

Book Reviews

Creating Historical Memory: English-Canadian Women and the Work of History. Beverly Boutilier and Alison Prentice, eds. Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press, 1997; illustrations, xii +308 pages; ISBN 0-7748-0640-0; \$75.00 (cloth).
Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History (Third Edition). Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, eds. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1997; xi +498 pages; ISBN 0-19-541291-5; \$25.95.

These two books provide an excellent "time capsule" for the state of Canadian women's history in the late 1990s. Both books in very different ways provide evidence and explicitly argue that "history without women is distorted history." While one book is an anthology of available writings on Canadian women's history, the other introduces us to "pioneer" women who produced history. The two books remind us that women are not only central actors in history but have played an important role in "creating historical memory."

Rethinking Canada: the Promise of Women's History is the third edition of a popular collection of course readings and is significantly revised. The book contains twenty-four pre-published essays (nineteen new for this edition) ranging from 17th-century aboriginal/European contact to contemporary debates around gender and public policy in Ottawa. The anthology nods to interdisciplinarity; the vast majority of the articles are drawn from history but several are included from political science, sociology and anthropology. Appropriate to an introductory course in Canadian women's history, the articles cover a wide range of themes such as politics, work, sexuality, public policy and family. Each article is introduced by a short essay which not only provides necessary background and historiographical context but also links themes and ideas with other articles in the

collection. The result is a coherent and accessible teaching tool.

The selected articles are nicely balanced in terms of chronology, region and ethnicity, and the lacunae point to the state of women's history rather than to any failing of this specific collection. The poor representation of readings (and indeed the paucity of readings available to the editors) on rural women, women in the north, women in the arts and the elusive nature of "private life" reminds us of the dearth of scholarship in certain areas.

Creating Historical Memory goes some way to making women, in at least the written arts, less invisible. This book introduces us to female historians, or in the words of the book's editors, "creators of historical memory." Boutilier and Prentice, along with their contributors, want to remind us that many women were directly involved in creating historical memory as they taught history in schools or wrote historical novels, textbooks, articles for local historical societies and convent annals. The women we encounter in this original contribution to Canadian women's history tend to be homogeneous: privileged, predominantly Anglo-Celtic and concentrated in Ontario. But among these women are examples such as Constance Lindsay Skinner (Jean Barman's contribution), where she shows how tenuous class and family status could be for women who did not conform to heterosexual marriage.

For the women introduced in *Creating Historical Memory*, economics was the most powerful force drawing them to history. History was a means to earn a living. Others were attracted to history by an ideological agenda as it provided a means to express national and racial identities or religious commitment.

History with a capital "H" was a "gentlemen's discipline" and even women who pursued advanced studies remained outside the academic historical profession until the 1960s (with the important exception of a few western institutions in the 1930s and 1940s). As history experienced the process of professionalization, emphasis was placed on scientific rigour and

objectivity. This process created a professional/amateur divide, with men in the academy and women outside, as their sentimentality and lack of rigour made them unsuitable for the pursuit of new scientific historical studies.

Of the ten essays, six take the form of biography. The individual essays are divided into four themes. The first deals with "Community Building" and explores Agnes Maule Machar (1837-1927), Sarah Anne Curzon (1833-1898), and the Tweedsmuir series of community histories created by the Ontario Women's Institute in the twentieth century. The second theme explores "Transitions," examining historical tradition in Catholic religious women's communities, and in the lives of Constance Lindsay Skinner (1877-1939) and Isabel Skelton (1877-1956). The third section brings us into the world of the university. Here, essays deal individually with historians Esther Clark Wright (1895-1990) and Kathleen Wood-Legh (1901-1981), followed by a fascinating overview by Alison Prentice of women in history departments at Dalhousie, McGill, Queen's, Toronto, Saskatchewan and the University of British Columbia before 1950. The final essay (a section unto itself!) examines the beginning of women's history as a distinct area of study. It is especially interesting, as Deborah Gorham is not only a fine historian of its evolution but was herself one of the first to offer a women's history course in Canada.

Overall, the collection is fascinating reading, but important questions remain. The argument tracing the exclusion of women from professional history is persuasive but there is no recognition that non-academic forms of history, where women were most likely to be found, were probably more influential in shaping popular understandings of the past. This was particularly true of Canadian history which, as the authors note, was marginalized in the university. While secure academic men may have attempted to rid the Canadian narrative of such myths as Laura Secord, the unscientific forms of history remained powerful at the level of popular knowledge.

Further, it would have been interesting had the editors questioned directly whether women created a different kind of history from men. There are glimpses of this, for example, in the account of an Ontario Women's Institute branch which traced changing bridal fashions in its community history, as well as in the editors' suggestion that women were unable to reconcile their own experiences with the content of professional History. But I was struck in particular that there was no mention of genealogy or family history in this volume; writing family history and biography was surely one of the most common ways in which women acted as historians of their world.

The two books are welcome contributions to women's history although they will find very different audiences. The Strong-Boag and Fellman book will update undergraduate courses or those trying to gauge the current pulse of Canadian women's history. *Creating Historical Memory*, which deals with a much narrower subject, should also have a wide readership and I recommend it to anyone interested in understanding the culture of history.

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Changing Lives: Women in Northern Ontario. Margaret Kechnie and Marge Reitsma-Street, eds. Toronto and Oxford: Dundurn Press, 1996; 368 pages; illustrated; ISBN 1550022393; \$24.99 (paper).

A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945-1980. Joy Parr, ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995; ISBN 080207695; \$21.95 (paper).

In recent years the contours of women's lives in the post-World War Two period have become of significant interest to Canadian scholars and social activists. The changes in Canadian society between the 1940s and the 1980s have been immense, and as the essays in the two anthologies reviewed here attest, the women of Ontario have