

# Sources for the History of Women at the Public Archives of Canada

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Documentation pour l'histoire de la femme aux Archives publiques du Canada.

Recent interest in the study of women in Canadian history has accompanied the movement of historical study into the fields of labour history, business history and urban history to cite but a few examples. The arrival of women's history has been the source of more controversy than any of the other new approaches to the past.

One of the leading historians of women, Veronica Strong-Boag, wrote in 1973 that 'Apathy and ridicule traditionally greet investigations of female experience.' By 1978 she could comment that while complaints about the validity of the history of women 'survive still ... such carping is on the wane.' Strong-Boag wanted no one to think that the history of women had won unqualified acceptance; rather, she widened her critique of the historical profession's response to the field by drawing attention to the need for more archival activity in the area. She asked for 'a positive commitment on the part of archives at every level' to the preservation of historical sources for the study of women. At the Public Archives in particular, she noted that no one had as yet been assigned to coordinate an archival program in the history of women.<sup>2</sup>

Since coming on staff in the Manuscript Division at the Public Archives in November, 1978, I have been responsible for just such a program. Three aspects of the work have concerned me most. First of all, contacts made with potential donors of archival material but not fully explored by others interested in the field at the Public Archives before November, 1978 had to be renewed. Secondly, information about women in sources elsewhere in the Manuscript Division had to be given more prominence, and finally, archival activity in fields

closely related to the history of women called for attention.

Significant additions have been made to the nucleus of manuscript material related to the history of women acquired by the Public Archives before November, 1978. Two of the most important are the papers of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire and those of the Canadian Girls in Training National Association. The Public Archives now maintains the papers of many of the most prominent women's organizations in Canada starting with the National Council of Women and including la Fédération de femmes canadiennes-françaises, Canadian Nurses Association, Victorian Order of Nurses, Canadian Federation of University Women, Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, the Media Club (founded in 1904 as the Canadian Women's Press Club), Young Women's Christian Association of Canada, International Council of Women and a number of others like the Canadian Library Association, Canadian Teachers' Association and the Canadian Council on Social Development which concern professions in which women are heavily represented.

In order to centralize information about historical sources in the Manuscript Division for the study of women a *Thematic Guide to Post-Confederation Sources in the Manuscript Division for the History of Women/Guide thématique des sources postérieures à la Confédération conservées à la Division des manuscrits sur l'histoire des femmes* was prepared and placed in the division's Reference Room as finding aid 1069. The *Guide* contains copies of inventory entries for manuscript collections which

make any reference to women. A revision of the *Guide* now under way will bring the number of inventory entries it contains to about 300. The *Guide* indicates that manuscript collections of interest to historians of women housed outside my own section of the division, the Social and Cultural Archives, include the papers of the women's division of the Ukrainian Canadian Committee in the National Ethnic Archives section and those of the National Federation of Liberal Women, Grace MacInnis, Agnes Macphail and the Massey family in the Public Affairs Archives section.

The third aspect of my work has resulted in the development of an acquisition program in the field of the history of the child. A *Thematic Guide to Post-Confederation Sources in the Manuscript Division for the History of Children and Young People/Guide thématique des sources postérieures à la Confédération conservées à la Division des manuscrits sur l'histoire des enfants et des jeunes* was compiled and placed in the division's Reference Room as finding aid 1068. After revision in March, 1980 it contains inventory entries for 133 manuscript collections possessing information related to childhood. Among collections of interest to historians of women are the papers of the Montreal Society for the Protection of Women and Children, the Dominion Council of Health, Charlotte Whitton, and OMEP-Canada (l'Organisation mondiale pour l'éducation préscolaire). ☉

#### Notes

1. Veronica Strong-Boag, "Cousin Cinderella": A guide to Historical Literature Pertaining to Women, p. 263. Marylee Stephenson ed. *Women in Canada* (Toronto, 1973).
2. Veronica Strong-Boag, "Raising Clio's Consciousness: Women's History and Archives in Canada", *Archivaria* 6 (Summer 1978): 71.