

## Introduction

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# Introduction

by Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer

This collection of articles on the history of women and education reveals the diversity and complexity of women's educational experiences in Ontario. They demonstrate the ways in which women have shaped and been shaped by educational institutions, government programs, public norms, and local community needs. Examining the lives of women educators living in Ontario, broadly considered, provides an important lens into the gendered hierarchy found in educational arenas, public and private, and reveals the ways in which state regulations provided opportunities as well as restrictions to women's professional and personal lives. The women featured in this collection faced a number of challenges in balancing their careers as educators with demands in their private and community lives. Although representing different communities and centered within different beliefs, they share a number of practices that reflect the adaptive strategies they developed in order to navigate the barriers that stood in the way of their success. Their commitment to their work, their families, and their communities, also provide us with a stronger understanding of the ways in which women negotiated with authorities to achieve their goals. Their negotiations involved school or museum boards, institutional authorities, or governments, that challenged

their initiatives and work, and which left them with limited resources or support. Despite this, or maybe because of it, the individual women and women's organizations presented in this journal were extremely successful at making change. Their historical importance is clear; they provide us with a better understanding of the work of women to improve education in the province of Ontario and the ways in which their work has altered the educational landscape.

Scholars have traced the ways in which school systems controlled and directed the learning and working opportunities for female students and women teachers. Published research on the history of women and education in Ontario began in the 1970s with the work of Alison Prentice who led the way with *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* in 1977, followed by an edited collection with Margaret Theobald in 1991 and *The History of Women and Education in Canada* in 1992. A two-volume collection, *Feminism and Education*, was published in the early 1990s by the Centre for Women's Studies in Education at OISE/University of Toronto, and included a wide range of education scholars. Current scholarship in the field explores new terrains, with edited collections by Rebecca Coulter and Helen Harper, scholarship by Kris-

tina Llewellyn, and my own UofT PhD dissertation, published as chapters in various book collections.<sup>11</sup> These collections incorporated oral histories; narratives of women's oppression and victimization by gender stereotypes that forced them into traditional restricted roles, countered by their heroic resistance and search for agency. These essays here are doing something more, as they focus away from educational institutions, to what lay beyond or in addition to the institution; towards communities. First Nations communities, networks of women educators and their own communities have provided through time, by women's knowledge of age-old homemaking energy-related practices, or deep cultural practices, new and interesting perspectives on what education meant to women, and the ways in which systems of education intersected with women's lives.

Education systems reflect a wide range of ideological perspectives: regional and national economic, social and political pressures that are subject to the changing influence of societal norms and state narratives. Shifts in curriculum and school policies reflect social and political changes that took place in regions across the province, and country. Historically, public educational opportunities for girls and women in Canada have been restricted by governments that have argued that women's "proper sphere" was in the home. However women have successfully manipulated discriminatory policies that placed restrictions on their actions and opportunities for advancement, by developing a keen ability to work both within

and separate from masculine dominated systems. The scholars' articles included here incorporate a wide range of sources that expose different narratives, including official narratives from governments and institutions, as well as non-traditional sources such as oral histories. Teaching practice, for example is an area underrepresented in official educational documents, but oral history, as a methodology, can provide valuable insight into the individual experiences omitted or marginalized from formal archival records. The oral histories allow us to better understand how women saw themselves as professionals within gendered hierarchal structures and expose how issues of gender, race and class affected their status and position within their work and communities.

Ontario women educators have worked as teachers within public and private schools, and within their homes and communities. Two articles in this collection explore the specific experiences of First Nations women educators. **Brittany Luby and Kathryn Labelle** explore the educational experiences of Matilda (Ogiimaamaashiik) Martin, an Anishinabek teacher-learner at the Day School on Dalles 38C Indian Reserve at the turn of the twentieth century (circa 1890-1910). They argue that most historical sources reflect the 'official' position found in government and church records. They note that "many First Nation communities record their history orally" thus providing important insight into the ways in which First Nations educators straddled the needs of their own community and the restrictions imposed by the Department

of Indian Affairs. Anishinabek education focused on cooperative knowledge building. Anishinabek teachers like Matilda actively incorporated oral history into their lesson plans, revealing a practice that some Indigenous educators developed to work within Western systems of learning. **Alison Norman** examines the lives of First Nations teachers Emily General, Julia Jamieson and Susan Hardie, who lived and worked at the Grand River and who, like Ogiimaamaashiik, negotiated multiple identities. These women exemplify the complicated and contradictory work of Six Nations women who also identified as Christians working in Western schools. These educators worked to improve education systems within their own communities and, as Norman notes “to stand up and fight for the rights of their people.”

In Toronto, urban teachers from black communities also faced challenges to their positions as professionals. **Funke Aladeje** explores the lives of black women educators working in Ontario schools and the ways in which they negotiated multiple forms of oppression that often excluded or isolated them from their work. Aladeje notes that these teachers “resisted and fought negative stereotypes by deflecting their experiences” in order to focus on their role as professionals. Despite facing discrimination, they created powerful and important “spheres of influence” both within their own communities and the schools in which they worked.

This collection also includes arenas that are not usually included in discussions about education such as education

in the home and in museums. Looking at pedagogy in ways that stretch beyond curriculum, they ask larger questions about how women taught and learned in a variety of arenas and within diverse communities, revealing how textured the portrait of education is. Two authors deal with informal learning in Ontario. **Kate Zankowicz** examines the life of Ruth Home, museum educator at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto from 1928-1945, to broaden the meaning of education in a museum and address the specific needs of the communities in which it served. Ruth Home met with a number of challenges in implementing her progressive educational ideas. In exploring Ruth Home’s professional life we are better able to understand the central role women educators played in providing access to a broader audiences. **Ruth Sandwell** argues that the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries witnessed a massive and multi-faceted public re-education campaign that sought to transform the ways that women used energy in the home. Using the lens of energy history, and focusing specifically on the campaign to electrify Ontario homes, Sandwell argues that governments, hydro-electric corporations and their affiliates, and women’s reform organizations such as the National Council of Women promulgated these ‘pedagogies of modernity’ – strategies to teach homemakers how to be modern – and with a range of motives. Like the teachers explored in this collection, women homemakers developed a variety of creative initiatives in order to maintain their agency and re-

sist educational programs imposed upon them. Sandwell explores the limited success that these pedagogies of modernity met with in compelling women to change their lives in ways that made little sense to them. It took more than a half century to convince women to fully accept electricity into their homes and lives, and when they did so, it was for reasons and with consequences that were not anticipated by the pedagogues. This reflects a central theme in this collection, which is, whether exploring educational systems, governments or institutions, women were consciously placed within the sphere of family and home, thus solidifying particular notions of gender roles.

These biographical/social historical lenses give us a deeper understanding about these women as people and the oral sources and lived history reveal the ways in which meaningful change comes into institutions – not top-down – but with the women negotiating from the bottom up. All women faced the challenges

of how to alter behaviours, attitudes and practices within schools, communities, institutions and government agencies. Major change rested on their work – their outreach and commitment, and significant dedication and energy. These women were innovators. Their progressive ideas brought new perspectives and programs into their educational institutions and communities. They played a significant role in the development of education in Ontario and helped shape future practices.

I want to thank the Ontario Historical Society for the opportunity to guest edit this special *Ontario History* journal edition. I gratefully acknowledge their support for this project. The leadership and expertise of senior editor, Thorold Tronrud, has played an important role in the completion of this work. I'd like to thank the reviewers for their fast turnover and important feedback and finally, the contributors for their hard work and enthusiasm for this project.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Prentice and M.R. Theobald, eds., *Women who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, c1991); A. Prentice, *The History of Women and Education in Canada* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1992); M. Danylewycz & A. Prentice, "Teachers Work: Changing Patterns and Perceptions in the Emerging School Systems of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Central Canada," *Labour/Le travail* 17 (Spring, 1986), 59-82; R. Heap and A. Prentice, eds., *Gender and Education in Ontario* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1991); Freida Forman et al, *Feminism and Education: A Canadian Perspective*, volume 1 & 2 (Toronto: CWSE, 1990, 1994); C. Reynolds, "In the Right Place at the Right Time: Rules of Control and Woman's Place in Ontario Schools, 1940-1980," *Canadian Journal of Education* 20, no. 2, (Spring, 1995); Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); R.Heap, W. Millar, E. Smyth, eds., *Learning to Practice: Professional Education in Historical and Contemporary Perspective* (University of Ottawa Press, 2005); R. Priegert Coulter & H. Harper, eds. *History is Hers: Women Educators in Twentieth Century Ontario* (Calgary: Detselig, 2005); K. Llewellyn, *Democracy's Angels: The Work of Women Teachers* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012); Rose Fine-Meyer, "The Ontario Women's History Network: Linking Teachers, Scholars, and History Communities" in C. Carstairs & N. Janovicek, *Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work and Nation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013)