

Fitting Society's mold (sometimes)



The first "co-eds" were sometimes taught in segregated classes or in their women's college.

By HEATHER HUESTON

Why would anybody study student culture?

Because, Atlantic Canada has "the largest number of degree-granting institutions per capita in the world." That's not a serious quote, but we all know that Halifax is crawling with students.

In his lectures on the *Role of Universities in Atlantic Canada*, SMU history professor John Reid touches on the largely ignored factor of students' impact at universities and specifically, women and universities. Official university histories dismiss students as too transient to make a lasting impression of the college while alumni histories tend to write up the hijinx, and folklore of the old daze. Reid not only makes amends in the field of student culture, he also takes a revisionist look at the Maritimes, peeling away the belief that we've always been an economic backwater. That's only been true since the "disastrous 1920s". Before that, says Reid, the Maritimes had innovations to be proud of, such as graduating the first woman in the British Empire from Mount Allison in 1875.

tual activity was also a time of the "Maritime Mission", when students felt called to go West and civilize the rustic frontier.

In central Canada, the radicalism of the 1960s was against the impersonal-ness of the universities there. Although Reid doesn't want to be an apologist for Maritime universities, he says the closer-knit, humane atmosphere here accounts for the less intense activism, rather than our backwardness. The students of the 60s knew their power — they were the largest student population and that self-consciousness was the main difference between them and earlier student movements. Not to mention, of course the anti-establishment values, and the sex and drugs.

The calmer periods of campus like the 30s and 50s can be explained by the social conditions. Thirties students faced tough prospects, they had less leisure time due to the need to work. The famous bland fifties students were, in fact, idealistic. Its just that their ideals, according to Reid, were to rebuild society and get a good job, and what about us in the 1980s? Well, Reid says we're "more finely balanced between the demands of society (conformism) and the critical edge (reform)".

Student culture now is more diverse due to rising number of older, part-time students and the growth of the "career student". There have always been people who holed up in cozy academia; the twist now is people who are investing their time in more education while waiting for the economy to improve.

The Maritimes have never had a strong tradition of community colleges especially in Nova Scotia, but Reid says universities have been accessible to middle class students and to some extent available to working class. Blacks and women have always had to be "that much better" to get in.

Some American colleges had been open to women since the 1830s. Mount Allison, connected to these Baptist and Methodist colleges, had opened a Ladies' Academy in 1854. Baptists believed in training women's intellect so she could be a fit Christian. Education was the best remedy for a frivolous life for both men and women. This religious ethic, plus the example of early female admission policy of U.S. colleges and most importantly, financial pressures, led to Mount Allison going co-ed in 1872.

This left the academies (and other private girls' schools) in an ambivalent position. Should they provide academic training, vocational/domestic training or be a finishing school? The economy decided whether the emphasis would be "ornamental" or practical. In flush times, upper class girls came for music and arts, in

harder times, the majority of students remained middle class girls sent for a Christian education. Eventually the economics of the 1930s plus the rise of public high schools, killed the academies. With them went "maternal feminism", the idea that women were naturally suited for nurturing professions and training in the domestic sciences (later, Home Ec.) The movement died out by the 1920s. Although it fought for the vote and decent pay for women's work, the movement was criticized by later feminists for maintaining the split between men and women's work. (Some of

Gillett describes the "Victorian distrust of women in positions of power or privilege". Curriculum at women's high schools, established in the 1870s, was not set to university entrance standards, women were eventually allowed to take the entrance exams but were not allowed entrance. Only when a grant was made to McGill to prepare separate teaching facilities for women did the university drop its excuses of inadequate funds and finally admit women in 1884. (After debate on whether to change a Bachelor to a Baccalaureate or a Doctorate to a Doctrix).

In 1939, 30% of all Maritime students were women, in 1940 it was 38% due mostly to fewer men during wartime. Gradually, the region achieved equality in numbers — in 1969 40% of all Maritime students were female. In 1984/85 48.9% were female. Reid notes that the learning environment is still not equal as long as women are more subject to sexual harassment.

There are fewer women on faculty. An article by Dalhousie history professor J. Fingaard traces hiring practices at Dal. till 1950, when it could be summed up as a "man's college". Women students and faculty found no women's residences, no women's college or even the maternal feminist women's programs.

Promotion was slow, despite credentials, department recommendations and work history. Protests over discrimination on the basis of sex or marital status (this was a time when women who wanted to marry staff usually checked it out first with the president) only saw such treatment made official. When one professor protested that her career had been penalized due to her marriage to another professor, her appeal was overturned and a policy instituted in 1950 of not hiring or retaining a husband and wife where both were above the rank of lecturer.

When a professor became pregnant in 1953 she shocked the administration by continuing to teach despite attempts to make her resign or take a leave of absence. In 1956, "the marriage of female faculty members (was) deemed to terminate her employment" although the university could make special contracts. This ruling was applied selectively and remained on the books, in some form until 1970.

There was no grievance procedure for women, and many women, Fingaard says, especially from "parochial Nova Scotia" actually thought they were well-off compared to other working women, such as schoolteachers. They had little contact with their male peer group.

the maritimes — not always been an economic backwater

Reid says that students behaviour is determined by the social pressures at that time. The rise and fall of college characteristics like initiation and student activism are indicators of what expectations are being brought to bear by society upon "the potential leaders of tomorrow".

Although currently in a mild, welcome-Frosh period, Ritual initiation becomes popular when people return to traditional values in unsettled times. The postwar 1920's saw a strong trend to initiations and hazing. Mount Allison had its own controversy in the 1880's when a student editorial deplored cruel treatment but noted that non-violent initiation made the privileged (for the nineteenth century) undergrad humbler. The idea was to give him a sense of duty to class seniors and later, to society at large. Reid feels that fraternities today see themselves as making groups that will last into later life.

Student activism was present in the Maritimes before the famous 1960s. The student strike at the University of Toronto in 1890s got wide notice and support on Maritimes campuses. This time of industrialization and intellec-

DAL 1956 marriage of a female faculty member is deemed to terminate her employment

the debate is similar to the problems feminists have been having recently as they try to fit homemakers into feminist theory).

Dalhousie and Acadia opened to women in 1884. Saint Mary's University "avowedly" male, Catholic institution, allowed women full-time enrollment in 196 (women had had part-time status since the 1950s).

In her book, *We Walked Very Warily: Women at McGill* M.

In the Maritimes between 1881-1901, 23% of students were women. If we started out first, how have we done since then? Reid says the gains we made levelled off because of economic differences. When hard choices had to be made about which child could be sent to college, it was usually the boy who was chosen. "Maritimers have had to make more hard choices than elsewhere," says Reid.