The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) is an 86 year-old organization founded in 1919 as a voluntary, non-profit club for female university graduates. Since its inception, the CFUW has pledged commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, the promotion of education, the improvement of the status of women and human rights, and active participation in public affairs. Based on cooperation and fellowship, the CFUW has been a network and community for many female university graduates, offering them the opportunity for friendship and activism within their local towns, cities and villages. The purpose of the CFUW has been to unite women locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, each level with a different agenda, but possessing a commitment to the same goals.

At the national level, the CFUW has existed to inform the Canadian government about policies regarding education, the status of women, human rights, justice, and social and environmental issues. It has also organized Canadian female graduates as a whole, allowing them the opportunity to network with other university educated women at local, regional, provincial, national, and international meetings. At the local level, the CFUW has existed to provide members with opportunities for regular fellowship and support, as well as to educate members at monthly meetings dedicated to the study of educational, cultural and social issues relating to women and girls. Local members are involved in activism and frequently lobby

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2 Alison Prentice et al., Canadian Women: A History (Canada: Thomson Nelson, 2004), 175.
Members of Parliament, Members of Legislature, and government groups for changes that will improve the status and lives of Canadian women and girls.³

Archival documents located at Mount Allison University have revealed that for local Sackville women there were three specific benefits of holding membership in the CFUW: first it has allowed women to interact regularly with other women, establishing long-lasting relationships; second, it has provided them with the opportunity for further study and education on a plethora of diverse and stimulating topics of their choosing; and finally, it has served as hub or locus for social activism within the community. The CFUW has been a place for Sackville women to get together and unite for a purpose.

The Sackville branch of the CFUW was established in 1947.⁴ It began as the initiative of fifteen women, and within one year the membership more than doubled to thirty-one. The Sackville branch was developed in close agreement with the mandates of the national CFUW; that is, “for the education and edification of female graduates and for the improvement of women’s status.”⁵ Early study groups included such topics as penal reform, immigration, and world crisis and their social activities included sending care packages and boxes of children’s books to postwar Europe.⁶

In the twenty years following the group’s beginning, the Sackville branch grew, expanding its membership, study groups, and activism. By the early 1970’s, as the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Sackville branch approached, involvement in the group reached an all time high. Membership during this period hovered between fifty and fifty-five members per annum. Despite the fact that Sackville was, and remains, a small town, membership in the

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⁴ MtAUa, Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW), Sackville Branch fonds, 7931/1.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶MtAUa, CFUW, Sackville Branch fonds, 7931/12.
Sackville branch was comparable to the four other CFUW organizations within New Brunswick, each of which were located in the much larger, metropolitan areas of Fredericton, Moncton, and St. John. A particular boost to the Sackville branch came in 1969, when Sackville members Gwendolyn Black, Joyce Ferguson, and Isabelle Faye were elected to the national executive council of the CFUW. Consequently, the CFUW national office was moved to Sackville for a three year period, from 1969 to 1972. The combination national office’s location in Sackville, the large local membership, and its extensive activity at this time makes this, arguably, the historical high-point of the Sackville branch.

This paper explores a number of questions about this specific period: What kinds of activities and study groups was the CFUW Sackville branch involved in? What roles did the social and political climate play in shaping their activities; especially, were any feminist politics espoused by members? The Mount Allison Archives provided some empirical/documentary evidence to answer these questions; however, an oral interview with CFUW member Eileen Mantz furnished further direction where archival material left gaps.

Beginning with the activities of the CFUW in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, the archives document a breadth of activity. Although certainly not all of the CFUW’s activities are represented, there are certain actions and activisms which emerge during this period. For example, raising money for the Sackville kindergarten was one particular initiative toward which the local members dedicated much of their fundraising efforts. Until the 1980’s kindergarten was not a part of the overall public education system in New Brunswick; they were not government funded. Therefore, communities had to assume responsibility for the education of kindergarten-aged children. Since the CFUW was an organization founded on a

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7 Ibid.
8 Mantz, 2001, 11.
commitment to improve education, it is not surprising that the local members dedicated themselves to supporting the kindergarten, even though fundraising was not a primary goal of the CFUW.

The CFUW – Sackville branch’s political activism during the early 1970’s is also reflected in their campaign to secure public funds to support the kindergarten system throughout New Brunswick. Sackville CFUW Member Eileen Mantz recalled: “they wrote letters, prepared position papers, and contacted members of legislature, all to push for a kindergarten system now so easily taken for granted.” The CFUW records in the Mount Allison archives reinforce her recollection of the Sackville Branch’s campaign as they contain copies of letters written by CFUW women to the Minister of Education and local school boards demanding the need for kindergartens and improved early childhood education. Clearly, the Sackville CFUW members used their wide range of skills as educated and privileged women to improve the lives and opportunities of the children in their community.

Another activity to which they were committed was the annual book fair which they organized each year in the months prior to Christmas. In the years before there was a bookstore in Sackville, the CFUW was concerned with the lack of access that Sackville residents, particularly children, had to books. To compensate for this problem the Sackville CFUW selected and brought in samples of over 500 children’s books from publishers and wholesalers, which were then arranged in colourful displays for Sackville residents to view and purchase from the CFUW. The Sackville CFUW members then ordered the books and delivered them personally to each home in time for Christmas. Again, with a concern for

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9MtAUA, CFUW, Sackville Branch Fonds, 7931/10.
10 Mantz, 2001, 10.
early childhood education, the local CFUW wanted to ensure that all families had access to a good supply of children’s literature, and assumed the responsibility of providing this access.

Monthly programmes of CFUW Sackville involved lectures on such topics as Acadian Culture in the Maritimes, early theatre in Nova Scotia, UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and new policies and programs of the Department of Social Services. Through study groups, members were able to acquire a further understanding of such things as “Technological Changes in Living, French Conversation, Educational Policies, and the Status of Women.”

Although all of the activities, lectures, and study groups of the CFUW are interesting in their own right, one cannot understand them without understanding the social and historical context in which they developed. The period under investigation corresponds with the beginning of the second wave of feminism in Canada. This movement involved increasing awareness of women’s oppression, “consciousness raising”, and activities to achieve equality for women in Canadian society. The archival documentation of the “Status of Women” study group indicates that the CFUW was indeed aware of the problems of inequality and oppression faced by women. However, as Eileen Mantz, a Sackville CRUW member pointed out, the full impact of second wave feminism on Sackville women was yet to come.

Eileen recounts that after she joined the CFUW in 1972, the list of CFUW Sackville members for the year of 1973 was compiled by the club secretary and sent to each member. On this list, each member was cited by her husband’s name, with her own name in brackets.

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11 MtAUA, CFUW, Sackville Branch Fonds, 7931/39.
Eileen’s name read as “Mrs. Douglas Mantz (Eileen).” Not surprisingly, she was bothered by this. That she should be identified by her husband and not herself was unacceptable to a modern, educated woman. In her view, The CFUW had nothing to do with husbands and their names; it was based on women and their own academic achievements. Consequently, she wrote a letter to the president of the Sackville CFUW branch, rejecting the use of husbands’ names. Eileen claimed that “women had no reason to hide behind the names of their husbands. Brenda in brackets, yes. Patricia in Parentheses, perhaps. But Eileen in brackets, I don’t think so.” She indicated that following this, she would “prefer to be known as E. Mantz - as in the first step to e-mantz-ipation.”

Eileen’s letter was presented to fellow CFUW members at the next meeting, to which one member commented “well that’s a very nice idea to use our own names dear, but the post office would never be able to find us!” Regardless, a motion was passed that following this meeting, women in the CFUW Sackville branch would be addressed by their first names. In the spring of 1973 “emancipation” occurred and local women reclaimed their names and their identity as individuals. With this decision, the importance of women’s autonomy and independence from their husbands was reintroduced and the group established a study group on books written about women, including novels, etiquette books, and instruction manuals for becoming a good housewife.

What appeared on the pages was a reminder of the insidiousness of women’s oppression and patriarchal rule. The oppression of women was not a new concept, and it was not the result of carelessly written policies. Women’s oppression was systemic. For example, local women had been complaining for years about problems like getting their name on the

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
car insurance for a vehicle that they shared with their husband. Women faced problems of inequality, but believed that this was the result of ignorance on the part of policy makers. Furthermore, they believed that if the problem was recognized by those responsible for it, the problem would be addressed and solved. What the CFUW members in Sackville came to realize during the 1970’s is that, unfortunately, women’s inequality is not so simple and cannot be rationalized as years and years of oversight.16

Through study and the sharing of stories and experiences the women began liberating themselves, as the second wave of feminism would explain it, by becoming more aware of their own oppression - a process that has been labelled “consciousness raising.”17 In response to their growing awareness of patriarchal oppression, arising from the “literature on women” study group, the Sackville CFUW wrote and produced its own drama, entitled “Bound in White Vellum.”18 The title was taken from comments made by John Ruskin, a 19th century British writer and critic who claimed that “any book that a young woman touches should be bound in white vellum.”19 The production consisted of dramatic readings comprised of famous, and not-so-famous, quotations taken from the literature, philosophy, and conduct books that the women were studying. Although these books were intended as instructional materials, the CFUW women recognized the patriarchal overtones and chose satire to publicly reject the restrictive and oppressive messages. This production was not bound in white vellum.

By the mid-1970’s it was evident that the women in the CFUW were responding to feminism and were actively participating in the women’s movement in Canada. The more

16 Ibid.
18 Mantz Interview.
subtle feminist attitudes that previously had to be inferred from the members’ actions and study groups were now apparent and public. However, the question of what particular feminist theory, or politics, they espoused is more challenging for a number of reasons. Although there were certainly commonalities between all of the women in the group, they were not homogenous, and neither were their politics.\textsuperscript{20} There were older and younger members, more traditional and more liberal members, professional and non-professional members. Given the differences of experience and perspective it is quite probable that there was at least some degree of disagreement among the individual women. However, regardless of this disagreement what does seem to be evident is that in the early 1970’s, as women all over Canada began to “ride” the second wave of feminism, there was a transition from liberal to more radical ideals within the Sackville group. That is, previous to their “consciousness raising” activities, the women in the CFUW Sackville branch were aware of the inequalities faced by women - how could they not be - but they did not see the “chain of oppression.”\textsuperscript{21}

The goal of liberal feminism is for women to have all of the individual rights and liberties afforded to men.\textsuperscript{22} Women must be included equally within existing public structures and decision making, and this essentially is what the CFUW – Sackville branch was promoting in the late 1960’s. However, when the members began their study of books written about women, they began to see that the history of oppression was deeply rooted in society and much more extensive than they had previously understood. Furthermore, the theme of patriarchy emerged, and it was apparent that the gendered struggles women encountered were due to an imbalance of power, and it was this imbalance that was at the

\textsuperscript{20} Mantz interview
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
root of the problems they battled. 23 Although it is probably not appropriate to term anything that occurred in Sackville “radical,” one CFUW member asserted that a shift in the thinking of local members occurred in about 1973; and although it may have been subtle, it was quite important nonetheless. Jill Vickers, a historian of the second wave of Feminism in Canada, uses the term “radical liberalism” to describe English-Canadian feminism at that time, and perhaps this best describes the character of the Sackville CFUW throughout this period. 24

In conclusion, what makes this period of time important in the history of the CFUW – Sackville branch, is that in addition to a large membership, substantial activity and involvement, the group firmly established a feminist presence in Sackville. The ideological changes that occurred within the group moved them from the shadows of feminism into a more politicized and influential position, one that was certainly to the benefit of women in the club and community alike.

23 Mantz Interview.
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