

“Stepping Stones”: Women and Political Rights

In 1784 an Order-in-Council at the Court of St. James in London created the province of New Brunswick by separating the newly defined territory from the province of Nova Scotia. An influx of Loyalist refugees a year earlier had so augmented the population of the region, already peopled with Micmacs, Maliseets and reestablished Acadians, and had so increased demands for land grants that the colonial government in Halifax found the region difficult to administer efficiently, especially at such a distance. Some of the newly arrived Loyalists, impatient with the slowness of the Halifax government and displeased with sharing Nova Scotia with peoples they considered less loyal than themselves to the British crown, began agitating for their own administration. England was convinced. A new government was in order. A new province.¹

Born not of revolution — either military or ideological — the administrative creation hardly signaled an attempt at building a wholly new society. Rather, it reaffirmed the continued presence of English legal and political tradition in the region. This tradition, distinguished like other European legal and political systems by values based on male dominance of family and state,² was to shape the lives of women and men of diverse cultures now living in the new province.³

What did the creation of the province signify in political terms to the women of the province — to the original women, the Micmacs and the Maliseets; to the reestablished Acadian women; to the recently established Black women;⁴ and to the newly arrived and diverse Loyalist women? Although the question requires us to evaluate the situation of 18th century women with 20th century criteria, we can nevertheless affirm that for even the most elitely placed of these women, the establishment of a new political order in the region did not improve or even alter women's status. Like women in similar situations elsewhere in British North America, they were not directly involved in the power transfer between the governments. They remained, in essence, political outsiders. In fact, they would not be directly a part of the governing elite for almost the next two centuries.

But the daily lives of most women in New Brunswick would go on much as usual under the new administration,⁵ as would those of their husbands, brothers, sons and fathers, only now they would have a government closer to home to petition⁶ and to criticize.

Voting in the new province

In 1785, the new Governor of New Brunswick, Thomas Carleton, turned to the task of establishing representative government in the province.⁷ He and his Council began considering who would be allowed to vote. But women as voters do not appear to have been a topic of their deliberations. In fact, it would be well over a century before electoral law would include women: 134 years before most women would be granted the provincial vote; 149 years before women could stand as candidates; 178 years before Indian women on reserves could vote provincially;⁸ and 182 years before a woman would finally be elected as a member of the Legislative Assembly. A long evolution in the perception of the status of women and the capacity of women to act as citizens would have to occur before women could begin to move into the political sphere as full partners.

New Brunswick's first election took place in 1785. The regulations governing that election allowed all white men 21 years of age or older "who had resided in the colony three months and were willing to take the oath of allegiance"⁹ to vote. In spite of their racial limitations, these regulations created what was considered universal manhood suffrage, an unusual state of affairs for the times. In all of British North America, the ownership or leasing of property was a requirement for the franchise.¹⁰ The anomaly was not to last and in fact had only occurred because of the problem of surveying new land and of quickly establishing land titles for the newcomers, the Loyalists.¹¹

While the 1785 voting regulations clearly excluded women, the province's first electoral legislation¹² of 1795 did not. It effectively debarred certain groups of people from the franchise — Roman Catholics, Jews, people of little property, aliens and minors¹³ — but it did not exclude women. The act allowed “persons” meeting certain qualifications (property owners, people amenable to the swearing of certain oaths) to vote. We are left to wonder: was “person” understood to mean a male or did it refer to both sexes?

Court cases challenging just this question took place in later years in England.¹⁴ Their judges were to rule that “person” and “man” did not refer to both sexes. Arguing that the franchise had always been intended for men only and rejecting as insignificant evidence of women voting in the past, the judges ruled that the words in question could only be meant to refer to men. The popular belief that women, along with infants, lunatics and aliens, were of a group of people lacking the capacity to vote because of a lesser status¹⁵, was likely held among the early legislators of New Brunswick, inheritors as they were of the British political tradition.

But New Brunswick was, for the people of European origin at least, a new land. Although the Loyalists had brought with them remnants of a class society, it would be difficult to compare early colonial New Brunswick with its diverse and sparse population to the populous, class-stratified society of 19th century England and Europe. Were women in this new and socially less complex society able to move within the political sphere more easily than their European counterparts? Were they able to voice a political opinion as a man would with a vote?

Evidence of women voting

Sparse evidence does exist to suggest that a few women in New Brunswick, most certainly white women of certain means,¹⁶ did in fact exercise the franchise in the years between the first electoral legislation of 1795 and the revised legislation of 1843 when the franchise was finally and clearly restricted to men.

In 1830 a letter from a disgruntled voter appeared in the *Gleaner and Northumberland Schediasma*¹⁷ mentioning the disconcerting fact that in a recent provincial election four women had cast ballots. He questioned the legality of the women's votes, but it appears that in spite of this controversy their votes were counted. Was this an isolated case or were there other women who exercised the franchise, perhaps raising a few eyebrows while doing so?

At least three politicians were to rise in the House of Assembly in later years when universal manhood suffrage and women's suffrage were under question to assert that women had voted during these early years of nebulous definitions.¹⁸ William H. Needham, of York County, arguing in 1870 for women's "lost right" to vote, affirmed that women of Carleton County had exercised the franchise until 1837 and he noted that women of Fredericton had voted municipally under its Charter until a Judge Fisher had added the restriction "male person" to the voter qualifications.¹⁹

However, pending further evidence to the contrary, it would seem that only a relatively small number of women exercised the franchise before 1843; their votes thus never swayed the balance of power.

Influence on male voters and politicians

Although during these early years it appears that the populace unquestioningly viewed the franchise as a male prerogative, some women could nevertheless indirectly influence provincial and municipal politics as wives or daughters, sisters or mothers, or as close friends of men in power or of men possessing the franchise.²⁰

By no means would all women have been in this situation. Many women were not even related or close to a man who had the franchise during much of the 19th century. Universal suffrage for non-Indian men was not achieved until 1889; until then large groups of men were effectively excluded from the franchise. Roman Catholics could not vote between 1795 and 1810 nor hold office until 1830, thus excluding virtually the entire Acadian²¹ and Irish populations.

Blacks were effectively excluded from voting in the early years, even during the very first provincial election which had been to all other practical purposes one of universal manhood suffrage.²² The Indian people were formally disenfranchised in 1889 and Indians living on reserves were not to be given a voice in provincial affairs until 1963.²³

Thus, it would appear that for much of the 19th century only white anglophone women would have had the requisite family ties linking them to some level of the political system, as would a few women from the politically-excluded groups who had married either men with the franchise or men in power, or who were born of such cross-cultural relationships.

Examples of wifely influence in provincial political affairs are to be found from the very early days of the province's existence. One is of Lois Paine, the wife of William Paine, a surveyor and a member of the House.²⁴ Evidently concerned about the need for an educational institution in the province, she urged her husband to sign a "memorial praying that steps be taken toward the institution of a Provincial Academy of Arts and Sciences".²⁵ Her husband was to head that important petition of 1785,²⁶ one which was effective in assuring that land was set aside for an institution that was to become the University of New Brunswick.

Family ties were not women's only indirect avenue to power. Even in their circumscribed professional roles women succeeded in wielding a considerable amount of influence in their communities.

One example is that of Barbe Desroches, a midwife who, as the story goes, happened upon fertile land on a morning's walk with her two sisters in 1832 and, in classic European fashion, claimed it as theirs, thus founding the village of Saint-Antoine in Kent County.²⁷ She was to become influential in the new parish, using her profession to wield power in the new settlement.

In October 1846, Father Julien Rioux, a priest in charge of the Bouctouche and Cocagne missions, wrote to Bishop Dollard in Saint John obviously concerned about the actions of "this wicked woman"²⁸ who was upsetting life in what he considered to be his parish. Rioux had what he perceived to be a rival and Desroches was supporting him. He was François-Magloire Turcotte, a priest newly in charge of the Gêdaïc mission (Grand-Digue). Rioux and Turcotte both believed that their missions included Saint-Antoine, and Desroches, the chapel keeper, believed Turcotte to be the better priest.

To Rioux's dismay, Desroches had begun mounting a petition in support of Turcotte and had even threatened to withhold her midwifery services from those who did not sign it. Moreover, she saw fit to occupy the church. Rioux laments that he was refused entry into the church and was obliged to give mass in a local house. And he writes, "This wicked woman threatens already that once the new church is built it will be she who will hold the keys."²⁹ In fact, so powerful does she appear to Rioux that he asserts, "it is she who governs the whole village".³⁰

Having mounted a convincing petition, Desroches set off for Saint John to present it to Bishop Dollard. Her journey must have been long and difficult considering the primitive state of the roads at that time, but apparently she and her supporters believed their cause was worth the effort. The bishop seems to have heeded the demands of the Saint-Antoine parishioners since Turcotte

remained a priest in the region for the next two years.³¹ Desroches had used political tactics to influence the clergy.

Barbe Desroches' story may not be unique. There probably were other New Brunswick women in the late 18th century and in the 19th century who, in spite of both political and legal restrictions, exerted considerable political influence over the life of their communities.

Certainly in the traditional Indian communities women exerted a considerable amount of influence. Maliseet oral tradition recalls a time when women played an important role in their bands, some say as band or clan mothers. If the Maliseets replicated the Iroquois system of government, these women would have had the power to choose and to overthrow chiefs. However, it may be that women in the Maliseet tradition held other equal but separate and yet unknown power roles. As in the rural white communities, the Indian women who dealt with the rites of healing, who were the keepers of medicine, held a special place among their people.³²

Petitioning — a voice for change

Certainly there were numerous women who appealed to the political system for property, financial aid, salary due and who were part of lobbies for the passage of prohibition acts and signatories to petitions of grievance. Petitions were an important tool to those otherwise without voice in the political system.³³ Since large numbers of men as well as all women were disenfranchised in the early years, mass petitions were not infrequent. In fact, within two years of the province's creation, mass petitioning had become so threatening to the Carleton government that legislation was passed to curtail a group's ability to petition.³⁴

Within months of the province's creation, women were signing petitions. In the late 18th century their numbers included mostly Loyalist and Acadian women; but later in the 19th century Black women were also petitioning the government.³⁵ Examples of Indian women petitioning during this period have not been found. Transactions involving Indians were usually between the band chief and the white government's representatives.

For their part, the Loyalists, unhappy with the slowness in receiving "their promised land"³⁶ began voicing their frustrations in petitions of grievance shortly after their arrival in New Brunswick. The earliest of these petitions to survive in Saint John is the Huggeford Petition of Grievance of December 24, 1784. Of its 345 signatories, four were women; barely making 1% of the total, they were present all the same.³⁷

As early as 1787 Acadian women singly or with other women and men were petitioning and being granted land.³⁸ Married women could not own land at that time and it would appear that many of these female petitioners were widows or single women.

One of the early petitions for financial aid is from a Phebe McMonagle of Westmorland.³⁹ In 1808 she petitioned the provincial House of Assembly for assistance after her husband, a House member, had been drowned while making his way to Fredericton, leaving her with four small girls and pregnant with another child. A fairly common petition for financial relief were requests for a pension from widows of "old soldiers of the Revolutionary War" — men who had served the British cause in the American War of Independence. Until well into the 19th century such petitions were sent not only by these widows but after their deaths by their destitute daughters.⁴⁰

The request for pay from early school teachers, both women and men, was another common 19th century petition sent to the House of Assembly after a teaching term during the year. Although after the 1837 School Act no distinction was made between issuing a grant to a female or male teacher, the new act was such that in those parishes with more than three female teachers, one per school, the "extra" women were "deprived of their government grant, unless they petitioned the legislature for a special dispensation in their favour".⁴¹ Not only did many teachers petition the House for these reasons but also "because the Trustees had been careless and failed to certify the school, or because the school happened to be in excess of the total number for which any given parish or county could legally receive the provincial allowance".⁴²

The teaching profession was to become a female preserve⁴³ and women who would otherwise have no contact with the political system would at least through these small means confront it. Although a large number of these women were anglophone, we do have examples of francophone women petitioning for their school grants.⁴⁴ Another concern of women was the establishing of schools. In 1840, for example, half of the signatories of a petition from black settlers "asking for assistance in establishing a school"⁴⁵ were women.

The 1850's witnessed a new period in women's petitions. The abuse of alcohol had become a problem in community and family life and women became a part of the lobby for prohibition. 1854, for instance, saw a flurry of women's prohibition petitions arrive at the provincial House of Assembly from the southern counties.⁴⁶ Who initiated these petitions? The women, themselves? The local reverend? The women in collaboration with the local reverend?

The Daughters of Temperance in collaboration with the zealous group the Sons of Temperance? Further study will tell, but whatever the case, women were voicing their concerns on an issue apparently close to their hearts for it was to continue to stir them until the early part of the 20th century.

Electoral revisions: women excluded

Since 1784, women in New Brunswick had been voicing their concerns to the government. But over the years they had not gained a direct recognized voice in political affairs, even though they formed half the population.⁴⁷ Why then in 1843 New Brunswick legislators saw fit to specify the sex of voters, in no uncertain terms restricting the franchise to "male persons of the full age of 21 years, not subject to any legal incapacity"⁴⁸ is unclear. Although legislative debates cannot be found to explain this revision, indirect evidence suggests that lawmakers were following the franchise trends established elsewhere.

New Jersey, one American state where women had "voted sporadically"⁴⁹ since 1776, "limited the franchise to free, white, male citizens",⁵⁰ in 1807. In 1832 England "explicitly restricted the exercise of the new franchises to certain groups of males",⁵¹ introducing gender restrictions for the first time. In 1836 Prince Edward Island followed suit. In 1834 the parliamentarians of Lower Canada had clearly expressed their desire to exclude women from the privilege of voting, and in 1849 that was effectively done in legislation. In the same year the Province of Canada excluded women from voting and in 1851 Nova Scotia did so.⁵²

Ironically, during this period, the first American women's rights convention was held not so far away in Seneca Falls, New York (1848); its participants resolved among other things that the duty of women is "to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise".⁵³ The event was an important milestone in the women's rights movement in North America. One historian, Catherine L. Cleverdon, has speculated that the move in British North America to restrict the franchise to men was in part a reaction to the growing women's rights movement already evident in the United States and Britain.⁵⁴ Whatever the specific reasons for the lawmakers' move, it is clear that the male voting restriction in New Brunswick was for the times a statement of the norm.⁵⁵

The women's suffrage movement begins

Soon after effectively barring women from the franchise, New Brunswick legislators began addressing the question of women's

suffrage. This reexamination may have been prompted by similar international trends in other seats of power. In 1867, for example, John Stuart Mill, the eminent political philosopher and parliamentarian, had unsuccessfully attempted to have women enfranchised by the British parliament.⁵⁶ In 1868 a women's suffrage amendment was introduced into the American Congress and another in 1878: it would be reintroduced until it was finally passed in 1920.⁵⁷ In the American territories, the women's suffrage cause had been gaining ground since 1869, when Wyoming granted the right to vote, followed by Utah in 1870.⁵⁸

One of the first suggestions that women's suffrage had become a public issue in New Brunswick came in 1870 when William H. Needham, a lawyer and a House of Assembly member from York County, introduced a bill which included a section allowing unmarried female property owners to vote. He argued that:

*If a man was taxed on a property and thereby had the privilege of voting, when he died, his widow, paying the same tax, should have the same privilege. So long as the vote is based on property, it can make no difference who owns it, so long as the qualification is there.*⁵⁹

To him it was only logical that two people with the same qualifications for the franchise should be able to exercise it regardless of their sex. And, according to him, women with property had voted in New Brunswick in the past. He merely wished to restore "a right ... which had unfairly been taken away from them".⁶⁰

The arguments raised against this early suffrage proposal were to be the same ones used to frustrate women's fight for the provincial vote for the next 49 years.

One of the most recurrent arguments against women's suffrage was that women's enfranchisement was "a theoretical question"⁶¹ requiring no action because the "ladies had not asked for such a law, and [therefore] ... did not desire it".⁶² This was the first rebuttal that greeted Needham after he introduced his bill. Indeed, it appears that at the time women were not publicly asking for the right to vote. But even in later years when they would be petitioning for the vote by the thousands, House members would continue this line of argument. In 1917, for instance, when public opinion was clearly in favor of women voting, one member declared that, "until there was a universal movement for woman suffrage"⁶³ he could not support it: this despite the fact, as some suffragists pointed out, that disenfranchised men never petitioned at all to have the right to vote extended to them!

In 1870, John A. Beckwith, a land surveyor and another representative from York County, dismissed the contention that women should not be granted the right to vote because they had not requested it. He asked, "How many ladies ask to have husbands and still get them?"⁶⁴ His question, humorous as it may seem, reveals something about women's restricted choices in Victorian society.

But the opponents could not be swayed. Angus McQueen, an insurance company director from Westmorland County forwarded the irrelevant assertion that "Few women, if they had the right to vote, would exercise it".⁶⁵ This, like the other arguments, would plague the cause until the end, and was proved quite invalid when women finally were able to exercise the franchise.

Certainly few women would have had the right to vote under Needham's proposal since his bill required that the female voters be both single and property owners. George E. King, a lawyer representing Saint John City and County and soon to be premier (1870-1871, 1872-1878), argued that the benefits obtained from allowing widows and spinsters to vote were too small to warrant any change in the law. He claimed that, "There was a maxim in law ... [which states]: 'the law does not concern itself about very little matters'".⁶⁶ The rights of women were simply not a primary concern.

This proposed barring of married women from the franchise also gave another opponent, George W. White, a Justice of the Peace from Carleton County, the fire to burn Needham's bill. He pointed out that by granting widowed propertied women the franchise, Needham was being unfair to other women not in this privileged position. But instead of proposing amendments to make Needham's proposition more equitable, White simply used this weakness to find reason to vote against the bill. If his concern had really been equality in franchise he would have debated the unfairness of the whole enfranchise law which excluded a large percentage of the population — all women and certain men.

Needham held the Victorian belief that married women were "nobody in law".⁶⁷ He declared that, "A woman and her husband are one and therefore she is legally incorporated"⁶⁸ and thus barred from the right to vote. King, an opponent because of the "smallness of the matter", nevertheless corrected Needham's patriarchal assumption by asserting that "the married woman may be nobody in common law, but we might make her somebody by statute".⁶⁹

This wrangling over the rights of married and unmarried women was to recur in the coming decades of the women's suffrage

debate. Sometimes women's suffrage politicians would be, like Needham, proponents of a limited franchise because they sincerely believed a married woman was one with her husband, that his political voice was also hers. And sometimes women's suffrage politicians would propose a limited franchise in the hopes that once unmarried women could vote, married women would soon be allowed to do so.

This differentiation between married and unmarried women's voting rights on the part of women's suffrage politicians weakened the suffrage cause. Opponents could easily dismiss the suffragist-politicians as inconsistent. And as the suffrage forces in the House never developed a common strategy in all the years that the debate raged, their Achilles' heel remained bare to the barbs of the opposition.

Undaunted by his bill's inconsistencies, Needham forged ahead with basic principles. Women, he affirmed, were capable and intelligent and, being so, had the right to vote. He was not at a loss in finding an undisputable and inspiring example of an able woman. He pointed to Florence Nightingale. She was not only well known — an international figure — but a woman whose aplomb in war-time nursing was bound to prove to doubting men a woman's toughness in stressful situations.

Needham challenged:

If there was a Bill to give her the right to vote, where would the man be found who would stand up and oppose it? If there was such a man, he would be annihilated by the breath of scorn.⁷⁰

Although his point was not challenged, it won no converts.

Anti-suffragist White asked the unaskable, "If [women]... were to be allowed to vote, why not allow them to be legislators as well?"⁷¹ (This fear of admitting women into the House of Assembly augured the approach finally taken by the legislators in 1919 — allowing women the franchise but not the right to hold office. In fact, as with no other province before or after, New Brunswick was to wait years after granting women the franchise before allowing them to stand as candidates and to hold office.⁷²)

Such was one of the earliest debates on women's suffrage as it was vigorously argued in the House of Assembly. For all of Needham's and his supporters' efforts, his bill died, and with it, for a time, the women's suffrage cause in the House.

The early debate raises some interesting questions. One wonders

what prompted these men to discuss women's suffrage at this time. Were women within these politicians' social circles broaching the question of women's place in the political sphere?

Women were certainly contemplating the issue in private. One early example appears in the "Fredericton Letters" of Juliana Horatia Ewing, an English writer. She was married to a British army officer stationed for two years in Fredericton and her frequent letters home were full of comments on the social life of the period. On at least one occasion she expressed her views on universal suffrage. Reacting to a bill calling for universal manhood suffrage that had been passed "back home" in the British parliament, she wrote in 1868:

*One really would think that experience on this side of the water would prevent anyone from wanting to extend the franchise more among the uneducated. I can see *that the unforeseen hazards* in giving the vote to educated women *are nothing compared* to the danger in increasing the influence of the ignorant mob over the legislature of the country.⁷³*

This was to become a major argument for women's suffrage, especially during periods of immigration. Suffragists everywhere were to contend that if the most uneducated man, unfamiliar with the issues and barely able to speak the country's language, could cast his ballot, then the knowledgeable woman, well-versed in the country's matters and well-rounded by a local education, should be able to vote, too.

As early as 1870 Needham was staking his claim for the intelligent woman's voting rights. He declared:

An idiot having his name upon the revisors' list, can go to the polls and deposit his ballot; does he do it by virtue of his being a man? So! because it is intellect which constitutes a man, and that he does not possess. You give him the right to vote because he has the appearance of a man; but you deny this right to a woman possessing all the necessary brain to judge rightly in reference to these matters simply because she is a woman.⁷⁴

Henry R. Emmerson, a staunch suffragist, a lawyer, a House member for Albert County and later a premier (1897-1900), criticized the universal manhood suffrage bill of 1889 by pointing out that it "provides a vote for the man who may not know the multiplication tables but denies it to the woman no matter how learned she may be in literature and science".⁷⁵

Another steadfast suffragist and lawyer, well-lettered Alfred A. Stockton from Saint John County, quipped in 1894:

*Why should an ignorant footman have a vote, while the lady he drives, who is educated, intelligent and has property of her own, has none?*⁷⁶

And in the same year Herman H. Pitts, a newspaper publisher from York County, said:

*It was absurd that the brainy women of the country should be debarred from the franchise which was extended to the "lowest truck" in the town.*⁷⁷

These arguments are steeped in a middle class sense of educated superiority. But at the time, they were perceived as a neat dabble in logic.

They were also, unfortunately, closely related to a sense of racial superiority which tainted the women's suffrage cause. Although this attitude was not pronounced in the New Brunswick movement, it did occasionally mar suffrage arguments, as it did elsewhere. In the United States the women's suffrage movement coincided with the movement for Black enfranchisement. Some American leaders of the women's enfranchisement cause became angry when their lawmakers would not, while enfranchising Black men, enfranchise all women.⁷⁸ Members of both the Black suffrage movement and the women's suffrage movement misunderstood the other's cause.

In New Brunswick it was the Indian people who bore the brunt of racial maligning.⁷⁹ In 1894 Henry A. Powell, an anti-suffragist lawyer from Westmorland County, maintained that the highest and most stable societies had women at home with the children (not out meddling in the public and political spheres). Stockton retorted, "If you go to the Indian camps you will notice that the lords of creation confine their better halves to attending to the motherhood of the race. Is the civilization of the Indian to be preferred to that of enlightened Christian people?"⁸⁰ He, as many other Victorians, was absolutely sure that the white and the Christian were on the path of the right and the good. This sense of righteousness would soon be sweeping North America as Christian reformers — the social gospelers — began their attempt to rid society of its evils: alcohol, prostitution, juvenile delinquency, poverty and destitution. Part of the women's enfranchisement cause would become caught up in this ideology, with some suffragists contending that female voters, as a force of good, could help clean up society.

In 1895, Emerson displayed yet another example of "logic" based on racial superiority. Noting that "the Dominion Government had extended the right of suffrage to the Indians of Manitoba"⁸¹, he asked, "When the illiterate savages of that Western country were being accorded that right, how was it possible to contend that the enlightened womanhood of this Province should not receive it?"⁸² Such attitudes contributed to the fact that Indian people on reserves in New Brunswick would be without a political voice in the province for almost the next century.

The 1880's: agitation begins

As Juliana Horatia Ewing's letter suggests, women in New Brunswick were privately mulling over the issue of women voting by the latter part of the 19th century. No doubt they had heard about the women's suffrage movement in the United States and received news of women in Britain calling for the right to vote. Perhaps some were aware of John Stuart Mill's now classic *The Subjection of Women*, which circulated widely among American suffragists after its publication in 1869, or even of Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*,⁸³ both eloquent statements on the rights of women. Certainly later politicians referred to these works.⁸⁴

In the 1880's New Brunswick women brought women's suffrage into the public place. Locals of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) were soon petitioning for women's suffrage. This province-wide organization, dedicated to prohibition, believed that once women could vote they would use their new power against the sale and consumption of alcohol. They exemplified the attitude that women as a force of good would sweep society clean of its evils. Later suffragists were to use more realistic arguments for women's suffrage.

Members in the House of Assembly responded by supporting the principle of enfranchising female property holders in 1885 but this endorsement led to no action.⁸⁵ In the same session A.G. Blair, a lawyer, a "future enemy of suffragism"⁸⁶ and premier (1883-1896), argued for the enfranchisement of spinsters and widows as well as tenants and farmers' sons. Even though House members agreed to Blair's bill with small amendments, it was quashed in 1886 by the Legislative Council, a now long defunct part of government.⁸⁷

While it appears there were political reasons for this bill's birth and death,⁸⁸ the fact remains that unmarried women, at least, were at a very early date only one step from voting. Later suffragists may never have realized this.⁸⁹ If there had been a

strong organized lobby for women's suffrage at this time, would the bill's final outcome have been different?

In 1886 women not only agitated for voting rights but received results. Six petitions from town and city councils and small groups of women⁹⁰ descended upon the provincial legislature and were introduced by various House members. Women from Woodstock, Moncton, Portland and Saint Stephen "pray...[ed] that an Act may be passed to allow unmarried Women to vote"⁹¹ in their municipal elections. Ironically, many of the women petitioning were married — not acting specifically in their own interests. Saint John women demanded more: that all women be allowed to vote in municipal elections.

The legislators were receptive to the majority's request and with "ease and dispatch"⁹² had the law amended so that "every Widow and unmarried female of the age of twenty-one years or upwards ... and possessing the electoral qualifications either from real or personal property"⁹³ could vote in municipal elections. Perhaps the lawmakers thought that the few women who would fit into this category constituted such "a little matter" as to pose no threat to established municipal voting patterns.

During the same session, William Pugsley, a lawyer from Saint John County, introduced a bill to allow unmarried women and widows to vote at school meetings and to hold the office of school trustees.⁹⁴ Although his measure was favorably received, provoking some members, among them Stockton, to go so far as to advocate giving the provincial vote to all New Brunswick women immediately, the bill did not survive.⁹⁵

In 1887, the W.C.T.U. again petitioned for women's suffrage,⁹⁶ and in 1888 women and men from the counties of Westmorland, Kent and Northumberland⁹⁷ sent nine petitions to the House of Assembly demanding the extension of the franchise to women. Westmorland's Amasa E. Killam, a building contractor with his ear to the ground, recognized the growing public interest in women's suffrage and introduced in 1888 an enfranchisement bill similar to Needham's bill of 1870. It stipulated voting rights for unmarried propertied women, but, like earlier such bills, it did not pass. He also advocated that all ratepaying women in the province should be able to vote, another unsuccessful bid.

1889: universal manhood suffrage

A great test of democratic principles came in 1889 when the House had its final debate on universal manhood suffrage. Should all the men in the province, regardless of property holdings have a political voice? As legislators strenuously examined this issue,

some members reintroduced the controversial question, "Why shouldn't women have the right to vote, too?"

It was difficult for many members to recognize that in spite of the democratic step forward they had made in embracing virtual universal manhood suffrage,⁹⁸ they were still excluding half of the population. These members already felt threatened by the thought of adding the "lower class" to the electorate. Perhaps they sensed that these men, coming from a socio-economic situation up until then unrepresented in the electorate, could alter established voting patterns — worse, could sway the balance of power. And not only would these "lowest trucks" be voting, they would also be running for office. This possibility disturbed one particularly conservative member from Sackville, Joseph L. Black.

He affirmed that:

*The more wealthy and more aged a man gets the more conservative he becomes, and the better is he fitted to serve as a member of the County council.*⁹⁹

Stockton, recognizing this resistance in the House, pushed to have propertied widows and spinsters enfranchised in the new manhood suffrage bill. Emerson understood that Stockton was operating "on the principle that if you can't get all you want, take what you can get",¹⁰⁰ but he staunchly argued for the enfranchisement of all women. He was one of the few politicians who avoided compromising the issue, committed as he was to the "democratic rights of all people, male or female, single or married"¹⁰¹.

York County's William Wilson, another lawyer, moved an amendment to Stockton's resolution, calling for the enfranchisement of all propertied women. Like Emerson, he was committed to democratic principles and he argued eloquently for them, stressing that "All human beings have the same interest in good government"¹⁰².

And he elaborated:

Whoever has no vote and no prospect of obtaining one will either be a permanent malcontent or feel as one whom the general affairs of society do not concern....

*Every man is degraded, whether aware of it or not, when other people, without consulting him, take upon themselves unlimited power to regulate his destiny.*¹⁰³

When voted upon, both Stockton's resolution and Wilson's amendment lost by considerable margins, 14 to 24 and 11 to 26 respectively. The House was not yet ready for full democracy. But its members had brought to light arguments regarding women's suffrage which were to be rehashed for the next 30 years.

The arguments: for and against

However unheeded in the coming decades, the democratic plea continued. True democracy, advocates affirmed, lay in the "principle that the Government derived its just powers from the consent of the governed"¹⁰⁴.

Emmerson asserted in 1889:

*While we treat them [women] with respect we do not as a rule under existing laws treat them much better than we do our mastiffs. Women should be in a position to demand their rights rather than beg them.*¹⁰⁵

In 1895 he declared:

*Taxation without representation is tyranny. Political power inheres in the people. Surely women are included in both of these axioms. To deny these principles is to justify despotism.*¹⁰⁶

As late as 1917, William F. Roberts, a doctor from Saint John affirmed:

*When use is made of such terms as "Government by the people" and "The voice of the people", it is patent that it is a bit hypocritical. Such high sounding phrases when used in connection with political affairs are really false pretenses, for only the male half of the population is meant. These phrases should either be revised or made to convey the full truth and apply to women as well as men.*¹⁰⁷

Anti-suffragists dismissed these statements as irrelevant. Leonard P.D. Tilley, a lawyer from Saint John and a future premier (1933-1935), chided, "All men and women should certainly obey the laws of the land"¹⁰⁸. And Madawaska County's J.W. Baker, a jack-of-all-trades once active in militia affairs, claimed that "when she [a woman] paid her taxes upon that property she contributed her share towards having it protected"¹⁰⁹.

Not only did women share with men an interest in good government and public affairs, but they also had interests

particular to themselves that needed addressing by the legislature. Their work in various organizations underlined their preoccupation with numerous social welfare questions including temperance and prohibition. Emmerson saw that as voters women would have more power to bring those issues to the fore.

In 1899 he revealed women's unequal position as paid workers and how as voters women could address that problem:

Women as a rule were not paid much more than half the salary which a man would receive for doing the same work, and he felt sure that if women had the right to vote, the sentiment of the country, with respect to the compensation which they should receive would be materially changed, and it is in the light of common sense that it should be so.¹¹⁰

Anti-suffragists refused to admit that women might have special interests. Blair, one of the adamant opponents, mocked in 1889:

What were the particulars in which women were tyrannized over by these despotic legislatures composed of men? If they were suffering, we do not hear any complaints. If they were injured, they took very great care to withhold from the ears of men the slightest sound respecting their wrongs.¹¹¹

Again in 1894 he scoffed:

It was said that women should have a chance to say what the laws of the land ought to be. Was there any important reform that the women required that they could not secure by asking for it? What privilege or benefit affecting their own interest and well-being had ever been denied them? What legislation had they asked for that had been withheld?¹¹²

Pugsley, a nominal women's suffrage supporter at best (supporting the cause when the political risks were low) affirmed in 1899 during one of his ambivalent periods "that whether in Colorado, Wyoming, or otherwise, in no country were women treated with greater respect than in New Brunswick"¹¹³. The assured applause of the House supported his observation.

But suffragists in the House quickly countered the anti-suffragists' claims of respect for and action on women's concerns. Both Stockton in 1894 and Pitts in 1895 challenged Blair, pointing to his resistance in "enacting women's desired social legislation"¹¹⁴. Pitts said, "The women may have occasionally

been thrown a sop in the way of some legislation they were favoring"¹¹⁵ but that hardly constituted a desired state of affairs. He stressed that, "It must be within the memory of every member present how strenuously Mr. Blair opposed the compulsory teaching of temperance in the schools"¹¹⁶, a demand of the W.C.T.U. Stockton added that Blair's very resistance on granting women the vote showed that he was not interested in heeding the wishes of women.

Anti-suffragists in the House realized that they could not effectively counter the democratic plea for the women's voice in the House using only the unfounded contentions that women were just fine as they were, so they argued that women could not enjoy the basic democratic right to vote because, being women, they were incapable of acting as citizens and only full citizens should be able to exert a political voice.

What was a full citizen? At the time it was a person who could, when needed, serve in the military, with the police, on a jury, or hold public office.¹¹⁷ The first two were "considered "physiological impossibilities for all women, regardless of their marital status,"¹¹⁸ and the latter two were perceived as public services which would "draw women away from their primary responsibility to the home"¹¹⁹.

Powell forwarded this argument in 1895:

*If a woman is to be given the right to vote, ... then she is logically bound to perform road work, to pay poll tax, school and municipal, and to perform constable duty when required. If she is entitled to a full share in the making of the laws she is certainly liable to do her share in enforcing the laws.*¹²⁰

Suffragist supporters in the House affirmed that women were indeed ready to assume the responsibilities of citizenship. In fact, in 1899 George Robertson, a grocer from Saint John, asked a question that nowadays holds a familiar ring:

*As to the question of whether women were prepared to take the full responsibility ... [I] would ask: Why not?*¹²¹

But ingrained in the anti-suffragists was the traditional belief that citizens were only those people who could bodily defend their country or its laws — something women, opponents believed, could not do. Nor could they conceive of citizens as people who contributed to their country through community work (as women had been doing since the mid-19th century) or as people who protected their country's ideals through peaceful means, using or

promoting law or democratic reform (as women had been striving to do in their various social reform organizations).

In other words, in a modern sense, women had been acting as full citizens long before the struggle for the vote began. But the anti-suffragists' traditional views on citizenship had not yet evolved to embrace the new citizenry. It would only be in later years, after women had in massive numbers displayed their colors in community work during the First World War that anti-suffragists acknowledged dedicated community work as a mark of a citizen, as work worthy of a vote. Even then the acknowledgement was used more as an excuse to help anti-suffragists save face before a public clearly in favor of women voting. But that comes later in our story.

Oddly, the weakest argument in the suffragist cause was the one stressing that women should be able to vote because they are human beings and as such should share the same rights as men.¹²²

York County's William T. Howe, a farmer and lumberer once active in militia affairs, declared in 1894 that the women's suffrage question:

*was not a matter of political expediency, but of right or wrong. For him it had always been a fixed principle that women should have equal rights with men in every walk of life.*¹²³

Another farmer, lumberer and miller, James E. Porter representing Victoria County, asserted in 1899:

*Wherever we found poverty, lawlessness and barbarism, woman is degraded. Self-government is self-respect. A law that debars one half of society from the franchise is unjust.*¹²⁴

In fact, as early as 1889, Stockton saw the women's suffrage question as part of a larger movement towards a utopia where women and men enjoyed equal rights — where basic justice reigned:

*Every movement recorded in history for the enfranchisement of women was a step from slavery to liberty, and from barbarism to civilization — nay, more, a step from Paganism to Christianity, and the whole history of civilization had been to elevate women in the scale of existence and make them in every respect the equals of men.*¹²⁵

That was the hope — equality in rights and status for women and men. But such a state, anti-suffragists maintained, was impossible. They “insisted that women’s reproductive function and their androgen deficiency made them unsuitable for political life”¹²⁶. They contended that women’s physical weakness as compared to men proved their mental inferiority.¹²⁷ As premier in 1895, Blair claimed, “for those classes of work which demanded the most vigorous and strongest mental capacity, man would always be supreme.”¹²⁸

If opponents were not pointing to the supposed mental and physical deficiencies of women, they were contending quite contrarily that in spite of, or rather because of, women’s “noble” abilities they were simply “not designed” for the political sphere. For politics was dirty and it would sully women. Men, as protectors, were to keep women from falling from their “higher and nobler sphere”¹²⁹ into the abyss of political life.

Robert J. Ritchie, a lawyer representing Saint John City and County, typified this line of thinking. In 1889 “he endorsed all that had been said in their [women’s] praise”¹³⁰ and continued:

*We should all honor our mothers and love our wives and daughters. We cannot elevate woman by legislation. Woman needs no act of parliament to honor and elevate her. She is already elevated. We can, however, put on the statute book [the right to vote] ... which may degrade a very considerable number of women.*¹³¹

Blair echoed in the same year “that he would deeply regret to see her [woman] dragged from the height upon which she stood and brought into the arena of politics.”¹³²

Almost thirty years later anti-suffragists were still subscribing to such logic. Jean G. Robichaud, a businessman from Gloucester County, said in 1917 that:

*He thought the passage of such a measure [to enfranchise women] would have the tendency to lower women from the high and responsible position they now occupied to the turmoil of political life.*¹³³

And what was that high and responsible position? According to the anti-suffragists, it was a woman’s role as wife and mother, which apparently, unlike a man’s role as husband and father, was to be her sole lifelong occupation. Society would fall if she dared to “undermine” that role with other interests, concerns or work. In fact society would be tinkering with divine will.

Powell explained in 1894:

*She [woman] is for what we might call the domestic field of action, and men for another field. It has been so since the dawn of time; in every civilization, the arena of politics has been for men. When that divine law is interfered with, the result is the injury, he would go further — it might be the ultimate undermining — of society.*¹³⁴

Anti-suffragists contended that women were actually very powerful in their designated roles. Blair, in 1889, affirmed that:

*In her proper position woman is supreme. "The hand that rocks the cradle," it has been said and truly said, "rules the world".*¹³⁵

Her power, the anti-suffragists maintained, was derived from her work as "educator... of our children, [as] moulder... of the characters and dispositions of our sons and daughters",¹³⁶ as "the guardian and instructor of mankind: [as] a priestess exercising an influence ... [in the home] such as she can exercise nowhere else."¹³⁷

In 1894 Powell affirmed that "the noblest, the supreme aim of woman should be to qualify herself to see to the correct physical, moral and intellectual development of her children."¹³⁸ But no mention was made of the father "qualifying" himself to attend to the needs and development of his children. In fact, even anti-suffragists observed that men in the pursuit of public careers had actually shunned their responsibilities to their children:

*In the feverish activity of modern society husbands and fathers relegate more and more to mothers and wives these sacred duties [the raising of children].*¹³⁹

But of course there was no contemplation on the part of anti-suffragists, or of almost anyone at the time for that matter, of men assuming responsibilities in the "domestic field" to allow women who choose to do so to participate in the public and political fields.¹⁴⁰

The suffragist politicians turned the contentions of "women's role" and "women's natural good" into arguments for women's enfranchisement. If women had the inherent powerful ability to "influence for good" then it should be they who were in that dirty corrupt arena of politics cleaning it up!

David R. Moore, a doctor from York County, said in 1889:

*I...feel assured that the hallowed influence of enfranchised woman would accomplish a very important purpose towards chastening and purifying the electoral courts of our country of many offensive and pernicious influences which at present prevail.*¹⁴¹

And Wilson in the same year asserted:

*If the result of the lords of creation having charge of the polling booths of the country, for all these years, had been to demoralize them, the sooner the refining influences of women were introduced the better.*¹⁴²

Suffragists pointed out that unmarried women had been successfully participating in political affairs at the municipal level since 1886 with no adverse effects. In 1917, Roberts also observed:

*It has also been urged that the surroundings of the polling station would offend the finer senses of women, but no objection was made to them paying their taxes and meeting with all classes and creeds while they were doing so; why then would they be contaminated if meeting these same taxpayers at the polling booths? If the manner of conducting elections is so bad that it is not fit for women to come in contact with it is clearly time such manner was changed.*¹⁴³

Perhaps as Alphonse Sormany, a physician from Gloucester County, claimed in 1909, "there was [not] a man in the House who would say that politics had improved him"¹⁴⁴, since politicians resembled a "bucket of bad apples"¹⁴⁵ and woman as the one good one "stood little chance of remaining true to herself, or of rescuing political life from its elemental vice"¹⁴⁶. But one wonders, if woman were as "morally fortified"¹⁴⁷ by divine law, strength and wisdom as anti-suffragists claimed — indeed morally incorruptible — how could she be contaminated by bad politicians and bad politics?

It should be recalled that election days were not the relatively quiet and ordered affairs of today. In the 1880's and 1890's they were still marked by the tradition of bribery and corruption of earlier days¹⁴⁸ — days when "riot, confusion, and drunkenness"¹⁴⁹ turned election days into "rough affairs"¹⁵⁰ indeed. Sadie Harper, a young diarist from Shediac, described an election in 1891, reporting:

*It is election day up in Cocagne and Papa went up and didn't get back till 4. They had a lively time of it. Two men came down to Dr. White's who were stabbed.*¹⁵¹

And her chronicler, John Edward Belliveau comments:

*Apparently the fights and woundings on election day were not considered extraordinary or disturbing, certainly not by a 16-year-old high school girl who ... took an interest in politics.*¹⁵²

As early as 1889 suffragists in the House were noting the double moral standards implied in the anti-suffragists' arguments to protect women.

In that year, Marcus C. Atkinson, a physician representing Saint John City, observed:

*It had been said that women would be contaminated [by going to the polls]. There were two conclusions that might be drawn from that, ...: Either that men could indulge in practices with impunity which were degrading to their wives, or that the polls of this country had attained a degree of vileness and demoralization which indicated that in the interests of the nation something should be done to rectify the evils that existed. No man should go to the polls and indulge in practices which he would not permit his wife or sister to indulge in. Whatever degraded women equally degraded men and whatever debased the one debased the other.*¹⁵³

If anti-suffragists could not successfully argue that woman was too good for politics, they turned around and suggested that she was too bad — that she was essentially immoral, a debasing or corrupting influence on man. A few anti-suffragists delighted in referring to women who had not advanced the cause of good. Pierre J. Veniot, a newspaper worker and future premier (1923-1925) from Gloucester County, pointed in 1917 to “the scheming which had been carried on by the wife of the Czar of Russia and the wife of the King of Greece in connection with”¹⁵⁴ the First World War. Baker reminded his colleagues that “while many great women had been good there were some who were bad and the influence of a bad woman was a terrible thing as history had shown in many instances.”¹⁵⁵ In 1894, Powell gave such an “historic example”, suggesting with it that if you leave a woman her independence, you are courting national doom. He claimed that the fall of the Roman Empire came:

when woman's sphere of action was extended and her status freed her largely from her husband's control.

*[Yes] when the glory of Roman manhood and womanhood stood at its highest woman played no part in the political history of the nation.*¹⁵⁶

These anti-suffragists suggested that the inherently corrupt nature of politics could hardly be bettered by adding a potentially wicked, potentially corruptible portion of the population to its arena. The nation — no, the world — would be better off if women stayed out.

When suffragists proudly pointed to the popular sovereign Queen Victoria as “the ruler of the greatest empire under the sun”¹⁵⁷ opponents rejoined that she “was so beloved because she did not meddle in politics.”¹⁵⁸

No, the place for women was the domestic sphere in the opponents' view. They raised “the specter of the motherless home”¹⁵⁹, decrying the time when women, especially married women with children, would move into the political arena “first during campaign days and then on election day, and finally [and fully] in ... [their] ... quest for political lives of their own.”¹⁶⁰ Ritchie recounted ominously in 1889 that:

*not the spinsters and widows, but married ladies — had remained all day at the polling places during a municipal election. If they were ladies with families, what delightful homes they must have, and what must be the state of their families.*¹⁶¹

When opponents pointed to women neglecting their children on election day, suffragists in the House wondered why arrangements could not be made once every four or five years, when elections were held, to permit women this small outing. When opponents pointed to the possibility of marital discord when a woman expressed political views “entirely different from her husband ... [creating] rancor and animosity that might disturb the domestic fireside”¹⁶², even raising the incidence of divorce,¹⁶³ suffragist politicians asked:

*If husband and wife differed in politics ... why [would this be] any more than a difference in political views between father and son, and if a husband and wife have no differences on any subject but politics then a lively discussion every four or five years will be good for both of them.*¹⁶⁴

Anti-suffragists ridiculed the possibility of women ever being active members of the political sphere. One asked:

*How long would it be before a woman would occupy the office of the solicitor general or clerk of the crown in chancery, and before the speaker should be addressed as "Mrs. Speakeress"? How far did they propose to go, and when did they propose to stop?*¹⁶⁵

Another quipped:

*I imagine a stout lady, Honorable Mrs. Jemima this or that, holding the office of the Provincial Secretary ... (Laughter.) I imagine further, Honorable Mrs. Isabella something else, as Chief of Commissioner of Board of Works ... (Laughter.)*¹⁶⁶

In rebuttal suffragists in the House suggested that "perhaps a lady could as well fill"¹⁶⁷ a House seat as a man.

To placate further the opponents' fears of women in positions of power, suffragist member Pitts affirmed in 1894 that "women did not wish to usurp the rights of men, but to have an even say in matters that affected them equally with men"¹⁶⁸. Earlier in 1889, Emmerson had argued that "it was illogical to say that if women vote they must sit as members of this legislature. At present, ministers, contractors and others vote, but they are disqualified from being candidates"¹⁶⁹. But the issue was still debated as late as 1917, and Roberts felt a need to put it to rest with a comment on the real numbers of people who actually throw themselves into active politics:

*Some persons ... seem to fear that if women got the vote they would go into politics. Of all men voters how many go into politics[?] Was not the struggle rather to get men to take a genuine and personal interest in politics[?] There was no need to have any fear for the women on that score. If a few women should go into politics, then so much the better for politics.*¹⁷⁰

Since the late 19th century, many suffragists outside the House had embraced the view that women had special concerns regarding the home. But unlike the anti-suffragists who then contended that women must stay in the domestic sphere to ensure that its high moral standards did not crumble, suffragists argued that women should bring those moral and nurturing concerns into the public and political sphere. Roberts captured the essence of this line of argument in 1917 when he explained:

A fatal mistake was made in defining home as the dwelling place occupied by her [the woman] and her family. Home is wherever the woman's influence

*dominates, and as the members of her family are separated from her at school, at work, or abroad her influence goes with them, and this in the larger sense is home. She is interested in the environments in which her family is placed, and she will exert every influence to make these environments conducive to the happiness and well being of her family. Women today are interested in factory conditions, they are interested in the moral and social environment of our industrial centres.*¹⁷¹

Suffragists adroitly turned the recurring anti-suffragist "woman in the home" contention into an eloquent suffragist argument. While clever for the times, the argument nevertheless locked women into a narrow role. It resembled anti-suffragist Powell's description of woman as the "guardian of mankind", as the world's nurturer in the broadest sense. But, limiting as that argument might have been, during the struggle for the vote it was a liberating assertion, radical and provoking.

Many New Brunswick women did not fit into the classic picture of the woman at home with her children. From the province's inception, there had always been women who worked outside the home,¹⁷² and from the late 19th century onward their numbers began increasing as women filled the ranks of the teaching and nursing professions, continued as domestics, entered factory jobs, became operators and telegraph operators, dressmakers and milliners, and opened small businesses ... and more.¹⁷³ To many suffragists it became more and more clear that the traditional role of women working exclusively in the home, as wife, mother and homemaker was one role among many which a woman could assume.¹⁷⁴

In the House, suffragists pointed squarely to that working women phenomenon. As early as 1889, Silas Alward, a physician from Saint John, noted that elsewhere, "women are making their mark as lawyers and doctors"¹⁷⁵. In the same year Wilson claimed, "As teachers and writers and in heroic devotion to duty they [women] are far superior to us lords of creation"¹⁷⁶. In 1899 Emmerson referred to the fact that there were thousands of women earning a livelihood and some of the most successful business ventures in the country were run by women. In the profession of teaching, they outnumbered men by nearly four to one.¹⁷⁷ Suffragists pointed out that many women were the sole supporters of their families when left as widows or deserted by their husbands.

And then there were educated women. Since 1854 when what is now Mount Allison University opened its Ladies' College,¹⁷⁸ and even as early as 1837, when women audited courses in chemistry at the University of New Brunswick,¹⁷⁹ a certain class of

privileged anglophone women had had access to higher education. Their success in this non-traditional field was exalted by suffragists in the House as a fact showing that women could and should enjoy life outside the exclusive domestic sphere.

In 1889 Emmerson commented:

*Ladies had in many cases proved themselves the equal to men in point of intelligence, and in this connection he referred to the success of the lady students at N.B. University, who last year were in advance of their male competitors. He had no sympathy with those who said the only desire of young ladies was to get husbands.*¹⁸⁰

In 1894, James Russell, a farmer from Charlotte County active in local affairs, noted:

*In the educational walks of life women were taking the leading positions. Only to-day he had read in the press that Miss Henry of St. Stephen has graduated from the Chicago Medical college, distancing all competitors.*¹⁸¹

Anti-suffragists had expressed the fear that married women would merely vote as their husbands, thus justifying the argument that these women should not be able to vote at all. Wilson proclaimed education as the prevention of "voter's imitation". In 1889 he said that

*He did not think there was anything in the argument that married women would vote at the beck and nod of their husbands. Wherever women had the advantage of education they were fearless and independent.*¹⁸²

Women's sphere had widened. They were to varying degrees involved in employment, education, social organizations and reform groups. But in the minds of many anti-suffragists, women's sphere had remained closed. Moreover, the opponents, like many people of their times, believed that women had innate feminine traits which, while appropriate to their "proper role", were at risk and undesirable in the political sphere. These traits included emotivity, caring, supportiveness and responsiveness, that apparently men could not display. On February 27, 1895 the Saint John newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* included beside its description of the women's suffrage debates in the House the quotation: "Effeminate men are ridiculous, masculine women repulsive."

To the most adamant anti-suffragists, like Blair and Ritchie, the "feminine" traits were repulsive when displayed by men. In 1889, while he was premier, Blair systematically accused the

suffragists in the House, men such as Stockton, Emmerson, and Wilson of emotionalism and sentimentalism. He declared that:

*If he had not known how talented these gentlemen were; how capable of dealing with public questions they were; how sound in many respects their judgement was, he would have felt that they had simply given themselves away to a species of fantastic sentimentalism which was not in accord with a wise and judicious public policy.*¹⁸³

Ritchie said he “would go further and call it fanatical sentimentalism”.¹⁸⁴ For these House members there was a clear division between emotion and reasoning and a clear place and sex for both. When Stockton called for the vote for unmarried women in that session, Blair requested that the House members “not yield to the appeal of his hon. member from St. John, but keep a firm and strong hold upon their heads and not allow their hearts to influence their votes upon this occasion”¹⁸⁵. Applause supported his demand.

Blair and his supporters advocated a notion typical of the Victorian Era. This separation of heart and head — of emotion and reason — and their attribution, one to woman and one to man, was widely propagated. It even found its way into the popular literature, assuring its wide dissemination. Alfred Tennyson, a popular English poet of the times, allotted the sex roles in his poem *The Princess*, stating succinctly:

Man with the head and woman with the heart;

.....
*All else confusion.*¹⁸⁶

The marriage of these two elements within one person was to these Victorians, inconceivable, even catastrophic.

Sormany, worrying about the mixing of female and male traits as women entered the political arena, stressed that he did not want to “champion...the suffragettes, those masculine-feminine beings who had done very little towards securing the rights of women.”¹⁸⁷ For him “securing the rights of women” was keeping them as they “should be, and as all true men wanted ... [them] to be”¹⁸⁸: in the home. He warned that we would bring “the evils of race suicide”¹⁸⁹ upon us if we allowed the intermingling of the sexual roles and traits, if we allowed women out of their “proper sphere”.

But as early as 1889 members of the House were challenging this Victorian assumption regarding the separation of roles and traits according to sex. Alward declared:

*The sexes by intermingling, improve each other. The men become more refined and the women more manly, if he might use the expression.*¹⁹⁰

Unlike Sormany, he saw the strengthening of society, not its suicide, emanating from the integration of the feminine and the masculine. He sensed that a spiritual liberation was possible when the sexes interacted, when they could if they chose be more alike.

Where did this Victorian concept of strict sex roles and traits place women? In a very defined and confined space. In 1889, Blair had just delivered a long speech on the place of woman, stressing that "the Creator designed woman... for the duties of a higher and nobler sphere"¹⁹¹ and that woman must keep to it. "Put her in a cage like a canary,"¹⁹² Stockton challenged, appalled that Blair would dare, even in rhetoric, clip the wings of half of humanity. Blair true to himself and true to Victorianism replied, "I would sooner see her in a cage than in a polling booth — and a cage is the proper place for a canary"¹⁹³. The House supported his remark with applause.

One could not have asked for an interchange that revealed more about the two opposing attitudes towards woman — one that gave her choices, the other rigid limitations. The Victorian image of the woman had placed her on a lofty pedestal, and as Stockton implied then, and as feminists are given to say even now: a pedestal is like a cage — it allows little room to move.

The heyday of the suffrage movement: the 1890's

The politicians arguing both for and against women's suffrage raised basic questions about women's place, roles, capabilities, even their emotional and psychological needs. But what about the women, themselves? How did they perceive themselves and how did they argue and fight for their right to vote?

After the agitation of the 1880's, women organized to advance the suffrage movement with even greater vigor, and their efforts, as much as their actual arguments, reveal what they believed they could and should be doing in the greater society outside their homes.

The 1890's were indeed the suffragists' golden years, the years which saw the first and only provincially-oriented Women's Enfranchisement Association (W.E.A.) formed (1894), when the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) added the issue to their platform (1895) and when women in large numbers began petitioning for the right to vote. This period of fervent

activity was not to bring any real change in the political status of women, but it witnessed such strong public and legislative debate as to prepare the ground for later success.

This new level of activity actually began before the turn of the decade, in 1889 when the manhood suffrage debate was in full swing in the House. At that time it appears that women were present in the galleries and on the floor of the House backing the politicians who argued for women's enfranchisement.¹⁹⁴

Then came the petitions. In 1891 the House received a petition from 31 women in Carleton County "praying that the New Brunswick Election Act of 1889 may be so amended that Women might thereby be entitled to vote for members of the House of Assembly";¹⁹⁵ in 1892 a similar petition was sent by the W.C.T.U. of the Maritime Provinces;¹⁹⁶ and in 1894 the House was inundated by women's suffrage "petitions signed by 10,000 or 12,000 persons"¹⁹⁷ from almost all corners of the province. In 1895 hundreds more petitioned the government on the same issue.¹⁹⁸ Women and men were attempting to counter the popular anti-suffragist argument that women did not want the vote.

Despite such powerful expressions of suffragist sentiment, many of the anti-suffragists in the House remained adamantly opposed to granting women the right to vote. When the petitions were introduced in the debates, Premier Blair claimed that:

*It [the women's suffrage issue] was not a live issue, and he believed the majority of women were indifferent or opposed to it. A great many signatures, it was true, had been obtained to the petitions, but they had been secured in many cases by irrelevant appeals to the signers. If the women did not want it, why should the House grant it? If they did want it he would be willing to give them a fair hearing.*¹⁹⁹

He insisted with others that women did not want the right to vote "imposed upon them"²⁰⁰. Even as late as 1917 Veniot would be arguing that "it would be wrong to force upon...[women] something [the franchise] which they did not desire"²⁰¹

Suffragists in the House counteracted this argument with common sense:

*In any event the right [to vote] was only permissive. If there were ladies who did not wish to vote they could exercise that wish, but they had no right to place a stumbling block in the way of those who did.*²⁰²

Suffragist politicians were obliged to repeat this near cliché for

almost three decades, watching it slide off their opponents like water. The House suffragists even pointed out that many enfranchised men did not exercise their right to vote (some being too drunk to do so), but there was no call among the legislators to repeal these men's right to vote.²⁰³

The women agitating for the right to vote were facing an opposition which, until the end, would attempt to ignore or disclaim their petitions, their letters and later their delegations, an opposition which in effect attempted to dissuade women from their cause.

In the midst of this suffrage activity, 18 Saint John women banded together on March 30, 1894 to form what became the New Brunswick branch of the Women's Enfranchisement Association of Canada.²⁰⁴ Its membership always remained small, and in later years it faced such indifference or hostility that it opted out of the suffrage struggle for short periods. But, in spite of the obstacles, the association was to become the "standard bearer"²⁰⁵ of the women's suffrage movement in the province. It was to be the first and only provincially-oriented society to dedicate itself exclusively to the cause of women's enfranchisement.

Three dedicated women formed the core of the W.E.A.'s first executive: Sarah Manning, as president; Manning Skinner, as vice-president; and Ella Hatheway, as secretary-treasurer. Their personal contacts with the business as well as the local and provincial political communities helped strengthen the potential clout of the club. Manning was married to the secretary of the Board of School Trustees, Edward Manning;²⁰⁶ Skinner's brother, C.N. Skinner, was a federal politician with strong provincial contacts;²⁰⁷ and Hatheway's husband, W. Franklin Hatheway, was a member of the "business elite of wholesalers and lumbermen",²⁰⁸ although a rather unorthodox one due to his "socialist-tinged progressive politics",²⁰⁹ and between 1908 and 1912 was a M.L.A. In fact, he was one of only two male members of the W.E.A.²¹⁰ and during his term as M.L.A. for Saint John he championed the suffrage cause in the legislature following in the footsteps of Emmerson and Stockton, both of whom had entered federal politics, in 1900 and 1904 respectively²¹¹.

Four years after the W.E.A.'s formation, Emma Fiske, a widow and a talented linguist heavily involved in local associations, became the club's second president, a position she held until her death in 1914.²¹² She was Skinner's sister and both had connections with many other community reform organizations.²¹³ In fact, since half the organization was composed of women from the upper class²¹⁴, it would seem that numerous members had social connections useful to the club. The involvement of these women in other community affairs helped

give the suffrage cause respect and acceptance it might not otherwise have had. The community at large could see for itself that suffragists were human and approachable. These organizational connections also put women, like Fiske with her involvement in the Natural History Society,²¹⁵ in contact with "reform-minded men"²¹⁶ with certain clout and influence such as politicians and editors²¹⁷.

Important as these contacts were, the basis of the club's strength lay within its members. They displayed great energy in organizing their petitions to and their lobbying of the government and remained dedicated to their cause even as they met indifference and hostility from politicians and occasional rebuffs from other women's groups.²¹⁸ In 1899, 12 petitions demanding women's suffrage "bombarde"²¹⁹ the legislature, among them the W.E.A.'s petition which included close to 4,000 signatures²²⁰. The W.E.A.'s tiny membership would have had to work tremendously hard to mount such a formidable petition, "a petition to dwarf all previous petitions"²²¹, especially since many of the club's members would not have had a great deal of extra time to devote to such an effort.²²²

The women's efforts between 1894 and 1899 instigated renewed efforts by suffragist politicians. In 1894 Stockton introduced a resolution to confer upon women the right to vote provincially, supported by the petitions of over 10,000 names.²²³ It lost 21 to 14. By then the *Saint John Daily Telegraph* had "thrown its full support to the suffragist cause"²²⁴ and viewed this setback as temporary. It commented:

*There is no law to prevent the Attorney-General [Blair] from changing his mind, and it is hoped he will see the subject more clearly before next year. The ladies may rest assured that they hold the winning cards if they are ready to use them.*²²⁵

Stockton tried again the next year for suffrage for unmarried women. Emmerson pushed a resolution for full enfranchisement. 18 petitions including petitions from the W.E.A. and W.C.T.U. supported these bills, but the measures lost, 15 to 14 and 19 to 15.

The *Daily Telegraph's* editor "heaped scorn and censure upon the heads"²²⁶ of those who had opposed the bills and optimistically predicted the eminent triumph of the cause:

...no opponent... was able to put forward a single reason against their bill which was worthy of serious consideration, or which rose above that species of argument which is denominated as twaddle. The man

*who, in this age ..., sets himself down seriously to the task of showing that women should not be entrusted with the power of electing legislators, only proves his utter incapacity for comprehending the signs of the times and the tendencies of the age. We consider that the cause of woman suffrage has made an immense gain this year in New Brunswick, and that its triumph at an early date is as certain as the rising of tomorrow's sun.*²²⁷

During this period of mounting interest and fervent activity in the women's suffrage cause, an Acadian woman, using the pseudonym Marichette, wrote a letter dated February 9, 1895 to *L'Évangéline*, claiming the right to vote for women and declaring that women were "aching with the desire"²²⁸ to get into the polling booths. Suffrage petitions containing over 10,000 names in New Brunswick in 1894 and in Nova Scotia in 1895²²⁹ proved Marichette's claim. Although the letter is identified in the paper as being from Chéticamp, Nova Scotia, research into the woman's identity indicates she was Emilie Leblanc Carrier, a woman from Memramcook, New Brunswick who had taught in Nova Scotia.²³⁰

This seems to be the first and last suffrage letter written by an Acadian woman to appear in a major Acadian newspaper. Other Acadian suffragists were to be denied these newspapers as a forum for their views. In April 1895, *L'Évangéline* announced that although it would continue to publish the letters of Marichette (a regular and apparently popular correspondent), they would "clip the wings"²³¹ of those many women who also desired to appear in its pages. The newspaper stated it was against women's enfranchisement. Over two years later, in August 1897, *Le Moniteur acadien* wrote that letters similar to Marichette's, which were written in a particular dialect, would be destroyed on the pretext that the dialect was denigrating to the French language.²³²

Suffrage petitions were not sent in 1896 but one small advance came that year. Emerson sponsored a bill which stipulated that all school boards have two female members, improving on an 1893 law that anti-suffragist Blair had introduced, permitting one woman on each board of school trustees.²³³

Also that year, when the convention of the Association for the Advancement of Women was held in Saint John, the W.E.A. took the opportunity of inviting speaker Julia Ward Howe to give a public address. She was the American feminist who, pained by the consequences of the American Civil War, had originated Mother's Day and its fundamental message for peace. She

accepted the W.E.A. invitation, and so it came about that at this early date (September 14, 1896) "feminism [was] preached by a world-renowned expert"²³⁴ before a large audience in Saint John.

In 1897, the W.E.A. backed Stockton behind the scenes²³⁵ when he made another unsuccessful bid to enfranchise unmarried women. The group could only have been heartened when Emmerson was elected premier in 1898. It and the W.C.T.U. began mounting another impressive example of popular support for women's enfranchisement. Twelve suffrage petitions descended upon the legislature between April 7 and 12, 1899; on April 13, Emmerson introduced his bill for the full enfranchisement of women.

The anti-suffragists voted down the bill — 34 to 7. John Douglas Hazen, the Conservative party's new leader, a lawyer from Sunbury County and a future premier (1908-1911), mocked the petitions, which had been circulated for the most part in Saint John because of the local W.C.T.U.'s and W.E.A.'s lack of resources. He noted that "fully one-half of the 2,183 names from St. John were those of men",²³⁶ as if this fact were somehow both aberrant and abhorrent, and worse "only 3,295 names were submitted, only 2,095 were women".²³⁷ He decried the fact that "No petitions whatever had been received from Madawaska, Victoria, Gloucester, Kent or Kings"²³⁸ without attempting to understand or analyze the reasons for this absence. He declared that, "Behind all legislation is physical force, and in the end the man must rule"²³⁹. So it was to be in New Brunswick's provincial politics for the next two decades, and, one could argue, for much longer.

The W.E.A. decided against sending a letter of thanks to Emmerson and his supporters, voting in their minutes that "the attitude of the legislature towards our Petition did not commend itself to the Club"²⁴⁰.

Years of adversity

After the 1899 suffrage effort, the women's suffrage issue seemed to die at the public level until 1908. The W.E.A., the "vanguard"²⁴¹ of the suffrage movement, turned inward. Between 1899 and 1902 it focussed on the political theories of collectivism and practical socialism, as well as certain women's rights issues such as equal pay for equal work.²⁴² In 1899 the group had been rebuffed at the Maritime Provinces convention of the W.C.T.U. The latter, having invited W.E.A. members to participate and their president to give a speech, "forgot that ... [the] Suffrage Club had any part to perform"²⁴³ in the convention. Relations remained good between the two, the president of the W.E.A. being the head of the

suffrage department in the provincial W.C.T.U.,²⁴⁴ but the groups never became close due to their ideological differences. The W.E.A. was not motivated by the temperance issue nor "maternal feminism" — the belief that woman's nurturing and good graces could save the world.²⁴⁵

In 1902, a rift that was to temporarily cripple the suffrage cause occurred in the ranks of organized Saint John women. The Local Council of Women (L.C.W.), a coalition of numerous local women's groups and an organization which in other Canadian cities had been a focal point²⁴⁶ for suffrage activity, had remained unsupportive of the suffrage issue since the Council's founding in 1894²⁴⁷. This inactivity angered the W.E.A., which itself had L.C.W. members. Further, at its annual meeting in 1902, the L.C.W. greeted the W.E.A.'s report on its socialist studies with a "laugh of derision or amusement".²⁴⁸ The W.E.A. formally severed its ties with the Council for several months.²⁴⁹ It took until 1910, when the L.C.W. received permission from the National Council to pursue the goal of women's enfranchisement for this rift to heal.

Between December 1903 and November 1907, the W.E.A., itself, ceased to function for reasons "best known to Clio"²⁵⁰. In 1907, its members turned their attention squarely to the practical issues of women's suffrage and women's legal rights. They reviewed suffrage activities and progress elsewhere — New Zealand, Australia, Finland and England — and studied Mabel French's suffrage bill, which they hoped to introduce into the legislature.²⁵¹ Mabel French was New Brunswick's first female lawyer and an active W.E.A. member until her departure for British Columbia in 1910.

1908 saw the W.E.A. reassert itself publicly, petitioning the government for the enfranchisement of women and sending a delegation of four armed with Mabel French's bill to discuss women's enfranchisement with the new Conservative premier, the well-known anti-suffragist Hazen. The reception was "chilling"²⁵². In the legislature, Hatheway and John Edward Wilson, representing Saint John, unsuccessfully argued for the bill, which would have given the right to vote to unmarried women.

Conservatism seemed to reign both within the legislature and without, among even the women's groups. This climate provoked one dedicated suffragist to write to the Saint John *Evening Times*. Her name was Mabel Peters, a woman active in community and reform affairs. She had, among other things, instigated the national playground movement to ensure at least a little healthy space for children, especially the needy, in the crowded early 20th century cities. She was the daughter of

Martha Hamm Lewis, the first woman to be allowed to attend Normal School (1849) in Saint John, on the condition that she enter class 10 minutes before it started and leave 5 minutes before it ended, spoke to no one and wore a veil.²⁵³

The letter which Peters sent to the *Evening Times* was actually written by the American suffragist Rose E. Helmes and Peters stated that it reflected her sentiments exactly. Through Helmes, Peters charged women for being "their own worst enemy",²⁵⁴ claiming with Helmes that "woman's advancement has no greater stumbling block [than]...conservative women's clubs"²⁵⁵. She hinted at the reluctance of certain women's groups in Saint John to join in the efforts of mounting suffrage petitions. She believed that while advancing "their own prestige [these conservative women]...tarnished the suffragists' reputation through their unwillingness to face the facts of women's repression"²⁵⁶.

*The conservative...woman...insists on staying in the rear...and worse, she will use her combined influences to keep the great sisterhood of women in moral slavery. And the very same women...are the women who...are holding themselves up as examples of superior intelligence, moral integrity and religious devotion.*²⁵⁷

The letter concluded with a remark which probably had great personal significance for Peters, considering her mother's trials in receiving a teacher's training: "Remember [that] the greatest soul is always the one with the broadest conception of individual liberty', not the one fettered 'to a life of narrow creeds and limitations' ".²⁵⁸

Again in January 1909, the W.E.A. sent a delegation to meet with Premier Hazen with no better results than the previous one. Hatheway (the M.L.A.) introduced another bill to enfranchise unmarried women three months later and in April when it was before the committee of the whole seven suffragists came to support it. Some of the legislators — gallant as always — greeted their arrival with "cries of 'Help!', 'Police!', 'Sergeant-at-Arms!'"²⁵⁹ and loudly clanged the division bells. Several of the M.L.A.'s were involved in a tactic of sexual harassment: composing, distributing and openly laughing over a sexist and sexually deriding "verse" inspired by the suffragists' presence. After the session, the verse, complete with the Legislative Assembly's seal, was anonymously sent to the home of one of the W.E.A. members.²⁶⁰

In spite of these coarse dismissal tactics, the suffragists stayed three days lobbying for the bill. But M.L.A. James A. Murray, a

manufacturer's agent from Kings County and later briefly premier in 1917, used a legislative tactic to put an end to the bill's legislative life²⁶¹ and the suffragists lost for another year. They noted in their minutes, "On this occasion we were treated with insult"²⁶².

As the suffrage cause gained support from established groups, such as the Local Council of Women and the Sons of Temperance²⁶³ in 1910, the W.E.A. was turning to more militant sources of inspiration, such as the daring and charismatic Pankhursts of England (mother and three daughters: Emmeline, Christabel, Sylvia and Adela). The W.E.A. wrote in their minutes in 1911:

*Lady-like effacement for the sake of party was productive of nothing and the suffragettes so-called have made themselves stepping stones for all women in the world to cross the river of injustice and gain the solid shores of human rights. Let us withhold our judgement upon the window smashers until quiet comes after victory and not condemn what seem rude and mistaken methods to us who have had no experience with old country politics, but remember what these English women are fighting for.*²⁶⁴

In January 1912, Sylvia Pankhurst came to Saint John to give a talk on women's rights and suffragism at the W.E.A.'s invitation.²⁶⁵ Having commenced the year with such a rousing meeting, the W.E.A. quickly sent another women's suffrage petition to the legislature. Walter B. Dickson, a lumber industrialist from Albert County, introduced yet another partial enfranchisement bill, supported by numerous petitions and resolutions including those from the W.C.T.U. and the Men's Provincial Temperance Federation²⁶⁶. It was unsuccessful due to a technicality.²⁶⁷

Ella Hatheway, prevented from voicing her grievances to the Assembly while this measure was being discussed, did so in the *Saint John Globe* probably much to the chagrin of the guilty M.L.A.'s. She recounted how several M.L.A.'s had attempted to sexually harass members of the 1909 delegation in an effort to dissuade the suffragists from their cause. She affirmed:

... The woman suffrage movement, the world over, had broadened and intensified during the past year. In no way is this shown more than in the growing demand from women that they shall no longer be regarded by men as sex beings, but as human beings; that they shall be recognized, politically and economically, as persons,

not as females merely. This note has been struck by writers and speakers alike, men and women, and is the keynote of ultimate success.

*Only the woman who is vitally interested in her own full citizenship recognizes and can comprehend the extent to which, as a sex class, we are set apart in a secondary position in the community, in the church, in the home, everywhere. Daily, in a hundred ways, she feels this secondary place. Now she is rising to an appreciation of herself, and with her new self-respect she is demanding recognition as a human being....*²⁶⁸

1912 also saw some forward steps made in the women's suffrage cause. W.E.A.'s president, Fiske, instigated the formation of an "equal franchise league"²⁶⁹ in Moncton, a realization which undoubtedly encouraged the W.E.A. The Protestant clergy had begun openly supporting women's suffrage. H.A. Cody, rector of the St. James Anglican congregation in Saint John, who "appears to be among the first ministers to speak from the pulpit on behalf of suffragism"²⁷⁰, gave a portion of one of his sermons at a W.E.A. suffrage tea. He proclaimed the women's demand for their right to vote "wholly righteous"²⁷¹. Although many of the Protestant churches were by then openly embracing the suffrage cause, evidence has yet to be found of the Roman Catholic Church's support.

In 1913, Donald Munro, a manufacturer representing Carleton County, introduced yet another of the bills that called for the enfranchisement of unmarried propertied women. He claimed the support of the Saint John Branch of the Canadian Suffrage Association (the W.E.A.'s new name after 1910), the provincial W.C.T.U. and the Carpenters' and Joiners' Brotherhood of Saint John and the backing of "largely signed petitions in different sections of the province."²⁷² The Assembly voted against it 21 to 10, despite a gallery packed with female suffragists.

During the debate, other suffragists in the legislature had observed that society, to its betterment, was evolving to allow women more rights. Northumberland County's James L. Stewart, a journalist and editor known for his independent views, affirmed that:

If one went back into history, what did they find was the ruling influence? It was the man with the club. He was the lord and master, the woman was merely a slave, but after many years.... Women arose to become rulers of the world, the world advanced along lines like these for ages. Every generation had extended more or

*less power to the women than the preceding ages, because in justice to the intelligence of the women, they could not deny them the rights the previous government had refused them.... The suffrage movement was an upward one, and progressed toward the light out of the darkness.*²⁷³

He also noted that:

*Men owed a great deal to the energy and ability of the women....Hon. members...owed much of the...education they had acquired to the energy of the ladies [female teachers]. It was that education that fitted them [M.L.A.'s] to take their place in public life to-day.*²⁷⁴

But to no avail.

When the First World War erupted in 1914, women involved in suffrage work began redirecting much of their time to the war effort. The deaths of Skinner, Fiske and Peters also dealt the W.E.A. a severe blow. Clara O. McGivern, an art teacher and a member of the W.E.A. for only two years, became its new president. Hatheway continued as secretary, giving leadership behind the scenes and assuring continuity within the club's executive.

Despite the club's internal hardship and the depletion of its human resources as members helped in the war effort, the club was central in 1914 to raising interest in the issue of granting married women voting rights in Saint John's municipal elections. (Since 1886, only unmarried propertied women in New Brunswick had had the municipal vote.) The City and County of Saint John responded to the agitation by petitioning the legislature to pass "an act to permit Saint John to hold a plebiscite on extending the municipal franchise to the married women of that city"²⁷⁵. The legislature complied and the plebiscite race was on. The W.E.A. became involved in a door-to-door campaign,²⁷⁶ building forces for the "yes" side. The plebiscite's results must have been heartening for the W.E.A.'s members who had become dispirited with the continued hostility towards women's provincial enfranchisement. 3,175 Saint Johners voted for and 2,260 voted against the proposal.²⁷⁷ The legislature later passed the Saint John bill with no debate.

This marked the first concrete advancement in the women's suffrage struggle in New Brunswick in almost 30 years. It also signified a reversal in attitudes to married women's place and rights in politics. Both the public and the legislature had conceded that married women could express a political voice of

their own without causing, as anti-suffragists had been so sure, the destruction of the family and the downfall of society.

Although the war effort absorbed much of the suffragists' time, it also, paradoxically, aided their cause. As one scholar of the New Brunswick suffrage story, Mary Eileen Clarke, put it:

*[The suffragists' war work]...provided...political opportunists, and...die-hards who had until the last moment stood upon an anti-suffrage island, [with] the excuse...they needed to float with the tide of world opinion which engulfed them, toward the eventuality of woman suffrage.*²⁷⁸

The anti-suffragists in New Brunswick were indeed beginning to look ridiculous by the spring of 1917. All the provinces west of Quebec had granted women the provincial franchise and Nova Scotia and the Dominion of Canada, with the federal franchise, were on the eve of doing so.

The New Brunswick suffragists had high hopes that 1917 would be their year. Ella Hatheway approached several newspapers to request wider news and editorial coverage of the women's suffrage bill and the W.E.A. asked for backing from various provincial organizations including the W.C.T.U. and the Trades and Labour Union. The Association tested the M.L.A.'s, asking each how he intended to vote on the expected suffrage bill. The club also sponsored a series of public meetings in the larger New Brunswick towns in April and May "to whip up interest in the pending suffrage bill to get people to sign petitions backing it."²⁷⁹ W. Franklin Hatheway, Senator George G. King, from Queens County, and two Saint John reverends, Wentworth and Jenner, lent their weight to this public campaign. The huge public effort resulted in the building of a loose provincial network of suffragists and suffrage sympathizers — a network so large that the tiny membership in Saint John could not wholly direct it. Also for the first time it heard from "an early suffrage circle"²⁸⁰ in Sackville and a new one in Perth.

In May, Roberts, the Liberal's Health Minister, brought in a private member's bill on women's enfranchisement. He had the solid support of the public. The W.E.A., the 19 branches of the provincial W.C.T.U., the Local Council of Women (representing 25 women's societies), many of the province's clergymen and the Saint John press had all thrown their weight and energy behind the measure. Resolutions arrived from the L.C.W. and the Trades and Labour Council supporting the bill and from the Fredericton King's Daughters supporting women's suffrage. As the bill was being debated, "lady school teachers"²⁸¹ and "members of the

Sunshine Bible Class”²⁸² both of Moncton, sent supportive petitions. Seven or eight delegations from around the province flocked to the steps of the legislature, including one sent by the W.E.A., all supported by the Women’s Institutes, a provincial network of rural women.²⁸³

In June, the bill went into second reading in spite of the attempt of some assemblymen to put it over until the next session, and men and “women flocked in such numbers to the Halls of Legislation [to support the bill] that ...[they] had the Hall itself and the M.P.P.’s went to the gallery”²⁸⁴. The bill’s passage began to seem truly imminent after two anti-suffragists, Tilley and Murray, made unexpected about-turns. They expressed strong support for the bill, claiming the women’s war effort had earned them the right to vote. But political reasons may have caused these M.L.A.’s change of heart. Both Conservatives, they likely wanted to embarrass the Liberals which, as a party, did not support suffrage, although a Liberal had introduced the latest bill.

“Like a bolt from the blue”,²⁸⁵ the assemblymen killed the measure, 24 to 15.

Veniot was among those who had opposed the full enfranchisement bill. Once adamantly opposed to women’s enfranchisement he had evolved to the point of accepting unmarried women into the voting ring and stated, “that before the end of another year that he might be persuaded [sic] to vote for the full enfranchisement of women”²⁸⁶. He joined several other of the bill’s opponents in a stalling tactic, suggesting that the measure be put off for yet another year. Frustrated by another example of this political game, a group of women apparently mobbed Veniot, symbol and practicer of these techniques, in a corridor of the legislature. Only after a struggle was he “rescued from his perilous position”²⁸⁷.

This episode was recalled in 1919 when Liberal Premier Walter E. Foster, a businessman by profession, was told that if his government continued denying women the vote he, too, “would be the brunt of a female attack”²⁸⁸. The speaker predicted that once women finally obtained the “whiphand”²⁸⁹ — the ballot — they could give Foster his life’s “worst beating”²⁹⁰ by soundly voting him out of office.

It had become obvious that for a government to continue delaying enfranchising women was to court, if not political suicide, at least political ridicule — and soon political losses. Anti-suffragists in the legislature had to begin reassessing their stand. The sudden converts to woman suffrage in the war years were seizing upon the old argument of women’s purifying strength, backed by the recent example of women’s war work. To these men, as to many

other people, women, with their "natural" nurturing bent, had somehow eased the horror and strife of war, as their caring hands knitted soldiers' socks and tended soldiers' wounds. If women were a source of strength and good during the war, then surely, these converts suggested, women could only be an even greater such source in provincial elections.

And so it was that, paradoxically, after the 1917 fiasco, the politicians were ready to concede that "the time had come",²⁹¹ that "the women's franchise in N.B. was inevitable"²⁹².

This came when the province's suffrage organization in Saint John had reached almost its lowest ebb. In 1917, it had suffered some internal strife when its president and vice-president resigned after the membership refused to endorse Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden's Union government.²⁹³ Its new president, Hatheway, left the club virtually leaderless during much of the spring of 1918 when she was away in the United States. The W.E.A.'s sole lobbying effort of that year, and its last before the club's dissipation, was to send Mrs. H.N. Coates, its corresponding secretary, to interview Premier Foster in the early spring. Still playing the waiting game he said that he wished to postpone introducing a women's enfranchisement bill for yet another year. Upon learning what position she held in the club, he then took the liberty of insulting her, stating that he was at a loss "to understand how so clever a woman had been overlooked. Why had she not also resigned [as McGivern had done], been sent abroad [as Hatheway had been], or killed out of hand?"²⁹⁴

But in spite of himself, Foster had to act soon on enfranchising women. In March of 1918, Murray, leader of the Conservative opposition and once an avowed anti-suffragist, introduced a resolution calling the legislature to endorse women's suffrage. Fellow Conservative Tilley, another suffragist convert, seconded him. Their reasons for their actions were obviously political but they received the unanimous support of the assemblymen; even "lukewarm"²⁹⁵ Foster had to concede to the principle of women's enfranchisement. The Conservatives then hoped to introduce a women's suffrage bill, but when Foster let it be known that if this were tried he would advise the lieutenant-governor to veto any such measure, the Conservatives desisted. Foster wanted the Liberals to receive full credit for introducing and passing the suffrage bill, and he promised that this would be done in the next session.

In 1919, he made good his promise, having the Attorney General, James P. Byrne, a lawyer representing Gloucester County, introduce the women's suffrage bill. A. Allison Dysart, a Liberal from Kent County, felt obliged to observe that "there are...women

who feel that the Province is now under an unpardonable disgrace in that such legislation was not brought down before.”²⁹⁶ Indeed, the issue of enfranchising women itself incited very little debate. However, one Conservative member, John Ray Campbell, a lawyer from Saint John, did voice the fear of admitting women into the seats of power. He was immediately assured that “The Bill did not go so far as to enable women to sit in the House as members”.²⁹⁷ To this Frank L. Potts, a Saint John businessman and a faithful suffragist, declared that “he did not know whether the Bill should be passed as a joke or not”²⁹⁸, observing that:

*The Government brought the measure in, not because it wanted to but because public opinion compelled it to take action.*²⁹⁹

Using the “women as purifiers” argument, he quipped:

*The Government had made great talk of the necessity of house cleaning, yea by refusing women the right to be members of the House it was excluding the class best qualified to clean house.*³⁰⁰

But the government felt no need to heed Potts’ argument. There had been no lobby to allow female legislators; the government sensed no obligation to legislate an unsolicited right, as clearly based in fundamental principle as it might be.

Francis J. Sweeney, a lawyer representing Westmorland County, could not resist a display of tongue-in-cheek chivalry. He suggested that “with the franchise extended to women an effort should be made to have elections take place in fine weather”.³⁰¹ Evidently he was not taken too seriously.

The M.L.A.’s were almost ready to rubber-stamp women’s suffrage when a proposal of drawing up a “special list of female voters” was made. The Liberals wanted to prepare a June list, prior to the regular autumn list, just in case such a list were to be suddenly required. Political games overrode the suffrage debate again. The Conservatives suspected that the Liberals, with the new list in hand, would call a snap election; (one recalls Prime Minister Borden doing just that to win the 1917 federal election with a newly enfranchised group of female voters). But members of both parties, while conceding that without such a list women could be denied their right to vote in the next provincial election and the proposed plebiscite on prohibition, agreed that the time required to prepare such a list would run into the autumn in any case. But the debate was not to end without such unenthusiastic comments on women’s suffrage as those of Francis C. McGrath, a physician from Northumberland County, who remarked that:

*He could see no need for haste or of putting the country in a panic and upsetting the revision of voters' lists to give women the vote. Women had been without it for centuries and women of the preceding generation had not asked for it, yet no great calamity had occurred.*³⁰²

On April 15, 1919, after almost half a century of debating the issue, New Brunswick legislators granted New Brunswick women the right to vote in provincial elections. At that late hour the suffragists had stolen from the scene, knowing that their urging was no longer needed to assure the bill's passage. They had done their part as best as they were able. The final debate was merely a formality, a testament to the decades of private and public lobbying in which two generations of suffragists had engaged.

Why such a long struggle?

In retrospect one wonders what took the legislators so long to accept and then enact the principle of women's suffrage. In fact, in 1895, Emmerson

*predicted that future ages would regard with amazement the long struggle on the part of women for the simple right of personal representation which ought to be the birthright of every citizen under our constitution.*³⁰³

As suffragists in the legislature pointed out repeatedly, disenfranchised men had never had to petition for the right to vote and no one had ever petitioned against women's suffrage.³⁰⁴ Indeed, in 1917 one exasperated suffragist politician declared that, "He could never understand why men wanted to dominate the whole situation [politics]"³⁰⁵. Why indeed did the suffrage debate last as long as it did?

The resistance to women's suffrage was bound up in two factors: women's perceived place in society and the political expediency of the issue.

Women's perceived place in society infiltrated almost every aspect of the anti-suffragist arguments. Upon tackling the issue of women's enfranchisement, the legislators had to thrash out the principles upon which the franchise had been based to ascertain how, in their view, women met the requirements of the principles.

The franchise had essentially been based on three principles: residency, property ownership and intelligence. Residency was an obvious criterion and a non-issue as far as female voters were

concerned. It simply required that voters live, or at one time at least own land, in New Brunswick to demonstrate the potential voter's interest in New Brunswick government as well as the voter's potential knowledge of New Brunswick issues.

Some form of property ownership or leasing of property had also been for most of the 19th century a criterion for the right to vote. New Brunswick took over 100 years to shake off the elitist form of representative government established in the province by Thomas Carleton. Even though the property criterion was done away with for men in 1889, suffragists in the House often argued that propertied women should be allowed to vote, even into the 20th century. In practice, however, most women were not property owners since most women married and until 1895 married women were limited in the way they could acquire and deal with property. Property ownership was therefore a poor method of enfranchising women.

Nonetheless, calls came from many quarters demanding that women with property be enfranchised, if not all women. Some demanded this because propertied women had equal voting qualifications as men, and some demanded it because the women's property should be represented.

Then there was the question of intelligence. Legislators had to be sure that voters were capable of making a sound and reasoned choice and that they were capable of acting as full citizens. When applied to women, this criterion brought into play the entire gamut of prejudices and beliefs regarding women's mental and physical abilities as well as their moral and psychological qualities. 19th and early 20th century society had very narrowly defined women's abilities and qualities, disallowing each woman any room to deviate from the standard norm or to progress beyond it. Society then placed women in a very special sphere, a protected one in which they would — presumably — excel. Given how deeply ingrained these attitudes were, only the most imaginative, inquiring and principled legislators could see the narrowness and unjustness of this sex-typing. The rest had to be convinced by dedicated suffragists, both women and men, who had not only the energy but the socio-economic privileges, the educational background and sometimes the professional status that would lend clout to their arguments (in a largely class society) and give them the needed time and money for their lobbying. The suffragists faced a long road of what we now call "consciousness raising".

Bound up in the concept of women's capabilities was the question of whether unmarried women were more capable of voting than married women. The law viewed single women as autonomous human beings in most matters and, as such, granted them many

of the same legal rights as men. But it did not view married women in the same way. Rather, the law considered that upon marriage a woman abandoned her individual legal rights and became absorbed under those of her husband. Although full separate property rights had been established for married women by 1895, they were still without many civil and legal rights. Arguing in circles, the anti-suffragists and nominal suffragists declared: since a married woman has few legal rights why should she have any civic rights? Since the husband had the legal rights, the anti-suffragists believed that he also by extension had the couple's political voice.

So bound up in the husband was the wife, in the anti-suffragists' view, that even if she were given the right to vote she would most surely vote as her husband, doubling the vote needlessly so to speak. Some suffragists used this argument to their advantage saying that women, inherently virtuous and morally upright, would double the vote only for the socially good causes, ensuring social progress. One suffragist, mocking the belief that a woman upon marriage could no longer think independently, queried, tongue-in-cheek, how a woman's intelligence by the simple act of marriage suddenly "sank below par".³⁰⁶ Both suffragists and anti-suffragists also spent many hours arguing the unfairness of enfranchising single women and then disenfranchising them upon marriage. These legislators predicted that single women would refuse to marry, creating social unrest. Better not to enfranchise them at all...

The most adamant anti-suffragists also displayed a fear of the implications of women's demands for voting rights. The possibility of women extending their movement into the political sphere beyond the right to vote terrified the staid conservatives. They foresaw the destruction of the family and the downfall of society as women began seeking full participation in political debates and party politics, began running for public office, and finally, began participating fully in the larger public sphere. Anti-suffragists, afraid that if they granted women a millimeter that they would grab a 1000 more, did not want to budge at all.

Political expediency also accounted for some of the delay in legislating women's right to vote. Women's suffrage was not a hot issue. It never truly became a partisan issue which suggests that neither major party in New Brunswick saw advantages to making it its own. After all, all the voters were men. Moreover, the members in both parties shared a diversity of opinion on women's place.

Then there was the perennial conservative question: "has it been done before?" In the early years of the debate anti-suffragists

declared that there were no political models upon which to base women's suffrage. Anti-suffragists repeatedly voiced a fear of the unknown, insisting that New Brunswick could not embark on the untried, nor lead public opinion. In 1894, Alward, impatient with this staid attitude, declared that:

*He was surprised that the leader of the government should advise us to wait upon the action of other countries. Had the house no reliance in itself that it was afraid to trust itself upon the untrodden ways of legislation? If that principle was adopted in all countries no great reform would ever be accomplished.*³⁰⁷

A year later Pitts boldly asserted that:

*he favored radical legislation when it was right legislation — when it was just and honest legislation.*³⁰⁸

To no avail.

When, as early as the 1880's, the anti-suffragists were presented with political models which happened to be from western American states, the anti-suffragists declared that these places were crude, rude, barbaric and uncivilized,³⁰⁹ that New Brunswick should not go to the "wild and woolly west for precedent".³¹⁰ Ignoring such early examples of women's enfranchisement in the Isle of Man (1881),³¹¹ New Zealand (1893) and some Australian states (1902), the anti-suffragists labelled women's suffrage as "unBritish"³¹² and therefore unacceptable.

Indeed it seemed, at least to the suffragists, that any excuse under the sun was legitimate to their opponents as long as it stalled the dreaded women's enfranchisement measure. Justice was pitted against political expediency. On two occasions in particular were stalling tactics especially evident: in 1899, in the wake of the first wave of suffragist sympathy, and in 1917 when public favor had again reached a peak. Somehow, in the face of all the agitation, the anti-suffragists needed a little extra push, an argument to grab on to in order to save them the embarrassment of admitting that they had been wrong. They needed an argument that was widely accepted by the population, a national rationale. And in the face of much favorable public opinion they needed a little time to sound out the population to find the least embarrassing option.

In the 1890's, suffragist converts had only the very popular women's goodness argument to which to turn and to it they did. Those who wished to continue stalling could keep lamenting that there were not enough international examples. But by 1917, anti-

suffragists could no longer honestly declare that women's suffrage had not been tried. Nationally and internationally it was becoming the norm. New Brunswick was going to be left behind. As suffragist convert Phinney had rightly declared in 1894: "If legislators do not lead public opinion they are forced forward by it."³¹³

In the same year Pitts had predicted that, "The statesman who opposed woman suffrage would soon feel the chariot wheels of progress roll over his neck."³¹⁴ Twenty-five years later politicians sensed the approaching wheels and began scrambling to get out of the way before they wrought their political damage. Left and right, anti-suffragists were leaping to safety declaring that women's role in the First World War had convinced them that women could handle life in the political arena. They had found their national rationale.

The suffragist converts' claim that their change of heart was due to women's war efforts remains suspect. The war was not "the great watershed"³¹⁵ that whisked women from the kitchen to the great wide world of social and professional opportunities. Increasing numbers of New Brunswick women had long before the advent of the war worked outside the home and engaged in voluntary social reform and suffrage work. Anti-suffragists could not have honestly denied that fact; they merely slid over it, declaring that at last they saw the light because women with all their gracious patient womanly traits, had aided in the war effort, had eased the worst horror man could ever inflict upon himself. Underneath all the novelty of the argument was the ages-old view that "woman brings good to the bad".

It cannot be denied, however, that the devastating effects of the First World War did encourage societies to question their old value systems, to rethink issues of social justice; the women's suffrage movement, along with other social movements, benefited from this universal reappraisal.

As well as the ideological and political reasons for the resistance to women's suffrage, there were tactical deficiencies within the suffrage forces themselves which weakened the cause. A lack of coordination existed among the suffrage forces both inside and outside the legislature. Since women's suffrage was never truly a partisan issue, suffragist politicians argued individually in support of women's enfranchisement. Some pointed to principles of justice and democracy, some to women's "innate" purity and virtue, others to their proven intellectual and administrative abilities. And some, for different reasons, argued for partial women's enfranchisement to the glee of anti-suffragists, who pointed to the seeming lack of commitment.

Suffragists outside the legislature also had different reasons for allegiance to the suffrage cause, different socio-economic and ideological backgrounds. These differences did not encourage a collaborative long-term lobbying effort among the various groups of suffragists and suffragist sympathizers, groups such as the W.E.A., W.C.T.U., L.C.W. and others. Geography and limited financial resources also contributed to the separation of the groups. In spite of the divisive factors, large lobbying efforts were launched on numerous occasions by the W.C.T.U. and on several occasions by the much smaller W.E.A., testifying to the great energy and dedication of the women.

In sum, women won the vote in New Brunswick only after a long and committed lobby. International and national acceptance of their cause helped sway the staid "provincialism"³¹⁶ resisting their demands, and their war efforts gave diehards a "tidy excuse"³¹⁷ to capitulate finally. But the great energy of the movement came from the New Brunswick suffragists who would not relent.

After the vote

The period following the granting of women's suffrage did not bring about the utopian changes the W.C.T.U. and other ingenuous groups had hoped — changes such as worldwide prohibition and women voting in blocks for social good and social progress. The more astute suffragists had known all along that legislating women's enfranchisement was only a small step in a long road to gaining equal rights for women. Indeed, once the more shrewd anti-suffragists had begun sensing that women would vote as disparately as men, that women voters would not significantly alter established voting patterns, then the anti-suffragists ceased fearing the women's vote.³¹⁸

In New Brunswick, as had occurred at the federal level, the party which brought in women's suffrage (in New Brunswick the Liberals) won the next election. Women were recognized as an important addition to the electorate (certainly their very numbers warranted such consideration) and politicians appealed to them for political allegiance.³¹⁹

But once women had been granted the right to vote, the suffragists' energies seemed to dissipate. Women had lost one of the few straightforward issues upon which they could all agree,³²⁰ one of the few issues which clearly disabled each and every woman 21 years of age and over. A new deeper level of political, social and economic inquiry regarding women's status had to filter through the masses before women would again in significant numbers agitate politically. Between the 1920's and

the 1950's provincial and national economies ranging from stable, even prosperous, to depressed, did not encourage women to analyze or question more deeply their social, political and economic status.

However, the women's suffrage movement did not go completely without aftereffect. The federal government consulted women on their concerns the year it granted all women the vote: 1918. It would do so again periodically and involved New Brunswick women in its major consultations with Canadian women in 1943 and 1967.

The 1918 War Committee of the federal government's Cabinet invited a select group of women from all over Canada to a Women's War Conference in Ottawa. They were to help the War Committee make recommendations on such things as women's relationship to increased agricultural production, commercial and industrial occupations and the conservation of food. Four New Brunswick women were named as delegates: the Countess of Ashburnham of Fredericton, Grace Jones of Woodstock, Mrs. J. McAvity and Mrs. G. F. Smith, both of Saint John. In 1919, the same government created a Women's Reconstruction Committee to help the government find ways to set Canada on the right path after the war. No New Brunswick women, in fact no Maritime women, were named to this Committee.³²¹

In 1943, Margaret MacKenzie, a woman from Fredericton active in community affairs, was among 10 Canadian women appointed to the Subcommittee on the Post-War Problems of Women. A lack of commitment by the Liberal government of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and a lack of public support in general let the Subcommittee's report collect dust.³²² Many of its recommendations would be restated over a quarter of a century later by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada.

In 1967, the federal government appointed the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, headed by Florence Bird. Doris Ogilvie, a Fredericton lawyer and deputy judge, was a Commission member. Several New Brunswick women and groups submitted briefs. The Commission tabled its lengthy report in 1970. Its 167 recommendations sent shock waves through Canadian political institutions as lawmakers and laypersons faced the facts of discrimination against women.

This round of consultations coincided with the growing Canadian women's movement. Everywhere, women were meeting to discuss their political, social and economic status. In 1974, New Brunswick women organized a provincial conference called New Perspectives for New Brunswick Women which

resulted in some 300 recommendations. An ad hoc committee under Dorothy Power-Lawson, a Moncton type-setter and computer operator, and Corinne Gallant, a philosophy professor at the Université de Moncton, formed with the mandate of seeing to the creation of a provincial advisory council on the status of women. Both the Bird Report of 1970 and the provincial conference recommendations of 1974 had recognized the need for provincial advisory councils on the status of women since historically governments had been slow, haphazard, noncommittal and even resistant in addressing issues affecting women.

The ad hoc committee drew up and presented a bill for an advisory council to the provincial government. In December 1975, during International Women's Year, the New Brunswick government passed an act to create the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, but not until December 1977 did the government appoint the first Council, after a strong women's lobby. Madeleine Delaney-LeBlanc, was named the Council's first Chairperson. She had been active in various community affairs and women's groups and had worked as a teacher, nurse, television host and translator. She remained Chairperson until 1985.

The creation of the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women marked the beginning of a new voice of women's influence in the political sphere. The lobby for it had matched the intensity of the suffragists' work of sixty years before. As Ella Hatheway had written of woman in 1912:

*Now she is rising to an appreciation of herself, and with her new self-respect she is demanding recognition as a human being.*³²³

Because of the infrequency with which governments officially consulted women regarding their concerns and because women did not form large united political lobbies in the years following women's enfranchisement, New Brunswick women's political status advanced only slowly. Further, their advances were sometimes met with backlash.

1919: Minnie Bell Adney, a music teacher from Woodstock, attempts to run for Parliament as a Conservative in the riding of Victoria-Carleton. She files her nomination papers but her name never appears on the ballot. She accuses her solicitors of having accepted bribes to ensure that her nomination files were lost.³²⁴

1921: legislators pass an act giving all women the same municipal voting privileges as men. All property owners regardless of sex and marital status can vote.

1925: Minnie Bell Adney again attempts to win the parliamentary seat of Victoria-Carleton. Running as an Independent with a strong conservative platform, she draws 84 votes, not a bad showing against running mates Conservative James K. Flemming, who had served as premier between 1911 and 1914 and the Liberal incumbent Thomas W. Caldwell.³²⁵

1925: women married to ratepayers become eligible to vote and hold office in rural school elections.

1926: *L'Évangéline's* editor Alfred Roy makes this front-page editorial comment:

*The vast majority of Acadians, I do believe, would have no objection to the repeal of the law which gives women the right to vote. Although we are not well acquainted with the opinion of the English majority, we do know very well that many of our English-speaking friends consider this law without merit.*³²⁶

1932: *Le Fermier Acadien* publishes an anonymously written article entitled "For or against the vote for women".³²⁷ The article reclaims women's, and in particular francophone women's, place in the domestic sphere. Woman, the article affirms, is the guardian angel of the home; there she reigns with grace, gentleness and love. Those who encourage her to look in directions contrary to her saintly mission be wary, for they strip her of her prestige, influence and respect by making apparent her physical weaknesses. Superior to man with her tenderness of heart and spirit, claims the article, woman is his inferior in all things which involve the vigor of the body and creative intelligence; women should be nowhere in the public sphere, not in the seats of Parliament, not in the halls of justice, not on the police beat, and not in the polling booths. This after women had had the provincial franchise 13 years. The article incites no response, suggesting that the newspaper's readers are either in complete agreement or that they think the article's ideas so outmoded as not to be worth a rebuttal.

1934: after being heavily petitioned by the province's Women's Institutes, former anti-suffragist Tilley, now premier, introduces a bill which allows women to hold provincial office, as well as vote. All the other provinces (except Quebec where women must wait until 1940) had simultaneously granted women the vote and the right to hold office.

1935: New Brunswick has its first female candidate in a provincial election, Frances Fish, a well-known lawyer from Newcastle. She runs for the Conservatives in a strongly Liberal

riding. The four Liberal candidates who run in her constituency win; it is still the period when several candidates are elected from one riding. She places a respectable first among the four losing Conservatives.³²⁸

1944-45: a study group of Fredericton women begins examining the municipal voting regulations. Since these stipulate that only propertied persons can vote, homemakers, almost always propertyless, cannot. Women who rely on municipal services just as much as men, are disproportionately disenfranchised by the property stipulation. The study group, which had been actively mounting petitions, approaches Muriel Fergusson, a well-known lawyer, to draft a brief to present to the Fredericton city council, urging a change in this voting criterion. She agrees and in her research discovers that in all provinces west of Quebec women and men without property can vote in civic elections. Her brief and the study group's recommendations meet with the city council's approval. The city informs the provincial legislature of its new position; an act is passed and in 1946 propertyless women can at last vote in Fredericton city elections.³²⁹

1948: Edna Steel becomes the first woman elected to municipal office in New Brunswick when she is elected to the Saint John city council.

1948: Gladys West, a homemaker and hairdresser from Queens County, running for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (C.C.F.), becomes New Brunswick's second woman to run for provincial office. She gains 4.5% of her riding's vote,³³⁰ a respectable showing for the C.C.F.

1949: Fredericton women gain the right to hold civic office, after lobbying by the new Local Council of Women.

1951: Muriel Fergusson, who had become in 1947 the province's first Regional Director of Family Allowances, becomes Fredericton's first alderwoman. She is reelected in 1953, and becomes the city's first female deputy mayor.

1951: the federal *Indian Act* is amended, allowing Indian women on reserves to vote in band elections and to hold office on band councils. Six months later, in November, Irene Bernard is elected to the band council of the Tobique Reserve.

1952: Louise Paul and Marion Gabriel are elected to the band council of Saint Mary's Reserve.

1953: Muriel Fergusson is appointed to the Senate, the first woman from the Atlantic provinces.

1956: Jean Adams, a research scientist, is elected to the Fredericton city council, only the third woman to hold municipal office in New Brunswick.

1963: Indian women and men living on reserves are given the provincial franchise.

1964: Margaret Rideout, a Liberal running in her deceased husband's riding, becomes the first and as yet only woman from New Brunswick to be elected as a Member of Parliament.

1966: age and residency become the only criteria for voting in municipal elections. Since 1961 the Saint John Council of Women has been a major lobbyist on this issue. Homemakers hitherto disenfranchised if they were not taxpayers can finally vote; they do so for the first time in 1967.³³¹

1967: Mathilda Blanchard, a hairdresser and union organizer originally from Caraquet, becomes the first new Brunswick woman to run for the leadership of a provincial party, the Progressive Conservative Party of New Brunswick.

1967: Christine Young, a hairdresser from Carleton County, becomes the first Liberal woman to run as a candidate for the New Brunswick legislature. She is unsuccessful.

1967: Brenda Robertson, a home economist from Riverview, wins a seat for the Progressive Conservatives in the provincial election.

1967: Marion Upton, an office manager from Minto, becomes the first female mayor in New Brunswick. She quips, "I hope I'm not the province's last."³³²

1970: Brenda Robertson becomes the first woman in New Brunswick appointed to Cabinet, assuming the responsibilities of Minister of Youth and in 1971, the added responsibilities of Minister of Welfare. She later serves as Minister of Health and Minister of Social Program Reform.

1971: Margret LaBillois, a homemaker, is elected chief of the Eel River Bar reserve, the first Indian woman in New Brunswick to hold that position.

1972: after nearly 20 years as Senator, Muriel Fergusson becomes the Senate's first female speaker.

1974: Shirley Dysart, a teacher, becomes the first female Liberal M.L.A., when she wins Saint John Park.

1978: Mabel DeWare, a manager of a dental firm wins Moncton West for the Progressive Conservatives and becomes the province's second female cabinet minister, as Minister of Labour and Manpower. She later serves as Minister of Community Colleges.

1978: Nancy Clark (now Clark Teed), a personnel consultant representing the Progressive Conservatives in Saint John South, becomes the fourth woman elected to the provincial legislature and in 1982 becomes the province's third female cabinet minister, as Minister of Social Services.

1978: Margaret J. Anderson, a businesswoman from Newcastle, becomes the second New Brunswick woman to be appointed to the Senate.

1978: Gail Walsh, a Dalhousie social worker, is elected president of the New Democratic Party of New Brunswick, the first woman.

1979: Caraquet resident Louise Blanchard, trained as an arts teacher, is elected leader of the Parti Acadien, the first female leader of any political party in New Brunswick.

1983: Elsie Wayne, who had served six years as councillor, is elected mayor of Saint John, the first female mayor of a New Brunswick city.

1983: Janice Clarke, a hotel and restaurant proprietor from Sussex, is elected president of the Progressive Conservative party of New Brunswick, the first woman.

1984: Brenda Robertson is appointed to the Senate, the third New Brunswick woman to be so honored.

Although women in New Brunswick have made small inroads into the seats of power in the province, the actual numbers of those who have run and those who have been elected remain a fraction of the numbers of men. Women in power in New Brunswick in 1985 are a tiny minority.

Numerous factors have been attributed to women's continued underrepresentation. Only very recently have women in significant numbers been entering the professions most associated with political careers, professions such as law and business. Women still carry most of the child care and household responsibilities, leaving little time and energy for political pursuits. And significant numbers of women have only very recently begun building business relations and networks that are key to financing campaigns.

As attitudes evolve and women are able to share more equitably in both public and family responsibilities, women will also one day assume their rightful equal place in the political sphere. But much will have to be done to bring that day closer. At the present rate it could take women 348 years to be equally represented in the New Brunswick legislature. Can New Brunswick accept to wait that long for power to be balanced by sexual equality?

