

# Women historians started at home

by Glenn Walton

What did Christine de Pisan, Charlotte Arbaleste, Margaret Lucas Cavendish, Catherine Sawbridge Macaulay, and Anne-Louise Germaine Necker have in common?

Coveted positions near the top of the Paris Social Register?

Obscure family connections with the Baron de Rothchild? The same hairdresser?

Wrong, three times wrong. These women with the high-sounding names were all historians and the subjects of a lecture given at King's last week by historian Natalie Zemon Davis of Princeton University. Michael Cross of

the Dalhousie History Department introduced her as a "fellow refugee from the fleshpots of Toronto", and one who stands in the front ranks of the social historians of our time. She has authored several books, including the forthcoming **Society and Salvation in 16th Century Lyon**, and taught at Brown, Berkeley and Princeton.

At the beginning of her lecture titled **Gender and Genre: Women as Historical Writers 1400-1800**, she stated her goal was to investigate what prompted women to write history; whether they had a distinctive voice, and how they were received.

Taking up Virginia Woolfe's comment to the effect that "all one needs to write is a room and money", Ms. Davis observed that a writer, particularly a historical writer, needs more. She needs access to material, the ability to travel, and enough "public life."

Women historians were up against great barriers: great research collections were closed to them; as was government and the law. Women were not taught composition, or even taken seriously as writers. Universities barred them.

In light of this, it is no wonder that women writers began with subjects close to

home, and their first attempts were small-scale religious and family histories. "I write particular history" the Duchess of Newcastle (Cavendish) once said, within her own "circumference of truth". The family history, in particular, occupied women: Charlotte Arbaleste wrote mainly her husband Philippe's version of things to educate their son, and stopped writing when the latter died in battle.

Margaret Lucas Cavendish (1624-1674) went a step further: she published her family chronicle. Catherine Macaulay (1731-1791) on the other hand, initially pulling into public life through her husband, became a full-fledged national his-

torian, publishing a history of England. She took part in the partisan brawls of 18th century England, espoused wider suffrage, freedom of the press, and in general radical Whig positions. She was highly successful and dubbed "Dame Eucuides" by contemporaries.

Anne-Louise Germaine Necker (1766-1817) was less interested in national history than philosophical history, and took up the banner in revolutionary France against Jacobinism and Napoleon. Starting out justifying her father's actions in the political arena, she branched out to broader analyses of literary and social phenomena.

Ms. Davis concluded with the observation that women, starting from a narrow view, had gone on to write all types of histories: family, national, and philosophical. All shared one trait: they were all conscious of their special position as women in society. "This will continue for a while" she said, "within an ever-widening circumference of truth."

## Policing punk rock

VANCOUVER (CUP)—RCMP pressure on the student administrative commission has put an end to plans to hold a punk rock concert this weekend at UBC.

The Alma Mater Society (AMS) cancelled the concert because of fears by the local police over the policing and security of the concert, AMS General Manager Bern Grady said Monday.

But concert organizers had planned to hire 20 security people from the Engineering undergraduate society.

Concert organizer Mike Bocking labelled the RCMP action "a blatant example of police intervention in legitimate student affairs."

"As far as I know, this approach is similar to practices in the Soviet Union, where the police monitor cultural events," said Bocking, editor of the student newspaper *The Ubysey*, which was sponsoring the event.

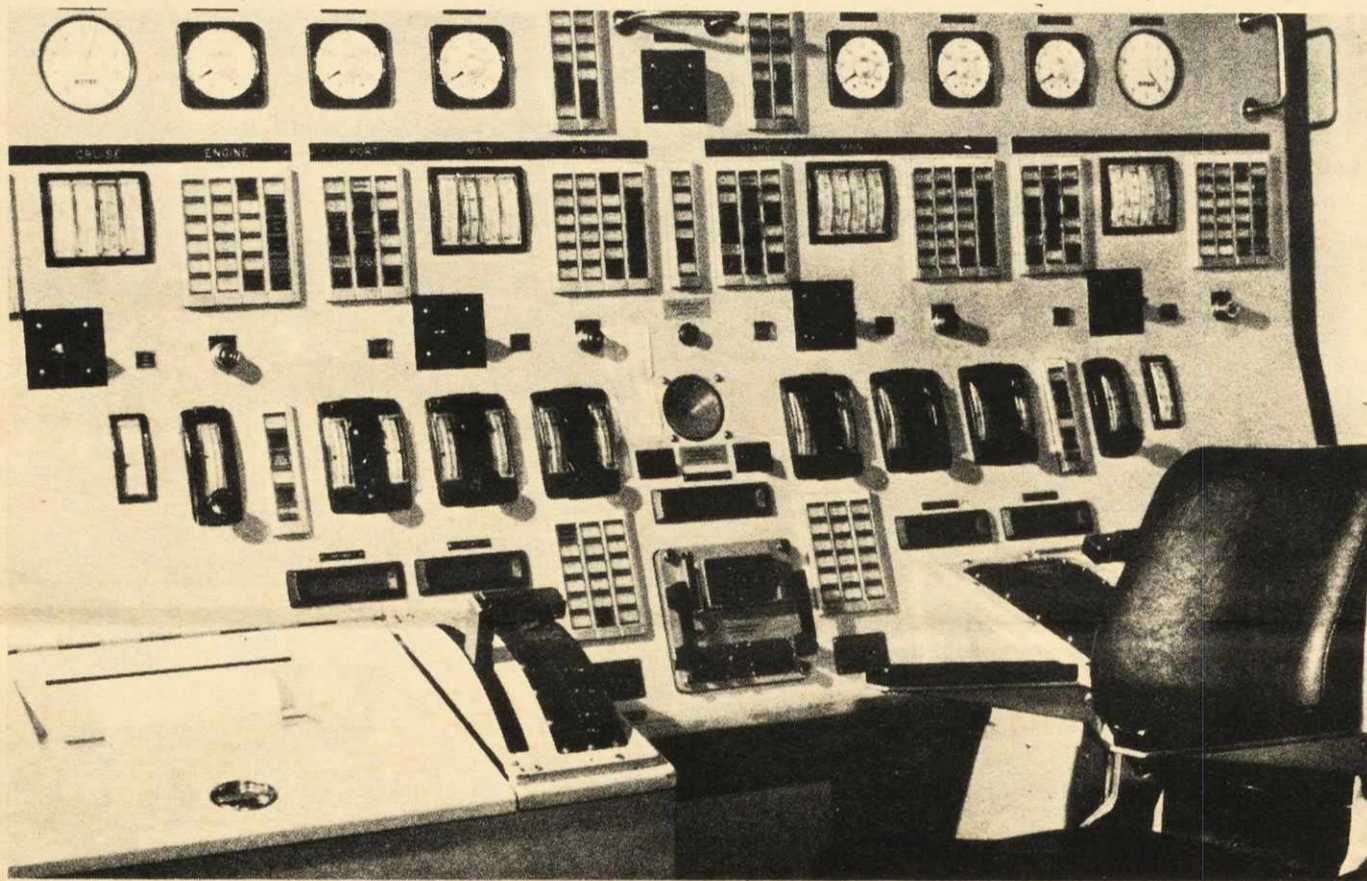
He said Monday the RCMP blackmailed AMS into accepting RCMP recommendations by using their power as advisors to the Liquor Administration Board. The RCMP can recommend refusal to renew the AMS liquor licence for the pit which comes under review at the end of March, said Bocking.

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