

# THE UNHEARD MAJORITY:



## A HISTORY OF WOMEN EDUCATORS IN MANITOBA

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Each year, Women's History Month is celebrated across Canada as a way of publicly recognizing the achievements of women as a vital part of our Canadian heritage. It is also a means of encouraging greater awareness among Canadians concerning the historical contributions of women to our society.

For 2002 the Manitoba Women's Directorate focused its celebration on women in education and commissioned an essay, *THE UNHEARD MAJORITY: A HISTORY OF WOMEN EDUCATORS IN MANITOBA*. It was authored by Clare Levin, an honours student in History and Economics, at the University of Manitoba (Winnipeg), under the direction of Dr. Robin Brownlie, Assistant Professor, Department of History, at the University of Manitoba. It is intended for Manitoba students in Senior 1 through 4.

The essay is a historical overview of some of the women who made substantial contributions to education or have been pioneers in the development and delivery of education programs in our province between 1830-1960. These women met seemingly unconquerable barriers, such as prejudice, ridicule and hostility, with courage and determination. They fought for and

demanded the right to a solid education. Some of them also fought for recognition within the teaching profession. All of them were the vanguard for generations of women to come.

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### **Cover Photos:**

- Sybil Shack, 1960  
Courtesy Department of Archives and Special Collections at U of M - Winnipeg Tribune files

- Ruth Emisch  
Courtesy of Ruth Emisch

- Aileen Garland, 1958  
Courtesy Department of Archives and Special Collections at U of M - Winnipeg Tribune files

- Typical Manitoba Rural School, 1911  
Courtesy PAM - Florence School Collection (N13550)

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## THE UNHEARD MAJORITY: A HISTORY OF WOMEN EDUCATORS IN MANITOBA

### I N T R O D U C T I O N

Women have played a fundamental role in education in the province of Manitoba. By the late nineteenth century the majority of teachers in Manitoba were women.<sup>1</sup> Although they formed a majority in the profession, women's voices and concerns were often unheard and unseen. In fact, the presence of so many women was seen as detrimental to the establishment of teaching as a profession. Women tended to have less training than men and many women saw their work as a teacher as temporary employment until they got married. Historically, women teachers worked in the more subordinate positions, as rural schoolteachers and elementary schoolteachers. Men made up the majority of junior and senior high school teachers, were the principals of large schools, and were supervisors. Because of this, although women made up the majority of people in the teaching profession, their concerns and issues were often overlooked.<sup>2</sup>

In order to understand the position of women teachers, a little bit of historical background is necessary. The first formal European settlement in Manitoba was founded near the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in 1812 on land owned by the Hudson's Bay Company. In the early years of the Red River settlement, because there was no formal government, education was the responsibility of the religious groups that had established missions at Red River. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists all created both churches and schools for their parishioners. During the first part of the nineteenth century men did the majority of paid work, including teaching. A woman working for pay outside the home was still an unusual practice in these early years.

When Red River joined Confederation and Manitoba became a province of Canada in 1870 the population began to grow and the city began to industrialize. More and more women were finding it necessary, and desirable, to work for pay and be self-supporting. At this time there were not many careers open to women. Fields such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work were seen as suited to women because of their role as wives and mothers at home. Women also worked as domestic servants, and in factories and shops. The jobs available to women were also dependent upon race and class. A woman from a British, middle-class background would often have an easier time gaining employment as a teacher than a woman from another part of Europe or a woman from a lower-class family.

In 1882, formalized teacher training, in the form of Normal Schools, was established in Manitoba. The two sections of the Board of Education, Catholic and Protestant, were responsible for opening and running the Normal Schools. These schools were open to both women and men, and greater numbers of women began entering the profession. Training requirements ranged from the completion of grade 10 and a short course in teacher training for a third class certificate to the completion of a university degree and a year of Normal School training for a first class certificate. Teachers continued to be trained by Normal Schools until 1965, when all teacher training was finally moved to the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.

Despite this more formal training, teachers still earned low salaries and the profession had a very low social status.<sup>3</sup> Low salaries made it difficult for a person with any dependants to enter into the

profession. Often the salary was not enough to sustain a family. This effectively excluded many men from teaching, something that was seen as detrimental to the profession.<sup>4</sup> There were also many permit teachers, teachers who received a special permit from the provincial government that allowed them to teach for a year without any training. The persistent granting of permits also had a negative effect on the development of teaching as a profession.<sup>5</sup>

The Manitoba Teachers' Federation (MTF) was founded in 1919 to combat the low social status of the teaching profession.<sup>6</sup> This organization helped teachers to form union locals and worked to improve teaching conditions and promote the status of teaching as a profession. In 1942 the name was changed to the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) when the organization was established in legislation. Although the majority of the members were women, in the first half of its existence the MTS did not recognize the concerns of women teachers.<sup>7</sup> These concerns included pay equity (pay determined based on job requirements, not on gender) and forced retirement upon

marriage or pregnancy. Women teachers had to fight to have their issues recognized.

This essay profiles some of the women who played an important role in education in Manitoba between 1830 and 1960. They were influential not only as pioneers in teaching, but also in advocating for the rights of women teachers. Women teachers had to contend with expectations about how they would behave and what proper roles for women were. In Manitoba's early history women such as Angélique and Marguerite Nolin and the women of the female religious orders such as the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, made an important contribution to the establishment of an education system for the province. As teaching and teacher training became more standardized, women like Aileen Garland and Sybil Shack actively worked to improve the status of women teachers. Women such as Margery Brooker and Ruth Emisch set an example for other women teachers through their dedication to teaching and their desire to help both students and colleagues.

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## ANGÉLIQUE NOLIN AND MARGUERITE NOLIN:

### THE EARLIEST FEMALE MÉTIS EDUCATORS IN A FORMAL SCHOOL SETTING

**A**ngélique Nolin, with the help of her older sister, Marguerite Nolin, ran one of the first formal schools in the Red River settlement. The school was created under the direction of Bishop Provencher who wanted to establish Catholic schools to educate and assimilate the Aboriginal population. There had been other schools in the area for Aboriginal boys, but Provencher felt that it was important to educate the girls as well. Angélique Nolin's school provided education to Aboriginal and Métis girls of

French, Cree, Ojibwa and Scottish backgrounds that lived near the Red River settlement.

Education was important in Aboriginal societies before the arrival of Europeans in North America but it did not take place in the same formal setting that our school system uses today. Instead, children learned by watching and imitating the example of the adults around them, and through the stories told to them by their parents and the elders of their community. Children learned the appropriate way to behave and learned

the skills they would need as adults, such as food procurement or fighting techniques, by watching and mimicking adults. Games also helped children learn skills they would need as adults by simulating adult experiences. There was hunting and fighting games, food procurement and preparation games, and others, all designed to reinforce the lessons and skills that children were learning.

Oral tradition, especially storytelling, was very important to Aboriginal education. In a culture where there was almost no writing, information about history, politics, ecology and the spiritual life of the community was passed down through stories. Legends told around the fire at night explained how the world came to be and how people and objects got their distinctions and characteristics. Stories were also used as a way of reinforcing the lessons that the youngsters had learned during the day. As children got older their education became somewhat more structured, especially if the child was to become a shaman or chief.<sup>8</sup>

Formal schooling was quite a different experience for Aboriginal children. Other earlier schools in the Red River area attempted to educate Aboriginal and Métis boys. This education proved to be fairly temporary, given the frequent movement of the pupils due to the seasonal changes in food sources. Provencher also had difficulty finding teachers for his schools, especially for the girls' school. The school that Angélique Nolin ran was the first Catholic school for Aboriginal and Métis girls in Red River.

The children of the settlers were mostly educated at home or abroad. Later, some of them may have attended schools established by the Catholic or the Protestant churches in the area. At this early point in the history of the Red River settlement, there were very few settler children living in Red River. Often when children got older, boys in particular were sent out of Red River to be educated. Louis Riel and Cuthbert Grant are both examples of this.

Angélique Nolin was also educated outside of Red River. She came from Sault Sainte-Marie to

Red River with her parents and three sisters in 1819. Her mother was Métis and her father, Jean-Baptiste, was a Canadian fur trader and merchant. He was well respected and held a privileged position in Sault Sainte-Marie, where the family had lived before coming to Red River. Angélique had received an excellent education in Montreal; similar to the education a wealthy settler would receive. She completed her studies with the Sisters of the Congregation of Notre-Dame in Montreal. Because Angélique was Métis and well-educated, Provencher felt that she would make a good teacher and would be able to run a school for girls. Provencher had not been able to find a religious order that could send nuns to Red River to teach. Since they were already living in the community and were well-educated women, Angélique and Marguerite Nolin suited Provencher's needs.

Provencher invited Angélique to come and run the school. At first, her father refused. He said that he needed his daughters to care for him in his old age (he was 82). Women were expected to obey their parents and to put their families first, so Angélique stayed home. The priority for women was the home and family life, rather than going out and earning a living. Since Jean-Baptiste had three other daughters at home to care for him, it seems likely that he simply did not want Angélique to work.

When Jean-Baptiste Nolin died in 1826, Provencher again invited Angélique to come and teach. This time she agreed, which suggests that she was interested in teaching and running the school, but did not accept at first because of the wishes of her father. In 1829 Angélique and her sister Marguerite opened the school to the Métis and Aboriginal children living nearby. It seems that the school was a success. The sisters learned how to sew and weave so that they could teach the girls these skills. Provencher believed that a practical education like this was important, especially for girls. Angélique and Marguerite ran the school for five years, until 1834.

It is unclear why the sisters decided to leave the school in Red River. One writer thought that they might have disagreed with the style of education that Provencher wanted them to provide.<sup>9</sup> Provencher favoured a complete separation from Métis and Aboriginal culture and ways of life. He wanted the children to learn only how to be Catholic and Canadian. If the Nolin sisters disagreed with this method, they may have preferred working with Father Belcourt.

In 1834 Angélique and Marguerite Nolin travelled to Baie St. Paul with Belcourt to assist him with teaching the children there. Belcourt had a more integrated approach to education. He wanted to combine the Métis and Aboriginal ways of life with a Catholic education. The Nolins worked with Belcourt for the next ten years, teaching and helping him with translation. Belcourt wrote an Ojibwa dictionary and several school texts in Aboriginal languages. Both women were fluent in French, English, Cree and Ojibwa. Without their help with the translations,

Belcourt's work would have taken much longer, and might have been impossible.

In the 1840s, for unknown reasons, Angélique and Marguerite left teaching and turned to farming, which they did fairly successfully until their deaths. Marguerite Nolin died in 1868 followed by Angélique Nolin in 1869.

Angélique and Marguerite Nolin stood out as educators in Manitoba in the mid 1800s because they were women who were Métis, and they were not members of a religious order. In the early part of the nineteenth century most schools were under the direction of the church and were run by religious orders or by educated men affiliated with the church. As Métis women, Angélique and Marguerite made an important contribution to the development of education in Manitoba by helping to introduce a formal education system to Métis and Aboriginal girls. They also gave Father Belcourt invaluable assistance with translation and the development of an Ojibwa dictionary.

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## SISTERS OF THE HOLY NAMES OF JESUS AND MARY (SNJM) AND THE GREY NUNS:

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE FEMALE RELIGIOUS ORDERS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION IN MANITOBA

**A**lthough there were some lay educators in Manitoba in the nineteenth century, much of the education system that evolved prior to 1900 came out of religion. Protestant and Catholic missions had been established in Red River at the beginning of the century. Each church made the foundation of schools a high priority. When the Grey Nuns arrived in Manitoba, they set out to begin educating Métis and Aboriginal children, mostly the girls. The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary arrived in 1874 and took over when the Grey Nuns returned to nursing. The focus of their order was primarily

education and they continued with the founding and running of Catholic schools in the province. They still run St. Mary's Academy today.

The Catholic Church was not the only mission to establish schools. By the time the Grey Nuns arrived in 1844 the Anglican Church had nine schools, primarily in the Red River settlement area. The Presbyterians had also established a school by 1847. Most of the teachers at the Protestant schools were men. The Catholic schools were different because women in religious orders provided much of the education in the

earlier period of settlement. Nuns taught both boys and girls, but at many times were in charge only of the education of girls. Therefore, nuns played an important role as female educators, and as teachers of girls.

After the Grey Nuns arrived, it was important to Bishop Provencher that they focus on establishing a school for Aboriginal and Métis children living in and around the settlement. Having a Catholic school would assist with the conversion of the Aboriginal people and would help to keep people in the Catholic Church. In July of 1844 the Grey nuns opened a school in their home for 27 girls and 44 boys. The sisters knew that although the house was crowded, and their own convent had not been built yet, this task was important. This schooling was done in French, as that was the language that most Catholics in Red River spoke. The sisters also continued with their other mission work. They visited the sick and the poor, and taught catechism to both adults and children.

The Grey Nuns continued to run their school in Red River although the school was becoming quite large. In 1854 the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Montreal arrived and began a school for boys. This took some of the pressure off the Grey Nuns and left them to concentrate solely on the education of the girls. They also assisted with education in other areas of the province. By 1860 they had opened convent schools in six different parishes in Manitoba.

St. Mary's Academy was founded May 1, 1869 by Bishop Alexandre Taché and two of the Grey Nuns. The founding of the school was meant to coincide with the opening of an Anglican school nearby. Bishop Taché did not want to lose any of his parishioners who might have sent their children to the Anglican school because it was more conveniently located. The school was opened on time and served both boys and girls. Evidence seems to indicate that by the 1870s the primary language of the school had switched to English and most of the pupils were anglophone rather than francophone. The subjects taught at the school included geography, history,

arithmetic, grammar, writing, French reading, instrumental music, and drawing.

In 1870 Manitoba became a province. This marked the beginning of a more formal system of education for children, regulated by the provincial government. In 1871 the newly created legislature passed the Act to Establish a System of Public Education in Manitoba which divided the province into 24 school divisions, half Protestant and half Catholic. This effectively allowed for a bilingual system where education could be delivered in either English or French, depending on the needs of the population around the school.

As the settlement continued to grow after Manitoba became part of Canada, the need for more space and more teachers at St. Mary's Academy became apparent. In the spring of 1873 there were 88 pupils at the school, being taught by only two nuns and an assistant. As well, the Grey Nuns had completed another building near their convent that was to serve as a hospital. They wanted to return to their primary mandate, that of nursing and charity. Bishop Taché began to look for new teachers for his school. He sent a request to the Mother Superior of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary (SNJM) and she agreed to send four nuns to Winnipeg to run the school.

The SNJM nuns arrived to open the school in the fall of 1874. This was their first mission in Manitoba and they continued to make education one of their priorities. They worked on educational projects in many parts of the province. St. Mary's Academy was the beginning of their educational missions. In the year that they took over, they offered education to both boys and girls, and Catholic and Protestant children alike. In 1875 education for the boys was moved to a different building under the direction of the Oblate Fathers. The sisters continued to teach the girls, and the number of pupils continued to grow. By 1876 eight nuns were needed to run the school. Eventually the sisters decided that a move was necessary due to the increasing deterioration of the area around the school. They moved to the current location of St. Mary's Academy in 1902.

In 1890 the bilingual school system was ended in favour of a non-denominational public school system. Prior to this St. Mary's had been considered a public school under the schools legislation of 1871. The SNJM nuns had two choices: St. Mary's Academy could become a public school and have its curriculum, including religious instruction and the language in which pupils were taught, controlled by the provincial government; or, St. Mary's could remain a private school, which meant losing its public funding. The sisters opted to remain a private school and depended on tuition fees and private donations to keep their school open.

Despite the new fees for students, enrolment at St. Mary's Academy continued to increase. The sisters felt that their time and efforts were also needed for education elsewhere in the province. In 1883 two sisters moved to the new Immaculate Conception parish in Winnipeg to start a school there. There were no lodgings for them and no school building. They stayed in the residence at the church and began classes in two extra rooms

until a school could be built. The SNJM nuns also took over teaching at three schools in and around St. Pierre-Jolys in 1886, founded a mission to teach at St. Jean Baptiste school in 1895, and taught at many other schools, including the school at Ste. Agathe, St. Joseph's Academy, and Sacré-Coeur School, all prior to 1905.

The Catholic religious orders played an important role in establishing the educational system that existed in Manitoba at the turn of the century. The nuns were some of the earliest female educators in the province. Most lay teachers or teachers in other denominational schools were men. As some of the first women teachers the Grey Nuns and the SNJM helped to establish women as teachers in the province. The new public school system, established in 1871, meant that the majority of teachers would now be from the general population and not from the religious orders. More and more women were joining the teaching profession, following similar paths to those of these early female educators.

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## AILEEN GARLAND:

### TEACHER, PRINCIPAL, AND ACTIVIST FOR THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN TEACHERS DURING THE DEPRESSION

**A**ileen Garland was a teacher and principal in Manitoba for most of her life, including 35 years on the staff of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1. She was an activist for the rights of women teachers during the depression and afterwards. She was an active member in the Winnipeg Women's Local and she was an advocate for pay equity and the right of married women to work.

Aileen was born in 1892 in Portage La Prairie. Her parents were early settlers in Manitoba.

In 1900 the family moved to British Columbia where Aileen finished her elementary and secondary education. At the young age of 16 Aileen began her teaching career as a permit teacher. Her first assignment was in a one-room school near Kaslo, BC in 1909. Many permit teachers taught in one-room schools where classes were usually 30 students or more and the pupils were at a variety of levels from grades one to nine. Despite the challenges that teachers in one-room schools faced, Aileen must have liked teaching enough to continue in the field. She went to University



College in Toronto and graduated with a BA in 1914. Upon completing her teacher training, Aileen returned to Manitoba.

Like many other teachers in this time period, Aileen Garland began her teaching career in Manitoba by working in rural schools. She taught in both Treherne and Minnedosa before she was hired to teach Latin and History as a secondary school teacher at Kelvin High School in Winnipeg in 1919. During the twenty years she worked at Kelvin some major battles for pay equity and the rights of married women to work occurred in Winnipeg and Aileen became involved in these issues. She was on the committee that negotiated with the school board for more equal salaries between men and women and was later President of the Winnipeg Women's Local that represented women teachers.

Women were historically paid less for their work as teachers. At the turn of the century, when teacher training became more formal and an increasing number of teachers were working, there were no standing salary agreements for teachers. Each teacher was hired on an individual basis and paid a salary dependent on who she or he was and what qualifications they had. In Winnipeg there was a form of salary schedule by 1917 which regulated how much teachers were paid. It was based on sex (women earned less than men in all categories) and on teaching position (high school teachers were paid more than elementary school teachers were).

When Aileen began teaching in Winnipeg the salary schedule that was in place contained quite a significant difference in the salaries that could be earned by men and women. As well, virtually all elementary school teachers were women, although there were women teachers at the junior high and senior high school level as well. Men taught only in junior and senior high schools and occupied most of the administrative positions, such as principals, inspectors, and superintendents. Very few women were in administrative positions. Because of the position of women in the profession, women, on average, earned far less than men did.

Many women teachers felt that this was unfair. Women and men teachers did the same work and many women teachers were not financially supported by a man. In fact, women often contributed to the support of dependants, either children or elderly parents.<sup>10</sup> Although they believed in pay equity, most women teachers felt that this was not the time to push for this right. Instead the focus was on ensuring that the differential between men's and women's salaries did not get larger.<sup>11</sup> The teachers of Winnipeg were threatened with this during the financial depression of the 1930s.

Because of the Depression, many people could no longer pay the taxes that funded schools. Rural teachers' salaries dropped to lows of an average of \$500 per year. Even the Winnipeg School Board found itself struggling to make ends meet. To combat the lack of funds, the Board proposed to cut the salaries of women principals and women junior and high school teachers by \$400 first before applying a percentage reduction on the salaries of all teachers. This would have increased the differential between the men and women to \$1000 per year in most cases, at a time when elementary school teachers were only earning between \$1000 and \$2000 per year.<sup>12</sup>

The argument behind this suggestion was that women did not need the income because they had a man supporting them, either a husband, father or brother. The feeling was that women could afford to lose part of their salary, while men could not because they had dependants to support. Many women teachers did not want to see the salary differential increased. Aileen was one of them. As a female high school teacher Aileen felt that it was necessary for women to stand up for themselves and to protest a further increase in the difference between men's and women's salaries. As a member of the conference committee, Aileen Garland negotiated with the School Board on behalf of women high school teachers. The committee was eventually able to prevent this increase in the differential and work out a sliding scale of wage cuts that would apply equally to men and women.

Another way that the School Board attempted to cut costs was to reduce 'unnecessary' staff through the enforcement of a strict marriage ban during the Depression. This ban had been in place before, but never as rigidly enforced. In 1930 all married women on staff in the Winnipeg School Division had to provide evidence to the School Board in order to keep their jobs. The acceptable reasons for being allowed to stay were that the woman had a special skill, or that their domestic situation was 'abnormal', that is there was no male bread winner. There was a widespread belief among both men and women that married women shouldn't work at times when jobs were scarce because they took jobs away from men who needed the income to support their families.

Aileen argued that taking jobs away from married women was not sound economics. Married women would spend their money just as unmarried women would and this would create fuel for the economy. As well, married women did not only use their salaries to purchase extra luxuries. Salaries often went to the support of the family and purchased basic necessities. The only danger that Aileen saw with married women working is that they might offer to take lower wages, since they might only need a lower income to sustain their families if their husband was working as well. Aileen felt strongly that all women should receive the same treatment, regardless of their marital status.<sup>13</sup>

Because of the division between the men and women over what should be done about salaries, the Winnipeg Teachers' Association split into a Men's Local and a Women's Local. They remained split until 1963. Although it was the men who wanted the split, it gave the women teachers of Winnipeg the opportunity to take charge and to work for goals that were important to them. Many women who probably would not have applied for

or accepted positions in a larger local shared with men were now forced to do the work themselves. Because of this the Women's Local produced some very fine leaders. Aileen served as the President of the Winnipeg Women's Local for several years after it was formed and continued to work for an improvement in the status of women teachers.

In 1938, after almost thirty years as a teacher, Aileen became the principal of William Whyte School, an elementary and junior high school in Winnipeg. She was the first woman to become principal of a junior high school in Manitoba. There were still separate salary schedules in effect for men and women, but since no woman had ever been a principal of a junior high before, Aileen received the same wage as a man in her position would. For some time she was the only female junior high school principal and received the highest salary paid to a woman in Winnipeg. Despite this, her average annual income from 1918 to 1953 was only \$2,907 per year.<sup>14</sup>

Pay equity continued to be an issue for women teachers into the 1950s and 60s. In 1949 the Virden teacher's local was the first in Manitoba to be successful in establishing an equal salary schedule, with no differential between men and women with the same qualifications. The Winnipeg local was able to achieve this in 1951 and in 1952 the Manitoba Teachers' Federation adopted pay equity as a policy.

In 1953 having seen the goal of equal pay for equal work achieved, at least in some areas, Aileen retired from teaching in the public schools. She continued to teach at the Manitoba Teachers' College until 1966. She also wrote eight books throughout her career, mostly about Canadian history. Aileen is remembered as an activist for women's rights and an excellent teacher and principal.

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## MARY MARGARET (MARGERY) BROOKER:

### FIRST FEMALE SCHOOL INSPECTOR IN CANADA

**B**orn in Dumfries, Scotland in 1901, Mary Margaret Brooker (Margery to her friends) completed her education in Europe and came to Canada in 1929. She worked as a teacher and supervisor in Winnipeg, and was appointed as a school inspector in 1941. She was the first woman in Canada to be appointed as a school inspector. Margery was very proud of her appointment, and made an excellent school inspector. School inspectors were appointed by the Provincial Department of Education and were responsible for assessing the skills and abilities of teachers and assuring the quality of education in the schools. The school inspector positions and many other positions of authority in the teaching profession were held mostly by men, despite the fact that the majority of teachers were women. It was no small accomplishment to be appointed inspector and it demonstrated the liking and respect that Margery Brooker had earned, as well as her competence as a teacher.

Margery Brooker received her MA (Hons.) from the University of Glasgow and then received a post-graduate fellowship that allowed her to travel and study for two and a half years. She studied in Rouen, at the Sorbonne and at the University of Hamburg during this time. Margery studied languages, mostly French and German, at these universities and became very proficient, especially in French. She also completed her teacher training in Scotland.

When Margery came to Winnipeg in 1929 she began teaching in a junior high school classroom at Cecil Rhodes School, but was quickly promoted because of her skill and knowledge in languages. She was now the Supervisor of French Instruction for the Manitoba Department of Education, a position that she held until 1938. As a supervisor Margery was responsible for

overseeing the instruction of French in schools across the province. It is important to note that many supervisors at that time were male. Women were appointed as supervisors, but often in areas that were considered to be women's work, for example, primary education, home economics, music and languages. As well, many of the first female university professors were primarily language teachers.

While she served as a supervisor, Margery Brooker was also an instructor at the Winnipeg Normal School. In 1929 there were six men and seven women on the permanent staff of the Normal School. Far more women were Normal School instructors than university professors. While she was the French supervisor Margery was seconded to teach languages at the Normal School and is remembered by her pupils as an excellent teacher. Sybil Shack remarks that "I learned more about the French language . . . in the weekly half hour she spent with us than in five years of exposure to French in school and university."<sup>15</sup>

Besides being a supervisor and an instructor at the Normal School, in 1941 Margery Brooker was appointed by the Provincial Department of Education as the school inspector for the Virden district. This made her the first woman in Canada to be appointed as a school inspector, a position she held for 14 years, in several districts around the province. School inspectors were responsible for visiting each school in their district and ensuring that the teacher was doing a good job. They often quizzed the students and would give lessons in areas where they felt the teacher needed assistance. For many teachers a visit from the inspector was a nerve-racking experience. Several teachers commented that Margery was so friendly and knowledgeable that they felt much better about their teaching after the inspection.



Children at Machray School, Winnipeg, 1903



Sewing class with teacher (1909)

PAM - Winnipeg-Schools-Model-1 (N21318)



Typical Manitoba Rural School, 1911

Courtesy PAM - Florence School Collection (N13550)

Sisters of the Holy  
Names of Jesus and  
Mary, 1915

Courtesy PAM -  
St. Mary's Academy  
(3) 18



Domestic Science  
Class, King Edward  
& William Whyte  
Schools (1921)

Courtesy PAM - Foote  
1584 (N2684)



Margery Brooker maintained her interest in languages and continued her studies. From 1946 to 1947 she took advantage of two research fellowships to return to Europe to study and travel. The fellowships were the Humboldt Stiftung Research Fellowship from the Berlin Research Institute and the Carnegie Fellowship from the Institute of Education at the University of London. Margery enjoyed this chance to travel and study abroad and to expand her knowledge of languages.

When she returned to Manitoba, Margery Brooker resumed her work as a rural school inspector. Soon after, in 1948, she was appointed as the first female inspector in the Winnipeg School Division. At the time, the majority of Winnipeg teachers were women, but there had never been a female inspector, until Margery's appointment. In Winnipeg she worked with two

other inspectors, both male. However, Margery got along very well with her male co-workers and paved the way for other women inspectors that followed in her footsteps.

Margery Brooker passed away in 1955, but, in the words of a friend and fellow teacher, made an "incalculable contribution to education in Manitoba."<sup>16</sup> Margery continued to give to others even after her death. She bequeathed most of her estate for a scholarship and bursary fund, a value of approximately \$60,000 which was given out over the next 15 years to deserving students. She enjoyed her work and, therefore, was revered for her role as a supervisor and mentor to many teachers across Manitoba. She was also a pioneer, being the first woman to be appointed as a school inspector, an important position of authority in the school system.

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## SYBIL SHACK:

### DEDICATED ACTIVIST FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS TEACHERS AND AS WOMEN

Sybil Shack is a well-known figure in education in Manitoba and in Canada. She has been an advocate for women teachers across Canada, working for equality in salary, pensions and retirement. She has been active in many teaching organizations, including the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Winnipeg Women's Local, and the Canadian College of Teachers, serving as president of all three of these organizations. Her career as an educator began in 1929 and ended when she retired in 1976, spanning 46 years. She worked in various locations in Manitoba, primarily in the Winnipeg School Division No. 1. Sybil has encountered many of the barriers that other teachers also faced, being a woman and Jewish. This did not stop her from being a very good teacher and principal, all the while working

to eliminate the obstacles that women faced, and continue to face.

Sybil had always wanted to go to university, and as a child had wanted at different times to be a chemist, a writer, and a lawyer. She graduated from the University of Manitoba in 1929 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. She had never really thought about being a teacher but because of limited family resources and her need to support herself, she saw only three career choices open to her after university: nursing, stenography and teaching. Like many other women at that time, Sybil decided that "teaching was the least disagreeable of the three."<sup>17</sup>

In September of 1929 Sybil paid the \$50 fee for Normal School and began her career in the

public schools of Manitoba. Upon graduation Sybil applied to teach in the Winnipeg School Division. She was told that there was no hope of an appointment there. She spent a year answering advertisements for teachers in the newspaper, with no luck. In an essay written about her teaching experiences, Sybil discusses how some teachers did not get jobs because they were not of "the right background". For example, advertisements for teachers would often list "Protestant" or "Male" as qualifications for the job.<sup>18</sup> Even School Boards that did not advertise openly for a teacher of a certain background still hired on this basis. Because Sybil was Jewish and a woman, it was more difficult for her to get a teaching job.

In 1932, in response to her 200th application, Sybil was finally hired as a teacher in the Foxwarren School District to teach French and English at a salary of \$900 per year. Foxwarren was a consolidated rural school, with students in grades 1 through 12 and seven staff, including the principal. Sybil taught grades 9 to 12 there for a year. She then moved to another consolidated rural school at Shoal Lake, where she again taught the senior grades. She taught at Shoal Lake for two years.

Throughout her three years as a teacher in a rural setting, Sybil recalls attending only two meetings of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation (MTF). Sybil's lack of attendance at MTF meetings was typical of rural teachers. Although there was good participation from the teaching staff in Winnipeg, most teachers in rural schools did not have the time, the money or the interest to concern themselves with the activities of the MTF. During the 1930s salaries for rural teachers were very low, an average of \$500 per year. Although the MTF was concerned about the conditions that rural teachers experienced, membership among rural teachers was low. Rural teachers were often permit teachers, meaning they had very little formal teacher training. Many teachers saw their teaching as only a temporary activity and so were not concerned about the long-term benefits of belonging to a professional organization. For these reasons, the MTF found it difficult to increase its membership among rural teachers.

In 1935 Sybil was hired as an elementary school teacher in the Winnipeg School Division, at Margaret Scott School. Although she had no experience teaching in an elementary school, Sybil was assigned to a grade four classroom. This was not unusual. Most women were assigned to elementary schools or to specialized areas like home economics or music. Most men were assigned to junior or senior high schools. Teaching young children was considered women's work and so women began there and worked their way up if they wanted to teach at higher levels. School and education played an important role in the assimilation of immigrants, in making them into "real" Canadians. Most of the teachers at Margaret Scott were of non-British backgrounds. None of these teachers would have received a position in a south end school, where the pupils were predominantly of white, Anglo-Saxon backgrounds.<sup>19</sup> The pupils at Margaret Scott, located in the Winnipeg North End, were mainly immigrants or the children of recent immigrants, many with the same cultural backgrounds as their teachers. Some of them did not speak English. However, most of their parents were eager for their children to come to school to learn how to be Canadian.<sup>20</sup>

Sybil worked at Margaret Scott until 1942. Throughout the war years and after, from 1942 to 1948 Sybil gradually worked her way up from elementary school to high school teaching. Feeling the need for more education to improve as a teacher, she also went back to school and received her Bachelor of Education and her Masters of Education. In the fall of 1949, Sybil was promoted, becoming principal of Sargent Park School, an elementary school in Winnipeg's North End. She spent the next 28 years of her career as principal of six different schools and during that time, was the only female in this position. This included Isaac Brock and Kelvin High School, her last principalship from which she retired in 1976.

Throughout her later career Sybil continued to be concerned with the rights and responsibilities of women teachers. She felt that women should play a more active role in the development of the education system by taking on more administra-

tive positions and becoming better trained and more involved in their workplace. Sybil herself became more involved in the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS) and was elected president of the MTS for 1960-61. In 1973 Sybil published a book about female teachers, *The Two-Thirds Minority*. She argued that while it was important for men and women to work towards equality, women had to be proactive and begin applying for jobs that had traditionally been held by men.

Throughout her career Sybil has distinguished herself, both as an educator, and as an activist for women. As a schoolteacher and principal, she was one of the pioneer women in Winnipeg. She became active in many organizations that she felt would benefit both teachers and women. In her work and her writing, she encouraged other women to get involved and fight for more opportunities for women teachers. Sybil Shack is an exemplary teacher and woman.

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## RUTH EMISCH:

### DEDICATED RURAL SCHOOLTEACHER AND SUPERVISOR

Ruth Emisch was a dedicated teacher in several rural schools throughout her teaching career. She often battled with distance, isolation and separation from her family in order to pass on her knowledge and to educate others. Teaching in rural schools in the province was fairly unregulated until the 1960s. Ruth experienced the difficulties that many other teachers in rural schools also experienced, and through it all she remained a dedicated teacher, touching and teaching hundreds of children across the province.<sup>21</sup>

Ruth was born September 18, 1923 on her family's farm near Plumas, Manitoba. She grew up during the Great Depression and saw the economic hardship that her family, like many others, experienced. Her two brothers did not go on to further education, so her parents encouraged her to get a good education and to find a career so that she could provide for herself. Ruth felt that there were really only two options for a professional career, teaching and nursing. Ruth's mother was a teacher and so Ruth eventually followed in her footsteps.

Ruth's early education was at the Deseronto country school near her family's farm. She

completed grades 9 and 10 by correspondence because those grades were not taught at the nearby school. She attended the Plumas Consolidated School for grade 11 and had to ride horseback the seven and a half miles to and from school each day. For grade 12, Ruth had to transfer again, this time to Gladstone school where they were teaching the grade 12 curriculum. She, along with many other rural students, had to travel long distances to complete their education.

Most rural schools were still very small schools where one or two teachers were responsible for teaching all the students from grades one to nine. Often rural teachers were overloaded with the work of teaching a wide range of subjects and grades at the same time. This did not leave them extra time or energy to focus on assisting those who wanted to continue their education in order to enter a profession.

In 1941 Ruth came to Winnipeg to attend Normal School, but this did not end her moving around the province. The Second World War, beginning in 1939, affected Canadians and the world in many ways. Because of the war the Normal School building was commandeered for the war effort. However, there was also a need for



new teachers because many men and women were participating in the war effort. The Normal School, and all of the students, had to move to Gimli, where living conditions were totally inadequate. They lived in huts, 20 in each hut, and slept on makeshift bunks made of chicken wire. In spite of these conditions, Ruth and the other students continued to work at their courses, intent on becoming good teachers.

Ruth received her second class Normal School certificate in 1942 and soon got a position at a one-room school near Plumas, teaching 33 students in grades one to nine. Teaching in rural schools was very different from teaching in an urban setting. The majority of teachers in rural schools were women, although principals in larger schools were often men. The teacher had to teach her students without the same degree of professional help, such as regular visits from a supervisor or principal. A new teacher in a rural classroom had to prove herself, both as a teacher, and a person. The teacher was an important part of the town's life and she was often carefully scrutinized.

Historically, a teacher's reputation in the community where she worked was very important and was based on the company she kept, how she was dressed and even whether or not the school Christmas concerts were successful. Earlier in the twentieth century codes of dress and behaviour were sometimes written into teachers' contracts. This applied especially to women teachers. They were not to wear makeup or dye their hair, go driving with men, smoke or drink, or wear fewer than two petticoats.<sup>22</sup>

When Ruth began teaching there were still certain expectations about how a teacher would behave, although these things were not explicitly asked for in the contract. For example, teachers were expected to organize and run extra-curricular activities for the students, including sports, music, and concerts. Ruth felt that the success of her school Christmas concert would help to give her a good reputation as a teacher and a person. She enjoyed this part of her job, making costumes

and coaching the children, and so her Christmas shows were always a success. Ruth felt that the expectations regarding community work were the same for men and women, and that both contributed in their own ways. Ruth enjoyed her teaching and the community activities that went with it.

In 1944 Ruth married Jake Emisch. At this time, married women were expected to leave their jobs in order to take care of the home and family life. This expectation prevailed, whether a woman was a teacher in Winnipeg or in rural Manitoba. For nine years following her marriage, Ruth worked at home and helped her husband with the farming. Then in 1953, because of financial difficulties, Ruth returned to teaching. She received a position at Hazel Glen School, near Tyndall. Ruth worked for many more years while taking care of her family and was part of a growing trend of accepting married women into the labour force.

Ruth not only worked as a married woman, she also continued working through a pregnancy, which was fairly unusual at this time. In January of 1954 Ruth became pregnant. Luckily, the School Board allowed her to continue teaching despite her pregnancy. Normally when a woman was pregnant, she could teach for a little while, but as soon as her pregnancy began to show, she would resign or take a temporary leave. This trend was gradually changing too. Ruth felt fortunate that she was able to continue teaching until the end of the year, by which time she was seven months pregnant.

Ruth's teaching took her to many different schools. Sometimes quite a great distance separated her from her husband and four children. Because Ruth's husband was a farmer, he was not able to move from school to school with Ruth, and generally a man would not be expected to move for his wife's job. However, women were expected to put their families and their husband's career before their own career. Sometimes Ruth lived near the school where she was teaching, returning home on weekends, and at other times

she commuted a great distance to and from school each day.

In the 1960s most school districts in the province were consolidated into larger divisions. Many smaller schools were closed in favour of a centralized system that would allow for more teachers and more professional support. Since rural schools were being closed, Ruth moved to a town setting, teaching English and Social Studies at Arden Junior High School for six years. She also taught at the Peguis Indian Reserve and the Minitonas School in the Swan River Valley. This often meant that she travelled long distances each day or on the weekend. In spite of the travelling for her work, Ruth was also completing courses for a Bachelor of Education in Special Education at Brandon University.

Ruth chose to focus on Special Education because she had always wanted to help the children who were having the most difficulty with their studies. With her specialization Ruth worked at Ste. Rose du Lac and at Glenella schools as a resource teacher for special education programs. Later Ruth was hired as the Co-ordinator of

Special Education for the Turtle River district and again travelled long distances to her office and to visit the nine different schools in the district. After her official retirement from teaching in 1985 she went back to school and earned a Masters in Education. Ruth then taught special education courses for Brandon University until 1992, both on campus and in northern Manitoba for the Brandon University Northern Teachers' Program.

Ruth Emisch was a dedicated rural school-teacher. She faced the same obstacles, such as distance and isolation that many other rural teachers faced. As well, as a female teacher, she had to live up to certain standards that were set for her by the communities in which she taught, as well as expectations about working during marriage and pregnancy. She continued to educate herself in order to improve her teaching, receiving her B.Ed. and later, a Masters degree in education. Ruth feels that her family continues to contribute to the field of education because three of her four children have also become teachers. Ruth dedicated 50 years of her life to teaching and has made a difference in the lives of many children during that time.

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## CONCLUSION

As evidenced by the women profiled in this essay, women in Manitoba have made important contributions to the education system and to teaching. The women profiled showed knowledge, initiative, and leadership throughout their careers. They were educators who worked to improve the welfare of their students as well as that of their colleagues. Each of these women experienced different obstacles in their teaching careers and was able to work through them to achieve important goals. The Nolin sisters, the Grey Nuns and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary taught girls despite the difficult conditions that surrounded them in the new Red River settlement. Margery Brooker

demonstrated, through her skill and knowledge in languages, that a woman could do a man's job just as well. Ruth Emisch continued to teach through both marriage and pregnancy, battling isolation and separation from her family. Sybil Shack and Aileen Garland both worked to have the rights and responsibilities of women teachers recognized by the schools, the public, and even their own professional organization. In the end, these women have paved the way for other women to have successful careers in education. It is now easier for women to enter the profession on the same footing as men, and to make their concerns heard throughout their careers. Women are no longer an unheard majority in the teaching profession.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Mary Kinnear, "'Mostly for the Male Members': Teaching in Winnipeg, 1933-1966", Historical Studies in Education 6, 1 (Spring 1994), p. 2.
2. For works discussing the position of women teachers historically in Manitoba and in Canada see: Frieda Forman et. al., Feminism and Education, A Canadian Perspective (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1990); Mary Kinnear, In Subordination: Professional Women 1870-1970 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995); Alison Prentice and Marjorie R. Theobald, ed. Women who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
3. Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofrè, "The Manitoba Teachers' Federation, 1919-1933: The Quest for Professional Status" in Bruno-Jofrè, Issues in the History of Education (Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), p. 334-39.
4. Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939 (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 58.
5. Alexander Gregor and Keith Wilson, The Development of Education in Manitoba (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1984), p. 132.
6. For a history of the MTS from 1919 to 1969 see J. W. Chafe, Chalk, Sweat and Cheers (Winnipeg: The Manitoba Teachers' Society, 1969)
7. Bruno-Jofrè, "The Manitoba Teachers' Federation", p. 361.
8. Information about Aboriginal education taken from J. R. Miller, Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), chapt. 1.
9. Diane Michelle Boyd, The Rise and Development of Female Catholic Education in the Nineteenth Century in the Red River Region: The Case of Catherine Mulaire (Thesis, Winnipeg, 1999), p. 51.
10. Aileen Garland, "Old, Unhappy Far- Off Things and Battles of Long Ago", The Manitoba Teacher (November- December 1968), p. 13.
11. Garland, "Battles of Long Ago", p. 10.
12. Garland, "Battles of Long Ago", p. 11.
13. "Should Married Women be Permitted to hold Jobs? Yes!" Winnipeg Tribune, Jan. 24, 1947.
14. Garland "Battles of Long Ago", p. 14.
15. Sybil Shack, "The Making of a Teacher, 1917-1935: One Woman's Perspective", in Bruno-Jofrè, ed. Issues in the History of Education in Manitoba, p. 453.
16. Irene Dickson, "Mary Margaret Brooker", in Tomorrow's Past, A Century of Manitoba's Teachers (Winnipeg: Canadian College of Teachers, Manitoba Chapter, 1970), p. 80.
17. Shack, "The Making of a Teacher", p. 452.
18. Shack, "The Making of a Teacher", p. 437 and 444.
19. Shack, "The Making of a Teacher", p. 465.
20. Shack, "The Making of a Teacher", p. 464.
21. The information for this section is primarily from Rhoda Lambert, "Ruth Emisch", in Extraordinary Ordinary Women: Manitoba Women and Their Stories (Winnipeg: Manitoba Clubs of the Canadian Federation of University Women, 2000, pp. 39-40) and from a telephone interview with Ruth Emisch.
22. For an example of this type of contract, see Beth Light and Ruth Roach Pierson, eds. No Easy Road: Women in Canada 1920s to 1960s (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1990), p. 270.

