

## Women's History at St. Thomas University

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Politics. At about the same time, the success of “Women in Europe and North America” prompted an expansion in women’s history courses as the discipline continued to move from six-credit to three-credit courses. By the early 1990s Dr. Condon was offering courses on “Women in American History” and “Women in Europe” as well as “Women in Canadian History”. The presence of a visiting scholar enabled the one-time offering of a course on “Chinese Women – 1850 to the present”. On the whole, however, it was Dr. Condon’s courses that established a profile for women’s history at UNB Saint John. When Dr. Debra Lindsay arrived in 1997, women’s history grew through the addition of “Women, Science, and Medicine”.

Over the years, aside from the core courses in women’s history, other courses taught by full-time and part-time instructors contained substantial segments concentrating on the role of women, among them, “Family and the State in North America”, developed by Dr. Greg Marquis, and two courses focussing on the city: “Studies in the Historical Sociology of Saint John: Community” and “Studies in the Historical Sociology of Saint John: Religion”. In 2002 UNB Saint John introduced both a minor and a certificate in gender studies developed by the Gender Studies Committee,<sup>4</sup> which included Dr. Debra Lindsay. A number of history courses dealing with the role of women are offered through this programme.

Women’s history on this campus emerged shortly after the department began offering a major. Like other departments, History was buffeted by the developmental issues that touched all academic programs on the Saint John campus. But women’s history and courses focussing on the role of women and gender offered, and continues to offer, intellectual stimulation to a more geographically diverse student body than could have been envisioned 50 years ago by Saint John’s “educational entrepreneurs”.

ELIZABETH W. McGAHAN

4 A proposal submitted to MPHEC by the University of New Brunswick – Saint John, Gender Studies Committee, 6 August 2002 [co-chairs Dr. Lee Chalmers and Dr. Miriam Jones].

### Women’s History at St. Thomas University.

THE STORY OF WOMEN’S HISTORY AT St. Thomas is influenced by the origins and development of the university itself. St. Thomas started as a boys’ high school and junior college in Chatham, New Brunswick, run by the Basilian fathers until 1923, then by the diocesan clergy. It became a university in 1934 and was moved to Fredericton in 1964. The Holy Cross Fathers set up a House of Studies on the campus and formed a nucleus for the teaching staff. Women religious had been admitted to university courses in Chatham and the first graduate was a woman religious in 1947. Bill Spray, who is writing the history of the university says the first female on the teaching staff was Mary Doran in 1952, but there is no sign of females on the faculty in the 1964–65 *Calendar*.<sup>1</sup> By 1971, there were 12 women and 56 men on the faculty and the redoubtable Marguerite Michaud was slipping some women’s history into her

1 Personal communication, Dr. W. Spray, 29 September 2003. The St. Thomas University calendars are available in the registrar’s office at St. Thomas.

French courses.<sup>2</sup> The number of female faculty and students grew and, by 1985, Sylvia Hale of the Sociology Department was leading a campaign to get more women's studies content in St. Thomas courses. She went to speak at department meetings, including the History Department, where the five men responded according to their various temperaments. They said they were not trained in this field, there were no materials available in this field and that it was an unreasonable division of history.

However, persistence paid off and the department sought help from the University of New Brunswick. As part of our annual exchange with the UNB History Department, Gillian Thompson gave a full-year upper level course on European women from 1000 to 1800 in the mid-1980s. Gail Campbell answered departmental queries with the course "Finding the Women: The Study of Ordinary Women in Canadian History" in winter 1988 and Gillian gave a three-credit course on European women 1400-1800 in winter 2002.

I was hired as sessional part-time to teach Quebec and Acadian history in 1988, and in 1989-90, 1990-91 and 1991-92 I filled in for sabbaticants while I was finishing my Ph.D. on elite white Acadian males. At the defence, my external examiner was Naomi Griffiths: she found the thesis acceptable but finished by saying "That's all very well Mrs. Andrew, but what about the women!" Nothing loathe, and thus inspired, I suggested a course "Women in Canadian History" for 1991-92. One of my tutors at St. Anne's College Oxford, Dr. Marjorie Reeves, had given the only course I have ever heard of called "The History of Hairdressing" before she arrived at St. Anne's, so I had another role model. The St. Thomas department had been prepared by Gail and Gillian, so when presented with the syllabus for "Women in Canadian History" and no alternative, they gracefully accepted. However, when I was hired for the newly established post in Canadian history the next year, one member of the department made it clear this was as a specialist in nationalism and French Canadian topics, not as a teacher of women's history.

Women's studies at St. Thomas has gone from strength to strength. Before I got involved, the Gender Studies programme was already providing stimulating contact with professors in other fields through meetings and cross-listing. The number of women on campus kept increasing, till we are now at 69 per cent female, and the number of students taking women's history has been steadily rising.

Men have also developed increasing interest in this field. In the early years, the hockey coach used to push his students into taking "Women in Canadian History". I was never sure if this was sensitivity training or because they thought it was an easy option. Some dropped out and some were very good students. The president of St. Thomas at the time was George Martin, who taught in the same room as the women's history course, immediately after us. He may have been intrigued, or we may have gone on too long, as he frequently came in to listen to the last part of the class. One day, I was giving a spirited version of the New Brunswick suffragists descent on the legislative assembly, not knowing Father Martin was right behind me: "Can I march too?" he inquired.

Thus encouraged, I developed an upper-level course "Canadian Women and the World", first offered in 1996-97. This looks at world issues like suffrage, Aboriginal

2 Personal communication, Dr. Claudia Whalen, St. Thomas University, 1996.

peoples, property rights, political leadership and whatever the class and I want to explore.

Coverage of gendered issues in courses increased and Don Wright's presence as a sabbatical replacement in the mid-1990s was a great help. Karen Robert is now broadening the field with a course "Gender and Power in Latin American History" for 2004-05 and it is a sign of the times that the next time "Women in Canadian History" is offered, it will be taught by Dr. Michael Dawson who is coming to us from the University of British Columbia. He says it takes a class or two to persuade some students that a man can teach women's history.

The Gender Studies programme has now developed into Gender Studies and Women's Studies, cross-listing courses in these fields to provide major and minor programmes; it has also come through the first stages of the process to become a full department with an honours programme.

I noted, with some sadness, that the advertisement for my replacement did not specify ability to teach women's history. I have enjoyed the experience and learned a great deal as I explored it with my students. We at St. Thomas were lucky to find Dr. Dawson who wants to teach this topic as well as having the other strengths the department wants. The argument used is that we should all be teaching people's history by now. So maybe gendered perspectives are now mainstream. At the Teaching History Conference in Montreal a few years ago, Veronica Strong Boag responded to Jack Granatstein's criticism that women had killed traditional Canadian history by saying, "Of course I killed Canadian history and I can see lots of people in the audience who helped me to do it". So, my thanks to the women and men who wrote the books and articles and gave the papers and support that helped me to learn something of women's history and also to the students who shared that learning process.

SHEILA ANDREW

### Teaching Women's History at Dalhousie: a personal account

I WAS HIRED BY DALHOUSIE IN THE winter of 1993, and started teaching full-time in the fall of 1994. I had taught part-time there for one year, taking on two existing half-courses while I completed my post-doctoral fellowship. In the second year, I added to my teaching schedule (among other things) a third-year class, already on the books, called "Women in North America". Fifteen students were enrolled in it. I was asked that year to propose for the following year two half courses at the second-year level which would attract at least 70 students each year (60 is our preferred minimum for a second year class, and we like to aim, at second year, for enrollments in the 80 to 120 range or higher). I chose to propose two courses that I called "Making Gender". These were to replace both the course I had just taught and another, called "Women in Socialist Societies", which was also on the books but which was no longer being taught. The two courses I proposed were to be survey courses, following the "western civ" model, with the chronological break between the two halves being Mary Wollstonecraft. The subtitle after the colon was (and still is) "male and female, from . . . to . . .".