

over time. These trends and perspectives Shore presents in her introduction to the collection, but even here there is a sense that in attempting to deal with the diversity of subject matter and approaches, the editor deals with each article on an ad hoc basis, with the result that one “loses the forest in the trees.”

These criticisms aside, the collection does show how the writing of Canadian history has evolved over time. The debate takes different turns but always returns to the central issue: to what extent the nation should be the focal point of Canadian history. That question alone has ensured that the writing of Canadian history will continue to be alive and well, at least among Canadian professional historians. Whether their writings will percolate down to the general public is another question – and one that will never be answered definitely because professional historians do not agree among themselves whether this should even be a concern.

This book will be of interest to instructors of Canadian history as a way of introducing students to trends in the writing of Canadian history, and to the debates that have informed the subject. It will be useful in making students aware of the dynamics of the subject of Canadian history.

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**Sharon Anne Cook, Lorna R. McLean, and Kate O'Rourke, eds. *Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. Pp. 495.**

*Framing Our Past: Canadian Women's History in the Twentieth Century* documents women's diverse experiences and contributions to Canadian society in the twentieth century; while it is academic and “rooted in the archival” and photographic record, it aims to tell women's stories and women's history “to a wide readership” (p. xxiii). The book is organized thematically, with an introductory essay on each section establishing the context for “diverse papers, vignettes, and images” (p. xxvi). As the editors admit, the book makes no effort to cover “each decade or every major historical event” of the twentieth century. Instead it implicitly challenges the traditional (male) time lines of historical

inquiry on the premise that women's lives were not compartmentalized or determined by national events, but "proceeded according to their own and their families' rhythms" (p. xxvii). The thematic sections, moreover, are mutable and overlapping, a fact that illustrates the blurred "boundaries of women's multiple tasks, activities and pleasures" (p. xxvii). Finally, while the contributions to this collection demonstrate the systemic barriers that women faced, they also celebrate the myriad ways by which "women persevered and found ways to achieve their objectives" (p. xxvii).

In her introduction to the first thematic section of the book, "Living Women's Lives," Veronica Strong-Boag explores the diversity of female culture as expressed in "such varied sites as artists' studios, the stage, the shop, women's clubs, religious communities and sports venues" (p. 3). The essays and images that follow document intimate relations between mothers, daughters, and extended kin, friendships forged in classrooms, workplaces, churches, and cultural groups, shared rituals and customs of diverse communities, and the artifacts – artistic and utilitarian – that women created. The histories of clothing clubs in Newfoundland (p. 7) and the Winnipeg Women's Reading Club (p. 10), accounts of missionary experiences (p. 27) and cloistered religious communities (p. 22), biographies of visual artists (pp. 45, 48), writers (pp. 36, 40), and craftswomen (pp. 54, 60, 62), all illustrate the diversity of women's communities and women's culture.

The second thematic section of the book, "Family and the Home," is introduced by Cynthia Comacchio. Family as concept, she asserts, "is so closely bound to women's role and status that, until very recently, few dared to question the assumed, exclusive, biological, universal understanding of woman-as-mother" (p. 75). The model of family life with a "male breadwinner and a dependent, stay-at-home wife" (p. 75) was based on Victorian middle-class ideals of selfless female devotion to husband and children. The biography of Madame Laurier, the first essay in this section, illustrates the challenges that even well-to-do women faced in meeting the demands of this ideal. Despite the force of the male breadwinner family model (and its concomitant angel of the house), Canadian women have always "contributed significantly to the family economy" (p. 75). This theme is documented in vignettes outlining the daily challenges of frontier living (pp. 86, 96). Articles exploring the impact of domestic technology on women's lives (p. 101) and the role of experts in child-rearing (pp. 134, 139) illustrate that despite new opportunities for work and leisure, the

emphasis on motherhood did not decline. Modern mothers “were supposed to study instruction manuals, attend domestic science and parenting classes, and heed the advice of doctors and other experts, largely men” (p. 77). These ideals of family life could be both oppressive and exclusionary. As Ruth Haywood argues in her article about single motherhood in Newfoundland, women without male breadwinners, however well they mothered their children, raised them “under the most difficult of circumstances” (p. 128).

In the third section of the book, “Teaching and Learning,” Nicole Neatby asserts that “schools and most universities only reluctantly opened their doors to women as teachers, professors and students, and when they did, the classroom often continued to perpetuate negative, confining stereotypes about women’s abilities and social roles” (p. 149). Articles and images in this section confirm the importance of young women in rural, primary education (p. 150). Moreover, despite reluctance to expose male students to female teachers at the high school level, expanding enrolments and financial constraints forced school boards to hire increasing numbers of women (p. 170). As further articles and biographies in this section attest, women also struggled for acceptance in institutions of higher learning (p. 166) and, once admitted, faced considerable prejudice and the widespread belief that they were not the equals of their male colleagues (p. 166). Vignettes also remind us that the curriculum, particularly in physical education, was consistently different for girls than for boys (pp. 189, 194). In a context in which women were long excluded from formal education, many children and adults learned outside the classroom environment; valuing and examining education in private and voluntary associations expands the scope of educational, and women’s, history (pp. 178, 184).

Similarly, women were politically active, even when such activity occurred outside the formal corridors of power. Joan Sangster asserts in her introduction to “Women’s Activism and the State” that the “word politics sometimes conjures up images of suffragists in long skirts presenting petitions demanding the franchise for women” (p. 201). Obtaining the vote was an important symbol of women’s admission into the formal body politic, but women, before and after the achievement of suffrage, worked in myriad ways to influence or initiate state policies. As political biographies of Agnes Macphail and Charlotte Whitton illustrate (pp. 212, 232) women’s politics were “shaped by class, race, ethnicity and culture; their political causes varied considerably, crossing a spectrum of political ideologies” (p. 204).

While Macphail and Whitton were elected representatives of the people, the activities of women at the grassroots level were also political. For both the communist and social democratic parties, as Joan Sangster illustrates, the organization of housewives was an important goal throughout the twentieth century; moreover, although their demands were not incorporated fully into party doctrine, women made radical demands for gender equality (p. 240). Across many political parties, “women expressed a keen interest in issues that spoke to their daily work and worries, including their responsibility for child rearing and management of the household budget” (p. 206). Perhaps because of their connection to children, women have been disproportionately active in peace movements in this country (pp. 248, 259). Often, however, women remained divided on lines of class and ethnicity (p. 263). As the final essays in this section suggest, our definition of political action must be expanded. Even when denied formal political power, women have protested and continue to do so, through art, literature, and performance (pp. 267, 271).

In the introduction to the fifth section of the book, “Health Care and Science,” Wendy Mitchinson asserts that by the beginning of the twentieth century “science had become a major arbiter of truth in Canada” and that “medicine shared in the growing prestige of science” (p. 277). Not only did science and medicine historically define women as inferior to men, until the twentieth century women were largely excluded from the halls of scientific and medical learning. When women persevered and received training in these fields, they faced discrimination in the workplace and ghettoization in particular areas of study and practice. Essays and vignettes in this section illustrate the importance of women’s work in informal health projects (pp. 284, 287), the challenges and successes of individual women who succeeded in non-traditional fields (pp. 305, 308, 311), and the emergence of nursing and physiotherapy as professions largely populated by women (pp. 289, 295, 300).

In the final section of the book, “Earning Their Bread,” the questions of what is (women’s) work, “who did it, what it meant, and how it was done” (p. 319) are explored. A wide variety of occupations and experiences are described. Through vignettes and essays on domestic servants (pp. 333, 336), millinery workers (p. 348), telephone operators (p. 376), wartime factory workers (p. 409), Newfoundland fishery workers (p. 343), Italian-Canadian couturiers (p. 366), and Japanese-Canadian dressmakers (p. 359), the productive lives of ordinary Canadian women – within and

outside the formal paid economy – are examined. Extraordinary successes are also illustrated. Portraits of diverse broadcasters and journalists (pp. 378, 381, 385), engineers (p. 396), and foreign aid workers (p. 417) underscore the complexity of the work lives of Canadian women and the challenges that women faced in traditionally male-dominated occupations.

As the editors of *Framing Our Past* admit, the book is not “completely representative of the total experience of twentieth-century Canadian women” (p. xxiii). Their vignettes, photographs, and essays are limited by the “constraints of formal archival collections” (p. xxiii). Although considerable effort is made throughout this collection to include material about non-dominant social groups and “to recover the lives of ordinary people” (p. xxiii), white, English-speaking, heterosexual women, particularly successful and famous women, remain prominent. Traditional historical periodization is challenged, and definitions of work, family, politics, health, culture, and teaching are interrogated and expanded; however, important topics – sexuality, law, race relations, religion, language, and ethnicity – are given little attention. Some women will see themselves much more clearly in this description of our collective past than will others. While there are limitations in the inclusiveness of the subject matter, *Framing Our Past* successfully bridges the all-too-often great divide between academe and the public; it is accessible, inviting, and informative. This collection deserves an extensive and appreciative readership and will be found on course syllabi as well as coffee tables.

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**Mary Hilton and Pam Hirsch, eds. *Practical Visionaries: Women, Education, and Social Progress, 1790-1930*. Harlow, England: Longman, 2000. Pp. 252.**

*Practical Visionaries: Women, Education, and Social Progress, 1790-1930* is a book that is long overdue. Its thirteen essays, written by educational researchers at Homerton College, Cambridge, and at other British universities, focus on the efforts of