

ABOUT Women

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Women in Trades *Then* and Now

Over the past century, women's advancement in the workplace has been so steadily progressive in some areas, that people may not realize how hard-earned the victory has been.

It is certainly not unusual to see contemporary women as doctors, lawyers, architects or other professionals working in fields traditionally dominated by men. A 2004 Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey shows the total number of women in a paid occupation in Manitoba was only slightly lower than men. But women are

still under-represented in many of the industrial and technical trades. The survey showed only about 1.5 per cent of all working women were employed in the Trades, Transport and Equipment Operation category, compared to nearly 25 per cent of working men.

The inequity does not reflect women's ability to work in the trades. During World War II, women replaced the men who volunteered for military service in jobs that included heavy industry, farm labour and munitions, welding, electronics,

drafting and industrial chemistry. They piloted airplanes and drove trucks. Women were also the driving force behind the railway system, working as conductors, mechanics and track workers.

Other women, like Elsie Gregory MacGill, demonstrated extraordinary talent during the war when she directed all the engineering work for Canadian production of the Hurricane and Helldiver fighter planes. While most positions were behind the scenes, often involving assembly line work, many Canadian women saw their wartime experiences as positive and liberating.

Unfortunately, the jobs were temporary – when the enlisted men returned, the women were promptly dismissed. Many sought jobs outside the home after the war. But the influx of women into the workplace from 1951 to the late 1980s occurred primarily in what are historically women's fields. In fact, in 1991, clerical, sales, retail, teaching and health-care occupations accounted for seven out of every 10 jobs held by women.

In the 1970s, revised human rights laws brought greater equality to the hiring process, requiring employers to consider women for many jobs, including those that were traditionally performed by men. Despite legislation to support the inclusion of women in the workplace, prevailing stereotypes that women "didn't belong on the shop floor" left some women feeling isolated or unwelcome on the job.

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Photo provided by:
Eric and Evelyn Smith

The Pioneer Hangar Girls, 1942 (L-R): Iona Bowie, Cora Taylor, Elda Crawford, Erma Jones, Hilda Smith, Margaret Briese, Margaret Brydon, Agnes McMurrich.

Minister's Message



Welcome to *About Women*. To celebrate Women's History Month, this edition looks at the traditional and non-traditional skilled

trades performed by women throughout history.

Our lead article features a recent graduate of Trade Up to your Future, a program offered by the Women's Directorate in partnership with Manitoba Advanced Education and Training that provides pre-trades training to women. This story is particularly encouraging, given that Manitoba recently achieved the nation's highest growth in urban housing starts and construction. In fact, we anticipate that this construction boom will translate into more jobs in the trades for both women and men.

This issue also provides information for teenage girls who wish to pursue a future in the skilled trades. Another article explores the role of women in Manitoba's textile industry. We also examine Habitat for Humanity's Women Build program which introduces women to homebuilding and construction work in a supportive environment.

Please join me for a reception at the Legislative Building on October 24, 2006, from 11:45 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., to celebrate Women's History Month. Space is limited, so please call the Women's Directorate (945-3476 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-800-263-0234) if you plan to attend.

I hope you enjoy this edition of *About Women* and look forward to meeting you on October 24.

Nancy Allan
Minister responsible for the
Status of Women

A Stitch in Time: The History of the Manitoba

Winnipeg's garment trade holds a prominent place in Manitoba's economic history, thanks to the great number of women who helped build the industry, while also struggling for workplace equality.

Though women dominated the needle trade even in its earliest days, men were typically given higher-skilled jobs and often earned more than twice the average salary of the female workers. It wasn't unusual for women to work 60-hour weeks in poor conditions, and at such a demanding pace, many suffered health problems.

The United Garment Workers of America established Canada's first women's local in Winnipeg in 1899. Over the next two decades, they pushed for changes to working conditions, but the process was slow. When Canada entered World War II in 1939, clothing factories became busier than ever. The high demand resulted in certain employer-imposed abuses, including unsafe workplaces and inadequate pay.

After the war, Manitoba's garment workers achieved a major victory when they became organized under the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. For the first time, women lobbied successfully for higher pay, better working conditions and equal rights. By the late 1940s, wages did significantly increase for female union members.

Throughout its history, Winnipeg's needle trade industry provided employment for a large proportion of new Canadians. During the 1940s and 1950s, many employees immigrated from Europe, later to be followed by women from the Philippines.

Women's Place is in the

Women have traditionally been considered homemakers, but an innovative home building program at Habitat for Humanity (HFH) is giving that role a whole new significance.

The Women Build program was established by HFH as a way to encourage the involvement of women in Habitat home construction. HFH is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to creating quality homes for disadvantaged families through community involvement and owner sweat equity.



Photos provided by: Habitat for Humanity

"About 50 per cent of Habitat's volunteers are women, yet only 25 per cent of the build site volunteers are female," says Joan Kennedy, a provincial civil servant and volunteer chair of the local 2006 Women Build Committee. "It's not about excluding men; it's about including more women on the build site."

Needle Trade Industry

Erlinda Tesoro, then 23, recalls arriving in Winnipeg in 1968 with 30 other young women to begin work in a clothing factory. She recalls sharing similar feelings and experiences with fellow workers. "Because I knew English, I could talk to many of the other women." Tesoro adds these friendships helped her adapt to her new country.

Today's garment industry has changed dramatically over the years, providing its largely female staff with the safe, equitable workplace to which everyone is entitled. It remains a large employer of new Canadians.

In Winnipeg, garment trade employees are represented by one union, UNITE HERE. It was established on July 8, 2004 with the merger of UNITE (Union of Needle Trades, Industrial and Textile Employees) and HERE (Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International). The union represents more than 450,000 active members and more than 400,000 retirees across North America. The local Joint Council represents six locals and its membership is about 95 per cent female.

Since the North American Free Trade Agreement came into effect in 1994, the local needle trade industry has been in decline. UNITE HERE is currently working to stabilize the job losses in this industry and keep products in Canada.



Woman sewing glove, 1968
Photo provided by: University of Manitoba Archives, Special Collections, Winnipeg Tribune Collections

Congratulations Manitoba! We're really *in motion* now...

October 5, 2006 was the first anniversary of the launch of Manitoba *in motion* and people across the province had reason to celebrate. Manitoba *in motion* is a provincial strategy to help all Manitobans make physical activity part of their daily lives for health and enjoyment. Your enthusiastic response is making the program a real success. We're now one year closer to our vision of creating a healthier Manitoba by increasing physical activity 10 per cent by the year 2010. Let's keep the momentum going!

Manitoba *in motion* Physical Activity Grants are available to communities wanting to create local programs that increase physical activity. Recently, the community of Lundar was awarded a grant to train 14 to 16-year-old girls as soccer coaches for younger children in the community.

Make sure your group isn't left out!

The next deadline for grant applications is December 1, 2006. Forms can be found at www.manitobainmotion.ca, by calling 945-3648 in Winnipeg or toll free at 1-866-788-3648.

Home...Building

Currently in its second year in Winnipeg, Women Build has brought together an all-woman work crew to build two homes in 2005 and another two this summer. Kennedy says the group reflects "all ages and all walks of life, from stay-at-home moms to professional women to retirees." She adds that many women underestimate their skills in non-traditional areas, such as construction. "They often believe they do not – or could not – have the same skills and experience as men."



Winnipeg physiotherapist, Chris Urban, is participating on her fifth Women Build crew, her second in the city after similar stints in Calgary. "It's such a safe, nurturing environment that no one is afraid of saying they don't know how to do something," says Urban, who also serves on the local organizing committee. "Being able to help somebody build their first home is so special to me, especially because it means so much to their children's self-esteem. When you are part of giving someone a decent, safe home, it's a real pleasure to share in their joy."

For more information about volunteer opportunities with Women Build, visit www.habitat.mb.ca or call Habitat for Humanity Winnipeg at 204-233-5160.

Did you know?

There are excellent programs designed to introduce young women to careers in technology and the trades:

- **Skills Canada Young Women's Conference**
Skills Canada hosts this day-long event for young women in Grade 8 to learn about careers in trades and technology. It includes interactive demonstrations and hands-on activities and mentors are available to provide career advice. For more information: www.skillscanada.mb.ca; or call 1-866-927-0250.
- **GETT at Red River College**
The Girls Exploring Trades and Technology (GETT) camps are hosted by Red River College in Winnipeg and offer girls aged 12 to 14 the opportunity to meet women who work in non-traditional jobs. The week-long camps include applied skills and technology activities. For more information call Christina Lambert at 1-204-632-2067, or toll free 1-888-515-7722, ext. 2067.

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Some publicly owned companies were slower to hire women for non-traditional jobs than their counterparts. Although a Lockport, MB woman became Canada's first female bus driver in 1917, it wasn't until 1981 that the Halifax Transit Commission hired its first, permanent, female bus driver.

The Women's Directorate, in partnership with the Employment and Training Services (ETS) branch of Manitoba Advanced Education and Training (MAET), offers an innovative program to give eligible women of all ages the opportunity to work in non-traditional occupations. Trade Up to Your Future gives women the education to pursue well-paid, high-demand, careers in the industrial trades. The program includes 10 months of shops training and classroom instruction at the Winnipeg Technical College, including a one-month work placement.

Jennifer Kullman-Allred enrolled in the Industrial Maintenance Technician program in 2005. Currently working as a machinist at Cormers Aerospace, she says Trade Up to Your Future introduced her to a career path she might have otherwise overlooked.

"Before Trade Up, I had never heard of this field but I soon found it was a field I really enjoy," says Kullman-Allred, who was offered a job even before she finished her work placement. "I would definitely recommend the program to other women."

Loris Loewen, manager of labour market information at MAET, says the current trends for trades occupations, such as welders, millwrights, machinists, and plumbers, are very positive and should remain strong. "As more women obtain journeyperson certificates, it will be easier for other women to be successful in the trades. For several years, we have noted that a journeyperson certificate is more frequently required by employers. This qualification also raises earning levels considerably for both employees and for the self-employed."

Women interested in non-traditional trades should contact any ETS Centre. For specific address information on the ETS Centre closest to you, call 945-0575 in Winnipeg or toll free 1-866-332-5077. Bilingual services are available at St. Boniface (Winnipeg), Steinbach and Morden ETS Centres.

Source: Canadian Women: A History, Ed. Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne et al. (1996).

ABOUT Women

About Women is a publication of the *Women's Directorate* that focuses on issues of interest to women and provides practical, timely information they can use. It is available without charge upon request.

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