

## **Women's History at UNB Saint John**

Elizabeth McGahan

Volume 33, numéro 2, spring 2004

URI : [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad33\\_2for06](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad33_2for06)

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

### Éditeur(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

### ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

### Citer ce document

McGahan, E. (2004). Women's History at UNB Saint John. *Acadiensis*, 33(2), 83–86.

be put off by a strong, clear statement of our convictions. For my own part, I am grateful that my women's history courses still include at least a handful of women students who have declared that they are feminists, and who are active in feminist causes at UNB. It is possible that the proportion of such students has declined over the years, but, if so, the decline has been slight. All our women's history courses have a few male alumni; I believe the proportion of male students in such courses has stayed at less than ten per cent.

Of course, the original hope of the first instructors of women's studies courses as well as of women's history courses was that the need for separate courses on women would gradually disappear, that women's experience would be an equal component with men's in all courses. We hoped that we could have a thoroughly human discipline in which both sexes/both genders would be equally well-studied and understood. My survey of the origins of the teaching of women's history at this university must recognise that, all along, our social historians have worked towards this end, and that the development of a cultural studies approach to history has also meant the incorporation of women's experience into standard courses. Women are as much part of the curriculum in such courses as men. As Lianne McTavish has said of her undergraduate teaching: she offers a lot of courses, and among them "there is no course in which women have not played a significant role". Of course, the prize is not yet won. There is still much to be sought and demanded for this branch of the historical discipline, and there is always room for improvement. But women's history is well-established at UNB and should enjoy a very bright future.

This fact was reinforced by the appointment of Linda Kealey in 2002. Then, a few months after that event, we gained the appointment of the Canada Research Chair of Atlantic Canada Studies. The appointment of Margaret Conrad, earlier the holder of the Nancy Rowell Jackman Chair of Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University, has been a most obvious triumph for women's history at UNB as well as for other aspects of the broader discipline of history. She stands – and is content to stand – as a beacon to our commitment to the practice of women's history. That practice was initiated long before her arrival on this scene.

D. GILLIAN THOMPSON

### Women's History at UNB Saint John

THE LATE DR. ANN GORMAN CONDON INTRODUCED women's history at the University of New Brunswick, Saint John (UNB Saint John) in 1982, 18 years after history courses were first offered as a campus endeavour. Women's history built on the remarkable expansion of courses following the introduction of a majors program in the late 1970s, and also contributed to the establishment of the honours program by the early 1990s. These advances were achieved through the efforts of a small but committed group of historians, as the journey towards programme development in all disciplines on the Saint John campus proved challenging.

In September 1964, after years of city-based lobbying to establish a university, UNB Saint John began conducting classes in assorted downtown locations, anchored by Beaverbrook House. Five years later, in 1969, the Tucker Park campus opened

overlooking the magnificent Kennebecasis River. The contrast in locales for program delivery mirrored the changes taking place in the wider city. By 1967 amalgamation increased Saint John's size to 103 square miles and almost doubled its population. Urban renewal in the late 1960s eliminated some of the worst housing in Canada, and the city's first high-rise building was constructed at the foot of historic King Street. Much of the 1963 Byrne Commission's recommendations regarding the delivery of services to New Brunswickers were beginning to be implemented through the Robichaud government's Equal Opportunity Program. It was an exciting time in the city's history. Against this background of enormous change the Tucker Park campus afforded UNB Saint John a physical base on which to establish its profile within the provincial university system.

In its own way, programme development was as contentious as securing a university presence had been. The first Deutsch Report in 1962 recommended UNB Saint John be a full-time branch of the main campus in Fredericton, offering first- and second-year programmes, "with further development" pending needs and resources.<sup>1</sup> The university *Calendar's* History section in the early 1970s listed historians for each campus, indicating under "Saint John Campus Faculty" those members teaching at UNB Saint John. Courses listed in the *Calendar* noted those which were "offered also at UNBSJ". The History complement on campus grew from one proposed member at the opening in 1964 to three by the early 1970s.

Several changes occurred in the first few years following the 1973 appointment of a dean of faculty at Saint John. Within two years a divisional structure emerged and History became a part of the Division of Humanities and Languages, which also comprised Classics and Ancient History, English, German, Humanities, Philosophy and Romance Languages. This reorganization was accompanied by the introduction of a four-year program leading to a B.A. in "20th-Century Studies in the Humanities", followed the next year with an additional major, "Literatures of the West". These initial interdisciplinary majors programs focussed on building upon the combined strengths of individual disciplines within a particular division while not duplicating programs offered at UNB Fredericton.

A second Deutsch report in the mid-1970s recommended the introduction of pure majors and eventually the interdisciplinary thrust was dropped. By this time History was offering eight six-credit courses during the academic year, three of which were at the third-year level. The number of course offerings remained fairly constant until the late 1970s when an increase in the number of historians at UNB Saint John as well as changes in personnel resulted in a wider selection of courses. By 1978 history was one of the ten four-year arts degree programmes available at Saint John. Courses in history reflected the development of the discipline elsewhere, with an increasing number becoming three-credit offerings. There were now six full-year (six-credit) courses and fourteen half-year (three-credit) courses being offered at UNB Saint John as a consequence of the rigorous curriculum development undertaken by the disciplinary unit.

With a History major in place, and reflecting her own research interests,<sup>2</sup> Dr.

1 Ian Cameron, *Program development and enrollment growth at the UNB Saint John Campus (1964-1898)* (Saint John, 1989), p. 1.

2 Eliza A. Otis, *Architects of our fortunes: the journal of Eliza A.W. Otis, 1860-1863 with letters and Civil War journal of Harrison Gray Otis*, edited and with an introduction by Ann Gorman Condon (San Marion, CA, 2001).

Condon developed "Women in Europe and North America", noting in the course description that the "medieval and renaissance experience will form the background for a closer scrutiny of women's history on the North American frontier, during the Industrial Revolution, and in modern urban society". Fondly remembered as a gifted and popular instructor, Dr. Condon introduced her students to the classic works in the field, and encouraged them to undertake research papers to deepen their appreciation of women's history as well as to understand its place within the discipline. Dr. Condon was sensitive to the role of UNB Saint John as a pioneering venture in a city where many of the students were the first in their families to seek a university education. I recall several conversations when she spoke of the importance of including discussions on urban society in her women's history classes to engage her Saint John students more fully in gender issues.

UNB Saint John was then, and still is, very much a part of the local community.<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 1985 when Dr. Dorothy Smith, a sociologist at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, delivered the annual Pacey lecture, titled "Gender and Power", the Honourable Elsie Wayne, then serving as mayor of Saint John and also the first woman to hold that office, was invited to attend. In what the student newspaper described as "a highlight of the evening", Mayor Wayne challenged the speaker's assertions about the impact of gender in political life, countering that "the important things are the issues and concerns at hand, not the gender of the person representing them". Clearly, for the student reporter in attendance, the exchange during question period was as significant as the speaker's comments.

Later that same term, Dr. Condon and Dr. Gary Worrell organized a joint session on women in sport with students participating from Dr. Condon's "Women in Europe and North America" and Dr. Worrell's "Sociology of Sport" classes. That session also focussed on gender-based stereotyping, particularly as it applied to women in sports. The student debate moved from women in sport to "the role women play in society". The combined history/sociology session and other debates emanating from Dr. Condon's subsequent women's history courses remain legendary in the recollections of her students.

Women's history at UNB Saint John resonated not just with History majors, but also spoke to a particular segment of the student body. By the mid-1980s the registrar, Dr. Barry Beckett, remarked on the increased enrollment of single-parent mothers. The city of Saint John contained then, and does today, one of the highest percentages of single-parent family units in Canada. UNB Saint John's integrated program of full-time and part-time students, as opposed to a separate extension program for part-time people, produced an urban student body drawn from a wide demographic base and possessing a diverse range of life experiences. The composition of the student body had also convinced Dr. Condon that women's history belonged in the curriculum.

Continued growth at UNB Saint John – 500 students by 1976 and 1000 by 1985 – witnessed the evolution of a departmental structure on campus in 1992. History moved from being one of many disciplines within the Division of Humanities and Languages to one of two disciplines in the newly created Department of History and

3 Peter McGahan, *The 'Quiet Campus' A history of the University of New Brunswick in Saint John, 1959-1969* (Fredericton, 1998).

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

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

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

ELIZABETH W. McGAHAN

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

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

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

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