

the Body and the Body Politic,” deals directly with this issue, noting how the more radical call for knowledge and control in women’s health activism, in the 1970s, shifted over subsequent decades into highly individualistic, consumeristic and depoliticized quests for women’s health “information.” According to Reverby, this has simply become a source of “reinscription of control by those selling us health ‘information.’” It has also frequently led to a diminution of attention to diversity and women’s varying health care needs. What both the editors and Reverby need to consider more fully, however, are neo-liberal economic and political policies associated with what is currently being referred to as “globalization.” Ironically, the “national” perspectives that this collection attempts to shed light on might soon be a thing of the past as neo-liberal policies and the World Trade Organization increasingly impose American-style, privatized, free-market economies, institutions, and policies around the world.

*Women, Health and Nation* is a timely publication for getting readers to think about women’s health care not only historically, but also at a particularly critical, current juncture in history when women’s health activism is sorely needed. To this end, this collected volume of essays is particularly useful as a teaching tool, as the comparative framework, the mix of primary documents and essays, and the attention paid to diversity, allow for an exploration of a number of important questions—such as body/body politic issues, women’s own agency in ascribing to biomedical models, and the conceptual frameworks that shape women’s health activism. Most importantly, though, the collection bespeaks the crucial need for women to consult, to theorize and to work across “borders,” transgressing boundaries both within and across nation-states, to further advance their health care interests.

## **FAMILY LIFE AND SOCIABILITY IN UPPER AND LOWER CANADA, 1780-1870: A VIEW FROM DIARIES AND FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE**

Françoise Noël  
Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003

**REVIEWED BY CLARA THOMAS**



Professor Noël, of Nipissing University, has written a carefully researched and well-documented study of social manners and customs and has presented it in a logically organized form. She has divided her findings into three major sections: The Couple, Parents and Children, and Kinship and Community. Each one is subdivided and plentifully supplied with evidence from diaries, journals, and letters. Section I gives us Courtship and Engagement, Marriage, Housekeeping and Household Production, and Married Life; Section II, Childbirth and Infancy, Childhood, Children’s Accidents, Illness, and Death and

Parent-Child Relationships; and Section III, Domestic Rituals and Celebrations, Family Sociability, Mutual Assistance and Reciprocity, and Family Correspondence.

It must be remembered that in 1780, Noël’s starting date, Lower Canada was a much more mature and settled society than Upper Canada. It was not until the large influx of immigrants from the British Isles after the finish of the Napoleonic Wars that the population of the two Canadas began to approach parity. The difference is reflected, of course, in the number of documents available to Noël for her study. She has scoured the available sources as her references and footnotes indicate and has generated an engrossing and valuable study, though two reservations emerged and took on importance as I read.

First I would have much preferred to have the Kinship and Community section placed first, because in my opinion that was by far the most important factor in both family life and sociability. Second, Noël might well have placed much more stress than she did on the effects of religious affiliation on society at every level. In Lower Canada, of course, the Roman Catholic Church enfolded most lives from cradle to coffin and was of prime importance; in Upper Canada the Anglican, as England’s Established Church, was well entrenched, but other denominations, especially the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist, were also exceedingly important in determining the actions of their adherents in every aspect of their lives. My paternal grandmother was born in 1863 and always Kinship and Community were her prime determinants, along with the church of her parents and then of her husband. In general, in rural and small town Ontario, I believe, there was only one time of major choice for a woman and none for a man: a woman might choose at the time of her marriage to leave the church of her family and “go with” her husband, but the man was by

custom locked into the church he had been brought up in. To switch allegiances took an exceptionally strong conviction and a strong individual. To marry a Roman Catholic was, for either man or woman, completely out of the question, unless of course, one had been born into the faith. Exceptions, of course, happened—but the pressures of Kinship and Community were very strong. This was certainly still the case when I grew up in the '30s in a small town in Southern Ontario. In fact, I believe that the present furor about the issue of "same sex marriage" which is often linked in the press with "family values" might well be more specifically linked to the continuing pressures and prejudices of kinship, community, and religious affiliation.

One of the strengths of this study is the frankness and charm of the many quotations from the letters, journals, and diaries of Noël's sources. Abraham Joseph, for instance, the son of a wealthy Jewish importer of tobacco and snuff, is a notably social bachelor who in the mid-19th century obviously suffered no discrimination in Quebec City society: "Because of religious food laws, he also declined most of the oyster parties which were frequent at certain time of the year: 'Oysters are now and have been for a week the nightly suppers. As I eat none I cannot join much their suppers to which I am frequently very much pressed in vain.' These seemed to have been the only restrictions that being Jewish placed on his social life."

Noël places a good deal of stress on the prevalence of marriage for love and on what she terms "companionate marriage," the mutual regard and friendship of marriage partners. While her examples certainly bear her out, one needs always to keep in mind that courtship and marriage were subsumed in the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of Kinship and Community and also in the ever-present if usually unvoiced considerations of class. There was always and everywhere a social hierarchy,

just as there was always a socially acceptable family hierarchy with the father at the top. That, of course, was undermined in countless instances by the presence of a strong woman—and we have never had any shortage of such!

Though I believe that Noël has somewhat overstated the freedom of choice young people enjoyed in courting and marriage, Part II, *Parents and Children*, assembles an excellent record of the stages of childhood, from pregnancy through childbirth, illnesses, and accidents to the interaction of parents and children. Sections on pregnancy and childbirth are especially informative and also especially linked to her Part III, *Kinship and Community*. In this final section she does acknowledge its overarching importance. The abundant evidence of community helpfulness and caring, especially offered by women to other women in times of childbirth and illness, is both moving and heartening to read: "The early nineteenth century has been associated with the rise of individualism and the ideology of the self-made man, but the reality, for most individuals, was that they were nurtured and supported by a dense matrix of family, kin and friends."

In Upper Canada, Catharine Parr Traill has long since become an icon of women's solidarity, not only for her frequent services as a midwife, but also for her lifelong code of helpfulness and love. Noël has widened our knowledge and appreciation of a host of other women like her.

## **LEARNING TO BE OLD: GENDER, CULTURE AND AGING**

Margaret Cruikshank  
Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003

### **REVIEWED BY SHERRILL CHEDA**

Do Not be misled: This is not a self-help book but a scholarly exploration of how cultural attitudes determine what it means to grow old in the United States, based on research, with recommendations for policies that could improve the situation, as well as a comprehensive bibliography. The author is well qualified as a Women's Studies lecturer and faculty associate of the Center on Aging at the University of Maine. This text is such a gem that it is tempting to quote from it non-stop. The main research finding of the book is "the current incidence of illness among old women and men, far from being inevitable, is more determined by culture than by biology." A medical system and political policies which stressed preventive medicine and exercise programs would go a long way to improving this situation for many older citizens. The way we age depends on where we live in the world, as aging is culturally determined. The US medical model that sees aging as illness and infirmity is not universal. Older people are more than just a bundle of illnesses that need medication. Many elderly people have illnesses from which they fully recover. Class, race, sex, education, and income are all-important factors in how we age and how healthy we are as we age. Research into aging indicates that what we call aging results from lack of exercise, smoking, other addictions, poor nutrition, falls, and stress. Cruikshank points out that there are no broken hips in the jungles