

JOAN SANGSTER

ONE
HUNDRED
YEARS OF
STRUGGLE

The History of Women
and the Vote in Canada



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WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

SERIES EDITOR: VERONICA STRONG-BOAG

The story of women's struggles and victories in the pursuit of political equality is not just a matter of the past: it has the value of informing current debate about the health of democracy in our country.

This series of short, insightful books presents a history of the vote, with vivid accounts of famous and unsung suffragists and overdue explanations of why some women were banned from the ballot box until the 1940s and 1960s. More than a celebration of women's achievements in the political realm, this series provides deeper understanding of Canadian society and politics, serving as a well-timed reminder never to take political rights for granted.

Books in the series:

One Hundred Years of Struggle: The History of Women and the Vote in Canada, by Joan Sangster

Ours by Every Law of Right and Justice: Women and the Vote in the Prairie Provinces, by Sarah Carter

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SURROUNDED BY MALE CANDIDATES, suffragist Margaret Haile cut an incongruous figure when she spoke on election platforms during the 1902 Ontario provincial election. At the time, women could not vote, but Haile's decision to run for the provincial legislature was nonetheless a smart strategy. The law barred women from voting, but it did not prohibit them from *running* for office. No matter how outraged other politicians were about Haile's presence, they could not remove her name from the ballot or prevent her from speaking at election meetings. Nominated by the Canadian Socialist League as its candidate for a North Toronto riding, Haile was characterized by some commentators as a courageous advocate for women's rights, but to others she was at best a curiosity and at worst a shockingly audacious woman who abandoned her proper domestic role for the public podium.

Haile received eighty-one votes; a small group of progressive men clearly supported women's right to vote *and* to run for office. Many politicians equated her election bid with the women's suffrage movement, and prominent Toronto feminists of all political stripes supported her candidacy, but her speeches did not focus solely on rights for women. On the contrary, she saw the franchise as a means to an end, a way of challenging an unjust, inhumane, unequal society, in which the ruling elite owned, controlled, and exploited working people. What we need, she told electors in no uncertain terms, is an international socialist movement that might build a new society in which all divisions regarding sex, class, colour, creed, and nationality are eradicated.

Haile's inclusive political vision was not unusual in her day. Many suffragists had far-reaching plans for social transformation, and they sought the vote not only as a basic human right for women but also as a means of producing comprehensive change.

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Still, their goals varied tremendously. Women followed diametrically different pathways to suffrage: the movement included socialists and conservatives, anti-alcohol temperance advocates and free lovers, imperialists and pacifists. Suffragists offered dissimilar rationales for why the vote mattered, both as an individual right and a social imperative. Some wanted to join the ruling class, others to abolish it. Some stressed women's innate biological and psychological distinctiveness, others emphasized the human connection and commonality between women and men. Some acted in fear of impending social decline and disorder, others in a sense of religious mission or passionate commitment to justice. Some promoted ideas that we now see as a repugnant contradiction to feminism, others glimpsed utopian visions of equality that more readily suit our views. In such diversity, feminists of the past are similar to those of the present. Far from being a politically uniform and socially cohesive group of same-thinking people, they represented a wide range of social backgrounds and ideals.

One Hundred Years of Struggle, along with the other volumes in this series, tells the story of women and the franchise in Canada, attending to the diversity of suffragists' ideals and goals as these shifted over time. Popular accounts and older academic studies, from Heritage Minutes to Catherine Cleverdon's groundbreaking *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (1950), tend to centre on famous firsts and definitive origin stories such as the Toronto Women's Literary Club or Nellie McClung's performance in the Winnipeg Mock Parliament. They focus on one organization or event, celebrate one or two leaders, categorize suffrage thinking as either maternal feminism (emanating from women's family roles) or equal rights feminism (establishing women's equality with men), or they shoehorn the movement into a "typically" Canadian politics of polite "civility," especially in contrast to the more sensational, window-breaking British suffragettes.

The political thought of Canadian suffragists was far more diverse, their activism never so tidy. The achievement of the vote is often presented as an optimistic story of the onward and upward, inevitable progress of history. In reality, multiple versions of equality, divergent strategies, and differing political visions were articulated by women and men suffragists. Moreover, the path to the ballot box included gains and losses, inclusions and exclusions, depending on where women were situated within the nation.

Over a century has passed since the audacious actions of Margaret Haile and other suffragists resulted in the extension of the vote to women. White women acquired the provincial franchise in Manitoba in 1916 and had achieved it in Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Nova Scotia by 1918. New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and the Dominion of Newfoundland followed soon after, although Quebec women did not secure the provincial vote until 1940. Ottawa passed an act in 1918 that extended the federal franchise to all British subjects, men and women, over age twenty-one, yet voting restrictions on citizens of Asian background and those of Indigenous ancestry were in place until 1949 and 1960, respectively.

Despite this lineage of suffrage victories, culminating in the enfranchisement of virtually all adult Canadian citizens by 1972, the vote as a symbol of democracy remains a contested concept. Feminists critique the “democratic deficit” in Canadian society, arguing that persisting economic inequalities and social prejudices discourage women’s political participation and skew decision making in favour of those with power and influence, thus marginalizing many women’s voices. Others are dubious about elections producing substantive social change. Recently, an old anarchist slogan from the rebellious 1960s – “Don’t vote: it only encourages them” – was resurrected in popular culture. In *Revolution*, his manifesto for the twenty-first century, English comedian Russell

Brand endorses direct and participatory democracy but dismisses elections as a means of change, portraying them instead as the tired old politics of political parties jousting for power while beholden to their own self-interest, corporations, and cronyism.

Young people appear to be listening to this message, as youth voter turnout has been low in many Western countries. In Canada, only 48 percent of those aged eighteen to twenty-four voted in the 2008 federal election, and in 2011 that figure dropped to a dismal 39 percent, compared to 61 percent for all ages. The provision of campus and community centre polling stations and an energetic get-out-the-vote campaign reversed this trend in 2015; more young people, especially post-secondary students, went to the polls to vote against the Conservatives. That so many young American voters supported Bernie Sanders's campaign for the US presidential primary in 2016 also suggests their hope that the ballot might deliver substantive social change rather than the same old, same old politics.

There is solid evidence behind claims that elections are less than perfect instruments of democracy, yet Canadians have also come to see the vote as a basic human right. They, like me, would take to the streets if anyone tried to deny them this right based on gender, race, or any other form of discrimination. That contradiction between ideal and reality, between our investment in, yet disappointment with, democracy speaks to the ambiguities inherent in suffrage history. We acknowledge the vote's importance as a symbol of equality and full citizenship, as our fundamental *right* to political participation, but we recognize that it has not produced a truly equal society – far from it. The vote symbolizes inclusion but was also used as a means of exclusion; it has been manipulated by those with power, but it sometimes became an effective means of popular protest. Although it is entwined with economic power, idealists still hope it can speak truth to that power. It has been celebrated as part of Canada's history of progress, yet we should be ashamed that we denied it to

racialized groups as late as 1960. Our right to cast a ballot was enshrined in our Charter of Rights and Freedoms only in 1982, yet Canadians who were in prison had to go to the Supreme Court to secure it, and citizens living outside Canada recently engaged in a new court challenge to maintain their place on the voting lists.

As a contested concept, the vote offers vital insights into Canadian social and political history. Using the knowledge accrued in nearly a half-century of feminist research into Canada's past, as well as my own ideals and sympathies, I tell the story of power, protest, and argument behind the century-long struggle for women's suffrage. The history of the vote reveals the deep fissures of inequality that transverse our society, their immense resilience, and why some groups clung adamantly to the status quo in gender relations. Opponents of women's suffrage, such as Stephen Leacock, one of the country's best-known writers and humorists, fervently believed that women should be domestic beings, that they were not capable of meaningful political debate, and that granting them the vote would seriously undermine the patriarchal (male-dominated) family and the British Empire, dragging Canada down into the mire of crass American materialism.

Yet Leacock also conceded that the movement would probably succeed. Why it did so had much to do with the energetic mobilization of the disenfranchised, who demanded their rights, made convincing arguments, developed innovative organizing tactics, and created temporary coalitions of dissimilar activists. Suffragists from differing political corners constructed alliances to win the vote, but they intended to use their new-found rights in disparate ways. Some women and men tried to employ the franchise to enhance social equality, others concentrated on lowering the barriers to women's individual success, and still others wanted to use the vote to regulate the lives of people who were deemed socially or intellectual inferior.

One Hundred Years of Struggle is an entrée to these suffrage debates, an invitation for readers to explore the topic further, as subsequent books in this series appear, and perhaps to dispute what I have presented here. Writing a national overview poses special challenges, outside of the fact that the provinces, not the federal government, determined who could vote for much of our history. One question bedevilled me: What and whom do I *leave out* of this incredibly rich, complicated story? Modern feminism did not take root in the late nineteenth century, when suffragists came of age. It germinated much earlier, within intellectual and political revolutions that raged through Europe and its colonies from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, promoting new ideals of reason, secular inquiry, and human equality. The industrial revolutions of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries likewise transformed class relations and women's labour inside and outside the home, and anti-colonial and anti-slavery movements questioned the "God-given," natural hierarchies of race, gender, and class that underpinned and justified nations and empires. Women may not have been the intended beneficiaries of this revolutionary thinking, but they adopted these ideals as their own. With male allies, they posed a new question: What was and should be "the condition of women"? Was their familial and social subjection natural or man-made by law and tradition? Was it just? Did women deserve an education that recognized their humanity as well as their femininity? Did their paid labour degrade and oppress them? By the late nineteenth century, the condition of women had ceased to be solely an intellectual debate: it had become multiple movements for social change. The suffragists and their various causes were only the most visible stream.

These revolutions were also global in reach. Movements to secure voting rights for women were shaped by national cultures and nation-building projects but also by the transnational circulation of ideas, people, and organizing. The agitation for women's suffrage cannot be contained strictly within Canadian borders.

Canadian suffragists were inspired especially by British, European, Antipodean (New Zealand and Australia), and American feminists; suffrage activism crossed national borders through the circulation of international suffrage newspapers, pamphlets, visiting speakers, conferences, and personal letter writing. Canadians were not powerful leaders in the international suffrage organizations, but they were in the loop politically and intellectually; they kept closely attuned to the arguments, events, and personalities of the struggle elsewhere. Their sense of international feminist solidarity was an integral part of the cultural feel of the movement, contributing to the emotional bonds that sustained women's commitment to the cause through times of hope and despair. Internationalism, of course, was not without its flaws. However idealistic, organizations such as the International Woman Suffrage Alliance were also conditioned by existing power relations and hierarchies; they found it difficult to completely shake off the national and ethnic prejudices and class divisions that pervaded world politics.

Canadian suffragists kept an eye on international events, but they collaborated most directly with women closer to home, from similar cultural, language, ethnic, and class backgrounds. Suffrage movements inevitably take on the concerns and peculiarities of their nation's history, social relations, and gender and racial ideologies. Economic crises, war, chance, contingency, and the personalities of leaders also shaped the course of each national movement. In keeping with Canada's strong regionalism, suffrage organizations were highly decentralized. Cohesive national associations were less the case in Canada than were city, regional, and provincial networks, which rose, fell, and re-emerged over decades.

There were collaborations between urban and rural, working-class and middle-class, socialist and liberal women within regions, but ideological, social, and cultural differences inevitably beleaguered the movement. Racialized women were often completely ignored. Many Indigenous women, for instance, were denied

voting rights unless they were legally enfranchised under the federal Indian Act, and becoming enfranchised automatically negated their treaty rights and erased their Indian status. As a result, the very word “enfranchisement” was understood completely differently, usually quite negatively, by Indigenous women. Language also divided the movement. Quebec women reformers and suffragists concentrated their efforts in either anglophone organizations, such as the Montreal Local Council of Women, or francophone ones, primarily the Fédération nationale Saint-Jean-Baptiste. English- and French-speaking feminists made important efforts at mutual accommodation, building bi-cultural organizations, but language, religion, and culture inevitably created two solitudes of suffrage struggle in Quebec.

These fractures within the movement remind us that suffrage is not easily separated from the complex history of major social divisions in Canadian society relating to ethnicity, race, colonialism, and class. Moreover, suffrage was only one component in the larger history of feminism. The suffrage movement can be imagined as a circle of ideas and people that sits within two other social movement circles. The inner circle was comprised of individuals who campaigned specifically for the vote. They believed in women’s basic humanity and equality with men, even if some saw women’s roles and capabilities as inherently and intrinsically different from those of men. Some wanted to go further, freeing women from their traditional, limiting roles, expanding their intellectual and social lives as much as their political ones. I often refer to these suffragists as “feminists,” although the word was first claimed during the 1910s by an elite group of British and American avant-garde radical, non-conformist, individualist women and only gained more widespread popular traction in Canada during the 1920s. Still, “feminism” seems an appropriate label: in our day, the word stands for individual autonomy and self-determination, human equality, and social justice for the oppressed, concepts that found succour in the suffrage movement.

The campaign for the vote was surrounded by a second circle of activism: the women's social reform movement. Its proponents were not focused so resolutely on women's equality, though they did endorse ideas about change that drew on women's gender-specific insights, abilities, and social worth. They were increasingly drawn to suffrage as a means to secure reforms to improve the lives of women, children, and families. Beyond the second circle was a much larger and more politically diffuse one that could be called the "women's movement" (confusing, I know, since the word is usually equated with feminism today), at that time comprised of many women's clubs, organizations, and religious, reform, and suffrage groups, all of which mobilized women on the basis of gender, all of which celebrated their special capabilities and perspectives. Their goals ranged from philanthropy that did not challenge the status quo to social reforms that did. The boundaries between these three overlapping circles of activism – suffrage, social reform, and the women's movement – were fluid, as women moved from one cause to another or embraced multiple goals. Some women's views shifted significantly over their lifetimes and as new ideas and events challenged their thinking.

We tend to know far more about middle-class suffragists, such as Nellie McClung, whose popular writing, autobiographical self-presentation, public speaking, and political involvement, including after the vote, ensured her place in history. Revisionist histories, penned under the influence of second-wave feminism, such as Carol Bacchi's *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English-Canadian Suffragists, 1877–1918* (1983), were highly critical of these suffragists' motives, even questioning their feminist credentials. Although I take this critique into account, I attempt to widen the parameters of suffrage history, adding significant but lesser-known women who tackled the question of social inequality from different angles than reformers like McClung. How, for example, did race influence who could or could not vote in the nineteenth century? The story of one of Canada's pioneer advocates for

women's rights, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, an African Canadian teacher and founder of a remarkable anti-slavery newspaper, the *Provincial Freeman*, contains some answers.

Shadd Cary's endorsement of women's rights as early as 1852 also underscores the importance of stretching out the chronology of suffrage history, too often pressed only into the period from the 1880s to 1918. Tracing the roots of suffrage history to the early nineteenth century raises another question: Why was property holding a key issue in nineteenth-century debates about suffrage for both men and women? Extending the focus beyond 1918 allows us to ask what happened to suffragists after many secured the vote through the federal "Act to Confer the Electoral Franchise upon Women." Why did political commentators assume that the struggle was over and done with, yet many feminists claimed it was only just beginning? Also, was the 1940 provincial enfranchisement of Quebec women evidence that they were political outliers in Canada, or should we compare their struggle to that of women in European countries such as France? Why were all Indigenous people not included in the electorate until 1960?

Exploring the diversity of feminist ideas behind suffrage is intrinsic to a more expansive definition of suffrage history. Nineteenth-century socialist debates about the "woman question" – or women's inequality – predated the emergence of many suffrage organizations. How did socialist writing about feminism shape the ideas of Francis Marion Beynon, a Prairie journalist, advocate of farm women, and suffragist whose passionate opposition to the First World War brought her into conflict with more conservative suffragists and led to her self-exile from Canada? Why do we know so little about Margret Benedictsson, an Icelandic immigrant who transplanted radical feminist ideas about the family, welfare, women's work, and "free thought" (challenging Christianity) into her editorship of the longest-running pro-suffrage newspaper in Canada, *Freyja* (Woman)?

Nellie McClung, Francis Marion Beynon, and Margret Benedictson all lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba. They were united on the need to face down anti-suffragists who peddled patriarchal and misogynist ideas that denigrated women as inferior and denied them the vote; they respected each other; they sometimes collaborated politically. They also came to disagree on key feminist issues. This trio of Winnipeggers symbolizes how dreams of equality have occasionally drawn feminists together in pursuit of a common goal, though the differences separating women never entirely disappear. It is these complicated relationships, inequalities, and ideological differences, along with how women interpret and negotiate them, that makes suffrage history so fascinating, vital, and pertinent to current feminist debates.

Our definitions of emancipation and the issues that we see as important are light years away from those of suffragists a century ago, who responded to feminism and anti-feminism by both using and challenging the knowledge and convictions of their time. The history of the vote, characterized by setbacks as well as advances, unforeseen consequences, and ideals both realized and co-opted, is nonetheless a sobering reminder that we should never rest on our legal laurels, which are always fragile, limited, and in need of reflective re-evaluation. Contemporary feminist concepts may help us understand power and privilege, oppression and exploitation better than earlier suffragists; however, the misuse of power and the inequality of privilege they identified remain at the heart of feminist critiques. The issues that suffragists glimpsed but could not conquer – the despotism of violence, the irrationality of wealth inequality, and the tyrannical domination of the powerful – remain just as pressing today as they were in the past, and we have much to learn from their struggles.

“It was true that neither money nor the possession of property was conclusive evidence of a person possessing brains ... but it was the best security they could get that a person having gathered around him some property would not be likely to wish to see the laws and the institutions of the country disregarded ... [Male voters should have an economic or propertied] stake-in-the country.”

ATTORNEY GENERAL OF NEW BRUNSWICK, 1855

THE PRIVILEGE OF PROPERTY



Julie Papineau, wife of Louis-Joseph Papineau, and their daughter Ézilda, 1836. Although his mother, Rosalie, once voted, Louis-Joseph Papineau did not favour women's suffrage. His wife and daughter represent more affluent women of influence in colonial Canada.

ROSALIE PAPINEAU, mother of Louis-Joseph Papineau, the famed Patriot leader of the 1837 rebellion, voted in a Lower Canada (Quebec) election in 1809. Not surprisingly, she voted for her son. Yet Louis-Joseph Papineau later offered his enthusiastic support to a bill, first adopted in Lower Canada in 1834 and confirmed in the laws of the Province of Canada in 1849, that removed all women's right to vote. His wife and daughter, he believed, should be protected from the immodesty of public display in elections, guaranteed their rightful place in the privacy of the family. It was odious, he wrote, to see women "dragged up to hustings [platforms where voting took place] by their husbands, girls by their fathers, often against their will. The public interest, decency and modesty require that these scandals cease."

There is no evidence of women being dragged to the polls, and indeed some intrepid women did attempt to vote during the colonial period. Seven rural widows (one of them Laura Secord's daughter) cast ballots in 1844 in Halton, Canada West (present-day Ontario), though their votes for the conservative candidate were immediately contested. In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, some women also endeavoured to exercise their rights as eligible property holders. The colonial constitutions of Nova Scotia and Upper and Lower Canada (1791) were somewhat ambiguous on the question of the franchise, since they listed the rights of "persons," without differentiating between men and women. That was precisely the ambiguity that Louis-Joseph Papineau and his fellow politicians sought to correct.

The few women who strove to vote were part of an already limited electorate. White, male settlers in the Canadian colonies began casting “viva voce” ballots (by raising their hands or shouting out) in the mid-eighteenth century, but differences of race, religion, profession, or class regularly excluded significant groups: at one time or another, Quakers, Roman Catholics, African Canadians, new immigrants, the poor, workers without property, “lunatics,” criminals, Doukhobors, Hutterites, and Aboriginal people were all denied the ballot. Rationales for exclusion varied with the group, over time, and in each specific colony or province. Although a few individuals (such as judges) were barred because they had government-funded jobs, most were excluded because they were seen as incompetent, incapable, or even as undeserving of the vote. They were imagined as second-class citizens: akin to children, irrational, not loyal to the British Crown, illiterate, and lacking the mental capacity to make decisions, or more often, lacking the required stake in the community signified by their ownership of property.

The inclusion of groups was never a steady and sure process of ever-increasing enlightenment. In each colony, and later province, the widening of the vote was intermittent and piecemeal, with some groups included, excluded, and included again. Nor did inclusion always flow from a commitment to equality and democratic rights. Still, the denial of the franchise to women, half the population, needs particular explanation. Why, given that so few women actually tried to vote, did governments in British North America feel the need to pass legislation barring them from doing so? Did women find other means of expressing their political views?

COLONIAL AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY VOTING

Representative assemblies – the precursor to today’s parliamentary institutions – were first established in Canadian colonies

such as Lower Canada, Upper Canada (Ontario), Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the first was in Nova Scotia in 1758, Ontario's in 1792, and British Columbia's in 1856. Rules on voter eligibility were borrowed from Britain. Men took an oath of allegiance to the Protestant monarchy, a requirement that automatically excluded Catholics and Jacobites (who did not support the Hanoverian rulers); state oaths compelling voters to "swear" and to be loyal to Christianity also barred Quakers and Jews respectively.

The Quebec Act (1772) exempted Catholics from such requirements, and by 1847, when Canada's colonial assemblies could finally determine their own voting rules, these religious exclusions were generally abandoned. *The Franchise and Politics in British North America*, a classic history of the franchise by John Garner, downplayed colonial-era restrictions as minor, noting that "no numerous and important segment of the population was excluded" from voting. Although the percentage of the voting male population increased significantly over time, moving toward universal manhood suffrage by 1921 (in fact, a vote for all white men), exclusions were hardly insignificant. They reveal the political ideas and economic relations that moulded the nation and how compromised the concept of citizenship was in our history. Although I focus on women and the vote, all exclusions are important, for they set the context for women's suffrage: namely, a society fractured by divisions of race, religion, and class, as well as gender. These interconnected circuits of power also shaped how, when, and why certain women secured the vote.

Political debates in the early nineteenth century, however, centred far less on barring voters than on whether representative government should be replaced by responsible government, with cabinets no longer appointed by an executive or the governor, but instead responsible to the majority in the legislature. After

the rebellions of 1837 in Lower and Upper Canada, and the granting of responsible government by 1849, many men hoped that their vote would entail a more direct stake in government decisions. By the mid-nineteenth century, voting was also becoming a party affair, with ballots increasingly cast based on party platforms.

Voting rights were also connected to British efforts to establish imperial ownership of Aboriginal land and as an inducement for white settlement. In British Columbia, incorporated initially as a fur-trading post, the British instructed their appointed governor to hold an election in 1856. The idea that the majority of its residents, the First Nations, might vote was never entertained and was purposely precluded by the British definition of property qualifications. Forty white men participated (including absentee landlords, who could vote through an agent), producing an assembly with seven representatives. However absurd this exercise seemed, it spelled the future: cheap land and voting rights for white male settlers (though initially excluding the rough-and-tumble transient gold miners) were intended to ensure a white-dominated settlement geared toward the economic development of land and resources.

Voting rules were shaped by both the common law (established traditions of British law) and legislated law (through legislatures and Parliament), though Quebec was also governed by elements of the old French civil law. Only rarely were the courts dragged into interpretations of the franchise, although voting practices often skirted or contradicted any notion of democratic process. In the colonial period, administrators appointed by the British government could literally make or break an election outcome. In 1841, when the vote decided the union of Upper and Lower Canada, the governor general, Lord Sydenham, controlled so many aspects of the election – rearranging constituencies, choosing candidates, flashing the bait of government money,

and firing officials – that any notion of democratic choice was ludicrous.

Voters might also be denied the opportunity to cast a ballot simply because of logistics, as was made clear by one inaccessible polling booth that served a vast rural nineteenth-century constituency with few roads. Canada's wild election practices in the nineteenth century would shock even today's jaded voter. Election dates differed from one constituency to another, allowing politicians to use success in one constituency to pressure voters elsewhere, and voting was a public affair until legislation from the mid-nineteenth century onward introduced the secret ballot. New Brunswick led the way in this regard in 1855, but before that, and even afterward (until Canadian legislation in 1874), voting lasted for days and occurred in public spaces, where your friends, neighbours, opponents, and anyone who might want to buy your vote with a few drinks could hear you name your choice. Fake voters were sometimes imported from other constituencies, even from the United States, and intimidation, hired thugs, and bribes were routine. Liquor often flowed freely. The results were skirmishes, police and army interventions, occasional riots, and even deaths: one count in the period before 1867 put the death toll at twenty.

Such deficiencies had their defenders. An Ontario politician denounced the secret ballot in 1831 as a terrible invention, a disreputable "sneaking system" that hid the identity of political participants. The open verbal casting of ballots, he suggested, was more British, more imperial, more manly. Presumably, facing down thugs and bribes was the stuff of which nineteenth-century masculinity was made. Corrupt election practices did not simply disappear after the secret ballot was introduced. Both Liberals and Conservatives bribed voters with patronage and liquor, and corruption was notoriously difficult to prove. When Sir John A. Macdonald, a consummate expert in such methods,

won his Kingston riding by only thirty-seven votes in 1874, he faced a legal petition demanding that the election be voided due to corruption. Witnesses who testified for him during the subsequent trial had remarkably sudden lapses of memory, protecting him despite the decisive evidence that treating with free liquor had bought votes.

The fact that elections were public, raucous, and occasionally dangerous was a key rationale for excluding women, at least respectable, virtuous ones, who should not have to endure the swearing, intimidation, and violence that male voters encountered. Unusual incidences of women voting often became public knowledge when politicians claimed their unscrupulous opponents were manipulating the vote of the so-called weaker sex for political gain. When women voted in the highly contentious 1840 election in Amherst Township and again in Annapolis County, Nova Scotia, their participation produced a public hullabaloo. One party member scornfully commented on his opponent's use of female votes in Annapolis: "I rode down to Annapolis Town to see what was going [on] in the enemy's camp, and lo and behold, what did I find the Tories there up to? Getting all the old women and old maids, and everything in the shape of petticoats to be carried to the hustings the next and last day to vote for" their candidate. Not to be outdone, this observer rode all day and night to encourage *his* supporters to use the very same tactic of enlisting women to vote against the Tories. Women were assumed to be obedient and malleable family members rather than thinking individuals, voting as their menfolk told them to in this tit-for-tat electoral strategy.

Surviving poll books (ledgers recording who voted and for whom) identify even more significant numbers of women who voted in provincial and municipal elections in Lower Canada. In Montreal's tumultuous and violent election of 1832, women property owners made up 14 percent of the electorate, the highest

percentage recorded in nineteenth-century Quebec, and likely a reflection of the strong property rights of widows under Quebec's distinct legal regime. The credentials of some single women (less so widows) were publicly challenged, but they braved these intimidating tactics at the hustings day after day, a testament to their courage and strong convictions.

Aspiring female voters attracted attention. Hostile newspapers questioned their virtue and dismissed them as "incompetents" who should be classed with non-voters such as "cripples, the elderly and infirm." In 1832, the mayor of Montreal travelled the city, making a note of every female elector, her choice, and whether she cast a ballot at a crucial moment in the contest. His assiduous collection of evidence may have been the precipitating spark that prompted the Lower Canada legislature to propose the bill that denied the franchise to all women. Other provincial legislatures such as those of Ontario and Nova Scotia acted with similar dispatch in the mid-nineteenth century to legally disenfranchise women lest they try to exercise their voting rights as eligible property holders. Although female voting had always been extremely limited and tenuous, by 1849 it was officially proscribed with laws that reaffirmed the electoral process as the preserve of men.

The Quebec law banning women voters was uncontroversial, opposed by no party or legislator. Defending this decision, Louis-Joseph Papineau explained that women's interests were encompassed within the patriarchal family, already represented by its male head. Besides, rowdy public election rituals would morally disrupt women's proper place in the domestic privacy of the family and endanger their morality. Politicians claimed that the new laws were intended to avoid the easy manipulation of impressionable female voters, but larger social forces were at work. As Quebec historian Allan Greer argues in *Patriots and the People*, politics were being redefined, or "remasculinized," in the

mid-nineteenth century, in keeping with emerging Victorian ideals of masculinity and femininity, which valued a more rigid separation of the public and private spheres for men and women.

The legal expulsion of women from the public sphere may seem a contradiction to eighteenth-century Enlightenment ideals about the rational nature of man and the inherent rights of the people, or mankind, to govern themselves. The 1837 rebellion in Lower Canada came on the heels of European revolutions and uprisings, including the French Revolution, inspired in part by such Enlightenment and republican ideas. But radical Enlightenment thinkers were not egalitarian as we understand the word, perceiving all people to be equal. (After all, in the United States, a republican revolution and a new Constitution did not abolish the ownership of slaves.) On the contrary, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a key Enlightenment philosopher, defended distinct roles for men and women: men were best suited for “the responsibilities of citizenship” and women for the domain of “family, childbirth and nurturing.”

Women’s assertion of their own intellectual and political equality was discordant to male advocates of revolution and reform. The efforts of even a few women to affirm their democratic rights loomed as a disturbing sign of sexual disorder, a threat to the patriarchal family, and an invitation to political corruption and debauchery. On the eve of the 1837 rebellion in Lower Canada, “Adelaide” wrote to the newspaper *La Minerve*, declaring her support for this French Canadian nationalist cause, as she believed the Patriots would protect the French civil code custom of equality in the marriage contract (as opposed to English common law). Her courageous call for equality, however, was out of step with the times. Sexual equality was not an apt description of marriage in Lower Canada, and more importantly, neither the republican Patriots nor their loyalist opponents supported women’s equal political rights. Enlightenment principles of human rationality,