

# Six New Women

## A GUIDE TO THE MENTAL MAP OF WOMEN REFORMERS IN TORONTO

*by Wayne Roberts*

Emily Stowe spent the last years of her life hampered and restricted by injuries from a crippling fall. She nevertheless arranged to have the rites of her death confirm the reform principles which had inspired her life. In a last testimony, her corpse was carted to Buffalo, the closest centre where facilities were available, and was cremated. Stowe had left strict instructions: "I have never done an act upon earth to pollute it and I do not wish to do so in dissolution."(1)

Emily Stowe had been the pre-eminent woman reformer of her day. This paper will attempt to sketch a portrait of Stowe and five other outstanding women activists, who illuminate some

of the discontinuities and ambiguities of the Toronto woman's movement before the First World War. People like Emily Stowe, Augusta Stowe-Gullen and Flora Macdonald Denison shared an outlook which profoundly separated them from people like Helen MacMurchy, Florence Gooderham Huestis and Mrs. Constance Hamilton. Each represented in her own way the upheaval taking place as the democratic radicalism of the late nineteenth century contended with the progressivism of the early twentieth; as non-conformity confronted social management, as ideals of social perfection clashed with social purity, and hopes for individual liberation met fears of social degeneration.

## Emily Stowe

Emily Jennings Stowe was a descendent of the non-conformist religious heritage brought to Canada by Quaker contingents of the late Loyalist migration. Humanitarians, egalitarians, believers in the primacy of the individual's conscience, or "inner light," in the search for truth, Quakers and other Dissenters played a distinguished role in pre-Confederation and pre-Civil War North American reform. Principles governing humanitarian service and equality of the sexes were indelibly stamped on the lineage of the Norwich, Ontario, family that brought Emily Jennings into the world in 1831. Two of Emily's sisters became doctors; one specialized in care for the poor and served as an editor of the American reform journal Humanity & Life. Emily initially took the more orthodox opening for talented women when she became a teacher at the age of fifteen. From this position, she quickly served notice of her intentions to break loose from restrictions imposed on women. Denied admission to the University of Toronto because of her sex, she went to Normal School (teachers' college), graduated with a first-class certificate and earned the principalship of a Brantford school--the first woman to be so honoured in Ontario.

She continued to teach following her marriage to skilled workman John Stowe. Perhaps she harboured further am-

bitions even then. At any rate when her husband was stricken with tuberculosis and the burden of supporting a growing family placed entirely on her shoulders, the matter was settled. She decided to take up medicine. Undaunted by the Toronto Medical School's refusal to accept women, she left her three children with a sister and went to New York. There she studied at the New York Medical College for Women, directed by Dr. Lozier, a close associate of American feminists Susan Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Graduating in 1867, she returned to Toronto to open the first woman's practice in the country.(2)

By the mid-1870s she indicated her sympathies for a probing exploration of the most advanced questions of the day by placing advertisements for her medical services in The National. This one-time Canada First organ had become a forum for bold discussions on such issues as divorce, Free Thought and independent political action. In 1877 she gave an Ontario lecture tour on "woman's sphere" and "women in the professions." The success of the tour, together with the inspiration she drew from a Cleveland meeting of the American Society for the Advancement of Women, led her to form the Toronto Women's Literary Club in the same year. The Club endorsed aspirations for the general advancement, education and self-improvement of women until it was reconstituted as a specifically women's enfranchisement group in the

1880s. In the interval, Stowe agitated for the admission of women to the University, the municipal vote for women and legislative reforms for working women. (3)

As the authoritative spokesperson for female suffrage, she rejected any notion of limiting woman's autonomy or potential. The "invidious distinction of sex is an arbitrary and artificial one, having no foundation in reason or common sense," she challenged. Homemaking should leave woman "as free to choose her vocation as her brother, man, tethered by no conventionalities, enslaved by no chains, either of her own or man's forging." Suffrage, however, was only part of her reform repertoire. Indeed, she did not even exercise her widow's right to the municipal suffrage, explaining to an 1898 conference of the Social Reform League that "she did not think it worthwhile." Like many North American radicals of her time, she was suspicious of the system of representative government through which blindly partisan parties manipulated a passive citizenship. For this reason, she did "not believe that any such thing as legislation by or for the people existed." Suffrage could be politically meaningful only if sovereignty of the people were guaranteed by referendums on all key public questions. "The principle of direct legislation was the only hope of the

people," she asserted. (4)

A rebel with many causes, Stowe integrated her feminism with a set of convictions shared by most late nineteenth-century radicals. She identified with the Christian socialist Citizen and Country, the Canadian Socialist League and even announced herself a scientific socialist. She was a charter member of the Toronto Theosophical Society, which followed a highly unconventional and eclectic religion that often served as a halfway house for devout Christians in the grips of agnosticism. In the 1890s this religion--a strange amalgam of Enlightenment rationalism's defiance of arbitrary convention and True Light Protestantism's intuitive recognition of universal truths--gathered a communion of leading Toronto reformers to its fold. They regarded human brotherhood as the logical culmination of the solidarity flowing from universal laws, extra-sensory communication and reincarnation. (5)

In common with other radicals, Stowe saw cooperation rather than competition as the agency of human progress. As an exponent of women's rights, she stressed the cooperation between men and women in her projected society of friends. Such collaboration, she stressed, was necessary for that "estate of perfect justice which is the desire of all good and true Reform-

ers," that estate could not be reached "until woman has her place in the body social and economic."

#### Augusta Stowe-Gullen

Augusta Stowe-Gullen was very much Emily Stowe's daughter. Keeping pace with her mother's penchant for setting precedents, she became the first woman to graduate from a Canadian medical school. Her classmates and professors, oblivious to the private agonies she had endured over their persistent taunts and barbs, rose to the occasion with a standing ovation. Following graduation, she married one of her classmates, another descendent of modestly placed Loyalist stock. Their marriage was the first of medical doctors in the country. Although no one commented on her retention of her maiden name, the ceremony was regarded as exceptional. "Contrary to the traditions of her sex on similar occasions," one reporter jabbed, "the fair young bride entered the church punctually." (6)

Like her mother, Stowe-Gullen was quickly disheartened with the possibilities of legislative reform. In the early 1890s she became the first woman elected to the Toronto Board of Education. While on the Board, she fought for the right of women to be principals of large schools and for the right of women teachers to dress according to their own preferences,



AUGUSTA STOWE-GULLEN  
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free from the priggish dictates of a stiff-necked Board. Notwithstanding two extended leaves of absence, she was too demoralized to stand for office again. She had learned "too much of the inside methods of conducting affairs." (7)

Office-holding and legislative reform were not at the centre of Stowe-Gullen's efforts on behalf of women's rights. Even during her lengthy presidency of the women's suffrage movement, other subjects received her first attention. In particular she wanted to purge the neurotic, anti-human shackles that bound people in anxiety. Her crusade was aimed at releasing humankind from debilitating

prejudices so that they might concentrate on the real bulwarks in the way of human perfection. "Man is capable of great achievement and there is no hydra-headed monster to be slain, save his own ignorance of infinite laws," she insisted in 1905. "But the inequalities of our social system (so apparent to all lovers of justice) must be obliterated ere humanity is in a position to demonstrate its God-like attributes. . . ." Social change, in tune with universal law, would rid humanity of the "two insidious yet efficient destroyers of happiness, fear and worry." (9)

From this perspective, she saw women's rights as essential for women's active participation in remaking the world. Women's disenfranchisement thwarted these possibilities, standing for "not only political, but educational, legal and social degradation," the denial of "all natural and inherent privileges" to which women had equal claim. In rising to their destined heights, women would also have to overcome sanctions against feminine independence and self-reliance and strive to be full individuals in their own right. (9)

Thus marriage alone could not be the "chief end of a woman's existence," for it made women helpless and turned marriage into legal prostitution rather than a relationship entered into with "the highest and purest mo-

tives." As against the limited and dependent sphere assigned to women, she held that "woman's sphere was that which she could do best in the interest of humanity. . . . The purpose of life was the perfection of the whole race, and the widest opportunities must be secured." (10)

In many respects Stowe-Gullen was an iconoclast, contemptuous of prevailing opinion. Many of her beliefs, like those of her mother, were informed by Theosophy, the tenets of which could bolster her spirits in a number of ways. After a debate with an opponent of equal pay for equal work, she expressed her hope that the theosophist belief in reincarnation "is a fact and that the next time Mr. Blank comes back to earth he will be a woman." She brooked none of the subordination that traditional religion preached for women. "I never liked that man, St. Paul," she told her nephew, "for he said that women should subject themselves to their husbands." In her early years, she was also a socialist identifying with the Christian socialist Citizen and Country and lending her prestige to the 1902 efforts of socialists to run a woman for parliament. (11)

The renown of her family name and her own impeccable professional credentials also earned Stowe-Gullen prominence in more socially acceptable organizations. The National Council of

Women, the Ontario Social Service Council, the University of Toronto Senate, the Women's Canadian Club and Lyceum and the Women's Art Association all borrowed her prestige and talents. Her erstwhile dedication to a perspective of liberating the autonomous individuality of women through fundamental social change often suffered from her adaptation to the requirements of these respectable associations.

One would hardly know it was the same woman giving some of her post 1905 speeches. "Equal suffrage would increase the proportion of educated voters as well as enlarge the proportion of the moral and law-abiding vote, while increasing the vicious and criminal but little," she argued at one point. "The farmer, manufacturer, lawyer, doctor, all need the ballot, that the manufacturing, legal and medical interests be regarded and protected. How much more necessary is the ballot to the homemaker, for the home is the cornerstone of the nation, the nation is but an aggregate of homes." Her use of the fashionable metaphor of the state as the aggregate of the nation's homes was sometimes unmitigated. "Women have been told that their kingdom is the home," she granted, but "in acceptance of the fact and also the greater fact, viz., that Governments. . . are but the outcome of an aggregation of homes, it must be clear to every

woman, whose instincts favour a clean and orderly home for herself, that her duty does not end with the individual home she calls her own. (12)

On a superficial level this rhetoric, which came to dominate the mainstream suffrage movement after 1910, was not unusual for reform movements. Artisanal workmen making the case for independent labour politics used similar rhetoric about the necessity of each social group to organize. So did farm leaders like William Irvine and Henry Wise Wood. However, the pluralist basis of these latter appeals was grounded in self-interest of the group and could be tested or found wanting if the antagonism between hostile social classes became more apparent. By contrast, the concept of the home as a social interest was based on subordination and the self-sacrificing service of women.

In adopting this argumentation, therefore, Stowe-Gullen was betraying her own roots and early convictions. Her individualistic presuppositions clearly conflicted with her later utterances which appealed to a conservative organic conception of social roles whereby individuals took their identity according to their assigned stations in life. These contradictions revealed the dichotomy between an earlier perfectionist and liberation-oriented view of woman's sphere and an increasingly dominant schema

of woman's public sphere as an extension of familial obligations. Her shifts and vacillations displayed above all the tension and ambiguity in the reform conceptions of women in her era.

#### Flora Macdonald Denison

A howling blizzard pounded at the lumber shanty where Flora Macdonald was born while her father was following a whim for prospecting in northern Ontario. Her life always had a helter-skelter aspect to it. A vigorous woman of irrepressible enthusiasms, she embodied the dynamism, hopes and disappointments of the self-fulfillment tradition of women's activism as it collided with the new breed of women progressive reformers.(13)

Her father, the black-sheep member of a well-stationed, Picton, Ontario, Loyalist family, soon returned to his teaching career in Picton. It was there that Flora grew up. Blessed with imagination, wit and love for nature, she quickly developed rebel instincts. As a child she resented religious discouragement of human spontaneity and the low status assigned to women by the church. She embraced her father's attitudes to life; joined him in scoffing at religious orthodoxies and social conventions, partook of his enthusiasm for the democratic message of Robbie Burns and shared his amazement at the extrasensory powers of her gifted sister,

who could ostensibly levitate chairs with her eyes and master mathematical puzzles with intuition. The experience stirred Macdonald's life-long fascination with the occult and physical and psychological experimentation. In 1890, she testified to the curative powers of absorbent medicated electrical belts which could cure all diseases, "on the principle that electricity is life," just as miraculously as they drew a lump from Flora's wrist.(14)

After working as a teacher in a backwoods French-Canadian settlement, Macdonald went to Toronto in the early 1890s. She maintained herself in this period as one of Toronto's leading dressmakers, reportedly raising her



FLORA MACDONALD DENISON

skill to the level of an artform. The urban environment also raised the level of her rebel instincts. She attended a lecture by the world-famous agnostic Col. Robert Ingersol and was won to a life-long passion for the democratic vision of Walt Whitman. Upon marriage, she lived in Detroit for a year, working as a journalist. There her son Merrill was born; it is said that she deliberately planned this so that her son could be born on republican soil.(15)

Back in Toronto, she was encouraged to write a column for the monthly journal, Saturday Night. Her columns, though apparently untutored by any connection with radical groups, issued far-reaching challenges to the social order. Her calls for universal brotherhood, social obligation and remedial action were formulated in direct opposition to anti-democratic concepts of social relations and Calvinist teachings on human nature.

"The theology of the past nineteen centuries has been one of death," she claimed. Original sin and human depravity were the stock-in-trade of churches which frightened "the people into the belief that they are sinners and that to atone for sin by suffering during all one's life time is the only embodiment of virtue." Macdonald counter-attacked: "there is no original sin. There is no depravity." Divinity flickered in all people and only needed to be fanned. Mechanical Cal-

vinist edicts of do's and don'ts had to be replaced with the propelling power of love whose vibrations could "find satisfaction only in the general welfare of the race and of all life." Remedies to moral and social evils would come not from churches, government or educational centres but the "thinkers among the masses." These "great unselfish souls" in labour's ranks must "keep on working, for just as sure as there is law in the universe, just so sure will your dreams find physical and material expression. Then will labour throw off its old hat and worn coat, and stand in all its dignified manhood."(16)

Her early comments on women were not sensitized to specific political grievances. Like most nineteenth-century radicals who marshalled an ethical-social critique of capitalist society, her political and economic distinctions were not finely tuned. Their amorphous commitment to equality, democracy and brotherhood cast too broad a net to encompass any single reform. Natural rights, co-partnership between men and women and resistance to arbitrary and restrictive convention was the credo she prescribed for men and women alike.

It was probably through her theosophical activities that she came into contact with Emily Stowe. Stowe provided Macdonald Denison with a letter of introduction to the American suffrage leader, Susan Anthony, and her visit



to Anthony provided the occasion for her first suffrage speech. Her interest once kindled, she became "captivated by the idea of Purpose, which I'm just learning to spell with a capital P," and agreed to serve as secretary of the Women's Enfranchisement Association. She also represented Canada at the International Women Suffrage Alliance in Copenhagen in 1906. (17)

Her capital P purpose notwithstanding, she could not become a "one-idea reformer." Almost anachronistic at a time when socialists, unionists and nascent progressives were settling down to hard economic and political planning, she continued to explore the full spectrum of human possibilities. She wrote "sassy vibes" to her sister about fortune-telling and psychic experiments. Both seemed to feel the need for a reckless affair, so they initiated a sublimating exchange of letters: one posed as young, dashing Peter Silver; the other as a respectably married woman who fell passionately in love with Peter. In their less torrid moments, Macdonald's "love letters" struck at the hypocrisy of marital relations and the need for people to be themselves, free from sexual stereotypes. Her real-life ventures into the world of sexual repression were just as daring. Always ready to defy convention, she took up the cause of her son who was fighting a highschool prohibition against boys and girls walking to school together.

The son's protest newspaper, allusively titled Vesuvius, carried a backpage ad for the suffrage movement. (18)

Macdonald's childhood-based love of nature continued to nourish her imagination and sustain her social criticism which was based on the distance between social convention and natural potential. Like Lampman and others, her reverence for nature became a text for society not an escape from it. Her weekly column in the popular news supplement, the Sunday World, was titled "Under the Pines" in honour of the strand of trees by her Bon Echo hideaway where she had written her favourite Indian romances. "I would much rather write Indian romances than suffrage news," she admitted, but "the call came. The story is not of an Indian girl being deceived by a white man, but of white women being deceived, and of wrongs that can only be righted by enfranchised womanhood." Macdonald invariably weaved anti-caste and feminist themes into her nature stories. In one, Grace Livingstone, the daughter of a wealthy New Orleans socialite, was cleansed in the wilds of Northern Ontario where she went to regain her health after a series of debauching debuts. The heroine's decision to marry the Indian guide was motivated by love for nature and the simple life, and rejection of the hypocritical lives of the wealthy. (19)

Her concern for personal expression was not bohemian or socially indif-

ferent. Rather, it set the standards for her critique of society. Hostility to caste remained her clarion call. "When I use the word 'caste,' I do so advisedly, because it is comprehensive and far reaching enough to include the thousand and one evils of state, of church and of social conditions generally," she stated in a typical speech of the pre-1910 period. Calling forth Burns and Whitman, she railed at the anomalies of the social system: "The thing that keeps the world moving is work, and yet the old hat and worn shoes are still its emblem. It is labour that builds the castles, makes the carriages and paves the streets and yet the one that can play the best game of cards with labour's products to shuffle or he who by chance of birth. . . claims ownership, lives in castles, rides in the carriage over the paved streets." She took what she had to say about caste seriously. In 1905 she quit her dressmaker's job at Simpsons in protest against the introduction of time clocks. The practice of forcing workers to punch in, she charged, fostered class distinction. (20)

The reciprocal relationship between suffrage and her general reform advocacy was based on the primacy of political equality in forging the preconditions for social betterment. She made this clear in a 1909 speech on the "mental atmosphere" of depression-stricken Toronto. She condemned the modern city as a "great cruel

chariot where a percentage of its inhabitants are bound to be crushed by its wheels while it should be like a great hospital home guaranteeing employment and comfort to all within its gates." Confronted with this challenge, the State "must have as its fundamental working hypothesis-- POLITICAL EQUALITY." This was central because "our whole social structure has been founded on a basis of inequality and injustice and while this continued, we cannot possibly attain a satisfactory grade of social development." (21)

The involvement of the entire population was required if society were to come to grips with the problems besetting it. "With the Great White Plague tuberculosis to fight, with the White Slave traffic prostitution to fight, with poverty and slums, with ignorance and crime, every mother, every woman is badly needed. Men need women in politics; women need men in the home. The suffrage fight is not to separate the sexes but to join the sexes." She did not conceive of the women's vote as a bloc vote for purity, extending maternal authority over public morals and confined to matters of public cleanliness. Woman's contribution "should not by any means begin or end in the street-cleaning or garbage departments," she insisted. The rhetorical flourishes lapsing into the image of women as guardians of the home corresponded to real problems which pressed directly

on housewives and not to special attributes of motherhood. It was a corollary of the individual's right to formulate the laws by which they were governed. With government lurking around in the baby's bottle and market basket, she contended, it is women's privilege and duty "to know something of the government that has entered into such intimate relations with her." (22)

After 1909-1910, suffrage became identified with a surge of progressive reform aimed at "social purity" and "social evils" rather than "social betterment." Macdonald also began to identify female suffrage as a means to attain purifying reforms. Children are influenced outside the home, she warned, and if the home is to be guarded, "women have to get out of it occasionally and help purify the demoralizing influence outside."

Women's organizations should organize against prize fighting, "for one sporting editor of the paper can undo the good influence of a thousand sermons." Vigilance committees should supervise cleanliness of the slums. By 1911, she changed the name of her column to "The Open Road Toward Democracy," and thereafter sandwiched suffrage news in between coverage of the philanthropic work of charitable worthies and her own meanderings on life. (23)

Despite this "mellowing" of her ideas, she could not become completely accep-

table to the new reform circles. She continued to support many prevailing views for her own reasons. Even her addiction to the popular fad of efficiency was designed to produce a radical result--provide women with a dignified living. As she wrote, "of course, all my roads lead to the one goal--the goal of women's emancipation from all customs and prejudices that have made her discriminated against. One great basic wrong has been that it somehow was wrong for her to be efficient." Many of her other ideas remained unconventional. She thought that women should be able to propose marriage and that discriminating titles "branding" women as married should be abolished. She charged that "those sacred institutions we call home are too often sweat shops where the bodies and souls of women are ground under." (24)

Macdonald Denison also distinguished herself in suffrage tactics, urging women not to marry or to leave their husbands if their men opposed suffrage. She defended the militance of the British suffragettes and opposed any legislative action short of suffrage on the same terms as men, at a time when many reformers were ready to accept "door-openers" like women's vote on the basis of property. (25) The one year she played an active role in the National Council of Women, the organization which best represented middle class attempts at a reforming role, she crossed swords with her new

allies more often than not. She opposed Council fanatics who passed a resolution to revive the flogging of men guilty of a wide variety of moral crimes. Instead of issuing moral condemnations of prostitutes, she insisted that the cause of prostitution was economic, not moral, and urged technical training as the solution.(26)

This earned her no friends. In the course of a heated factional fight over leadership of the suffrage movement that broke out before the war, one anonymous personage warned her to keep quiet. Macdonald had done nothing for the cause compared to her opponent Hamilton was the charge. Hamilton and her friends had "lifted it right out of the dressmaking class." If it weren't for them, "suffrage would be unknown among the best people. Keep to your own class and don't get a swelled head."(27)

Shortly thereafter, as the world moved towards war, Macdonald was initially pacifistic. Discussing the failure of one of the British suffrage delegations, she found British Prussianism only a little worse than the German variety and concluded: "No--we do not want to shout too loud about fighting for Democracy till we have a little more of it at home." This period was, however, one of great financial and personal strain for her. Shortly, she picked up war fever. After her son enlisted, they teamed up as a powerful mother-and-son routine

who gripped audiences as she read letters from him urging her to keep up the work for the suffrage while he fought for democracy overseas. She came to refer to female suffrage as a war measure and spoke of the two major opponents of the suffrage--the Kaiser and John Barleycorn.(28)

She was far from limiting herself to suffrage even in this period. In 1916, she promoted a Walt Whitman dinner at fashionable McClonkeys. Although without savings, she did not mind spending for Whitman. "Pshaw--who could compare a bank account with hitching one's life to a real life star," she cried. In 1918, she returned to the devotion of Whitman, for "to propagate that democracy is my life's work." She turned her Bon Echo cottage into a resort in honour of Walt Whitman in 1919.(29)

She did not specialize so easily however. After the war she was a member of the Social Reconstruction Group of the Theosophical Society. She worked with the emerging Labour Party and various socialist formations and was invited as a delegate to the Ontario Labour Party convention as a tribute to her work for the suffrage. She was part of the Labour Lecture Bureau in 1918. As well, she became involved in footwear and dress reform.(30)

Flora Macdonald Denison died in 1921. "No-one," claimed the obituary in the Canadian Theoplist, "in the present

generation of Canadians has done more for the 'institution of the dear love of comrades' than Flora MacDonald Denison." With her death there passed away a species of reformer of an earlier epoch, one who could feel at home in a variety of emerging movements, one with an impulse to reform the world, to make it accord with universal laws of justice. She also represented a distinct school of thought in the women's movement by placing democracy and personal autonomy at the center of feminism. Although her course was at times tortured and contradictory as she attempted to join with other forces, her gyrations were always tempered by adherence to certain basic principles. She, like Emily Stowe and Augusta Stowe-Gullen, embodied the world-view of a certain tradition of new woman in the broader reform world of her day. That tradition can be sharply appreciated by the contrast with the tradition best represented in Toronto by Helen MacMurphy, Mrs. A. Hamilton, and Mrs. A. Huestis.(31)

#### Helen MacMurphy

While Helen MacMurphy was embroiled in a 1910 feud with the Board of Education over her authority in the stepped-up programme of medical inspection of schools, the press mistakenly referred to her as a captain of suffrage work. Flora Macdonald took care to correct the error: MacMurphy did not represent the suffrage

movement; she represented the cause and power of new women professionals. Indeed, the medical career and social activism of Dr. Helen MacMurphy exemplified the high-powered vigilance of new women professionals who came to maturity at the time of the progressive movement.(32)

Unlike early women professionals whose marginality in the social order distanced them from social conventions and whose tenuous legitimacy encouraged off-beat and visionary lifestyles, the role of women professionals in the early twentieth century was more prescribed. Once the principle of women's rights to professional careers was established, women served in the vanguard of the new professional zeal for social relevance. Women professionals could help meet the impending social crisis by rounding out the narrow and calculated proficiency of their male colleagues with the intuition, tenderness and guardian instincts of women. As MacMurphy's obituary put it, she "tried to see urgent medical and health problems from a social point of view, as well as from the merely professional and scientific." Goaded by a strenuous sense of the responsibilities of womanhood, her "social point of view" was fixated on anxieties about social degeneration. The daughter of a respected high-school principal, she was dubbed "the feeble-minded MacMurphy," probably as a

way of distinguishing her from her reform-minded sister, "the social worker MacMurchy," and as recognition of the outstanding cause which consumed her dedication. (33)

Like many reformers swept up in the amorphous progressive movement, questions of public health provided her point of departure. She was an early exponent of medical inspection of schools, regarding it as one of the most important areas of preventive medicine. It was also a matter of social patriotism: MacMurchy dated sanitary reformers' interest in this aspect of socially applied medicine to the alarming discovery of the poor physical stock of Britain's manhood during the Boer War. She proposed broad measures to ensure national stock-taking and upgrading. Food for poor children, playgrounds, parks and school gardens were integrated in her early vision. She thought it cruel to expect starving children to perform well and warned that "it is far cheaper to feed them. . . than to let them grow up defectives and consequently poor citizens." Her progressivism was defined by her breadth of scope, which superseded an artificially compartmentalized approach to institutional functions that had formerly separated physical well-being from intellectual well-being, recreation from character development and education from citizenship. Her progressivism was also defined by her mode of formulating goals, a mode quite out of

keeping with transcendent individualism. (34)

MacMurchy's energies were later extended into the campaign against infant mortality. "One out of every five of the children born in the city of Toronto is carried out of home in a little white coffin before the year is out," she charged in 1910. Not only was this a "massacre of the innocents" which out-Heroded Herod; "It is a question if ten thousand emigrants from anywhere would equal in value to us these ten thousand little Canadians of Ontario, whose lives are sacrificed to our carelessness, ignorance, stupidity and eager haste to snatch at less valuable things." She reminded her audiences forcefully that "obvious as the discovery is, we are only now discovering that Empires and States are built up of babies." (35)

Although she regarded infant mortality as "a poverty question largely," she insisted that "we always come back to the personal equation. The efficient person of adequate and strong character, the person of principle and affection will succeed where the weakling, the unemployable, untidy, unthrifty good for nothing never succeeds." This emphasis on the personal equation bore little resemblance to the individualism of nineteenth century radicals, who identified individualism with self-expression rather than the qualities that prepared a person for competition and

calculated hard work. Her emphasis on the personal equation also betrayed the dilemma resulting from the dual allegiance of most progressives. Basically confident in the just workings of unrestrained capitalism in the economic realm, they thought the social imperatives of industrialism required state intervention to buttress and invigorate cornerstones and values necessary for social stability. In this vein, MacMurchy did not advocate massive housing programmes or minimum wage legislation to overcome the poverty that underlay the blight of child mortality. Rather, she promoted education on cleanliness and mothering, legislation to protect mothers from overwork and mothers' pensions--the latter to enable mothers to breastfeed and nurse their children properly.(36)

MacMurchy's campaigns to maintain the quality of the national stock through medical inspection of schools and reduced infant mortality were outdone only by her crusade against the feeble-minded. This problem also involved social medicine, for it went hand in hand with poor nutrition, overworked mothers and heredity. It attracted her attention as early as 1907 when she noted that "imbecility and heredity are known to be the most prolific of the causes of pauperism and crime." She later concentrated on it from her position as provincial Inspector of Feeble Minded.(37)

The unvarnished focus of her concern was a preventative policy to protect "society from the feeble-minded." Although she could horrify paranoids with scare stories of the "feeble-minded with a gun," her speciality featured feeble-minded girls made pregnant by uncles or other villains. "This is the most urgent part of the Feeble-minded problem," she warned. MacMurchy pressed for a thirty-year policy of institutionalization to "stop the supply" and prevent any posterity. The problem was an urgent one. Not only were they physically and morally degenerate, she menaced, the feeble-minded were also multiplying faster than normal people.(38)

Women were assigned a special role in this campaign. "The remedy lies with the women of Ontario," she told one meeting of 1909. "When they have a say, say, it will not take ten years to get a home for the feeble-minded." Soon, she succeeded in making the issue a central one for all beleaguered reformers. "Let the question of social betterment come up at all," she boasted in 1910, "and it brings with it the question of what to do with the feeble-minded."(39)

Even among the healthy, there were crimes against the unborn by those who thought only of their own pleasure, who used the services of that "black shame of the profession," the abortionist. Children were not coming into the world because of the hard-

ness of the world's heart.

MacMurchy became a besieged activist. She had carved out a sphere appropriate for her concerns as a woman doctor. Part of her obligation was fulfilled by stocking the nation with healthy citizens. But in all her campaigns she was loyal to a higher ideal. She saw herself as one of the first of a new breed of doctors, with the high calling of serving posterity. (40)

#### Florence Huestis

Preventative medical and social reform attracted another distinguished woman activist of the period, Mrs. Archibald Huestis. Raised by the opulent Gooderham family, she was educated at Bishop Strachan and other private schools. Unfortunately, her social position was a block to her lifelong devotion to public health. Her parents felt that medical training was beneath her dignity and prohibited her from following her interests at a professional level. In 1872 she married A.M. Huestis, who hailed from a distinguished Nova Scotia line of United Empire Loyalists and parsons and had become associated with the Methodist Book and Publishing House in Toronto. (41)

Although she came to support woman suffrage by 1911 and protested the discriminatory exclusion of Marie Curie from the Institute of France,

she does not deserve to be remembered primarily as an activist for women's rights. Rather, her life was one long struggle against dirt. Wherever it is evident that Toronto is a clean city, there should be erected a plaque to the memory of this woman. (42)

In the course of her embattled life, she served as an executive for the Canadian Public Health Association, treasurer for the National Council for the Prevention of Venereal Disease, president for the Toronto branch of the Hygiene Club. As well, she agitated for medical inspection of schools, operated pure milk depots for babies, convinced the city of the need to filter the water supply and was instrumental in establishing the Toronto Vice Commission. These encompass only a fraction of her activities. For these and other services in relation to war-time recruitment work she won the Lady of the Decoration Award from the Navy League.

She became interested in medical inspection of schools at the turn of the century when she met a feebleminded person at an Art League school. "And from that time forward I became a convert to medical inspection in the schools," she recalled. She also saw medical inspection of schools as part of the campaign to overcome immigrants' lack of individual responsibility for and ignorance of cleanliness and diet. The school nurses should teach them about hygiene. She was



quite prepared to call for state enforcement of these measures: she thought, for instance, that parents who would not follow the admonitions of the health board should be dealt with by the Juvenile Court. Preventative work never costs as much as leaving the problems go and dealing with the results, she implored.(43)

In the course of her untiring efforts against dirt and degeneracy, she became a convert to eugenics. At one point she was involved in a petition campaign to force applicants for marriage licenses to present doctor's certificates attesting to good physical and mental health. Premier James Whitney dismissed the campaign as "crude."

#### Constance Hamilton

"Mrs. L.A. Hamilton is typical of all that is best in Canada," the Star Weekly eulogized. She certainly typified one strain of the new woman of the time. Her talents were already evident when she accompanied her husband, chief of the land department of the CPR, to Winnipeg. She busily set to forming the Musical Society of Winnipeg. Music, she felt, should play a major role in educating foreign people, most of whom came from musical races. She later came to Toronto where her life was filled with activity as convenor for the committee on agriculture in the National Council of

Women, an activist in the YWCA, a prolific writer and accomplished linguist testing her skills in social work among immigrants.(44)

She applied considerable attention to the working girl. In the interests of scientific management of households, she urged a number of reforms in the hiring of domestics. She recommended a ten-hour working day despite the self-sacrifice this required from the woman with only one or two maids. She promoted chaperoned clubs for the servants. She did not flinch from such reforms. The self-sacrifice was warranted because "our duty to the race demands that we should govern the con-



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ditions of this young woman's work so that in later years she may have a chance of becoming the mother of a second generation." She matched this magnanimity by hiring city working girls to perform healthy outdoor work for local fruitgrowers in the vicinity of her own fruit farm. By living in hostels, the girls could clear three to six dollars per week for a twelve-hour day. The exercise in philanthropy still left a balance in hand for the owner. (45)

Like other woman crusaders of her type, Hamilton did not become involved in the suffrage movement until rather late in its development. Turning her hand to suffrage endeavour as the war years approached, she led the faction which confronted the group headed by Macdonald and Stowe-Gullen. (46) Eventually Hamilton formed the Equal Franchise League, under her presidency. The League was not able to sustain independent work for a prolonged period. Within a short time of its formation, all its activists were embroiled in patriotic work for the war effort.

### Conclusion

The contextual sketches provided here cannot serve as the foundation for a heroine history of Canada or even a collective biography of women activists. They may nevertheless provide a suggestive guide to the mental map of women's reform activism in pre-

World War I Toronto. For historians these women can serve as guides to the primitive and diffuse ideological and organizational development of the women's movement in this period. The women studied here were prototypes of divergent patterns of motivation, action and thought, and belonged to distinct reform traditions. Stowe, Stowe-Gullen and Macdonald Denison wielded reason against convention, natural law against social injustice and human emancipation against restraints. They wanted to release women to accord with what they saw as universal laws of freedom. They drew on the non-conformist traditions of nineteenth-century democratic radicalism. MacMurchy, Huestis and Hamilton wielded hysteria against apathy, science against custom and duty against rights. They were drawn to ideals of motherhood rather than sisterhood as they tried to construct a female fortress to stem the tide of degeneracy. They belonged to, and helped shape, the breakdown of progressivism. The woman's movement was one of the last arenas where this historic contestation of reform ideologies was posed so sharply.

#### NOTES

I would like to thank Ned Hagerman, Gene Hamel, and Debbie Gorham for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

1. Except where otherwise indicated, material on Stowe comes from: unidentified clippings and obituaries in the Flora Macdonald Denison (henceforth FMD) Scrapbooks (University of Toronto Rarebooks); Augusta Stowe-Gullen Collection (henceforth ASG), (Victoria College Library); *Canada Lancet*, June, 1903, pp. 760-61; J.E. Thompson, "The Influence of Dr. Emily Stowe on the Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada," *Ontario History*, December, 1962; C. Hacker, *The Indomitable Lady Doctors* (Toronto, 1974).

2. E.P. Lovejoy, Women Doctors of the World (New York, 1957), p. 112; Hacker first clarified the graduation date in The Globe, January 27, 1974.
3. I would like to thank Russel Hann for enlightening me about The National and Stowe's connection with it.
4. Mail and Empire, November 25, 1898; The Globe, November 25, 1898.
5. H. Morgan, The Canadian Men and Women of the Time (Toronto, 1898), p. 974. I would like to thank Mr. Ted Davies for making the Toronto Theosophical Society Minute-book (in possession of Toronto Theosophical Society), available to me. For a discussion of the sometimes allied and sometimes conflicting impulses of Enlightenment rationalism and True Light Protestantism, see Roy Porter, "The Cultivation on Science," Times Literary Supplement, January 7, 1977.
6. J. Gullen Memoir in ASG; unidentified clipping, ASG Scrapbooks.
7. Unmarked clipping, ASG Scrapbooks, pp. 34, 36, 38; Toronto Public School Board Minutes, 1893, pp. 95, 189; ibid., 1895, pp. 54, 94, 110, 184. She voted against a motion to hire union labour only, ibid., appendix, June 6, 1895; ibid., 1894, p. 170, ibid., 1845, p. 54; ASG Scrapbooks, p. 19.
8. Unidentified clipping, ASG Scrapbooks; 1905 clipping, "Mental States," ibid.
9. Unidentified clipping, ibid. She regarded balloting inequalities as "perversions of natural law."
10. N.d. clipping "Onlooker," ibid. See also Sunday World, September 27, 1908; n.d. clipping, ASG Scrapbooks, p. 20.
11. Toronto Theosophical Society, Minutebook; J. Gullen Memoir in ASG; Citizen and Country, May 13, 1899; Mail and Empire, May 19, 1902.
12. N.d. clipping, "Woman's share in municipal life," in ASG Scrapbooks; n.d. clipping, "Women's Hospital Edition of the Daily Times-Journal," ibid.; unmarked clipping, ibid., p. 14.
13. D. MacDonald, Mugwump Canadian, The Merrill Denison Story (Montreal, 1973), p. 9.
14. H. Morgan, op. cit., pp. 625-26. The relation to the non-conformist tradition is removed but it may be worth noting that they were descendants of Jonathan Edwards. J. Garvin ed., Canadian Poets (Toronto, 1916), p. 260; H. Merrill ed., Picturesque Prince Edward County (Picton, 1892), esp. pp. 110-26; Sunday World, June 18, 1911, The Canadian and British News of Canada, March 19, 1913 in FMD Scrapbooks; F. Macdonald, Mary Melville, Psychic (Toronto, 1900); Globe, May 3, 1890. I would like to thank Steve Beckow for generously bringing this to my attention.
15. Clipping, December 11, 1898 in FMD, box 5; The Sunset, March 1916, p. 12, FMD; D. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 5.
16. Saturday Night, June 1898, FMD, Scrapbooks; ibid., April, 1898; ibid., June 1898; ibid., March 1898; on the power of Vibrations, see ibid., January 1898; ibid., August 1898; ibid., April 1898.
17. It is not clear how she met Stowe, but see Sunset, March 1916, p. 16 FMD. This article also refers to the influence of Goldwin Smith; Macdonald claimed to have held Stowe's hand when she died, "Under The Pines," October 30, 1909, FMD, Scrapbooks; unidentified 1914 clipping, FMD Scrapbooks, p. 16; FMD to Dear Old Ned, November 16, 1907, Merrill Denison Collection (Douglass Library, Queens University) box 91; Mail and Empire, March 17, 1906; see her report, November 20, 1906, FMD, box 2. One admirer offered to finance a suffrage paper for her if she would edit it. See J. Stewart to FMD, April 19, 1906, April 24, 1906 in Merrill Denison Collection (unsorted at time of research).
18. See correspondence between Hazel and Flora in FMD, box 3; and Merrill Denison, box 69; D. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 12.
19. "Under The Pines," November 28, 1909, in FMD Scrapbooks; "Pateeka, a Romance of the Highlands," FMD, box 3.
20. Typescript, FMD, box 3; see also Sunday World, January 27, 1907; for other examples of Burns, Whitman, Ingersol influence, see "The Servant Girl Question," FMD Scrapbooks, speech on Ingersol, January 5, 1906, FMD, box 3, report of speech in Halifax Morning Chronicle, February 14, 1908, FMD Scrapbooks; D. MacDonald, op. cit., p. 11.
21. Typescript, "The Mental Atmosphere," FMD, box 2. She also saw suffrage tied into general reform because all social problems were interlocked. See "The White Slave Traffic," FMD, box 2.
22. "Under The Pines," October 3, 1909, FMD Scrapbooks; item, "Problems Confronting Women in Politics," FMD; "Women in Politics," FMD, box 2.
23. Unmarked clipping, July 10, 1910, FMD Scrapbooks; "The Open Road. . .," February 12, 1911, ibid.; ibid., February 25, 1911.
24. World, October 9, 1913, ibid.; n.d. clipping, "Should a Woman Propose," ibid.; Mail and Empire, March 1, 1913; unidentified clipping, "Man's Work and Woman's Work," November 2, 1913, ibid.
25. Unidentified clipping, January 3, 1912, ibid. She billed a number of speeches as "how the Pankhursts set the movement back" and proceeded to defend Pankhurst as a heroine who had not set the movement back at all, Star, October 14, 1913; Canadian Courier, August 19, 1913, p. 24.
26. Flora Macdonald Denison to Madam President, May 2, 1913, National Council of Women Papers (PAC), Vol. 67.
27. Anon. to Mrs. Flora Denison, dressmaker, March 22, 1914, FMD, box 2.
28. In 1913 she had opposed dreadnoughts, Star, May 19, 1913. An unpublished short story of 1914 was sentimentally pacifist, cf. notebook in FMD, box 5. See also her 1914 "Women Against War," in R. Cook and W. Mitchinson, The Proper Sphere, Woman's Place in Canadian Society (Toronto, 1976), pp. 249 ff; Sunset, April/May 1916, p. 10. On her strain, see Merrill Denison to FMD, undated, Merrill to FMD, September 28, 1915, Merrill Denison Collection, box 69, FMD correspondence with her lawyer, FMD, box 4. Part of her mother and son routine was enacted in New York where she organized for the suffrage campaign Advertiser Journal, July 16, 1917, World, July 12, 1917, ibid., August 2, 1917, in FMD Scrapbooks; Utica Daily Press, June 2, 1917, ibid.
29. Invitation, Muriel Denison Collection, box 69; FMD to Glen, July 18, 1918, Glen Papers (Douglass Library, Queens University) box 1; FMD to Glen, March 1, 1918, ibid., advertising card in Merrill Denison collection, unsorted; her resort plan was formed in 1916, cf. Sunset, March, 1916, p. 8.
30. Simpson to Glen, April 13, 1918, Glen Papers, box 1; "report of meeting May 3, 1918," ibid., n.d. clipping, "Reform in Women's Dress," FMD, box 2.
31. Canadian Theosophist, June 15, 1921, pp. 57-8.
32. Unmarked clipping, October 6, 1910 FMD Scrapbooks. The controversy is covered in Star, October 21, October 25, October 26, November 7, 1910, ibid., March 3, 1911.
33. Globe and Mail, October 10, 1953 (University of Toronto Necrology Files); M. Macbeth, Over My Shoulder; Star Weekly, August 23, 1913, has a useful summary of her life.
34. See her regular 1902 columns in Educational Monthly of Canada; Industrial Banner, December 6, 1912; H. MacMurphy, "Recent Progress in School Hygiene," Ontario Education Association, Proceedings, 1905, pp. 118-127, esp. p. 125. She wanted to overcome attitudes which saw children as "disembodied spirits" rather than whole beings. H. MacMurphy, "The Physical Needs of the Child," Ontario Education Association, Proceedings, 1907, pp. 393-97.
35. H. MacMurphy, "Report on Infant Mortality," Ontario Sessional Papers, 1910, pp. 3-4.
36. ibid., passim; see also Star, March 8, 1911.

37. H. MacMurphy, "Report on the Care of the Feeble-minded in Ontario" Ontario Sessional Papers, 1907.
38. H. MacMurphy, "Report on the Care of the Feeble-minded in Ontario." Ontario Sessional Papers, 1911, p. 6; ibid., 1911, p. 5; ibid., p. 6; ibid., 1913, p. 12; Star, April 25, 1912; Industrial Banner, December 13, 1912.
39. Toronto World, June 26, 1909, FMD Scrapbooks; H. MacMurphy, "Report on the Feeble-minded," Ontario Sessional Papers, 1911.
40. H. MacMurphy, "What Can We Do For Posterity," The Canadian Therapist and Sanitary Engineer, June 1910, pp. 305-06.
41. Her life and activities are summarized in Globe and Mail, March 24, 1955 (University of Toronto Necrology Files); J.E. Middleton, National Encyclopedia of Canadian Biography (Toronto, 1935), vol. 1; V. Strong-Boag, "The Parliament of Women; The National Council of Women of Canada 1893-1929," (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1975), p. 154; see also Star, June 10, 1913.
42. Star, January 11, 1911.
43. Ibid., March 28, 1912; The Canadian Nurse, February 1, 1910, pp. 65-9; Star, January 22, 1913; ibid., March 28, 1912.
44. "A Figure in Feminism," Canadian Courier, April 4, 1914.
45. L. Hamilton, "The Scientific Management of Household Work and Wages," Public Health Journal, January 1913; Labour Gazette, August, 1913, p. 150.
46. The split is discussed in my "Social Perfection and Social Housekeeping," (forthcoming); Lance, August 29, 1914.