



By Franca Iacovetta

As we race towards the 2014 Toronto Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, the most Indigenous and international program in Big Berks history, this update unashamedly, and anecdotally, celebrates our program. (Critical reflection is later.) The Big Berks is the most important conference in women's, gender and sexuality history and our venue offers many opportunities for Canadian scholars to present with/to international colleagues, hear leading-edge research and network on a global scale. And then go to St Catherine's for the 2014 CHA at Brock.

But first, a few thank-yous, to CHA Council, Canadian Committee on Women's History, and the deans/chairs in universities across Canada for their critical support. Thanks to the 2013 Victoria CHA Program Committee for approving two well-attended Berks-related events: a wide-ranging panel on transnational feminist history (Lynne Abrams, Eileen Boris, Elizabeth Vibert and Nancy Forestell) and a lunch event where panelists told poignant and funny stories. (Self-confessed hoarder Tina Simmons pulled out notes from the first 1973 Big Berks, where she heard Carol Smith-Rosenberg and Natalie Davis, also on this panel, give papers that became highly influential articles in the field, on women's romantic relationships and on women's history as "gender" history before the latter term was coined. Bettina Bradbury recalled trying to join a tennis match in the early 1980s involving Davis, Jill Conway and other Berks "stars" and being asked if she was any good.) The CCWH-sponsored Feminist Mentors event in Toronto Berks, featuring these and many other Canadian scholars promises yet more fun.

As a feminist conference, the Big Berks is also a different kind of history conference: scholarly rigorous and intellectually ambitious certainly, but also much less stuffy, with an emphasis on mentoring next generations, expanding one's intellectual horizons, and more interdisciplinary. The shifts into a gender and sexuality as well as women's history conference speak to the Berks' continuing importance as a site of political debate. The Berks' activist side will also be much in evidence in Toronto: for example, in the Indigenous panels on the Red Power and Idle No More movements, Toronto Memory and Power project, Christine Welsh's screening of *Finding Dawn*, on the missing and murdered Indigenous women, and the exhibit and performance by artist Rebecca Belmore – to name just a few examples from just one of our key themes.

The Berks began as a US-based project and early programs grouped sessions into North America, Europe and the rest of the world(!), but Canadians have been there from nearly the start and have helped to internationalize it – a trend the border-crossing into Canada has reinforced. Ruth Roach Pierson has recalled how attending the 1974 Big Berks transformed her into a woman's

historian. She'll present in Toronto, too, but in her new role as award-winning poet on our exciting Friday cultural night. For more details about the offerings, which also include a play about the 1980s Toronto Eaton's Strike and Queer Bathroom Stories, both informed by the research of colleagues from York University, a major Berks co-sponsor, go to <http://berks2014.com>. We're also continuing the gender-bending performances introduced at the 2011 Big Berks with our Saturday Night Drag Show and Dance.

The result of truly collective efforts helped by a SSHRC grant, we are especially proud of our scholarly program. Many leading scholars are there: founders such as Linda Gordon, Alice Kessler-Harris, Deborah Gray White, and Estelle Freedman; disability scholars Catherine Kudlick, Kim Nielsen, and Anita Ghai; Latin Americanists Cristina Rivera Garza and Gabriela Cano; and Caribbeanists Verene Sheppard, Bridget Brereton and Myriam Cottias.

Instead of keynotes, we invited pre-eminent scholars to anchor multigenerational and transnational panels in their field. Scholars from Japan, Turkey, Mexico and Canada will debate with Joan Scott the translatability (or not) of gender history in different national/linguistic contexts. Other keynote-quality scholars anchoring major panels include medievalist Caroline Walker Bynnum, oral historian Luisa Passerini and Caribbeanist Jacqui Alexander. Leaders in newer fields include Susan Stryker, transgender historian and co-editor of *TSQ*, the first trans-studies journal, to be launched in Toronto. McMaster's Wilson Institute, another major Canadian co-sponsor, will showcase a panel on African Canadian women's histories, and the Ontario Women's History Network, yet another sponsor, on Alison Prentice. We will honour Jill Conway and Natalie Zemon Davis at the university where they began their careers and first introduced women's history. Their former TAs and students, Nikki Strongboag, Linda Kealey, and Libby Cohen, are also leading participants.

There is so much more on the program (Sarah Polley, the AGO sessions...). To help navigate it, like us on Facebook, follow us on twitter, and download our stream documents (on such topics as lgbtq, disability, and Latina sessions). Create a stream document and share it with us/others.

To help graduate students/low-income scholars, we will keep the registration fee at \$100 and billet those who need a free bed. Whether presenting or not, ask your department for support: the Berks is not only about seeing the stars, but meeting your peers; networks forged in Toronto will help with future international conferences and research projects. See you in May!