

WOMEN'S STUDIES IN FOCUS

The Work of Margaret Conrad

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Introduction

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Historians are aware that our observations are always partial and incomplete. Only part of the story is ever told; elements are always left out and complexities flattened out. The following five papers were originally prepared for a plenary organized by *Atlantis* editor Linda Kealey at the 2009 Atlantic Canada Studies Conference held in Charlottetown to mark Margaret Conrad's "official retirement" from the University of New Brunswick and to pay tribute to her productive and expansive career. Focusing on her contributions to Planter Studies, political history, women's history, textbook writing, and public history, these papers testify to an imaginative, productive, and wide-ranging career which challenges any attempt at simple categorization. Additional papers could be easily imagined, such as ones exploring and celebrating Marg's contribution as a teacher and mentor, public intellectual, cookbook writer, editor, or Atlantic Canadianist.

Born in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, Margaret Conrad is a graduate of Acadia University and the University of Toronto. She taught in the history department at Acadia before moving to the University of New Brunswick to take up the Canada Research Chair (CRC) in Atlantic Canada Studies. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and an Officer of the Order of Canada, Margaret Conrad has served as President of the Canadian Historical Association and on scores of federal boards. A founding editor of *Atlantis*, she has made important scholarly

contributions through her own research, her ability to synthesize grand narratives in national and regional history, and her generous talents in creating and fostering intellectual communities. It is fitting that *Atlantis* hosts this collection in light of the key contribution she has made to feminist scholarship and to the lives of women within the academy.

At the conference, while wonderful images of Marg's life lit up the screen, a packed audience listened to colleagues, co-authors and friends speak on her impact as a political historian, a feminist scholar, a pioneer in creating modern Planter Studies, a textbook author and as a public historian and citizen. Her ethical commitment to social justice, feminism, and diversity and promotion of Atlantic Canada are themes that unite the following papers and connect Marg's scholarship, commitment to the democratization of history through the dissemination of archival material through electronic texts, service to public boards and actions as a public intellectual. Whether through her biography of Annapolis Valley politician George Nowlan, her landmark articles such as "'Sundays Always Make Me Think of Home': Time and Place in Canadian Women's History," or her advocacy and skilled use of diaries, Gwendolyn Davies describes Margaret Conrad's scholarship as located at the "intersection of research and originality." Her outstanding organizational talents have helped create not only the Centre for Planter Studies at Acadia University and the Electronic Text Centre (ETC) at the University of New Brunswick but also this very Journal and helped lay the foundation for Women's Studies in the Atlantic Region. Noting Marg's interest in politics, but never as a traditional political historian, Gail Campbell also emphasizes her innovation and rejection

of conventions. Bonnie Huskins, in her contribution to this group of essays, explores not only Marg's feminist scholarship but also her insistence in bringing her feminist practice to teaching and service both with the university and wider community. As a longtime collaborator with Margaret Conrad, Alvin Finkel explores how her ideas have shaped the way Canadian history is taught through the popular textbook *The History of the Canadian Peoples*. In the final essay, Lyle Dick addresses the importance Marg has placed on reaching the public and championing public history through her public service such as the Historic Sites and Monuments Board and her involvement in the Canadians and Their Past Project.

At the end of this well-attended session where original versions of these papers were read, Margaret Conrad said that she did not recognize herself in what had been said. We hope that the readers of *Atlantis* will recognize Marg Conrad in these papers, at the same time realizing that the portrait is still incomplete and partial. We learn little of Margaret Conrad as a dedicated and generous teacher, mentor or colleague. In her career Marg has never isolated nor compartmentalized what matters to her. Rather, she has worked to integrate her various identities and passions into a coherent whole with the objective of creating an informed and often hopeful basis from which to act in the present.

Margaret Conrad, Selected Bibliography

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Margaret Conrad: Planter and Loyalist Contributions

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Abstract

This paper examines Margaret Conrad's central contributions to the fields of Planter and Loyalist Studies, underlining her combination of originality in research and commitment to making this history accessible to the general public.