

# HOW WERE WOMEN FIGHTING FOR CHANGE?

In Canada today, women officially have equal rights to men. Women can work in any profession, vote in elections, live on their own, and wear what they like. In comparison, life for women in the late 1800s was very different. There were strict guidelines on how women could act and what they could do. It was not acceptable for women to be out after dark or to travel on their own. They could participate in only certain kinds of sports. There were even restrictions on what women could wear. For the most part, women had to wear long skirts and dresses. Women were also discouraged from attending university, and they were not allowed to vote in provincial or federal elections. Women were, however, able to volunteer and create their own charities, as well as political and social groups. If you were living in Canada in the late 1800s, what women's issue would you want to improve first? How would you go about improving it? In this section, you will examine how some organizations created by women improved their opportunities to change their role in society.

## WORKING IN CITIES

Increasing industrialization and the growth of cities led to more women looking for work outside of the home. Working-class women, particularly young, single women, were leaving their families for jobs in the city. Many found work as domestic servants or in factories. Read **Figure 8.30**, a quote from historical geographer Richard Dennis. How did Canadian society at the time view these working women?

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

In response to the increasing numbers of single, young women living in the city, organizations like the Canadian Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) were formed. The first YWCA in Canada was opened in 1870 by Agnes Blizzard in Saint John, New Brunswick. It wasn't until the 1890s that it became a national organization. The association provided women with safe, affordable places to live, usually in the form of boarding houses. The women living in the boarding houses were supervised and had a curfew. The YWCA also supported these women by running training schools where they could learn job skills.

Are there areas in which women today still face inequality?

"Women who did not live at home might be treated with suspicion, as too independently minded ... too likely to be inefficient workers, prone to gossip about their activities the night before, or to turn up for work late or tired out by too much leisure activity."

— Richard Dennis, historical geographer

**FIGURE 8.30** A 2006 quote from Dennis, a historical geography professor at University College, London. **Analyze:** Why do you think women who did not live at home were treated with suspicion?

## IMPROVING SOCIAL STATUS

Many other women's organizations supported women in their efforts to join the labour force. One of these groups was the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association, led by Dr. Emily Stowe. Like other suffrage groups, the association was interested in helping women gain the right to vote. Stowe and her members also campaigned for women to study in universities so that they could become professionals, like doctors and lawyers. Stowe herself was denied admission to medical school in Toronto. As a result, she promised to dedicate her life to helping improve the lives of Canadian women.

Like Stowe, Lady Aberdeen was dedicated to improving the status of women. She was the wife of Governor General Lord Aberdeen and founded women's organizations like the National Council of Women of Canada. Read **Figure 8.31**. What does this quote reveal about who benefited from Aberdeen's work?

In her travels across Canada, Lady Aberdeen recognized that there was a desperate lack of doctors and hospitals in many rural and isolated areas. She responded to the healthcare crisis by creating the Victorian Order of Nurses. This organization trained young women to learn nursing skills so they could become visiting nurses. They were sent to remote and rural areas to care for the sick. They were even sent into high-risk situations, such as the Klondike typhoid epidemic in 1898.

Nurses also provided care during wartime. In 1899, the Canadian Army Nursing Service was created as part of the medical department of the Canadian army. As part of the military, women were given the same rank and pay as an army lieutenant. Examine **Figure 8.32**, a photo of one of the nurses sent to southern Africa during the Boer War. How did these opportunities help women improve their social conditions?

"[Lady Aberdeen] is particularly interested in the intellectual advancement of women, and ... has roused the women of Canada in all social classes to improve their conditions.... The working girls, the shop-clerks, the servant class, the trained nurses, the schoolteachers, and every other class have received a share of her interest."

— *Chicago Record*

**FIGURE 8.31** A quote from the *Chicago Record* from 1898. **Analyze:** What do you think is meant by "improve their conditions"?



**FIGURE 8.32** A 1900 photo of Minnie Affleck, a nurse with the Canadian Army Nursing Service during the Boer War. **Analyze:** What does this photo tell you about the experience of nurses at this time?



A

## ESTABLISHING THE DOMESTIC SCIENCES

Although more women were joining the workforce, most women, in all classes of society, were also working as mothers and wives. The work of many women's organizations was focused on making their roles more safe and healthy. In 1889, Adelaide Hoodless (**Figure 8.33A**) was struck with a tragedy. Her 14-month-old son, John, died of meningitis from drinking contaminated milk. During this period, milk was not usually pasteurized (treated with heat) to kill potentially deadly germs. As a consequence, it was common for people to become ill with diseases such as meningitis and tuberculosis from drinking unpasteurized milk. Many women unknowingly gave their family contaminated milk, which caused many deaths. After the death of her child, Hoodless devoted her life to educating the public, and women in particular, about food safety, nutrition, and hygiene. These subjects were part of a new area of study called domestic science. Read **Figure 8.33B**. Why did Hoodless believe it was important to educate women?



B

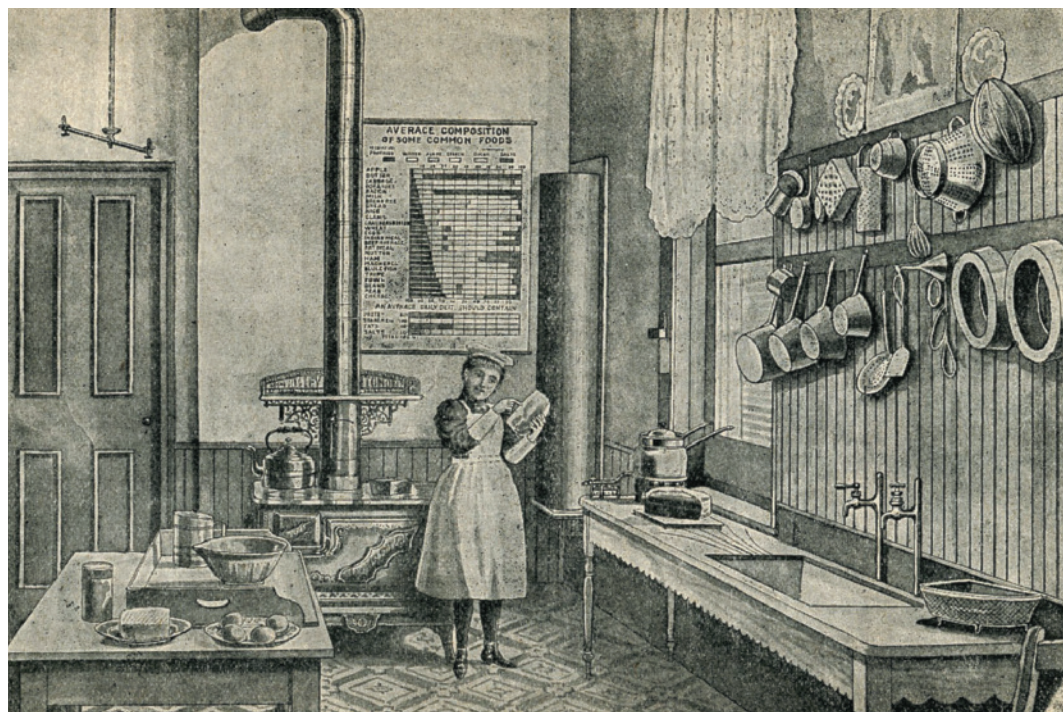
“Educate a boy and you educate a man, but educate a girl and you educate a family.”

— Adelaide Hoodless

**FIGURE 8.33** (A) A portrait of Adelaide Hoodless by J.W. Forster from 1909 (B) An 1892 quote from Hoodless. **Analyze:** What does this quote tell you about her beliefs regarding women's influence in society compared to men's?

## THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

Hoodless became a popular speaker, educating people on new ideas related to domestic science. In 1897, she founded the first Women's Institute. The Women's Institute educated women about domestic science. In the early 1900s, more than 500 Women's Institutes were established across Canada. Colleges and special branches of universities also opened all over the country to teach domestic science to women. **Figure 8.34** shows a page from Hoodless's book, *Public School Domestic Science*. This became the standard textbook for the education of women. How did Women's Institutes help to promote acceptance of educating women?



**FIGURE 8.34** This is a picture from the front of Hoodless's *Public School Domestic Science* textbook, which was certified by the Ministry of Education in Ontario in 1898. **Analyze:** What elements of this picture illustrate Hoodless's ideas about food safety, hygiene, and the scientific aspect of domestic work?



“[The church] is not today coping successfully with the great social problems which in their acutest form, are found in the city ... Perhaps its programme is too limited.”

— Reverend J.S. Woodsworth

**FIGURE 8.35** A quote from Reverend Woodsworth from 1911. **Analyze:** What does Woodsworth say is the reason for the decline in the church's influence?

**social gospel** a religious movement by Protestants that arose in the late 1800s to make Christian churches more responsive to social problems, such as poverty

## FOLLOWING THE SOCIAL GOSPEL MOVEMENT

In the early 1900s, the social lives of many women revolved around the church. However, because of the changes in society during this time, social problems were changing. Examples included poverty, crime, and unemployment. The importance of the church was also changing, as expressed by Reverend J.S. Woodsworth in **Figure 8.35**. What reason does Reverend Woodsworth give for why social problems were more severe in cities?

In response to the social problems, a new Protestant movement called the social gospel was starting to gain popularity, particularly in English Canada. The **social gospel** movement promoted the idea that society could be improved if everyone worked together and applied Protestant values to overcome harmful social problems. Many leaders of the movement, including Reverend Woodsworth, were able to use their ideas to influence Canada socially and politically. Organizations such as the Canadian Woman's Christian Temperance Union were rooted in Protestant values, so they supported the movement. These values included working hard and living a well-controlled life. They believed that their efforts would help others live better lives. This would then help create a better society.

The All People's Mission in Winnipeg was a Methodist organization that followed the principles of the social gospel movement. The mission operated in one of Winnipeg's poorest neighbourhoods, which was heavily populated with Eastern European immigrants. The mission workers, who were mostly women, provided programs, such as free kindergarten and English classes. Look at **Figure 8.36**, a photo showing mission workers with children at the All People's Mission in 1904. How did following the principles of the social gospel help female workers at the mission contribute to society?

**FIGURE 8.36** This 1904 photo shows child-care workers and children from some of the city's poorer neighbourhoods in front of the All People's Mission in Winnipeg. **Analyze:** What does this photo reveal about the children being helped by this mission?



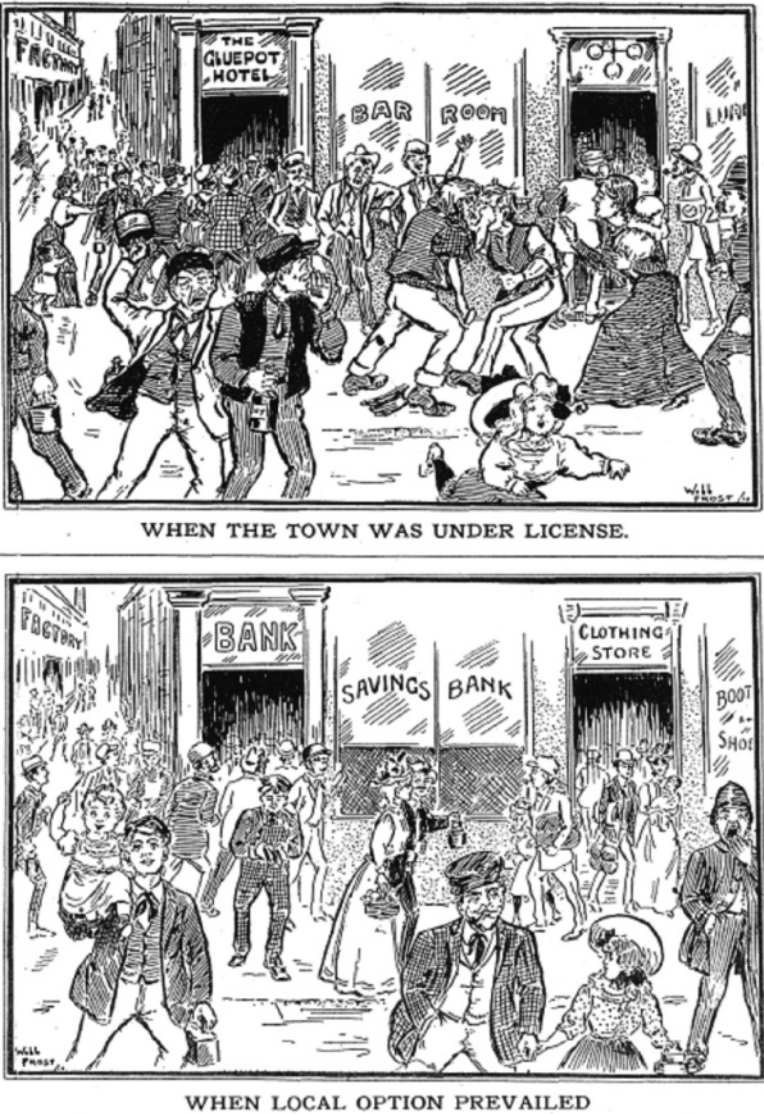
SOCIAL GOSPEL, WOMEN’S SUFFRAGE, AND TEMPERANCE: COMMON GOALS

A key part to achieving a better society was getting government funding for social gospel programs. If women supporting the social gospel movement won the right to vote, they could vote for legislation that would support church programs. Leaders of the social gospel movement realized that supporting women’s suffrage could be a way to sway the government. By 1914, national church conferences across Canada supported women’s suffrage.

The social gospel movement also shared common goals with the temperance movement. As you learned in Chapter 4, the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union believed alcohol abuse led to family violence and higher crime rates. These social problems could only be solved by banning alcohol. The organization’s views fit with the social gospel movement’s goal of supporting families and improving society by living well-controlled lives. Read Figure 8.37, a quote from a temperance advocate in 1905. What does this quote tell you about the perspective of people who supported temperance?

Now examine Figure 8.38. This cartoon illustrates the fears the temperance movement used in its campaigns. The first panel shows a town where alcohol was freely available in licensed businesses. These towns were considered “under licence.” The second panel shows the town after the local government wins the vote to ban alcohol, or “local option.” What are the key messages from the temperance, suffrage, and social gospel movements in Figure 8.37 and Figure 8.38?

**FIGURE 8.38** This cartoon promoting a ban on alcohol was published on October 11, 1912. **Analyze:** What are the differences being shown when comparing the two cartoons?



“If we are to do permanent work we must enter the field of politics as our opponents the liquor interests have done and fight this battle for God and our homes.... [We must] rise in the strength of God and by the exercise of that God given privilege—the Ballot—smite [strike] the liquor traffic to the death.”  
— Methodist conference report

**FIGURE 8.37** This quote from a Methodist conference report shows the stance of the Methodist Church regarding the temperance movement in 1905. **Analyze:** What kind of imagery does this quote create?

WORKING TOGETHER

Despite the common goals of the social gospel, suffrage, and temperance movements, there were still disputes on the best way to empower women. For example, Lady Aberdeen believed that if the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), pictured in Figure 8.39, wanted to do more to help the country, it needed to unify as many women as possible. The council supported Hoodless’s efforts in domestic science. It also explored women’s roles in the arts and ways to help children, poor people, and the sick. Lady Aberdeen felt that women had the power to help society even more by working together on these issues.



**FIGURE 8.39** This photo shows Lady Aberdeen, the president of the NCWC, seated in front of Lord Aberdeen in the centre of the photo. **Analyze:** Why do you think Lord Aberdeen was also placed in the centre of the photo?

However, she often found it difficult to find unity with other women’s groups. For example, some members of the temperance movement were often critical of the NCWC for allowing wine at its dinners. The temperance women wanted the NCWC to focus on women’s suffrage instead of non-political issues. They wanted women to unite to force politicians to ban alcohol at all occasions everywhere. The differing perspectives of other women’s groups were also barriers to unity. Read Figure 8.40, a quote from a letter Lady Aberdeen wrote in 1894. What are the competing perspectives expressed in this quote?

“We have had anxious times, ... the narrow Protestant section in Ontario ... feared they should be considered ‘disloyal’ if they joined the National Council on a basis broad enough to allow Jews & Ukrainians to come in.... Women here who have generally only as yet had to do with organization on religious or church basis, cannot understand the broader National basis.”  
— Lady Aberdeen

Why would some women’s groups be more influential than others?

**FIGURE 8.40** This letter, written by Lady Aberdeen in 1894, shows the differences between different women’s groups. **Analyze:** What was the relationship between women’s groups and religious groups at this time?



**FIGURE 8.41** A photo, circa 1913 to 1917, of Black women standing in front of Ontario House in Toronto. **Analyze:** How might this photo show evidence that Ontario House helped Black women improve their status in society?

## SUPPORTING BLACK WOMEN

In the 1890s and early years of the 1900s, many women's organizations were led by white, upper- and middle-class women. They tended to focus on issues facing white women. Black women, for the most part, were shut out of these organizations. There were just a handful of organizations that did reach out to Black women and other minorities. In Toronto, the Young Women's Christian Association set up specific housing for single, Black women, such as Ontario House, as seen in **Figure 8.41**. How could Ontario House providing housing for Black women benefit their work situations?

The discrimination against Black women revealed some of the deep-rooted prejudices that existed in Canada. Just as Black men formed their own hockey league, Black women created their own charitable organization. The Coloured Women's Club of Montréal was founded in 1902 by wives of Black porters. Their goals were to fight poverty and discrimination. The club worked primarily to help Black families living in Canada, such as by providing winter clothing to families arriving from the Caribbean. Club members actively volunteered in Montréal by helping the homeless and unemployed, and provided counselling for unwed mothers. In 1907, the club helped to found the Union United Church, which is now Montréal's oldest Black church. How might the actions of the Coloured Women's Club have raised the profile of Black women in Montréal?

## PARTICIPATING IN SPORTS

Women were also beginning to participate in public activities outside of volunteering, work, and church. By the end of the 1800s, suffragettes were encouraging women to participate in sports because of the health benefits. Usually only middle-class, white women or female students in private schools had the opportunity, time, and money to participate. Sports that were believed appropriate for women were ones that were considered graceful, like rowing, skating, or golf. Team sports, such as hockey, field hockey, baseball, and lacrosse, were considered unsuitable for women. This was mainly because they were not seen as graceful and required more intense physical effort. However, some women still participated in these sports.

Examine **Figure 8.42**, a photo of women playing field hockey in 1912. The first recorded field hockey match was played in 1896 in Vancouver. Women attending university at this time were able to play on field hockey teams. Now compare **Figure 8.42** to **Figure 8.43**, a photo of a member of Canada's national women's field hockey team in action. What similarities and differences do you see in these photos?



**FIGURE 8.42** A photo from 1912 of women playing field hockey in Winnipeg. **Analyze:** What would be some advantages and disadvantages of playing in these clothes?



**FIGURE 8.43** Canadian field hockey player Natalie Sourisseau battles for the ball against two players from Argentina at the 2015 PanAm Games in Toronto. **Analyze:** Does this photo show progress or decline for women since the early 1900s? Why, or why not?

## CHECK-IN

- GATHER AND ORGANIZE** Use a graphic organizer to list challenges that women had in the past and the actions that different women's organizations took to deal with them.
- HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE** Consider the women you have learned about in this section. Who would be the most historically significant? Use evidence to defend your choice.
- CONTINUITY AND CHANGE** How do you think Hoodless improved the status of women in her lifetime?
- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** Whose ideas of "improving women's lives" do you think were closest to present-day ideas of "improving women's lives"? Compare the differences and similarities of the issues for women at this time and present-day women.