

“A NICE LITTLE WIFE TO MAKE THINGS PLEASANT:” PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN IN CANADIAN HISTORY TEXTBOOKS APPROVED IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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ABSTRACT. This study examined 20th Century Canadian history textbooks authorized in British Columbia, for their portrayals of women. The texts do not adequately reflect feminist scholarship nor societal changes. The nation building narrative of the textbooks precludes the inclusion of women in important ways. In the interwar years, the women who appear in history textbooks are portrayed as parasitic and weak. In the 1950s to 1970s period inclusion requires royal status or fame as a writer. In the 1980s women are often depicted in larger-than-life ways and “filler feminism” is a problem.

“UNE BELLE PETITE FEMME POUR RENDRE LES CHOSES PLAISANTES” :
PORTRAITS DE FEMMES DANS LES MANUELS SCOLAIRES D'HISTOIRE CANADIENNE
APPROUVÉS DANS LA COLOMBIE BRITANNIQUE

RÉSUMÉ. Cette étude examine les portraits de femme dans les manuels scolaires d'histoire du Canada au 20^{ème} siècle, autorisés dans la Colombie Britannique. Ces textes ne reflètent pas adéquatement les études féministes et les changements sociaux. Le récit des manuels au sujet de la construction de la nation exclut l'inclusion des femmes de multiples façons. Durant l'entre-deux guerres, les femmes qui apparaissent dans les manuels d'histoire sont décrites comme parasitaires et faibles. Des années 1950 à 1970, l'inclusion exigeait un statut royal ou une renommée en tant qu'auteur. Dans les années 1980, les femmes sont souvent décrites de façon « plus large que la vie » et « le féminisme comme dédommagement » est un problème.

When Edith Deyell (1958a) used the phrase, “a nice little wife to make things pleasant,” in her textbook, *Canada: A New Land*, she was referring, apparently without ironic intent, to the decision by French fur trader Médard Chouart des Groseilliers to marry (p. 138). We assume that textbook portrayals alter over time to reflect changing societal views and it seems certain that if Deyell were writing today, she would use quite different language. However, the findings of this study indicate that textbook portrayals of women have not changed as much as we might expect.

It is important to investigate what provincially approved textbooks have to say for two reasons. First, they have an unambiguous relationship to the state. Official textbook approval processes have been in place in Canada since the establishment of common school systems beginning in the mid 19th Century. They, therefore, represent what is deemed to be legitimate knowledge for students by those in positions of authority within the educational hierarchy. Second, they are central to classroom instruction. In the province of British Columbia, teacher reports (1958),¹ interviews about students' school experiences (Sutherland, 2003), classroom observations (BC, 1960), and teacher surveys (Cassidy & Bogнар, 1991), combine to support this assertion.

Collective memory

History textbooks are *lieux de memoire*, to use French historian Pierre Nora's (1996) term; that is, places that define and construct collective memory. As "sites of memory" history textbooks quite intentionally offer a particular past to their intended readers. But collective memory itself has a history; that is, it changes over time. History textbooks are potent tools for understanding these changes, offering glimpses into the segment of the past in which they were written and authorized by the state for use in schools. As Elie Podeh (2000) has reminded us, "In constructing the collective memory [at any particular moment], textbooks play a dual role: on the one hand, they provide a sense of continuity between the past and the present, transmitting accepted historical narratives; on the other, they alter – or rewrite – the past in order to suit contemporary needs" (p. 66). Through changes in emphasis over time, as well as changing choices regarding both omissions and inclusions of people, events, and ideas, they provide opportunities for insights into the ways the past was framed at the time of writing.

This study was concerned with representations of women in Canadian history textbooks over time. In looking at ways in which they have been represented, as well as places where the texts fall silent about them, my intention has been to illuminate areas of continuity, resistance and change in Canadian collective memory, with regard to women.

By definition, a textbook is a book intended for use in schools. Since textbooks serve as a window into classrooms of the past, it is important to limit a study such as this to textbooks which have received a stamp of approval in the form of official authorization status. This study was limited to history textbooks about Canada, approved for use in the province of British Columbia from the 1920s to the 1990s, with a few from the province of Ontario consulted for purposes of comparison.

Women's history

As historian Michael Kammen (1991) has pointed out, "the more we read about memory, the more we also are reminded of amnesia" (p. 9). It is

worthwhile to take a moment to consider why “women have been deprived of a usable past” (Lerner, 1997, p. 120). While collective memory goes far beyond the work of academic historians, their work is relevant both in shaping and in reflecting collective memory. It is only in the past thirty years that historians of women’s and gender history have come to the fore in Canada, along with labour and other social historians. These historians are posing different questions about the past in order to find out what the women were doing.

There has been a paucity of information in the historical record concerning the details of women’s lives in the past, since sources have not been as plentiful as have those about men’s lives. Women have conducted their lives in the private, domestic sphere of life. Because women rarely contributed to political, economic or military aspects of the public sphere (at least in ways that have garnered recognition), they naturally have not figured prominently in histories of the development of the Canadian nation. Or so the explanation goes. Certainly, a grand national narrative has provided the structure of historical accounts.

Recently, however, this prevailing view has been challenged in two ways. First, we have ample demonstrations that rich accounts of women’s lives can be constructed using the scant records they have left behind. For example, in *The Private Capital*, journalist Sandra Gwyn (1984) provides a rich and compelling description of life behind-the-scenes in Ottawa from Confederation to the end of the Laurier era. She relies heavily on the journals of Ethel Chadwick, an astute social observer and daughter of a civil servant, and on the newspaper society columns of Amaryllis, an anonymous socialite. American historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich (1990) has constructed an intricately detailed story of the life of midwife Martha Ballard in 17th Century New England from terse diary jottings such as this typical entry, dated December 6, 1793:

*At Mr. Whites
Clear. I was Calld to Benn Whites at 2 hour morning. Wrote in a sleigh.
(p. 165)*

There has been an outpouring of biographical work about Canadian women (Barman, 2002; 2004; Duncan, 2003; Gossage, 2001; Strong-Boag & Gerson, 2000) and collections of historical work about women and gender issues (Cavanaugh & Warne, 2000; Cook, McLean, & O’Rourke, 2001). This recent work provides new perspectives as it explores women’s multiple identities through the intersections of race, class, and gender. The painstaking research which has been conducted on the lives of women should contribute significantly to the reservoirs of evidence and insights about women and women’s lives from which textbook writers can draw. There are also many autobiographies, memoirs and accounts constructed from interviews which

could be used more extensively to explore the realities of women's lives in the past. Examples are: Susanna Moodie (1852/1962), Catherine Parr Traill (1926/1971), Anna Jameson (1932/1965), Emily Carr (1966), Elizabeth Goudie (1973; 1996),² Denise Chong (1994), Nellie McClung (1965), Fredelle Maynard (1973), and Judy La Marsh (1968).

The public/private dichotomy explanation also has limited usefulness due to the numerous women whose individual stories offer resistance to such easy categorization. For instance, the image of Susanna Moodie writing in the wee hours of the night in order to supplement the income earned from the family homestead in Upper Canada counters the public/private dichotomy. Historians have illuminated the intricate overlaps and interconnections that exist between these supposed binary opposites. As Cynthia Comacchio (2000) has put it,

New research recognizes the permeability of boundaries between work and home, the overlap of domestic and productive reciprocity, often involving the exchange of services necessary to transform commodities into things that family members can use: hot lunches, clean clothes, mended shoes.

Whatever the prevailing views about where they belonged, then, women and children lived in networks of domestic and public, home and work, family and neighbourhood, just as did men, if not in precisely the same ways. (p. 199)

Historians have begun to examine the experiences of working-class women in the paid labour force. Bettina Bradbury (2002) has looked at working-class women in nineteenth century Montreal in both home and factory settings. Joy Parr (1990) has done comparative case studies of two Ontario towns, looking at the waged labour and domestic lives of female textile workers in Paris and male furniture workers in Hanover between 1880 and 1950. Other historians have examined ways in which working class homemakers, who did not have the luxury of choosing to remain within the private sphere of domesticity, have earned an income or stretched the income of the male breadwinner. Even in early settlement times, the family home was frequently the setting for paid labour such as spinning, weaving, dressmaking, and tutoring. Although many gaps remain, Canadian historians have examined women's income-earning work, including: home-based needlework in Ontario and Quebec (McIntosh, 1993); the keeping of cows and pigs and the taking in of boarders in late 19th Century Montreal (Bradbury, 1984); and the maintenance of wheat farms through unprofitable periods (Cohen, 1988). The work of Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has been particularly illuminating in contesting this conception of a rigid public/private dichotomy. In her books *A Midwife's Tale* (1990) and *The Age of Homespun* (2001), Ulrich weaves a complex account of the intricate connections between the private domestic activities of spinning, weaving, and childbirth and public political, economic and legal events in New England.

Middle class women, too, have often chosen to leave the domestic sphere in order to engage in more public activities, although not necessarily for monetary gain. Over the past thirty years, there has been much research in Canada on the voluntary work which middle-class women of the past have carried out in an effort to improve conditions in homes, schools, and the broader society through women's organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (Cook, 1995; Michinson, 1976; Sheehan, 1984), the International Order of the Daughters of the Empire (Michinson, 1977), the National Council of Women of Canada (Boutilier, 2000; Strong-Boag, 1976), the Young Women's Christian Association (Pederson, 1996), and English Protestant organizations, including women's missionary societies (Brandt, 1985).

The domestic sphere itself has been put under the microscope in order to determine how the unwaged work that goes on there contributes to the capitalist economy and to the survival of individual households in unmarked ways. Meg Luxton (1980) looked at women's domestic work in Flin Flon, Manitoba from 1927 to 1977. Veronica Strong-Boag (1986) probed domestic work to uncover the ways in which the waged-labour economy is intertwined with the domestic economy. Margrit Eichler (1985) argued that domestic labour must be recognized as socially useful because it contains social, as well as private elements.

Questions of historical significance are relevant here. If only macro-economic, political and military events are considered to be of significance historically, then there is little hope of seeing many women on the pages of Canadian history textbooks. However, if we can begin to recognize that both the so-called public and the private spheres have great bearing on how we live our lives as people and as Canadians, and that they are interconnected and overlapping, then our concept of historical significance will be broadened and, therefore, more inclusive of women.

It should be noted that, while female historians have brought women into history, women were not left out in the first place because of, as Gerda Lerner (1997) puts it, "the evil intent of male historians" (p. 119). She adds that "we have missed women and their activities because we have asked questions of history that are inappropriate to women" (p. 119). Therefore, we must begin to ask questions which will draw out the information about what they have been doing (Crocco, 2002).

Methodology

This study heeds Ian McKay's (2000) warning against "attribut[ing] to the entire dominion patterns characteristic only of one of its parts" (p. 638). Accordingly, I limit my claims to findings related to the textbooks of one province. I examined 55 elementary and secondary school Canadian history

textbooks approved in British Columbia over three periods.³ The term “approved” is used here as a broad label to encompass various terms employed in provincial documents at different times, including “prescribed,” “authorized,” “recommended,” “reference,” and “supplementary.” These terms have had various meanings over time. However, at all times, these labels were an indication that the text was sanctioned by the Department of Education for use in schools. Furthermore, at all times the label “prescribed” has denoted the highest status. It is important, however, not to limit a study such as this to prescribed texts. The Canadian History Readers by Donalda Dickie, for example, are referred to in the textbook catalogues as “reference” books. However, that label is accompanied by a recommendation to purchase 20-35 copies of each book, indicating an expectation that individual copies would be available to students. Thus, it is evident that these books were considered important to the attainment of curricular objectives.⁴

The first 14 books examined were published in the interwar period. This includes seven comprehensive texts and seven which were collections of stories and accounts of particular events and people in Canadian history (Canadian History Readers by Donalda Dickie). I use the term, “comprehensive” as a label for traditional-style texts which cover extensive periods of Canadian history. These texts normally held “prescribed” status, while the other texts were labeled in various other ways. The intent, in keeping with the pedagogical philosophy of progressivism evident in the programmes of study, was that students be exposed to a range of resources. Many of these texts continued to be approved through the 1940s, as few new books were published during the Second World War. For instance, *The Romance of Canada* by A.L. Burt (1937) was prescribed from the 1937/38 school year through the 1949/50 year.

The second set of 31 books was published from 1949 to the 1970s and later books in this period continued to be approved until the appearance of new elementary (1983) and secondary (1985) provincial curricula. There was a phasing in of a multiple authorization approach, beginning in the 1968/69 school year. This meant that at every grade level teachers could select from prescribed textbooks ranging from a single comprehensive text through to sets of sample study texts (booklets) on various topics. This sample study approach was intended to provide opportunities for teachers to take an approach to history involving depth rather than breadth, in keeping with the “structure of the disciplines” approach advocated by American psychologist Jerome Bruner (1960) and others in this period. Prescribed “textbooks” also included picture sets at the elementary grades and collections of primary source excerpts in either book or package format. I examined 12 comprehensive texts, 15 sample study texts, and four document collections in book format.

The third set of 10 books comprises those published in the mid to late 1980s to support the 1983 elementary and 1985 secondary curricula. The 10 texts

examined comprise the entire list of prescribed Canadian history texts. Teachers were not provided with options in this period and the Ministry of Education distributed class sets of each book to schools.⁵ These texts continued to be approved until 1997, when a new curriculum was implemented. Since then, new textbooks have been approved, which were not examined for this study. In this last period I also make reference to four Ontario textbooks in order to highlight representations which are in contrast to those identified in the British Columbia texts.

I note that there is overlap among Canadian provinces with regard to textbook authorizations. Texts authorized in Ontario have been commonly used elsewhere.⁶ In the first two periods under discussion here, many of the texts were also used in other provinces. In the third period, the texts were written to fit the British Columbia curriculum and were not prescribed in other provinces.⁷

Remoras, or just invisible: Interwar period

Married women worked predominantly in their homes and were supported financially by their husbands in the interwar period. Middle-class women sometimes engaged in volunteer activities such as rural school board membership, and church and charitable work. They were sometimes involved in social and political organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Imperial Order of Daughters of the British Empire, and rural Women's Institutes. White women had achieved the federal franchise by 1919 and by 1925 women could vote in every province but Quebec.

The predominant theme of texts in this period is the building of the Canadian nation, which involves the sub-themes of aboriginal cultures prior to European contact; taming the wilderness (and aboriginal people); establishing new political and economic systems; and defining relationships with the "mother country" and the United States. These themes are explored as they play out in the public sphere of life, not in the private. Women play supporting roles in the story of the *Romance of Canada* (Burt, 1937).

James W. Loewen (1999) has used the metaphor of the remora, which usefully describes representations of women during this period. A remora is a fish that attaches its sucker-like fins to other fish or to ships, living as a parasite. With the exception of a few heroines such as Laura Secord of Upper Canada or Madeleine de Verchères of New France who were heroic in times of war, women in textbooks of this period are remoras, parasites on the host body of a male. The *filles du roi* can be counted on to embark from their ships into the eager arms of the young male habitants of New France, and then fade away, while the texts move on to the more important affairs of the male fur traders and explorers. Pioneer women are presented as weak and dependent or as onlookers to the crucial tasks in which the males are

engaged. For instance, at first sight of her new home, one female pioneer “leaned her head against a tree and wept despairingly, ‘Oh, Robert,’ . . . looking at her children, ‘take me back! take me back!’” (Dickie, 1928a, p. 115). During a logging bee, whenever a giant log had to be pulled, “word was passed to the women, who flocked out and, perched upon convenient log piles, watched their men with admiring eyes” (p. 218).

Primarily during this period women are invisible. I will use one typical textbook to illustrate this point. In A.L. Burt’s *Romance of Canada* (1937), the first three chapters are “The Discovery of Canada,” “Champlain, the Father of Canada,” and “Missionaries and Savages.” In these 62 pages, there is a reference to, “a rich young widow, Madame de la Peltrie, [who] came out with several nuns of a famous teaching order, the Ursulines, and built for them a convent at Quebec” (p. 52). The next chapter, called “Talon, Laval, and Frontenac,” contains a paragraph and a half about the *filles du roi* (pp. 64-65), the only fairly detailed reference to any women in the entire 400 page text, as well as two sentences about Madeleine de Verchères. There are only three references to women in the remaining 17 chapters. Queen Victoria gets a mention because the island of St. John was “later christened Prince Edward Island in honour of [her] father” (p. 154). The second reference was in an explanation of the purchase of Rupert’s Land from the Hudson’s Bay Company (p. 282). The final reference to women is with regard to the home front during World War One, when no-one “can ever forget how untiringly the women of the country knitted for their menfolk overseas” (p. 343). In fairness, the text goes on to acknowledge “the sacrifice of the people at home” (p. 343), which presumably is intended to include women.

The invisibility of newcomer women in the texts is understandable in the case of Canada’s very early history since they were, after all, present in very few numbers. However, by early settlement times, although these women were not involved in political affairs they were a crucial part of pioneer life. As historian Veronica Strong-Boag (1994) reminds us, women’s contributions included two areas: their domestic labour and their contribution to a stable community life. For the most part, neither of these is acknowledged in textbooks of this period. References are made to “the early settler and *his* [italics added] family” (McArthur, 1927, p. 212) as if, somehow, other family members are not also pioneers. The men’s work of clearing land and planting crops is the core of the story. The rest of the work occurs around this, if it occurs at all. Duncan McArthur’s (1927) *History of Canada for High Schools* mentions that, following a logging bee, “the women took great pride in providing a sumptuous feast as reward for the strenuous labours of the men” (p. 214). The “strenuous labours” involved in putting together a “sumptuous feast” for a large group of people, with no electricity, no running water, and no grocery stores are not mentioned.

There are some limited exceptions, of which one is historian George Wrong's (1921) *History of Canada*. Wrong points out that the men "cleared the ground and tilled the fields, but most of what was used within, the women had to make – the daily bread, the candles, the soap, not least the clothing, for the spinning-wheel was in every household. When there was illness the doctor was often remote" (p. 214).

Such exceptions are found primarily in the texts of Alberta educator and curriculum developer, Donald Dickie, whose texts were approved for use in elementary and junior high schools in British Columbia and other provinces over a period spanning four decades. Dickie (1927c) acknowledges females. She notes, for instance, that women in New France "spent their lives in crushing toil" (p. 211). She says, "women had to have steady hands and level heads as well as brave hearts in those days" (1928a, p. 244). Fourteen of ninety-three chapters in her text, *In Pioneer Days*, are about females. This may seem scanty, but when placed against other texts, it becomes significant. I. Gammell's (1921) *History of Canada*, for example, lists three women in its index: Laura Secord, Queen Elizabeth, and Princess Louise, only one of whom was a permanent resident of British North America. Perhaps as a woman it seemed only natural to Dickie to include female experience. Compare Dickie's empathic treatment of the *filles du roi* with that of a male author, Gammell. In the Dickie text, *When Canada Was Young*, the reader is taken into the minds of these young women who are embarking on a new life: "Very lonely they must have been as the ship put out to sea, and the pleasant shores of France faded from their sight forever. No doubt they wept long and sadly, comforting one another as best they could . . ." (1927c, p. 104). Under a subtitle called "Increase of Population," Gammell (1921) states that "shiploads of girls were then dispatched, also at the king's expense, to provide them with wives" (p. 45). Nothing more is said on the matter. The Gammell text might as well have been referring to shiploads of seed to provide the settlers with wheat, as to young women. Gammell's treatment is the more typical of the two.

Dickie includes topics which are not touched in other textbooks in this period. These include the contributions of Women's Institutes to "inculcating Canadian ideals and principles" (1927b, p. 324), and the experiences of women teachers (1927b). In *How Canada Grew Up* she includes a story entitled, "The Blue Silk Dress," which in detail describes a dress made as part of a bride's trousseau. She says "the soft thick taffeta" [was] "blue, deep bright blue, blue as the Mediterranean seen in flashes between the pink rocks on the way to Genoa . . . The ear-rings were long and very heavy. The dress was fastened at the throat with a large cameo brooch" (1927b, p. 264). I was astounded when I first came across this description, which goes on for an entire page, providing details about the dress and how it looked on the woman. It seems incongruous situated as it is, between a passage about the

Quebec Conference and a section about John A. Macdonald. I wondered what could have prompted Dickie to include it. Was it her way of poking a bit of fun at the importance placed on political history, which consists of events far removed from the quotidian details of ordinary people's lives? Was she saying that such small pleasures add up to the crux of what makes life worth living? Whatever the motivation, it is difficult to imagine such a story in a text written by a male author.

Another difference in the Dickie texts is a tendency to be slightly more explicit about sexual matters. For example, she is the only author I found in this period who mentions Isobel Gunn (aka Mary Fubbister), the Scottish woman who was the first non-Native woman in western Canada (1927a, p. 88). She disguised herself as a man and came to North America in a Hudson Bay ship to join her lover. She became pregnant and had her baby at Pembina, a North West Company fur trade post on the Red River (much to the surprise of Chief Factor, Alexander Henry).

The topic of inter-racial sexual relationships is generally avoided or dealt with in passing. For instance, the texts do not reveal that British Columbia Governor James Douglas' wife, Amelia Connolly was of mixed European and native background. In *The Canadian West*, Dickie (1927a) says, "Young Douglas had not been long at the fort when he fell in love with . . . the chief factor's daughter. It was looking high for a clerk; most of the men had to be content with Indian wives" (p. 134). Although her views may have differed from her male counterparts, Dickie was still a woman of her times.

It is not possible to state definitively that Donald Dickie's more sensitive treatment of women is due to the fact that she *was* a woman. If there were more female authors writing textbooks in the period, one might compare texts written by female authors with those written by males. However, given that Dickie was somewhat of an anomaly, this cannot be done. After all, George Wrong was male, and he also wrote somewhat sensitively about women.

Writers and queens: 1950s to 1970s

The period from the 1950s up to and including the 1970s in Canada was one of very gradual change in terms of women's social roles. Women were entering the paid labour force in this period, comprising 32.7 percent of the labour force by 1970. In spite of this, women continued to handle the vast majority of household duties. A study conducted in British Columbia in the 1970s revealed that, in the case of childless couples, a wife's entry into the paid labour force meant that her husband relieved her of domestic duties for an average of six minutes a week. Husbands who were also fathers contributed an extra hour per week (Luxton, 1986).

Women and girls continue to receive short shrift in textbooks. Those adult women who merit inclusion are usually writers or royalty. The four women

found in the popular text *A Nation Developping* (1970), which was prescribed for an eighteen year period, are all queens – not one of whom ever stepped onto Canadian soil. *Footprints in Time* (1962), a collection of primary source excerpts, has three references related to women: Temperance Societies, Queen Victoria, and Elizabeth Ward. Each is peripheral to the content of the text. Temperance Societies are mentioned in the introduction to a document which describes an unfortunate accident connected with excessive intake of alcohol at a building bee. Queen Victoria is mentioned because she set her seal on the Act of Parliament which created the Dominion of Canada. Elizabeth Ward is included only because she is the intended recipient of a letter from her husband, a segment of which is reproduced in the text.

Writers and queens find themselves in textbooks because they form the two groups of women about whom we have easily accessible records. It was usually men who took part in political affairs, who signed deeds and made wills. It was men who were visible. Women engaged in the behind-the-scenes activities which went unacknowledged in the public arena. Yet, it was women's care of home and hearth that provided the infrastructure which supported the visible activities of men.

The contributions of pioneer women to European settlement of Canada continue to receive little acknowledgement. As in the previous era, when women's contributions are acknowledged it is, for the most part, by female authors. There are more female authors in this period and more references to such contributions. *Ellen Elliott: A Pioneer*, a sample study text by Elizabeth Andrews (1972), is one such example. In this text about a family of Scottish immigrants to Canada, the focus is on a young girl's experiences. Edith Deyell (1958b), author of *Canada – The New Nation*, makes the following remarks about the daily activities of a "farmer's wife":

but every season still brought plenty of work. She had to do the spinning and the weaving, the churning and the baking, the sewing and the cleaning, and the preserving, pickling and soap-making. She traded her extra butter and eggs at the store for sugar, tea, hardware, and such clothing as she could not make. Never an idle moment for her or her daughters!
(pp. 19-20)

Donalda Dickie (1950) uses the phrase "forefathers and foremothers," (p. 464) a concept which is quite unique in this era. *Settlement of the West* by Rosemary Neering (1974) has a story about a family who has come to the Prairies from Ontario. Although the story focuses on the little boy of the family, it is the mother rather than the father who is the stronger influence in making the decision to stay when others in their group decide to return to Ontario.

Canadian history texts in this period show the same tendency as the earlier texts to avoid the topic of inter-racial marriage between white fur traders and

aboriginal women. One text manages to deal with this topic without focusing on it directly by including a photograph of "Trader McPherson and his family." It shows two European men and three aboriginal women, all dressed in European clothing. The caption coyly asks, "What nationalities are the people? Are they wearing everyday dress? What could their relationship be?" (Andrews, 1970, p. 23). The author seems to want to point out that this is an inter-racial marriage without explicitly saying so.

"Filler feminism." 1980s

J. Donald Wilson (1994) points to a new tolerance in Canadian society, beginning in the 1960s, which he attributes to "revulsion against Hitler's racism, the decline of close ties to Britain, and the impact of the American civil rights movement" (p. 8). This new tolerance was manifested in the establishment by 1975 of a human rights commission in every province. It included an evolving view of women and their roles in Canadian society. It also coincided with a second wave of feminism, known as the women's liberation movement. Women demanded social and economic reforms such as equal-pay legislation, paid maternity leave, and the removal of occupational barriers in the workplace. In 1967, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada was established with a broad mandate to examine women's place in Canadian society. Its 1970 recommendations set out a reform agenda for women's rights groups. The advent of the birth control pill, which was introduced to Canadian women in 1966, coincided with greater societal acceptance of married women working outside the home during their child-rearing years. These factors greatly contributed to the increased participation of women in the salaried workforce during this period. By 1983, the first year in which texts for a new British Columbia curriculum were being published, 41.5 percent of women were engaged in paid work, a substantial increase from 32.7 percent in 1970.

As newspaper headlines such as "Slanted Textbooks" (1967) and "Tell it the Way it Was" (1968) attest, beginning in the late 1960s there was huge public interest in the way in which Canada's changing social reality was being portrayed in textbooks. Textbook analyses were initiated by provincial departments of education, provincial human rights commissions, and university researchers, as well as women's and aboriginal groups. A major study was carried out as part of the mandate of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. This federal commission examined elementary reading, social studies, mathematics and guidance texts and concluded that "a woman's creative and intellectual potential is either underplayed or ignored in the education of children from their earliest years" (1970, p. 175). The depiction of various groups in textbooks was an early concern of the new provincial human rights commissions and at least four of these carried out textbook studies during the 1970s. Leela Mattu and Daniel Villeneuve

(1980) produced *Eliminating Group Prejudice in Social Studies Textbooks* for the Human Rights Commission of British Columbia.

In response to the findings of these studies, many provinces developed guidelines for authors and publishers. *Race, Religion, and Culture in Ontario School Materials: Suggestions for Authors and Publishers* (Ontario, 1980) is perhaps the most influential. Such guidelines became virtual bibles for publishers and aspiring textbook authors. In fact, *Race, Religion, and Culture* was greeted with the comment, “[It] virtually ensures the elimination of racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious bias in future Ontario textbooks” (Pratt, 1984, p. 155). Two decades later, this remark seems naive. It reflects the optimistic view, prevalent at the time, that bias-free texts were achievable, and that this achievement was a simple matter of locating such bias and rooting it out.

In all provinces, assessment procedures applied to textbooks had become much more rigorous by the 1980s. In British Columbia, textbook assessment involved four separate analyses: for instructional design, readability, social considerations, and curriculum match. It is the social considerations component which is relevant here. This analysis examined such areas as language usage, gender role portrayals, age portrayals, and references to belief systems, social class, and ethnic groups. The purpose was to “alert material selection committees, the Curriculum Development Branch and the Ministry of Education to potentially controversial and offensive elements in the materials” (1981, n.p.) It signaled a desire for a greater degree of inclusion in textbooks.

One would certainly expect to see profound changes in the depiction of women in textbooks published in the 1980s as a result of this increased attention to diversity within the broader society, and in connection with the increased scholarship in women’s history during this period. And certainly, great change is evident. However, it is not as consistent nor as profound as one might reasonably anticipate.

In British Columbia there is a marked disparity in this period between the elementary textbooks and the secondary. The secondary texts are strangely devoid of women and of discussion of gender-related issues. For instance, in *Thinking About Our Heritage* (1985), there are only three references to women (two queens and a saint) in the index and 81 references to men. In *Our Land: Building the West* (1987), there are only three references to women in its index: one to a writer, another to a queen and a general reference to “women in the labour force.” Only six illustrations feature women or include them as an important part of a scene with men. It is interesting to note that the Yukon Department of Education, which uses British Columbia curricula and textbooks, developed its own text called *Our Land, Too: Women of Canada and the Northwest, 1860-1914* (Moore, 1992) to supplement this book.

The elementary texts, on the other hand, make a concerted effort to include women in important ways, making texts of this period very different from those developed in the 1970s. These texts acknowledge the toil of pioneer women and the presence of white women at the Cariboo gold rush. *Canada: Building Our Nation* tells about a woman who started up a pie business, selling her pies from a tent; a washerwoman; a woman who accompanied her husband to work a mining claim; and a woman who planned to build her own hotel. The reader is also told about a woman who was traveling alone to the gold fields: "Our new friend had started out with a pack train but grew tired of waiting for the others. . . . She walked a little way with us and then went on ahead. She said we were too slow" (1985, p. 117). Such references are a far cry from the complete absence of women in the two texts about the gold rush in the previous period, *Gold Rush in the Cariboo* by Harper (1974) and *Gold Rush* by Neering (1974).⁸ These depictions of women as active participants in the Cariboo gold rush are supported by the later research of historian Sylvia Van Kirk (1992) who has pointed out that more women participated in the Cariboo gold rush "than has been appreciated and, although their numbers may have been few compared to that of their male counterparts, they had a role to play and an impact on the society out of all proportion to their numbers" (pp. 21-22).

The elementary texts acknowledge the crucial social and economic roles of aboriginal women in the fur trade. In *The Explorers: Charting the Canadian Wilderness* (1984), one of Anthony Henday's journals is described from the perspective of Grey Goose Woman, an imaginary name given by the author to an aboriginal woman who accompanied him. This 1984 text reflected scholarship which was very recent at the time: namely, Van Kirk's (1980) argument that extensive intermarriage among white fur traders and Native women "was 'the central social dynamic' (p. 21) of the western fur trade and that Native women played an important economic role in the fur trade which has received little notice in historical accounts.

In the secondary school texts, women's contributions are sometimes trivialized, as they were in the earlier periods. In a photograph of women at flight training school in Quebec during World War Two, found in a text by historian Desmond Morton (1988, p. 21), military women seem to be, as Jane Turner (1998) has pointed out, "sharing some girlish secret" (p. 43). The worth of women's contributions to Canada's military effort is negated by the visual image of women laughing and whispering together. As Turner says, "In no way would this picture disrupt traditionally held assumptions about women's role in society, even though the women are in a non-traditional job" (p. 43).

An earlier Ontario text, *In Search of Canada*, Vol. 2 (1977), provides a striking contrast. It contains a photo of a woman working in a factory dur-

ing the same war, in plain clothing and a hat to keep her hair out of the machinery. It is decidedly lacking in any kind of glamour (p. 179). This text also provides much more detail about the various roles which women assumed during the war than the British Columbia text.

Canadian history textbooks approved in Ontario during this period were far more equitable than those authorized in British Columbia. There is a more successful attempt to include women as part of the ongoing narrative, what might be called history from a human, rather than a solely male perspective. For example, *Discovering Canada: Settling a Land* (1982), an Ontario grade seven text, states that,

[Prior to the American Revolution] many colonies began boycotting high-priced British goods. They began making and buying their own goods. For example, a protest group of women, Daughters of Liberty, encouraged people to wear colonial-made clothing rather than the high quality British-made clothes. (p. 283)

This is not a peripheral depiction of women. This is what Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault (1987) would call a “history of gender” that is, “a search for the points where women’s and men’s experiences intersect” (p. 175). In histories of gender, private and public aspects of life are viewed as a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

It is interesting to note that the second book in this two-part set, *Discovering Canada: Developing a Nation* (1983), includes a conversation between John A. Macdonald’s rival, George Brown and his wife Anne Nelson, in which she helps Brown make a decision to form a coalition government with Macdonald.

Scene 2: A woman’s advice

“I cannot do it,” exclaimed the tall, red-haired man to the woman across the breakfast table. “I cannot work with the scalawag, John A. Macdonald!”

“George Brown, it may well be that John A. is a scalawag. But, many people vote for him. They say he is a practical man, a man of common sense. Like you, he works hard and gets things done.”

He is still a rascal, and I’m proud to have opposed him all these years.”

“So it’s your pride, is it? Are you going to let your pride get the better of you?”

“It’s not just my pride, Anne. What about the voters who supported my stand against John A. on so many things? Will they not think I have let them down?”

“You will just have to convince them that it is time for everybody to cooperate.” (p. 103).

This is a clever attempt to show that while women were not active in the political arena, they may well have been influential behind-the-scenes. Historian Gail Cuthbert Brandt (1992) has called for such an approach, using the example of women's activities at the Charlottetown and Quebec Conferences. She maintains that women provided the social glue during the many balls, dinners and excursions in which relationships among the male political leaders of the various colonies were cemented, ultimately leading to confederation. This role, as Brandt reminds us, is not normally acknowledged.

Historians Beth Light, Pat Staton, and Paula Bourne (1989) have pointed to a tendency in textbooks to blame female family members for men's faults and failures. In *Canada: Growth of a Nation*, the ill health of Isabella, wife of Canada's first Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, is identified as the root of his drinking problem. Because he felt a need to escape his unhappy home life, he began to visit taverns, thus developing a dependency on alcohol. They call this "blatantly wrong" (1980, p. 20).

The Ontario texts in this period provide more detail about many aspects of women's lives than the BC texts. This difference may result from the greater emphasis on social history found in the Ontario curriculum. It may also be a result of the research interests of the particular authors involved. Desmond Morton, for instance, although a social historian, does not necessarily include women's history among his particular research interests. The difference is not related to male or female authorship, since the textbook authors in both provinces were almost solely male. However, with respect to the highly innovative BC elementary texts, one can point to the profound influence of Carol Langford, a BC teacher who conceptualized, and then took on the immense task of spearheading the development of a series of new textbooks from grades one to grade six, for publisher Douglas & McIntyre (Educational). Individuals, when placed in key roles, can make a difference.

In spite of sincere attempts on the part of the elementary textbook authors and publishers to include women, the textbooks display three approaches which seem curiously resistant to reform efforts and historical scholarship. Females continue to operate in limited ways. Idealized versions of gender roles are presented. Females are frequently presented off to the side, both actually and metaphorically, of the main story.

The concern about the limited roles played by females in textbooks was expressed best in 1987 by then *Globe & Mail* columnist, June Callwood. She quoted a former textbook editor as saying, "Every jet pilot has to be female. . . . and I don't think you can find a book any more in which a little girl cries. They've all got to be tough as nails" (1987, p. A2). Related to this is the tendency to feature women who are 'larger-than-life'. The portrayal of Mrs. Temple, an early Grand Forks settler, in a grade three text, *Exploring*

British Columbia's Past (1983), is an example. This woman not only farmed successfully without a male partner, but introduced several agricultural innovations which were adopted by other farmers in the area. She is certainly not a typical pioneer, male or female. Nor is the woman in *Canada: Building Our Nation* who found the pace of the male travellers to the Cariboo gold rush too slow. It seems more important that the contributions of so-called 'ordinary' women be recognized than that the texts present unlikely, and perhaps even unappealing, models for students to emulate.

Women, when included, are often relegated to sidebars. This approach has been disparagingly referred to as "filler feminism" (Lerner, et al., 1995, p. 55). Women are highlighted in boxes separated from the ongoing narrative of the textbook. While this has the effect of increasing the number of women listed in the book's index (useful when provincial and school district textbook selection committees count), it conveys the message that women are peripheral to the core narrative.

Concluding comments

Jane Austen (1817/1975) once had a character observe: "[History] tells me nothing that does not either vex me or weary me . . . the men are all so good for nothing and hardly any women at all" (p. 96). The comment rings true (at least as far as women are concerned) in history textbooks an ocean away and across two centuries of time. In Canadian history texts published up to the end of the 1980s, the focus is on the exploits of white males. The tasks of newcomer females are not acknowledged as contributing to the building of the nation (the predominant theme of the texts). With some exceptions, aboriginal women receive short shrift as well.

Canadian history textbooks approved in British Columbia resonate with silences related to women and women's lives. They are silent about how women have exercised agency, both for themselves and on behalf of others, in response to the political, social, cultural and economic contexts in which they have found themselves. They are mostly silent about women's role in community building, their involvement in activities and organizations which relieved the isolation of rural women, built community cohesion among both men and women, helped members of the community in material ways, and achieved social change. They rarely do more than mention in passing the work of national and international organizations built on female membership, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the International Order of the Daughters of the Empire, The Young Women's Christian Association, the Woman's Institutes, or the National Council of Women. Nor do they discuss women's public work in their own communities.

A second silence is about women's paid labour in both the public and the domestic spheres. Throughout the past century many women worked in

salaried occupations such as teacher, librarian, nurse, secretary, store clerk, and telephone or telegraph operator for at least part of their lives. Such occupations receive little recognition in the texts. Many women also engaged in paid labour outside the periphery of the official economy. These women took part in informal and often unrecorded economic transactions such as midwifery, the sale of farm products, the spinning and weaving of cloth, the sewing of garments and the teaching of neighbours' children. These transactions formed a crucial part of the economic structure and division of labour on which communities relied.

With the exception of some passages in texts by female authors, they are silent about women's unpaid labour in the domestic sphere. They rarely mention the unrelenting daily toil of pioneer women, the cooking, baking, sewing, knitting, mending, and the planting of kitchen gardens. They are also silent about living life without adequate means of birth control, the very real danger of maternal death during and following childbirth, the high rates of infant mortality, and the burden of providing medical care to family members and neighbours. Such realities of many women's day-to-day existence are simply not explored. They are silent, too, about women's work behind-the-scenes of major political events in which men took centre-stage roles.

The crucial question which must be addressed here is why is there such a gap between recent historical scholarship about women and what appears on the pages of textbooks. I offer five factors which may, together, form an explanation for this gap. The first is that historians no longer write textbooks intended for elementary and secondary schools. At one time such a pastime was actually in vogue. Witness the work of historians A.L. Burt, George Wrong, and Duncan McArthur among others in the first period, followed by Arthur Dorland, W.G. Hardy and Blair Fraser among others in the second. In the third period, Desmond Morton is the only academic historian to be found.⁹ The finger points in two directions. University tenure and promotion policies have changed over time, at present giving academics little credit for contributing to school textbooks. Accompanying this trend has been a concerted and successful effort among BC teachers for involvement in textbook authorship.¹⁰ I believe that collaboration between teachers and historians would enrich textbook content.

Second, publishers choose textbook authors for their familiarity with provincial curricula and with pedagogy, rather than with their historical scholarship. Textbook writers tend to emerge from the ranks of teachers who are visible because they are active in the provincial social studies teacher association or who have done contract work for the Ministry of Education. For teachers, the incentives are the satisfaction of a different kind of professional challenge, public recognition (which they do not often receive through their daily work), and financial remuneration over and above their usual salary.¹¹

Third, textbooks are not written in a vacuum; they are written to support a provincial curriculum. The provincial curriculum has always been predicated on a nation-building framework and I will provide one example to support this statement. The 1985 *Social Studies Curriculum Guide, Grade Eight-Grade Eleven* lists five understandings and skills that students should acquire as a result of a focus on Confederation in grade ten: “identify and describe the events which led to the demand for responsible government; describe the achievement of responsible government; list and explain the factors which led to Confederation; describe the nature of the Confederation agreement; describe the major changes to Confederation since 1867” (pp. 54-55). With a list of intended outcomes such as this, it is a wonder that any women at all found their way into the texts written to support the curriculum! As long as the curriculum is based on a nation-building framework, the textbooks written to support it will be as well. Therefore, the onus is on provincial Ministries of Education to ensure that curriculum policy documents reflect current historical scholarship.

Fourth, while many historians have encouraged “the abandonment of synthesis as an unattainable goal” (McKay, 2000, p. 621), this is precisely what textbook writers are required to do in order to meet curriculum goals. It is a daunting task to deal with hundreds of years of Canadian history, including aboriginal and European perspectives, women, other ethnic groups, and to do it all in two to three hundred pages. It is no wonder that textbooks are criticized for being superficial and for omitting people and perspectives.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that there will likely always be a lag between the forefront of historical scholarship and what appears in textbooks. Part of the problem in this regard is the length of time for which textbooks are approved for use in classrooms. For example, textbooks approved to support the 1968 secondary social studies curriculum maintained their status until 1985, when a new curriculum was finally put in place. Even a textbook which may have been relatively current in its interpretations at the time of publication will certainly no longer be so seventeen years later. We will not even venture into the murky waters of the length of time some textbooks continue to be used in schools beyond the expiration of their approval status.

Textbooks present an approved and even ‘official’ version of how young people are intended to understand their world. They reflect the prevailing views of the historical period in which they are written and selected by the state educational apparatus, for use in schools. As such, they provide fascinating evidence of change – but also of continuity – in the ways in which women’s place in the broader Canadian society has been remembered over time.

What is most striking is how meagerly the textbooks reflect both feminist scholarship and societal changes. The texts of female authors Donald Dickie in the first era, and Edith Deyell in the second, are, in many ways, as inclu-

sive of females as texts in the last era examined, which followed a period of intense attention to issues of equity and representation in texts. While there is no doubt that “filler feminism” resulted in the addition of females, it is often done in superficial, limiting and even demeaning ways. By the late 1980s textbooks had not come as far as might be reasonably expected.

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NOTES

1. A District Senior High School Social Studies Teacher, “Unedited Mimeographed Copy of Original Material Submitted to Compilers of Brief for Board of School Trustees (Trail), Brief #93. Board of School Trustees, Trail, October 24, 1958, pp. 3-4. PABC, GR 683, Box 1, File 15.
2. Gerald Friesen uses Elizabeth Goudie’s memoir in his book, *Citizens and Nation* (2000).
3. The Reference List includes only those textbooks referred to in the article.
4. Two of Dickie’s Canadian History Readers, *The Canadian West* and *The Long Trail*, were listed in Department of Education Textbook Catalogues or Programmes of Study from 1927 to 1968. Her text with Helen Palk, *Pages From Canada’s Story*, was listed from 1931 to 1968.
5. An exception to this was at grades four and five, where two textbooks from two competing companies, Douglas & McIntyre (Educational) and Prentice-Hall Canada, were prescribed for each grade and schools selected one pair or the other and then received class sets of the two texts.
6. A 1918 survey of Canadian urban school systems by W.L. Richardson (1921) identified 20 textbooks published by the Education Department of Ontario, with a total of 42 authorizations in other provinces. Also, the British Columbia edition of early Canadian history texts often had a few chapters tacked onto the end of an Ontario text, following the original Index. These chapters often repeated written content and even photographs contained in the main part of the text. For example, in its British Columbia Supplement, I. Gammell’s *History of Canada* (1921) repeats photographs of Governor James Douglas, explorer Simon Fraser, and fur trader John McLoughlin, which had been used just a few pages earlier in the main body of the text.
7. The one exception was *Exploration Canada* by Paul Collins and Norman Sheffe. Published in 1979 by Oxford University Press, this was the only existing text prescribed to support the new curriculum. The rest were written in the 1980s specifically for the curriculum.
8. *Gold Rush in the Cariboo* (Harper, 1974) mentions “one married couple” (p. 16) who were part of the Overlanders group.
9. In the first period, all seven comprehensive textbooks examined were written by historians. Donald Dickie, who was a Normal School Instructor, wrote the other seven texts, which were collections of stories and accounts on specific topics. In the second period, six of the 12 comprehensive texts were written by historians. The other six such texts were written by professors in faculties of education and Normal Schools. I am unfamiliar with the majority of the authors of the 20 sample study texts in this period. However, Rosemary Neering, who wrote all five of the books examined in the Growth of a Nation series, is a professional writer. Of the ten books in the third period, historian Desmond Morton wrote one. Others were written by secondary school social studies teachers, a college instructor, and professional writers.

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10. The Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association *Brief #149* and the Vancouver Secondary School Teachers' Association *Brief #328* both made the recommendation that teachers be involved in textbook authorship to the 1960 Chant Commission. The Chilliwack District Teachers' Association *Brief #113* recommended that school boards grant teachers leaves of absence in order to write texts. (PABC, GR 683, Box 16)
11. The comments in this paragraph are based on my personal experience as a textbook author and my observations regarding the selection of other authors.

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