
A Research Guide on **Notable Women** in Brome County



The Brome County Historical Society



The Quilting Bee. The Brome County Historical Society, CA BCHS BCHS202-S1-D3-P3

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INTRODUCTION

While Brome County has a rich and extensive history spanning back before Confederation, much of who and what is studied involves the important work of men. The buildings, political structure, and the prominent figures that built them are held in high regard today. Women were foundational in the progress of Brome County society, and the towns of the county benefit from the work performed by these women even today. This research guide offers an introduction to the prominent women and groups who have contributed to many facets of Brome County. This guide's goal is to offer a foundation of information about these women, as well as resources that are accessible at the BCHS or externally.

Historical studies on women: issues and biases

While proof of the exemplary work that women and women's groups have performed over the years in Brome County exists, the research subject will unfortunately have some limitations. Though vast, the material and history at the BCHS and beyond is comprised mostly of men. This is due to the social frameworks of the early 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries where gender classes were rigid and functioned on a patriarchal hierarchy. Although this hierarchy still exists today, the structure in these times left a void regarding women's history in certain areas. As time progresses, more information about women in art and history is beginning to materialize through the hard work of scholars and individuals. The silent histories of women and other ethnic and religious minorities are beginning to emerge. Therefore, this research guide should be used as a stepping-stone into the topic on notable women in Brome County. While we recognize that there is more information on the subject than what is presented, we hope that researchers continue to contribute to emerging information on the many important women in Brome County's history.

Located below are articles and resources regarding amplifying women in history and art:

- [The Representation Project](#) is a global non-profit organization advocating for breaking gender norms in media and society.
- [Where are the Women?](#) although based on American academia, is a profound report on how women are (or are not) represented in social studies topics. The report lists takeaways and solutions to this issue.
- [Women's history: a study in change, continuity or standing still?](#) is an article addressing feminist perspectives of history along with its drawbacks and positives.
- [The WikiProject Women](#) address the fact that only 17% of Wikipedia biographies are written about women.

HOW DO I FIND INFORMATION ON WOMEN'S GROUPS?

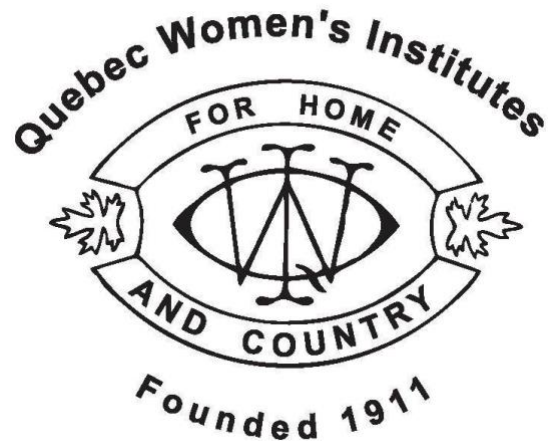
The Women's Institute, or WI as it is also known as around the world, is a global women's community organization promoting community service and peer support for its members. Although the Women's Institute reaches multiple continents with hundreds of branches, the movement began in Stoney Creek, Ontario in 1897. Today, Quebec has its own chapter of the institute, the Quebec Women's Institutes (QWI), which operates many branches throughout the province. The QWI first began in the Eastern Townships in 1911 by Elizabeth Ann Beach in Dunham. Because the Eastern Townships were isolated and quite rural, the original goal of the QWI was to teach and give cultural access to women who were not located in large cities. Teaching through reading, writing, painting, economics, quilting, child care, languages etc. became routine. The QWI operates 33 WI branches in 13 Quebec counties today.

The Brome County Women's Institutes

The first WI branch in Brome County started in 1920 thanks to Mrs. A.P. Hillhouse from Bondville. This first branch was located in Foster and had 20 members, but at the time the branches were named The Homemakers' Clubs of Quebec Province. During an annual convention that same year, a resolution was passed to match the name of "Women's Institutes" as it was named in every Canadian province, Britain, and in Belgium. By 1949, 10 branches of the QWI existed in Brome County. The most recent active branches in Brome County are the South Bolton WI, Abercorn WI, and Austin WI (which shut its doors in 2017). The Abercorn WI made a significant contribution to the BCHS when it donated a 1881 Diamond Rock stove, which is displayed on the second floor of the Paul Holland Knowlton Memorial building.

Notable Women of the QWI from Brome County:

- Alicia Patterson
- Edith Holland Knowlton
- Edna Richards Ingalls Garland
- Edythe Westover
- Ethel Coates
- Mabel Bothwell Jenne



For more information on these notable women, a great resource to consult is the publication *QWI Pioneers 1911-1981* by the Quebec Women's Institutes. A copy is available at the BCHS in the Austin Women's Institute files.

How can I find more information on the QWI?

For more information on the QWI, publications available at the BCHS under the Austin WI files also include:

- Quebec Women's Institutes, *Handbook*, CopiRapide, 1991: This is the handbook that members would be given. This book notes all of the rules, regulations, and inner workings of the QWI.
- Quebec Women's Institutes, *Quebec Women's Institutes 100th Anniversary 1911-2011*, Champlain College Lennoxville Campus, 2011: A thorough history of the QWI from its inception. This publication offers a detailed history of each QWI branch and county.

A file on the Women's Institute from the BCHS archives offers supplemental material that may be helpful for research:

- A report on the 17th bi-annual convention of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada
- Annual report of the Quebec Women's Institutes, 1951
- Report on Brome Women's Institutes compiled by A.P. Hillhouse in 1921

The Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec holds the QWI fonds. The information can be accessed [here](#).

The Eastern Townships Resource Centre created a virtual exhibition on the Women's Institutes and other women's groups in Quebec called [Through the Looking Glass: One hundred years of Women's Groups in the Eastern Townships](#).

[An online version](#) of a 1997 publication by the QWI gives a Q&A style text on the history of the QWI.

[The Lennoxville Women's Institute Fonds](#) are accessible through the Eastern Townships Resource Centre and includes a wide range of documents on the branch.

For a list of current QWI branches, consult [this list of QWI counties and branches](#).

The Austin Women's Institute

The BCHS holds numerous files and documents on the Austin Women's Institute (AWI). The AWI was one of the most successful Institutes in terms of community service, and it served the community since 1926. The branch was formed at the home of Maude Bryant, and was known as the East Bolton WI (the Austin name took over in 1939). The first major contribution of the Institute to the community was the municipal town hall, as the land they owned was sold to the local government along with furniture donated to the municipality. The Austin Garden-Party was the largest annual fund-raising event run by the AWI which raised funds for a plethora of groups and members of the community. A major contribution by the branch started with their story hour

and the taking over of the McGill bookmobile once it ended. Members would read to children after school, and the AWI donated books to form a library.

The library today is known as the Memphrémagog Library, a substantial multi-million dollar establishment. Grace to the AWI's conception of the original library and the AWI Library Committee, Magog now has a vast cultural center to call their own.

For more information on the library:

- Jean-Philippe Léveillé, *La Bibliothèque Memphrémagog et la Fondation de la Bibliothèque Memphrémagog: une histoire, 1963 à 2000*, Fondation de la Bibliothèque Memphrémagog inc., 2005. ISBN 2980894907.
- [Series 001- Memphremagog Library](#). A series containing primary source material about the library.

How do I find more information on the AWI?

The BCHS has an extensive collection of documents from the Austin Women's Institute. This primary and secondary source material can offer substantial information for research about women's groups and Institutes in Quebec. Among the files, you will find:

- Photo albums depicting branch members and AWI events
- Thank you letters from the Federated Womens Institute of Canada, outlining how the AWI was directing funds to women's groups at the national stage
- Newspaper clippings of the Institute's many fundraising efforts, community service, events, and activities
- Numerous financial reports on the AWI and events such as the Garden-Party
- Bursaries and awards granted to students
- Many books (minute books) of proceedings that show primary documentation of how the Institute functioned
- Publications on the history of the AWI and QWI

Suttons Women's Institute

Although the Sutton branch of the Women's Institutes does not operate anymore, it was once an active organization in Brome County. As implied by the name, the branch primarily focused on community service in Sutton. The Sutton Junior Girls' Institute, an organization which included young women and girls as members, would eventually lead to the creation of the Sutton WI. The funds to build the clock on Sutton Town Hall were raised by the Junior Girls' Institute to commemorate the men who died during the World Wars.

The BCHS has access to various documents pertaining to the branch. Included is:

- Minute books from 1950-1959
- Minute books from 1968-1976
- Jr Girls' Institute minute books 1928-1950

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- Brome County Women's Institutes scrapbook: A compilation of newspaper clippings, meeting programs, brochures and pamphlets, and photos pertaining to braches in Brome.

The Daughters of Rebekah

The Rebekah Order (known as Daughters of Rebekah) is an offspring of the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF). Established in England, the IOOF was a fraternal order of individuals wanting to do charitable work. Initially the group only included men, but by 1851 the Rebekah Order was established to include both men and women. In 1906, three lodges (branches) of the IOOF were located in the Eastern Townships. By the 1910s, membership and lodges increased although it is unclear by how much. The BCHS has files on one of the Rebekah lodges from East Farnham. Included in these files are minute books noting down proceedings, awards, and members. A statue of Rebekah (the biblical figure for whom the Order is named after) is located at the BCHS as well.



The Women's Christian Temperance Union

The Women's Christian Temperance Union was one of the largest women's organizations in Canada in the 19th century. The members were evangelical protestant, and the religious group advocated for sobriety and the banning of all alcohol in society. The group also advocated for women's suffrage, which would have aided women in being a driving force to implement prohibition. The Union had branches in Brome County, most notably a very active group in Sutton. The BCHS holds a file on the W.C.T.U. of Quebec.

The file includes:

- Annual reports of the Quebec Provincial Women's Temperance Union dated 1940-1966
- Minute books and cash books
- Newspaper clippings on the group as well as on topics of alcohol
- Letters between the Quebec Liquor Commission and the Union, including demands to ban or revoke liquor licenses in Brome County

SALLY WOOD: A PIONEER OF WOMEN'S PHOTOGRAPHY

Sally Elizabeth Wood was born in Brome Township in 1857. Not much is known about Wood's personal life, however most of what is known about her career is remarkable.

Sally Wood grew up in Brome with a passion for photography. Therefore, it did not take her long to discover that she wanted to go to Montreal to pursue her passion. She learned her skills of photography at Notman Studios, one of the finest studios in all of Canada. She became an apprentice for William Notman (owner of the studio and prominent photographer). Wood returned to Brome County after her apprenticeship and worked as a substitute for a photographer named John A. Wheeler in Knowlton and Cowansville. After 1897 when Wheeler left the business, Wood opened up her very own photography studio in Knowlton. Around the turn of the century female photographers were rare, however this did not deter her from running a successful and influential studio. She worked with and mastered all the best equipment. The studio eventually closed in 1907.

The Sally E. Wood fonds

In 1905, along with studio portraits, Wood published what is considered to be her most well-known work, a collection of illustrated postcards of Knowlton and the countryside. The cards offer artistic first-hand accounts of Knowlton's architecture in the early twentieth-century as well as the scenery of Brome County.

At the BCHS archives, over 300 of the postcards and studio portraits can be found. The fonds (CA BCHS BCHS202) consist of glass negative photographs taken by Sally Wood for her publication in 1905.

The John A. Wheeler fonds (CA BCHS BCHS203) are also located in the BCHS archives. John A. Wheeler's many photos entitled "Portrait of a Woman" present glass negative portraits of many women from Brome County.



Old Knowlton Academy. Brome County Historical Society, CA BCHS BCHS202-S2-D2-P3. This building, captured by Sally Wood, is currently part of the BCHS Museum.

Note: Knowing call numbers (such as CA BCHS BCHS202 for the Sally E. Wood fonds) prior to research is the best way to quickly access documents. Call numbers assist BCHS staff at finding documents as proficiently as possible.

An analysis of Sally Wood's photos:

While Sally Wood's career is an important point of research, her photos are also a substantive topic that can be used for unpacking the social constructions of femininity at the time. The photos in the fonds depicting women are mostly taken outside or in other natural settings. Sally Wood's career marked a time of transition for feminine representation, as it was on the back end of the Victorian-Era with its more structured understandings of femininity, and the beginning of the War-Era which saw a massive transition of women entering the workforce. The photos that Sally Wood captured of women often stray away from Victorian depictions of women that is represented in portraits.

Some photographs can be found at the McCord Museum in Montreal. A portion of them can be found in the [collections](#) where reproductions are available for purchase. For further documents, the McCord Museum archives should be [contacted](#).

The Canadian Women Artists History Initiative Documentation Centre, a Concordia University organization that circulates scholarly research about women's historical and cultural contributions, also has a file on Sally Wood. They can be contacted [here](#).

Old photography equipment at the BCHS

While Sally Wood's equipment is not located at the BCHS, a large collection of equipment pertaining to photography from the late 19th and early 20th centuries can be found. The artifacts may give researchers a foundational understanding of the type of equipment Sally Wood was using during her career. The artifacts are labeled by item description, date/origin of the item, and date received at the BCHS. Listed below are some items that can be found within the larger collection:

- Cameras (different models)
- Lenses
- Frames/Holders
- Camera Bags
- Drying Racks
- Tripods
- Camera Fitters/Flashes
- Meters

Suggested Readings:

- Lucie Bureau, *Le portrait photographique au Québec: Les cas de Sally Eliza Wood (1857-1928) et de Marie-Alice Dumont (1892-1985)*, Université de Montréal, 2007.
- Madeleine Marcil. *Femmes et photographie au Québec, 1839-1940*, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1990.



NARCISSA FARRAND PETTES: THE CREATOR OF A CULTURAL INSTITUTION

Narcissa Farrand was married to Nathaniel Pettes, a descendent of British loyalists from the United States. The Pettes family were successful career-wise, as Nathaniel was an owner of a general store in Knowlton, director of the South Eastern Railway Co. and Canadian Central Railway, city councilor, school commissioner, and federal Member of Parliament for Brome County. When Narcissa Farrand Pettes was left widowed, she inherited much of the family heritage, which would eventually lead to the creation of the Pettes Memorial Library.

In the spring of 1891, Narcissa Farrand obtained land and erected a building for plans of a library. This library was built in honor of her late husband, and then it was deeded to the community. The library was monumental in that after an act of Parliament passed in 1894, it became Quebec's first free public library in rural Quebec. The library continues to support the community of Knowlton and the county today, just as it did in 1894. Narcissa Farrand's legacy will continue to be displayed and fostered through the success of the library as it continues to grow through the years. The first book list of the library can be found in a [1898 publication](#).

“Desiring as I do most earnestly to perpetuate for all time the name and memory of my dear late husband [...] I have concluded that I cannot better do so, than by devoting a portion of the means which it pleased God to give us, to the establishment of a free public library and reading room [...] the whole for the diffusion of useful knowledge” –Narcissa Farrand Pettis

Mrs. Farrand's legacy also continued to grow strong through education. Established in 1914, the Narcissa Farrand (Mrs. N. Pettes) Scholarship awards students from the Eastern Townships who attend full-time post-secondary studies. Throughout the years, students who have attended universities such as Bishop's and McGill have been awarded the scholarship.

Suggested Readings:

- François Séguin, *Capsule historique # 5 – La première bibliothèque publique et gratuite en milieu rural au Québec*, Federation des Milieux Documentaires, 2016.
- Taylor McClure, *Pettes Memorial Library*, The Record, 2020.

How do I find material about the library and Narcissa Farrand?

The BCHS holds documents which pertain to the library.

Narcissa Farand Pettes:

- A few photos of Narcissa Farrand are found within the Nathaniel Pettes files
- More photos can be found within the Pettes family fonds (CA BCHS BCHS290)

Note on names: Women were often referred by their husband's names in documents. Narcissa Farrand therefore is referred to as Mrs. Nathaniel Pettes.

Pettes Memorial Library Papers:

129 documents in the library papers include various topics including:

- Letters of different types, including correspondence between Narcissa Farrand, building contractors, and other companies and members of the town regarding the building of the library.
- Estimates, tenders, and invoices pertaining to the building of the Pettes Memorial Library offer more logistic first-hand accounts of how the library was built.

Minute Books Papers:

- Minute books, funds, and account books show the internal handling of funds within the library throughout the years
- Visitor books found in the archives show the many visitors of the library throughout the years.
- Books of donors list the names of donors along with their material and financial donations.



Mrs. Nathaniel Pettes nee
Narcissa Farrand. Brome
County Historical Society, CA
BCHS BCHS290-S2-P18

MARION L. PHELPS: A CURATOR OF BROME COUNTY HISTORY

Ms. Phelps was born to William W. and Maude Phelps and grew up in Shefford County before attending the School for Teachers at McGill University. Upon graduation, Ms. Phelps went on to teach in the Laurentians and eventually in the Eastern Townships. Ms. Phelps's work with local historical societies began in the 1960s when she helped infuse the Missisquoi Historical Society with new life. Indeed, the MHS had become dormant after it was closed for the duration of World War I but thanks to community involvement and Ms. Phelps's passion for history, the Missisquoi Historical Society became what it is today.

In 1969, Ms. Phelps crossed the county border and was appointed the Curator at the Brome County Historical Society. There, she worked furiously to support both the Museum and Archives and published or edited countless historical articles and volumes, including the popular Yesterdays of Brome County series, all the while organising engaging displays with the BCHS's outstanding collection. Ms. Phelps's unbelievable work with the Sir John Johnson Branch of the UELAC is also worth mentioning as she could go toe to toe with anybody on Loyalist history. For her educational and scholarly work, Ms. Phelps was honoured with multiple awards including the Order for Scholastic Merit (1960), the Heritage Canada Award (1981), and the 125th Anniversary of Canadian Confederation Medal (1992).

Unfortunately, the world lost Marion Phelps in 2013 but the BCHS honours her dedication to local history with a building in her name and with the annual Lecture Series that has borne her name since 2013. When asked to describe Ms. Phelps in 3 words, her long-time colleague and treasure-trove of Ms. Phelps stories, Arlene Royea, simply stated "She was incredible".



The BCHS holds lots of contextual material related to Ms. Phelps and her work. Documents located in her fonds not only offer material about her outstanding achievements and career, but also present examples of her work.

Documents among the fonds include:

- Letters and awards from the Prime Minister and Governor General(s) of Canada sent to Ms. Phelps
- Various photos and newspaper clippings depicting her work and achievements
- Multiple awards such as the Community Service Award from the Heritage Canada Foundation and the United Nations National Assembly of Volunteers Award
- More contextual material about Ms. Phelps's historical work, such as a list of Knowlton Mayors from 1888-1968

HOW DO I FIND INFORMATION ABOUT BROME COUNTY WOMEN AT WAR?

Almost 50,000 Canadian women enlisted in the forces during World War II. The Women of Brome County took part in the efforts for Canada among different divisions such as the Royal Canadian Women's Navy Service, Canadian Women's Army Corps, and Nursing Services. The BCHS holds a book sharing the pictures and stories of Brome County women who took part in the War. Fortunately, many of these women were alive to tell their stories during the compilation of this project. Among the profiles, items such as pictures, medals awarded, units, and first-hand accounts can be found. Listed below are the women who are mentioned in these profiles.

- Bleasdale, Irene
- Call (Davoud), Jocelyne (nee Tetley)
- Dranfield (Dewberry), Violet J. (nee Law)
- Field, Coralie- Mrs. T.R. Somerville
- Fisher, Katherine (nee Littler)
- Gardner, Marion
- Gilbert, Eunice (nee Astles)
- Gilday, Jane (nee Winan)
- Grant, Nancy (nee Gigot)
- Hudson, Freda Parkes
- Kelly, Mary
- Leggat, Sue
- Little, Nancy (nee Campbell)
- MacLellan, Elizabeth (MacPherson)
- Marks, Marjorie (nee King)
- Nixon, Elizabeth (nee Johnson)
- Porteous, Janet- Mrs. Ian McDougall
- Purvis, Peggy (nee Wright)
- Sherrer, Lorraine E. (nee Wilkins)
- Wooton, Jean Scrimger

The book also features an in memoriam section for the Brome County women veterans who have passed away.

Mabel Geldard-Brown

Mabel Geldard-Brown was a Scottish-born resident of Brome County. She was active in both World Wars, and kept a documented account of her life's work. Beyond her war efforts, she was known for her exemplary work which strived for peace and equality. Geldard-Brown was associated with many organizations around the world, ranging from refugee camps in Poland to the founding the The Ladies Auxiliary Knowlton Legion (an organization helping wounded soldiers returning home). A substantive list of these organizations are noted in the Brome County Women at War book. The BCHS also holds five of her War medals demonstrating her successful military career.

Located in the Knowlton Scrapbooks at the BCHS (CA BCHS BCHS6002-D11) a remembrance book of Miss Geldard-Brown celebrates her 100th birthday and marks her accomplishments. This obituary scrapbook was composed by Marion L. Phelps.

CONTACT US/FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information or for research assistance please do not hesitate to reach out to us at archives@shcb.ca. You can also reach us by phone at 450-243-6782.

To read the BCHS's research policy [click here](#).