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BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Wendy Robbins, Meg Luxton, Margrit Eichler,  
and Francine Descarries, eds.  
*Minds of Our Own: Inventing Feminist  
Scholarship and Women's Studies in  
Canada and Québec, 1966–76.*

Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 2008. 408 pp.

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This is a collection of retrospective essays written by some of the women and men responsible for bringing Women's Studies programs to Canadian and Quebec universities. The collection is patterned after *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from 30 Founding Mothers* which documents the emergence of Women's Studies in American universities. The Canadian version, reviewed here, spans a ten-year period when Women's Studies was emerging in Canada and Quebec. The account by Greta Hofmann Nemiroff entitled "You Just Had to Be There" struck a strong cord with me. It is difficult to convey to those entering Women's Studies today what it was like to work within an emerging discipline with few resources and often a hostile environment. Jill Ker Conway and Natalie Zemon Davis speak to the fact that in attempting to develop a Women's Studies course they had "no model to follow, no pre-existing syllabus" (82). Micheline Dumont describes her struggle to write the history of Quebec women without any archival materials. She overcame the problem by undertaking interviews.

While the material available in the early days was sparse, as I surveyed the list of the forty-six contributors, I was reminded of how dependent those of us teaching Women's Studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s were on materials that had been produced by the women represented in this collection. Books such as Marylee Stephenson's *Women in Canada* and Marguerite Andersen's *Mother Was Not a Person* (1972); journals such as *Resources for Feminist Research*; and collections such as *Women at Work, 1850–1930* (1974), were fundamental to our teaching. Soon other material

would join the list. *Canadian Woman Studies/Les cahiers de la femme*; collections such as Micheline Dumont, Michèle Jean, Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddard's *L'Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles* (1982); *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement* (1983) co-edited by Linda Briskins and Lynda Yanz; and Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff's *The Neglected Majority* (1985) would join a growing list of resources.

I was touched in many ways as I read the accounts of these women. The diversity in experience of the various authors is marked, reflecting no doubt the differing political and social milieu in which they worked in Canadian and Quebec universities in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Certainly, the personal accounts of the people involved in the early Women's Studies movement are central to this book, but the introduction and the conclusion should be essential reading for anyone connected with Women's Studies. For those who were not there, or are too young to know, these sections emphasize that there was a time in Canada and Quebec when women could be denied employment or fired if they married, when birth control and abortion were illegal, and as Sandra Pyke tells it, when a married woman could only get credit in the name of her husband, when the ideology of marriage and motherhood had a powerful hold on women, when pay discrimination based on sex was legal, when women's education was narrowly defined, when Aboriginal women's experiences were all but ignored, and a time when sexual orientation was openly viewed as deviant. For those who were part of the Women's Studies revolution in the ten years covered here or who came to the discipline in its early years, these two chapters allow us to reflect on the many limitations women accepted. The emergence of Women's Studies shows that some women were willing to challenge the status quo.

Contributors raised a number of important questions many of which cannot be fully answered even now. For example, has Women's Studies achieved what many of the pioneers hoped that it would? Greta Nemiroff Hoffman envisioned that Women's Studies would "change the disciplines and 'feminize' the university" (138) and even bring about the social, political and economic equality of women. Certainly great gains have been made but issues such as women's poverty and violence against women, particularly that of Aboriginal and disabled women remain largely ignored within our society.

Other contributors are concerned with the fact that many new faculty in Women's Studies came not through experience in the rough and tumble of a dynamic women's movement, or participation in grass roots organizations, as they had, but rather came to a university teaching career through the discipline itself. They will not be denied tenure because of their association with Women's Studies as was the experience of Marylee Stephenson and Meredith Kimball. Linda Briskin queries whether institutional pressures placed on new faculty may force them to make choices about the degree to which they can make links with community-based women's movements and the discipline will be the poorer for it.

To think that we who are in Women's Studies can rest on the work of those who have gone before us is naïve at best. Terry Crowley's account of establishing Women's Studies at the University of Guelph is particularly ironic. Just this past spring the

Senate there approved the administration's proposal to cancel the Women's Studies program.

This collection of short memoirs reviews the work of many of the women and men who pioneered the discipline of Women's Studies in Canada and Quebec. The editors admit that it is not a perfect document. Some of the people involved have not been included for a number of reasons. But it is an important resource for anyone who needs to be reminded about what the 1960s and 1970s were like for women in Canada and Quebec and particularly for those who want to know more about the people who were passionate about women's equality in the university. Women's Studies today is a strong, viable discipline in most Canadian and Quebec universities. Threats to its existence will arise, but today's generation of Women's Studies faculty can look to their fore mothers as role models and will be able to tackle the challenges with courage.