

Teaching Women's History at Dalhousie: A personal account

Shirley Tillotson

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[See table of contents](#)

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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 . . .".

In proposing these courses, I felt like I was putting my own mark on teaching women's history at Dalhousie. Judith Fingard and Mary Turner before me had done this more dramatically when, in 1986, they had created the first women's history courses, the ones that mine would replace. By 1994, however, Turner had retired and Fingard was preparing to do so. The field was clear for me to do what I wanted. I hoped that my new courses would present gender in history, not as a specialist topic to be taught at the upper level, but as one of the basic narratives that would be a normal part of a history major's foundation. Also, in this survey form, the courses would be accessible to all Women's Studies majors (and the courses did become core courses for the Women's Studies honours programme).

This, then, was my plan. And I was pretty much free to implement it as I wished. At the time I joined the Dalhousie History Department, it had a tradition of more or less complete professorial autonomy in course offerings. Fingard and Turner had benefited from that. In preparing this paper, I asked Fingard about reactions to those first women's history courses that she and Turner had created, and her comment was "I don't suppose anyone paid us much attention". She and Mary Turner had their offices in a different building from the rest of the department's faculty at the time, a spatial arrangement that may have expressed something about their relationship with the department. However, when I was making my plans for teaching women's history about a decade later, some of the autonomy that had complemented marginality was gone. This was not because of any change in the department, which still placed a high value on professorial autonomy. The change was that, in the intervening years, the university's internal budget allocation methods had been arranged so as to reward faculties (and, by extension, departments) whose enrollments grew. A crisis in university finance in 1993-94, in which several departments were threatened with closure, helped to turn that system of incentives into an explicit pressure. As a result, I was not really free to choose to continue with small enrollment, upper-year women's history courses. Something had to be done at second year. And it had to be as broad as possible in its appeal.

Had I developed these courses in the early 1980s, the problem around which I organized them might have been "what explains women's oppression?" or "how does women's status change historically?" These were the questions that had shaped the women's history course I took, by correspondence, in Vancouver in the early 1980s. But these were not the questions which shaped the construction of my present courses. I designed courses which led students through an inquiry about what it meant to be male or female (or some intersexual version), masculine or feminine, in all sorts of different ways and in different cultural and historical contexts. Students cannot help but look for answers to these questions in terms of power and conflict and hierarchy. But the courses leave them free to argue against an oppression interpretation or against the existence of "women" or "men" as meaningful social categories. I tried to help them to see historical interpretation as debate, and I described for them a series of projects that feminists, non-feminists and anti-feminists have undertaken in considering women, sex difference and gender. I developed ways of showing them, without fancy jargon, the difference between gender as a signifier and gender as a social relationship. And both the Women's Studies students and the others have very happily reported in subsequent years that they looked forward to coming to the classes because they learn "such interesting things". Those who like these courses, to quote

the beer commercial, like them a lot.

Nonetheless, I do have worries about teaching women's history and gender history at Dalhousie. These fall under two headings: curriculum development and enrollments. The curriculum that a department offers is based, in part, on the expertise of its faculty, and at the moment, we are undergoing a transition which may reduce the presence of gender-focussed courses in our curriculum. This presence was considerable in my first five years or so. There was a recognizable gender "stream" of history courses that students could follow. Jane Parpart, one of our Africanists, taught two gender history courses (at 3rd and 4th year), Jack Crowley offered a family and community in colonial America course, and Stephen Brooke's "Class and Culture in 20th Century Britain" had a very substantial women's history element. We promoted that set of courses, including my two, with a poster and in student advising. Now all of those colleagues are gone, are about to go or have stopped teaching the relevant course.

On the credit side, we have added British historian Krista Kesselring, who is offering, every second or third year, a course on sex and gender in Reformation Europe. Moreover, two of our other recent hires, Africanist Gary Kynoch and Canadianist Todd McCallum, have had, as one of their comprehensive fields, gender history, and have included gender analysis in their published scholarship. This shows the mainstreaming of women and gender in historical interpretation. Few, if any, of the numerous new colleagues that demographic change is bringing our way will send their students to me for essay advice because they themselves don't know anything about women's history. But I wonder whether any of them will be interested in developing a new kind of gender history course in their area. If they don't, then the interestingly complex currents of our six-course stream risk shrinking into a specialist channel.

The other worry relates to the pair of core courses that I teach. In their first five years, those courses enrolled about 70-90 students per year. Then, coincidentally or consequently, after a difficult hiring decision in which allegations of feminist coercion were taken up by students, the enrollment on the history side of my cross-listed Women's Studies and History gender courses fell dramatically – by half – while enrollments in my other, non-cross-listed courses remained stable. If the enrollments in my gender history courses recover in 2004-05, when presumably the mechanisms of undergraduate collective memory will have filtered out the events of 1999-2000, then it may be possible to conclude that the decline in enrollments was situational. However, if the enrollments in my second-year courses have plateaued at a lower level, then it may be that demand for these courses among History majors has fallen off for multiple reasons, ones that may be largely beyond my control to affect. I am not sure what to expect. Encouragingly, a recent survey of the students in second-year History courses offered the encouraging datum that 49.1 per cent of this large group considered that additional courses in the areas of "family/gender/sexuality" would be either very interesting (27.2 per cent) or the most interesting (21.9 per cent) thematic courses they'd like to see us offer. I've discussed options with my department Chair, and she has been respectful and supportive and shows every sign of trusting that I will make a reasonable judgement, balancing the needs of the Women's Studies (WOST) programme and the Department of History's enrollment standards. She and I both know that labour history courses slid from our department's offerings because they

lost enrollments precipitously. That's the spectre that haunts my planning.

Finally, a word about graduate teaching. Expressions of interest in graduate fields in gender history continue to be frequent among applicants to our graduate program. Gender history is one of our department's thematic fields, renamed from women's history. As I teach the field, it includes literature that might be categorized as either or both women's and gender history. I've very much enjoyed working with students in that field area. Of the nine M.A. theses in history that students have completed under my supervision, four have been in substantial measure women's history or gender history. All but one of the nine have made gender analysis part of their research strategy and have integrated it as an element in their work. In graduate teaching, then, my students are taking a mix of the specialist or integrative approaches to the place of women's history in History. As a result of the scholarly and political work of feminist women historians before me, at Dalhousie and elsewhere, it is now necessary for history students, graduate or undergraduate, whose intellectual interests are about power and justice, to know about women and to think about gender.

SHIRLEY TILLOTSON

The Origins of Women's History at the Université de Moncton

I WOULD FIRST LIKE TO THANK THE organizers of the symposium for the invitation to participate in this roundtable. My understanding of the task I have been assigned is that I have the responsibility of representing the accomplishments and assessing the gaps in the teaching of women's history at my own institution, the Université de Moncton, and providing some indication of the potential for the future of the practice of women's history at this same institution.

I will begin by stating that the gaps have, so far, outweighed the accomplishments (this, I fear, will be a common assessment at this afternoon's roundtable) and I will attempt to provide some context for this assessment.

The Université de Moncton is a French-language institution within the English-speaking academic milieu of the Atlantic Provinces and, as such, it has always suffered from intellectual isolation. After all, communication through language – both oral and written – is, for academic institutions, fundamental to its mandate and academics have not managed, generally speaking, to overcome the language barrier that would allow greater communication regarding their research and their institution's programs and, more importantly, greater collaboration in these areas.

The Université de Moncton is not solely responsible for this state of affairs. However, its institutional mentality encouraged – and indeed still encourages – this isolation in a number of ways. After all, its *raison d'être* within the academic milieu of the Atlantic Provinces is unique: the post-secondary education of Acadians in the French language. The minority status of Acadians within the Atlantic region, which bred a policy of cultural isolation in order to achieve cultural survival, has had great influence on this institution and its predecessor, the Université Saint-Joseph, throughout the 20th century. This is hardly surprising, since the elites responsible for