

We, the undersigned



A HISTORY OF N. B. WOMEN 1784-1984

by ELSPETH TULLOCH

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**A Historical Overview of New
Brunswick Women's Political
and Legal Status
1784-1984**

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for the

New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women

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1784-1984

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List of Abbreviations

C.S.A.	Canadian Suffrage Association
I.O.D.E.	Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire
L.C.W.	Local Council of Women
M.L.A.	Member of the Legislative Assembly
N.C.W.	National Council of Women
W.C.T.U.	Women's Christian Temperance Union
W.E.A.	Women's Enfranchisement Association

Photos

C.E.A.	Centre d'études acadiennes
H.I.L.A.S.C.	Harriet Irving Library Archives and Special Collections
M.M.	Moncton Museum
N.M.C.	National Museums of Canada
P.A.N.B.	Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
P.A.C.	Public Archives of Canada

Author's Comments

Recorded history has been, to a large extent, men's history. This book does not pretend to give New Brunswick women their full place in written history. It is a beginning look at how women's political and legal status changed in New Brunswick between 1784 and 1984.

While official records exist of what New Brunswick men said and did regarding women's issues and actions, comparatively few such records about New Brunswick women, even the political agitators, were ever made. Much more investigation is required to uncover the richness of these women's stories. Letters, diaries, minute books, newspapers, and other resources must be examined to find out who these petitioners and lobbyists were, how they viewed the issues and how they worked. The passage of time makes research more difficult. In peak lobbying years, such as 1894 and 1899, thousands of people signed suffrage petitions which today no longer exist.

A study of the oral history of New Brunswick women could uncover even more examples of women's thoughts and actions that challenged the official norm. Oral histories could also alter our perception of women's daily lives and concerns. Such an approach would be particularly useful for uncovering the histories of aboriginal, francophone, Black and rural women who figure less frequently than urban anglophone club women in official historical literature and resources.

This study gives an idea of the officially-held attitudes regarding women over the course of the province's 200 year history and, to the extent possible, of women's efforts to influence change.

For our purposes, political status has been defined as one's right to vote and to run for political office, and legal status as how one is viewed and how one's actions are circumscribed by the law. Since the major change in

women's political status came with the right to vote, the suffrage movement in New Brunswick is examined at some length. It is followed by a brief chronology of firsts for women at various levels of government.

Progressive changes in women's legal status occurred throughout the province's history and a broad range of laws which specifically affected women is examined. This discussion is followed by examples of women who acted against legal strictures and a brief chronology of women involved in the administration of justice.

The past 200 years have brought the most dramatic changes ever in women's rights and perceived roles and abilities. Many social and economic factors contributed to these changes: immigration, urbanization, industrialization, technological evolution, developments in social thought. But no changes could have taken place without women, themselves, demanding them.

This book is dedicated to these women, to those who organized, petitioned, lobbied, and to those who simply wondered what if and why not and passed the question on. May their full story be told one day.

Elsbeth Tulloch

“Agitate, Educate, Organize” An Introduction

To say that women have not had a place in New Brunswick's written history would not be quite correct. They have, but a place far from reflecting the full spectrum of their contributions and struggles as a group. New Brunswick women appear in annals for having accomplished non-traditional or extraordinary things (Mary Cannon, an 18th century manager of huge tracts of land; Ann Mott, a 19th century newspaper publisher; Julia Beckwith-Hart, a 19th century and Canada's first native-born novelist; Sarah Edmonds, a 19th century spy; Muriel Fergusson, a 20th century senator). They have been celebrated as peoples' heroines (*Malabim of Maliseet* oral tradition; Madame Latour of 17th century Acadia rivalries; Tante la Blanche, helper of 18th century Madawaskan poor; Lady Alice Tilley, 19th century Fredericton philanthropist; Marguerite Michaud, 20th century educator). They have been aggrandized into myth and symbol: Evangéline. They have been acclaimed for their fertility, eulogized for their role in the survival of their race, as guardians of religion, culture and home. A few have been remembered for their work as nuns, sage healers and midwives.

Yet, as a group which shares a common heritage, women have not been examined in New Brunswick histories. New Brunswick

women have made important contributions to many fields, from agriculture to health services, from education to social reform. They have experienced social upheavals in ways different from men. As a sex they have shared concerns and sought innovations in areas different from men's predominant concerns, such as reproductive health care, child-rearing, household management, home remedies, marital property laws and the right to employment. Yet, women perhaps most often appear simply as wives, wives of common men or wives of prominent New Brunswickers, and history is not always respectful of even these women.

Hannah Carleton, who was married to New Brunswick's first Governor, Thomas Carleton, receives short and peculiar mention in W.S. MacNutt's *New Brunswick, A History: 1784-1867* (1963), in a letter from Mather Byles, an early Saint John rector, to Ward Chipman, a New Brunswick lawyer:

*[Thomas Carleton's] rigid, military disposition could not have been softened by his spouse. "Do you know the reason why Mrs. C. doesn't like to ride in a sleigh with two horses? She thinks two horses look sociable and she hates everything that looks sociable."*¹

Amelia Fisher, who was married to Charles Fisher, a mid-19th century member of the New Brunswick House of Assembly and later a Supreme Court Judge of New Brunswick, receives memorable treatment in Marc La Terre's *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (1972):

*Little is known of Mrs. Fisher except that she was inarticulate. An apocryphal story is worth repeating because it may contain a germ of truth. On the occasion of Fisher's elevation to the bench Mrs. Fisher asked "You'll be 'Your Honour' and what will I be?" He replied instantly, "You will be the same damned old fool you always were".*²

School history texts have neglected women's presence. One, *New Brunswick: The Story of our Province*, published in 1965 and used for 11 years in New Brunswick schools, begins: "Has your father or grandfather ever told you the story of his life?"³ This same history textbook, when noting the mood at the end of the First World War, states, "Men now demanded a better, safer life for themselves and their children".⁴ Indeed, this textbook is fraught with omissions of women's part in history. Even in recent publications, although there are some exceptions, women are curiously and conspicuously absent. For example, in a chapter entitled "La Politique et les Acadiens" in *Les Acadiens des*

Maritimes (1980), women's attainment of the right to vote is not mentioned, although Roman Catholic men's right to vote which was won in 1810 is discussed. It is indeed the history of Acadiens and not Acadiennes.

New Brunswick women's advocacy for rights and recognition has a long history. Like any group which is greatly underrepresented in the Legislative Assembly and in decision-making positions in industry and government, women have had to resort to indirect methods to demand their rights, expose their grievances, exert their influence.

While these activists' full story has yet to be told, what we know of their numerous lobbies over the years is impressive and inspiring. While they were outside the realms of power, these women demonstrated a sense that they could change things if they worked long and hard enough. In major lobby campaigns, such as during the women's suffrage struggle, one senses these women's frustrations as they begin to realize their lack of power — which is clearly measured by the very length of their lobby.

Whether it be Phebe McMonagle in 1808, the Women's Enfranchisement Association in 1895, the Women's Institutes in 1933, the Business and Professional Women's Club in 1953, the Groupe de femmes francophones de la région de Moncton in 1968 or Sandra Lovelace in 1977, New Brunswick women singly or in groups have been putting their names to petitions or briefs asking for what they believe is justly theirs.

Women have also been bringing women's and human rights matters to court or to political attention, challenging society's views on their place. In 1800, Nancy asked to be a free Black. In 1905, Mabel French asked to be admitted to the bar. Both cases went before the Supreme Court of New Brunswick. In 1849, Martha Hamm Lewis required an Order-in-Council from the lieutenant-governor to attend Saint John's Normal School. In 1885, Mary Tibbits sought legal advice on whether she could be legally considered a person and admitted to the University of New Brunswick. In 1977, Sandra Lovelace appealed to the United Nations Human Rights Committee to rule on sex and racial discrimination in the *Indian Act*.

These women were up against popularly-held or at least officially-held ideas regarding women's place and abilities. Often, the ideas about women's role voiced by politicians, editors and judges did not reflect the reality or the demands of women of the time. In fact, the more narrowly politicians, editors or judges defined women's role, the more severe were the social changes these men foresaw and the more threatened they may have been by changes in women's roles.

For instance, while certain politicians in the 1890's were insisting that women's place was strictly in the home raising children, over 11% of females aged 10 and older were already in the work force, making up over 12% of the work force.⁵ Although evidence suggests that most of these women were single, married women in difficult financial straits had been working outside the home since New Brunswick's early days, and widows were known to continue running the businesses their husbands had established.

By 1911, still in the middle of the suffrage debate and the accompanying debate on women's place, 15% of women aged 15 and over were in the work force and their numbers continued rising steadily (1921, 16%; 1941, 18%; 1961, 25%; 1971, 34%; 1981, 45%)⁶. For brief periods, the two World Wars brought many New Brunswick women into new roles, temporarily shaking conceptions about women's place and abilities. Married women began moving into the work force in significant and stable numbers in the 1950's. By 1961, 17% of married women in New Brunswick worked, by 1971, 32% and by 1981, 46%.⁷

Most politicians of a century ago correctly sensed the immense social changes women's steps beyond the domestic sphere would eventually entail and while some politicians feared such change and cried all the louder for women's retention in the home, others applauded women's widening opportunities.

Not only did the late 19th century witness women's increased participation in the work force, but it also saw women's entrance into the ranks of post-secondary education. New Brunswick's Normal Schools had opened their doors to women in 1848 and 1849; in 1872, Mount Allison Wesleyan College decreed that women could earn university degrees, and became the first Canadian university to graduate women; in 1886, the University of New Brunswick followed suit. In 1888, the Saint John General Hospital began training nurses; other nurses' training programs for both anglophones and francophones were established before the 1920's. Francophone women, however, would have to wait until 1943 before they could receive university training in French when the Religieuses de Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur began offering classical training to women in Memramcook and later Moncton.

Women first became involved in volunteer and community work in the 1800's as "lady directors", members of auxiliaries or "women's branches" of men's or male-directed organizations. It was perhaps in religious orders and religious lay groups that New Brunswick women first began to form solely women's groups. The Sisters of Charity founded New Brunswick's first congregation in Saint John in 1854. Religious orders continued to proliferate

throughout the 19th and early 20th century. Women's missionary society's affiliated with the Presbyterian, Methodist and Baptist churches began forming in the 19th century, particularly the latter part. Lay women's catholic groups, like Les Enfants de Marie, also formed before the end of the 19th century.

This period also witnessed the founding and development of numerous women's philanthropic, reform and social groups such as the Young Women's Christian Association (Saint John, 1870), Women's Christian Temperance Union (Saint John, 1879), Local Council of Women (Saint John, 1894), Women's Enfranchisement Association (Saint John, 1894), Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (Fredericton, 1900). Such activity continued into the 20th century with the founding of such groups as the Women's Institute, University Women's Club, and Business and Professional Women's Clubs. Many of these groups became politically active at one time or another, lobbying the government for social reforms or improvements in women's status.

The forming of the group Voice of Women, which addresses peace issues, in the early 1960's in Fredericton marked a new era of specialized women's groups. In 1973, in the wake of the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, francophone women in Moncton formed the political action group LES FAM (Liberté Egalité Sororité - Femmes Acadiennes de Moncton; Liberty Equality Sorority - Acadian Women of Moncton), joining Canadian women everywhere in their new-found political awareness. In 1975, International Women's Year, specialized feminist groups began multiplying throughout the province, including l'Institut d'études et d'apprentissage féminins (Moncton, 1975), Fredericton Rape Crisis Center (1975), Women of the Miramichi (Newcastle, 1978), Saint John Women for Political Action (1978), Comité de femmes de Bathurst (1979), Charlotte County Women's Council (1979), Saint John Women's Network (1982), and several transition houses for battered women.

Women of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds also began feeling the need to form groups, either to address community issues or to treat women's issues particular to their people: la Fédération des Dames d'Acadie (Campbellton, 1968), Women's Auxiliary of the Black Community (Saint John, 1970), Tobique Women (Tobique Reserve, 1975), New Brunswick Native Indian Women's Council (Fredericton, 1981), Women Working for Immigrant Women (Fredericton, 1983), Canadian and Immigrant Women in Action (Moncton, 1984).

Women also continue work today in women's committees and auxiliaries in professional and community organizations and in

unions, in the tradition of the Female Reform Society's Ladies' Committee of 19th century Saint John.

In 1974, the first of five provincial conferences on women's issues held over a period of 10 years took place in Memramcook. Out of this first conference came hundreds of recommendations, including one for the creation of a provincial advisory council on the status of women. The subsequent conferences became increasingly specialized and began focussing on the creation of a network of New Brunswick women's groups. This work was realized in 1984 with the founding of the New Brunswick Women's Network. Its triangular structure is unique in Canada; it recognizes three cultural groups: aboriginal, anglophone and francophone.

The past 200 years have seen New Brunswick women move from an individual approach to government, as women singly or in small separate groups petitioned the government, to the collective approach of the suffrage, temperance and jury lobbies and of the more recent feminist lobbies for the creation of a provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and for the inclusion of the sex equality clause in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The development of women's groups has been one of the most important reflectors of women's concerns about their status and social reform.

Women's power continues to lie in their desire and ability to band together on common issues. Activist women's groups still adhere to the "gleaming watchwords" of the Women's Christian Temperance Union of yesteryear: "Agitate, Educate, Organize".⁸

