, by the Toronto Board of Education (Adams 1997).

Gay and lesbian history in Ontario is, to date, generally more the subject of a number of forthcoming graduate dissertations than a published body of work. What has been published has not only shown us that "they were here" - whether the

"they" were the politicized lesbians of 1970s' Toronto's LOOT or turn-of-the-century men engaging in sex in Toronto's lavatories and parks - it has also demonstrated how sexual categories and spaces were defined by both authorities and those who contested their power (Maynard 1996, 1997; Ross 1995). This work has shown that Ontario was not isolated from those forces that reshaped sexual practices, beliefs, and categories in the United States and Britain. However, the history of sexuality, gay and straight, continues to remind us of the significance of time and place. While commercialized sex took place in the province's southern and/or urban centres, in the words of one historian: "Toronto was not New York."¹²

Other areas of feminist scholarship have given an added depth to established fields, one notable one being that of education. Over the years the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) has done much to foster feminist research into the history of education and schooling (the two, it should be noted, not being necessarily synonymous; see Heap and Prentice 1991, vi). Such work has been done at a number of levels: feminist supervision of graduate research in both history and sociology; collaborative work within OISE by faculty, researchers and students that has produced many collections of documents and articles; and scholarship by feminist historians such as Alison Prentice. Prentice, along with other scholars, has shown that many aspects of schooling were shaped by gender, as well as class relations, from the content of the curriculum and schools' architecture to the training, appointment, pay scales, and working conditions of teachers (Cook 1993; Danylewycz and Prentice 1986; Danylewycz 1991; Heap 1991; Houston and Prentice 1988; Lenskyj 1982, 1990; Prentice 1977; Prentice and Theobald 1991; Stamp 1977). Building upon feminist insights into the importance of gender in Ontario's schools, but also influenced by Foucault, Marx, and Philip Corrigan, historical sociologist Bruce Curtis' work on the educational state of nineteenth-century Ontario has demonstrated its attempts to inculcate particular kinds of gendered and class identities, for both teachers and students, and to create boundaries between suitable and unsuitable forms of behaviour and ways of being in schools - and out - for both groups (Curtis 1988, 1989). Another historical sociologist, Kari Dehli, has opened up the

schoolhouse door by examining the activities of middle-class women in parent-teacher associations and the work of public-health nurses. Dehli analyzes these groups and individuals with both socialist-feminist and Foucauldian theoretical perspectives (1990, 1991).

The history of higher education in Ontario now tells us much more about gender differentiation in Ontario universities: the numbers of women who entered them, the particular courses in which they enrolled, and their participation in student culture, either in mixed groups or as part of women-only organizations and networks (Axelrod 1990; Burke 1996; LaPierre 1991; Marks and Gaffield 1986; McKillop 1994; Neatby 1991). However, with the exception of a few studies - Lynne Mark's work on Jewish high school students in 1920s Toronto and Afua Cooper's search for the Black teacher, Mary Bibb, in Canada West - the teacher and the student in Ontario feminist historiography have overwhelmingly been Anglo-Celtic and Christian (Cooper 1991; Marks 1991). They also have often been middle class.

A few feminist scholars of education have examined the role of women religious in this field (Smyth 1991) and Marion Royce did pioneering work on the role Protestantism played in women's education in nineteenth-century Ontario (1975, 1977, 1978). Overall, however, the field of gender and religion in the province's history is a very uneven one. We know now more about women preachers in Upper Canadian Methodism, for example, or about the role of women in late nineteenth-century church-based activism, such as missionary work, the social gospel, or moral reform (Brouwer 1990; Gagan 1992; Muir 1991; Muir and Whiteley 1995; Valverde 1991). The work of Roman Catholic nuns in preparing young Toronto women for more than just a life of "accomplishments" has been documented (Smyth 1991). Brian Clarke has pointed to the active associational life of Irish Catholic women within the late nineteenth-century Toronto church (1993). But these studies are far from being exhaustive of the topic of women, gender, and the Catholic church in Ontario.

The history of Ontario women and religion still lacks much breadth and depth, the range of nuances and subtleties that distinguish its counterpart in the United States. Much of the

literature, older and more recent, deals with Protestant churches. While this focus is understandable, given both the numerical dominance and social and political significance of Protestantism in Ontario, nevertheless it has left us with some significant gaps in our understanding of how other religions have been gendered. As well, we have as only a hazy notion of how women and men from these religions have negotiated the gendered ideals and practices of their churches. Moreover, with the exception of Paula Draper and Janice Karlinsky's research on the charitable work of women within Toronto's Jewish community, we have very little work that examines their lives within its religious context (Draper and Karlinsky 1986).

Even work on Protestantism has been structured in ways that emphasize its secular dimensions, possibly for an audience that has not seen religion as an important category, certainly not one to be treated like gender, class, race and ethnicity, and sexuality (Brouwer 1992). Spirituality, piety, the cultural significance of women and gender to religion (in iconography, for example, and other forms of religious representation), the lines between women's versions of popular religion and official church doctrines: in the Ontario context, many of these areas - with the exception of Marguerite Van Die's work - await their historians (Van Die 1996).

According to Sharon Cook, though, evangelical feminism underpinned the work of one of the province's largest and longest-standing women's groups, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). In *Through Sunshine and Shadow*, Cook has demonstrated that the organization's work stretched far beyond temperance, as its members' concerns encompassed women's enfranchisement, social purity, working women's problems, and the treatment of young female offenders (1995). Although her theoretical and conceptual framework differ (and her intended scope is the national stage of reform), Mariana Valverde also has shown that the social purity movement, of which the WCTU and other women's groups formed an important part, was not concerned with repressing sexual knowledge, an all-too-common stereotype of turn-of-the-century women's organizations. Rather, they worked to

produce discourse on sexuality that treated it as healthy and also linked it to notions of racial purity.

The links between women's religiosity and their participation in reform organizations were often downplayed in the literature of the 1970s and early 1980s. Work by scholars such as Linda Kealey, Wayne Roberts, Wendy Mitchinson, Deborah Gorham, and Veronica Strong-Boag (1979) emphasized both women's secular activism and the political and conceptual limitations of their agency. In carrying out their research, these historians found themselves faced with a range of reform work, much of it involving the interests of women and children in urban settings.¹³ So far as feminism was concerned, these historians argued that, in general, maternal feminism dominated Ontario suffragists' ideology. In this literature maternal feminism was espoused mostly by middle-class women who valorized women's place in the home and who saw themselves as the protectors and regulators, not equals, of working-class women. Such an ideology flourished because of the absence of working-class women from these groups (Kealey 1979). And maternal feminism has been the dominant model for discussions of first-wave feminism, woman's rights, or woman's suffrage in Ontario ever since.

It may be time to revisit this topic, particularly in the light of a plethora of work in the United States and Britain on suffrage and moral reform. In our rethinking of - or at least adding more nuance to - the history of first-wave Ontario feminism, we would be the richer for studies that are more attentive to local contexts and that take more seriously the rhetoric of race, nation, and empire in feminist writings and strategies.¹⁴

It is no longer possible to claim that women's political activism died after the vote was secured for Anglo-Celtic and Euro-Canadian women in Ontario, only to be resurrected as liberal/radical/socialist in the 1960s. A number of essays and biographies have demonstrated the various kinds of activities into which women's political and social energies were channeled after the 1920s, such as the peace movement or "mainstream" political parties (Fairclough and Conrad 1995; Iacovetta 1989; Roberts 1989). An important part of this scholarship points to the significance of women's role in the Left during the 1920s and 1930s, both within the Cooperative

Commonwealth Federation (CCF) or the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) (Frager, 1992; Sangster 1989). A more general study that links these various political efforts, both to themselves and to the post-Second World War period, is now needed. The same might be said for 1960s and 1970s feminism. While we have a fine overview by Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail (1988), most of the scholarship on the "2nd wave," presently scattered in various journals and anthologies, needs to incorporate the work of ethnic and racial minority women, as well as Aboriginal women's insights into the various women's movements. Ruth Roach Pierson and Marjorie Griffin Cohen's two volume collection of documents, *Canadian Women's Issues: Twenty Five Years of Women's Activism*, provides much valuable information on Ontario during this period and suggests how feminist historians might tackle such a project. Finally, our next step as feminist historians is to explore the gendering of politics in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at the levels of both political rhetoric and political practice.

Feminism, then, has done much for Ontario history. It has debunked such existing assumptions as women workers' passivity or notions of the narrow focus of reform organizations; it has added new dimensions to areas that had not previously taken gender into consideration, such as the history of religion or the welfare state; and it has also opened up many new areas of historical inquiry that the existing historiography did not touch, such as the history of sexuality. Further, it has helped to widen the scope of Ontario historiography which in the past had often tended toward narrowness, parochialism, and insularity. Overall, feminist history has given us fresh insights into the dynamic and complicated nature of Ontario's past.

But if we can respond with confidence to the question What has feminism done for Ontario history?, it is a little more difficult to answer What has Ontario history done for feminism? What have been the concepts of Ontario as a region that have underpinned feminist research? As Jane Errington has recently argued, "the once grand tableau of progress, democratization and economic prosperity" has been blurred by the insights of feminist, and other, scholars (1998, 150). But what has replaced these metanarratives? As previously mentioned, at

one point Ontario was seen as a synecdoche for the nation by its historians, feminist and otherwise, as much as by its politicians (Errington 1998, 150). But the flip side of this approach has been that the concept of region and regional inequalities is shadowy, more assumed than developed.

Such a framework could be applied to Ontario feminist history as a means of better understanding the dynamics of region within the province. Northern women's history has been the subject of relatively few historical inquiries: it is almost banal to observe that much of the literature discussed above is set in southern and central Ontario. The point of more work on northern Ontario, though, is not just about gaining more knowledge of the details of northern women's lives; it is also to understand how regional disparities have affected gender relations, along with other forms of inequities. What might our analysis of the gendered welfare state, for example, look like once historians turn their attention to long-standing patterns of the administration of northern social welfare from southern centres?¹⁵ How might we understand the particular gendered configurations of family and work in Ontario's past if we incorporated the experiences of women in resource communities, such as mining, where opportunities for women's waged work were few and far between and men's paid labour was debilitating, dangerous, and all too often deadly? (Forestell 1996).

If anything, J. M. S. Careless' concept of "limited identities" might be the best way of describing how feminist history fits into Ontario historiography.¹⁶ But limited identities can be a fairly benign concept, harking of the rather bloodless concept of diversity and lacking any sense of domination and resistance (however fragmented and decentred we now understand these things to be). Another important framework that feminist historians of Ontario might consider is that of a white settler colony. While the ongoing dispossession of Aboriginal peoples, particularly Aboriginal women, from the 1790s on would be an important part of this project, it would also take colonialism seriously enough to see it in operation even when removed from treaties and reservations, missionaries, and residential schools. Seeing Ontario as part of both national and imperial processes might help us to understand better the intertwined creation of multiple categories and

hierarchies, such as "Black woman," "Chinese man," and "working-class woman," or "white, middle-class man," in the home, church, workplace, school, legislative assembly, or voluntary organization. To be sure, I would argue that such an approach must take into consideration the differences between Ontario and other colonies; if Toronto was not New York, neither was it Sydney nor Victoria.

Yet thinking more seriously and consistently about the role of colonialism in Ontario's history might help us to continue answering that sixty-four thousand dollar question:

what, in the end, does it matter that we know this or that about another group of women, be they workers, teachers, students, housewives, reformers, or feminists? In the end, perhaps it is less important what Ontario feminist historians study as they continue to reshape our understanding of the province's past than that they continue to draw attention to the locations of power and its deployment by whom and on whom (McPherson, Morgan, and Forestell 1999, 11). It is that past and, I hope, ongoing sensitivity to such relationships that has been feminism's most significant impact on Ontario history.

ENDNOTES

1. While of course not all women's history has been motivated by feminist desires to understand the power dynamics of the past, I would argue that the vast majority of work on women in Ontario history falls into that category, with, of course, the proviso that not all feminists research and write alike! In selecting works that illuminate the impact of feminist scholarship on Ontario history, I have used a broadly-based definition of "feminist" scholarship as being work that:

- a. acknowledges the previous absence of women from mainstream narratives of the province;
- b. sees such an absence as an intellectual and political problem and not just an unfortunate but understandable oversight;
- c. acknowledges the historical subordination of women to men but, in the case of some scholarly approaches, also sees women's lives as having been shaped by other relationships of power (such as class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality);
- d. explores women's experiences of this subordination but also examines their negotiation and, at times, resistance to it.

2. For the sake of brevity and clarity, and in order to devote space to other questions, in this article I have chosen not to enter into the thickets of the women's-gender history debate. I have expressed my perspective on these matters in the introductory chapter to my book, *Public Men and Virtuous Women*, and in the introduction, co-written with Kathryn McPherson and Nancy Forestell, to *Gendered Pasts* (1999). A number of feminist scholars whose work is discussed here study both women and men, as they believe that gender is relational. See, for example, work by Joy Parr, Franca Iacovetta, Mariana Valverde, Lynne Marks, Karen Dubinsky, Carolyn Strange, Nancy Forestell, and Cecilia Morgan. Lack of space prevents me from examining new work on masculinity.

3. See, for example, the scholarship of Mariana Valverde, Carolyn Strange, Constance Backhouse, Alison Prentice, Ruth Roach Pierson, and Sharon Cook. As well, a number of feminist historians are also often cross-appointed to women's studies programs.

4. For example, this list includes Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (1995); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City 1880-1930* (1995); Sara Z. Burke, *Seeking the Highest Good: Social Service and Gender in the University of Toronto, 1880-1937* (1996); Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (1996); Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: the Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (1996). As well, the series has published important work in gender history that examines other areas of the country. See Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (1995).

5. See, for example, Strange's discussion of the strong influence of US Progressivism on Toronto's social purity/reform movements (*Toronto's Girl Problem*).

6. Allan Greer, "Canadian History: Ancient and Modern," *Canadian Historical Review* 77 (1996): 575-90.

7. I must admit to being a little less optimistic about this state of affairs than my colleague, Jane Errington. I agree that much work has been done over the last ten years to redress this imbalance. Still, I would agree with Greer's arguments about the lack of interest in the field of pre-Confederation history. Without a continuing influx of graduate students, it is very difficult to foster debate and a diversity of studies. See Errington, "'And What About the Women?' Changing Ontario's History," *Ontario History*, LXXX.2 (Autumn 1998): 135-55; Greer, "Canadian History: Ancient and Modern."

8. It would be impossible to cite all of the relevant literature; see the attached bibliography for works by scholars such as Joan Sangster, Joy Parr, Franca Iacovetta, Lynne Marks, Jane Errington, Ester Reiter, Nancy Forestell, and Dionne Brand. For a more extensive discussion of this topic, see the essay by Joan Sangster in this issue.

9. See David Welch, "The Dionne Quintuplets: More Than an Ontario Showpiece - Five Franco-Ontarian Children," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29.4 (Winter 1994/95): 36-64; Linda Cardinal, "Making a Difference: The Theory and Practice of Francophone Women's Groups, 1969-82," in Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980* (1996); Marie-luce Garceau, "La pauvreté des Franco-Ontariennes de 45 à 64 ans du Nord-Est de l'Ontario," in Margaret Kechnic and Marge Reitsma-Street, eds., *Changing Lives: Women in Northern Ontario* (1996).
10. Catherine Hall, *White, Male, and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (London: Routledge, 1992); Ann Curthoys, "Identity Crisis: Colonialism, Nation, and Gender in Australian History," *Gender and History* 5.2 (Summer 1993): 165-76; Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History* (London: Verso, 1992).
11. See, for example, Peter Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Edward S. Rogers and Donald Smith, eds., *Aboriginal Ontario: Historical Perspectives on the First Nations* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1994); Janet Chute, *The Legacy of Shingwaukonce* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998). Carl Benn's *The Iroquois in the War of 1812* contains a number of insights into Iroquois masculinity (University of Toronto Press, 1998).
12. This comment was made by Steven Maynard in a session, "Historical Constructions of Gay Male Sexuality," at the Organization of American Historians' conference, Toronto, April 1999.
13. Some work has been done on women and reform in rural Ontario. See Terry Crowley, "Madonnas Before Magdalens; Adelaide Hoodless and the Making of the Canadian Gibson Girl," *Canadian Historical Review* 67, 4 (1986): 520-47; Linda Ambrose, "'What Are the Good of These Meetings Anyway?': Early Popularity of the Ontario Women's Institutes," *Ontario History* 87.1 (Spring 1995): 1-19.
14. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Marilyn Lake, "Australian Frontier Feminism and The Marauding White man," in Claire Midgley, ed., *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Claire Midgley, "Anti-Slavery and The Roots of 'Imperial Feminism,'" in Claire Midgley, ed., *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
15. I would like to thank Nancy Forestell for pointing this out to me and reminding me of the dearth of historical work on women, gender, and northern Ontario.
16. J. M. S. Careless, "Limited Identities in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 50 (1969): 1-10.

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