"A REWARD FOR WORKING IN THE FIELDS AND FACTORIES:" CANADIAN WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT AS PORTRAYED IN ONTARIO TEXTS

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The year 2016 marks the one hundredth anniversary of women's right to vote in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. Ontario and British Columbia followed. This paved the way for the extension of the right to vote in federal elections in 1918.[1] The topic of suffrage holds a unique place in history curricula as it is a noted women's historical experience in all school texts, albeit briefly. Until the 1980s textbooks and resources focused exclusively on male military, industrial, and political achievements. Women did not appear, except in brief flashes. So the topic of "suffrage" provides an opportunity to explore how women's historical experiences enter the curriculum schema, and change over time. What is evident in Ontario history textbooks is a limited and static portrayal of the suffrage movements, reducing decades of women's reform activism into a legislative "reward" for good citizenship. This paper briefly reflects on how suffrage is presented in approved textbooks 1922-2014. None offer a full examination of women's work to achieve equity in Canada.

The first post-World War One, Ontario history textbook, published in 1922, made brief reference to women gaining the right to vote noting; "war service was made the basis of war-franchise." It argued that under terms of the Wartime Elections Act, "... the vote was given to the mothers, sisters and wives of all who had enlisted..."[2] In the first decade after

1 Alison Prentice et al, *Canadian Women a History* (Harcourt Brace, 1998). At the federal level women's right to vote was achieved in 3 stages: The Military Voters Act, 1917 to women nurses serving in the war; The Wartime Elections Act to wives, widows, mothers, sisters, daughters of those serving in the war and The Federal Women's Franchise Act, which gave the vote to all female British subjects aged 21 who met the property criteria in their province of residence. The vote was denied to Indigenous women and women of certain religions and race.

2 W.L. Grant. Rev. *The Ontario High School History of Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson Press 1922), 386

the war, brief recognition of women's suffrage in school texts is noted, and tied to women's work during the war; as a reward for their patriotism. By the 1930s texts add reference to the Persons Case, the right of admission to universities, and "eligibility for election to parliament, appointment to cabinet office, and the senate."[3] After the Second World War, despite increases in narratives, books continue to focus on the links between war service and the vote.[4] These early texts form a template for future textbooks. None will recognize that women did not speak in one voice; that they held multiple positions on the reforms they supported, and on the vision they had for Canada. Few texts will reference the multiple reform activism of the 19th and early 20th century, or that the suffrage movement was regional, national and international, or that not all women were included in the legislation of 1918, including Indigenous women and women of certain religions and race.[5]

Early academic scholarship, such as Deborah Gorham's article on Flora Macdonald Denison, a leader in the suffrage and reform movements, provided support that challenging the narrative that women were 'granted' the vote within the context of war work. Gorham argued that Denison stood out from the "early women doctors" as she was not middle class but rather a dressmaker and journalist who advocated for working class women.[6] In fact, references of working class narratives were only found in supplementary texts, such as Desmond Morton's "Years of Conflict" which explored working conditions of women, the NCCW demands for reforms in public health, and links to the vote. Morton recognized the "group of brilliant women journalists, including Nellie McClung, Cora Hind and Francis Beynon, who broadened the suffrage campaign by backing labour and temperance causes.[7] This book is one of the few that also acknowledged that not all women supported the war; "some like Flora Denison and Francis Benyon had joined the small brave minority of pacifists."[8]

The majority of school texts disregard the diverse women's organizations that existed across Canada. The WCTU, the NCWC, the WI, The DWE, The CWSA, to name only a few, all had goals and objectives.[9] Some advocated for rural women's rights to property and some for urban women's labour

3 Wm. Stewart Wallace, *A History of the Canadian People* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, 1930), 352

4 George Brown, *Building the Canadian Nation* (Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1946), 411. Although textbooks had expanded narratives, women's suffrage remained a small reference point. Exact text in Chaffe and Lower, *Canada-A Nation*, (Toronto: Longmans, Green) 1948 with reprints into the 1950s.

5 http://www.elections.ca The 1948 Dominion Elections Act deleted the reference to discrimination in the franchise on the basis of race. By 1960, further amendments removed racial and religious discrimination.

6 Linda Kealy, ed. *Not an Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Women's Press,1977).

7 Desmond Morton, *Years of Conflict* (Century of Canada Series (1983), 15-16

8 Ibid, 80-81

9 Full names: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, The National Council of Women, The Women's Institutes, The Dominion Women's Enfranchisement, The Canadian Women's Suffrage Association. Women were active in hundreds of women's clubs across the country, most which advocated for social reform.

rights in factories. Middle class women advocated for access to higher education, acceptance into the professions, and the health of children. Protestant Women, Black Women, advocated for social reforms through missionary societies, French Catholic women social, health, and daycares. Suffrage had links to organized labour, farmers associations, churches, schools and communities. There was significant regional diversity within the reform movements.[10]

What is also missing is acknowledgement of the reform movements as international in nature. As members of the Commonwealth, Canadian reformers were knowledgeable about reforms in New Zealand and Australia, that legislated for the vote in 1893 and 1894, respectively, and suffrage movements in the United States and in Britain, through newspapers and public talks. An invitation to speak by Dr. Emily Stowe to Sarah Curzon in 1882 and Anna Howard Shaw in 1889, are only two of the many visits to Toronto by well-known American suffragists and Emmeline Pankhurst, founder and the leader of the British Suffragette Movement. Canadian women were also part of the WILPF, their peace activism established in the Canadian Suffrage Association, FWTA, WCTU, The Red Cross, and as part of religious sects. A number of women travelled as a result of this work; significant trans-national activism that linked them to women's groups in different countries.[11] To access these narratives, however, educators had to access supplementary resources. Not all teachers did, as it was never mandatory.

Social movement activism in the 1960s and 1970s helped draw attention to demands for greater equity, and feminist scholars, and women's organizations, pressed governments to make change. The RCSW in Canada published a number of studies.[12] A 1973 Ontario government report focused on the removal of "sex bias" from textbooks. To remedy the situation schools boards organized workshops and published resources for teachers; some published by the Ministry of Education that provided a small wedge in adding women's historical narratives into the curriculum.[13] Resources featured prominent women such as Nellie McClung, Agnes Macphail, Suzanna Moodie as well as Clara Barton, Peggy Mann (US), Emmeline Pankhurst (UK).[14]

Textbooks were slow to catch up. "Decisive Decades," a 1960s popular text was first to list suffrage in the Index and to acknowledge the inequity of

10 See: Gail Cuthbert Brandt et al, *Canadian Women: A History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2011)

11 Fine-Meyer, ""The good teacher is a revolutionary": Alternative War Perspectives in Toronto Classrooms, 1960s-1990s, in C. Gidney & L. Campbell, eds., *Worth Fighting For: Canada's Tradition of War-Resistance from 1812 to the War on Terror* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2015) After the war, The Canadian Women's League of Peace & Freedom undertook a survey of textbooks to assess in what ways textbooks supported militarism.

12 See: *The Report of The Royal Commission on the Status of Women Canada* (1970) and Margaret Wade Labarge et al, *The Status of Women Canada:* Volume 8: *Cultural Tradition and Political History of Women in Canada* (1971)

13 Ministry of Education for Ontario, *Equal Opportunity for Women in Ontario: A Plan for Action* (June 1973); *Girls and Women in Society: A Resource List* (1977) Resource lists included films, audio-visual materials, primary resources and biographies, many which focused on suffrage.

14 This book contained multiple photos ranging from Lady Aberdeen, Nellie McClung, Agnes Macphail, factory workers, farm workers in WW1, Temperance Parade, 1905, Female army Volunteers, Canadian Women's Press Club Executive 1923.

the Act.[15] Canadian women were placed in the war section, adding the act "gave the vote to women; not all women, as a reward for working in the fields and factories…"[16] By 1978, and influenced by the expanding women's movement, textbooks explored the history of the NCWC, noting some of women's reforms. One text includes a bio of Nellie McClung, and a reference to how the post-war period changed the "old order" and brought "a society ready to create a more democratic order in which men and women have more freedom to question authority and to choose their own social roles."[17]

In 1987 the Resources for Feminist Research (RFR/DRF) published "Women's Studies in Canada," a booklet that included suffrage related resources.[18] That same year, a teacher's guide, "Women as Agents of Change" acknowledged that most history studies texts "gloss over or ignore the contributions of women" acknowledging that students may complete their education "having little or no knowledge of the female involvement in history."[19] The guide suggested themes, such as suffrage, be implemented as "case studies."[20] In 1992 the Canadian government designated October as Women's History Month and provided funds for a range of supplementary resources, but not to overhaul curriculum.[21]

Fitzhenry & Whiteside published a series, "The Canadians." The book, "Nellie McClung" explored her family life, publications, and activism. This 62 page booklet is filled with primary documents and a reading list for students. It explores suffrage history; bills introduced in Ontario and Manitoba, and recognizes the work of the CWPC, especially E. Cora Hind. The book makes note of visits from Emmeline Pankhurst and Barbara Wiley, which "helped fire the club with fresh enthusiasm" and the work of Local and National Councils of Women.[22] McClung led a delegation to parliament in Jan 1914, represented by the PEL, the IWSA, the Grain Growers Association, the WCTU, the Trades and Labour Council, the CWPC, and the YWCA; thus acknowledging diverse groups. It explores the famous Mock Parliament, staged at Walker Theatre, where "peti-

15 AB Hodgetts, *Decisive Decades* (Toronto: T. Nelson, 1960), 151.

16 AB Hodgetts, 214-215.

17 R. Stewart, N. McLean, *Forming a Nation: The Story of Canada and Canadians* (Gage Educ.Pub 1978), 223.

18 Resources for Feminist Research / Documentation sur la recherche féministe included, Catherine Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (U. of Toronto Press 1950; Meg Luxton, *More than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home* (Women's Press, 1980); Alison Prentice & Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History Toronto* (McClelland & Stewart, 1977).

19 ON Ministry of Education, *Sex-role Stereotyping and Women's Studies Conference Report* (Toronto: 1978), 65.

20 ON Ministry of Education, *The Story of Canada and Canadians, Canada's Original People, Women's Suffrage and Trade Unions*. Intermediate Division Curriculum, 1977, Circular 14 (1983). (Circular H.S.1. 1979-1981).

21 See: Rose Fine-Meyer, *Including Women: The Establishment and Integration of Canadian Women's History into Toronto Ontario Classrooms 1968-1993* (PhD Thesis, U. of Toronto, 2012).

22 Mary Lile Benham, *Nellie McClung* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1977), 25 The author points out the resistance from Manitoba Premier Rodmond Roblin, who is quoted, "I don't want a hyena in petticoats talking politics at me. I want a nice gentle creature to bring me my slippers." CWPC =Canadian Women's Press Club.

tions were presented, motions were moved…and bills were read."[23] The book, "Emily Stowe" explores her work as a physician, activist, and founder of the women's suffrage movement in Canada.[24] Denied entrance into medical schools in Canada, Dr. Emily Howard Stowe obtained her education in the US where she met American activists engaged in anti-slavery, civil and women's rights movements. The book notes her attendance at the iconic 1848 Convention for Women's Rights in Seneca Falls, where she met Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. In November of 1876 Stowe established the Toronto Women's Literary Club, with a number of prominent Canadians activists, later called the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association. The book explores the many deputations the Club prepared; thousands of signed petitions; historical details not found in school texts.[25]

Some school boards developed resources. The Toronto Board of Education had a Committee on Women's Suffrage.[26] Suffrage was a major focus for educators and a special Unit was developed in the 1980s for all grade 8 students, part of Social Studies.[27] A play, "Fighting Spirit, the story of a Canadian Suffragette," was also developed and presented by the Toronto Workshop Productions.[28] The Curriculum divisions advocated for special "kits" with primary documents and bibliographies.[29] Two resources, published by OISE, "Pioneer Women of Western Canada;" primary documents on suffrage and "Breaking the Mould,"on women's voting and labour issues.[30]

A popular 1990s textbook included "women icons" throughout the text with references to the WCTU, Dr. Emily Stowe and women's' war work. The revised 2000 publication removed the icons and devoted 2 pages to suffrage, noting, "Since women were doing so much for the war effort, they wanted to share in making decisions about the country."[31] Still linking the war to suffrage is not surprising, but by the 2000s, there remained limited attention to broader reform movements. One text notes, "In one fell swoop, parliamentarians officially granted all white women born in Canada the right to vote in

23 Ibid, 27-28 Political Equality League, the Icelandic Women's Suffrage Association, The Woman's Christian Temperance Union.

24 Janet Ray, *Emily Stowe* (Don Mills, ON: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1978) and *Towards Women's Rights* (Toronto: Grolier, 1981).

25 Janet Ray, Emily Stowe. See also Margaret McCallum, *Emily Stowe* (Canadian Pathfinders Series, Grolier, 1989) which also explores her life and leadership in the suffrage women's movement.

26 Toronto Board of Education (TBE) Archives/Women's Studies File, 1980).

27 Myra Novogrodsky. Interview with author, Toronto: October 29, 2009. See also Myra Novogrodsky, "Generating Women's Studies Programs in the Public Schools: The Use of Human, Print and Audio-Visual Resources," *Canadian Women's Studies*, 6, no. 3 (summer/fall 1985): 34-35.

28 T.B.E. Committees: Status of Women Files. The play was shown to over 900 grade 8 students in the 1980s, then linked to Suffrage units.

29 P. Bourne, *Women in Canadian Society*, (OISE 1978), V. D'Oyley, *Black Presence in Multi-Ethnic Canada* (1978), B. Kane & P. Harris, *The Women's Kit* (OISE 1974), C. Pasternak: *Breaking the Mould* (1977).

30 Others in the series included: Linda Silver Dranoff, *Women in Canadian Law.* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1977); Jean Cochrane, Abby Hoffman, Patricia Kincaid, *Women in Canadian Sports.* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1977); Jean Cochrane, *Women in Canadian Politics* (Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1977).

31 J. Bradley Cruxton, W. D.Wilson. *Spotlight Canada* (Oxford University Press, Toronto, 2000), 116.

federal elections."[32]

So to summarize, no texts discussed the conflicts and power relationships that took place within communities, workplaces, homes, and governments that affected women's work to make change. None covered the breadth of the movement across the country or the links to democracy; that the fight for enfranchisement was not about rewarding women for good citizenship, but rather was rectifying a wrong, an essential element of a democratic society. If women had not received the vote, could Canada have continued to identify itself as a democratic state? Few acknowledge Indigenous women, or black, or immigrant women.[33] Finally, the use of language never changes. Women are "given" the vote, as texts maintain a patriarchal perspective, and reform movements are women's "struggle." They do not explore women's diverse historical experiences, and as such, continue to support gender inequity.

What is surprising is the lack of attention in school texts to increased scholarship in the field of women's history. As history educators, we need to do more than question pedagogy, we need to question content. Feminist theorists, such as Anne Philips, have suggested that women were included as a "special case," peripheral to dominant narratives.[34] Wendy Brown has argued, women's history requires a newly constructed historical framework; a bold step, yet to take place in education.[35] And yet, the history of women's suffrage provides a lens into broader economic, political, and social histories in Canada. Its inclusion, as a reward for patriotism, is disappointing and historically inaccurate. History students deserve the full story.

32 Margaret Hoogeveen et al, Creating Canada (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 2014), 200-203.

33 Texts make no mention of feminist activism, including early work by Mary Ann Shadd Cary and her newspaper *The Provincial Freeman* (1853-1857) which advocated for the abolition of slavery, temperance and the franchise.

34 Anne Phillips, "Democracy and Difference: Some Problems for Feminist Theory" in Will Kymlicka, ed., *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 293.

35 Wendy Brown, "The Impossibility of Women's Studies," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*. 9.3 (Fall, 1997)