

undertook to prepare an inventory of the holdings in the ducal library (now the *Biblioteca Estense* in Modena). Later, in 1488, he was appointed *conservatore de la ragione de la Camera* (archivist) and charged with responsibility for all public and private records under nominal control of the Estensi *signoria*, including the dormant administrative records formerly preserved by the cameral *referendarius* and his *cancellieri*. Numbered among his most significant contributions to *quattrocento* Ferrarese archivy would be the inauguration of a central records repository in the Palazzo della Ragione, the foundation of the secret archive (*Archivio Segreto*), the organization of signorial records into *fondi* and series, and the preparation of a complete inventory of archival holdings. His other accomplishments were many and varied. He formed part of a small circle of humanist scholars with Tommaso Fusco, Lucas Gauricus, and Lodovico da Bagno, and he wrote prodigiously, providing us with the *Annales Ferrariensis*, the *Ortopascha*, the *Collectanea*, and *De Spectacula*. He designed the first modern European theatre to be devoted to the presentation of secular drama and was instrumental in the translation of the Terrentine and Plautine texts used as scripts. His knowledge of diplomatics and protocol was also in constant demand, and, at one time or another, he acted as Estensi ambassador to the Court of Milan and the Venetian Republic.

In singling out Prisciani, I want to emphasize that he was far from unique; however, there is no need to catalogue the others which fit the archivist-historian mould. Rather, it has simply been my intention to offer a perspective on early modern archivy quite distinct from the one proposed by Mr. Taylor and to raise questions concerning his historical interpretation. Mr. Taylor is certainly entitled to his opinion of the archival profession, and there is much of value in what he says. But before we exorcise the historian from the archivist by reference to the past, we might well profit by a more cautious and considered examination of our professional roots.

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The Women and War Exhibition, A Rejoinder

First, let me compliment *Archivaria* for acknowledging through its exhibition reviews, the valuable role of exhibitions of archival documents in transmitting information to the general public about our history. It is indeed heartening to know that times and attitudes are changing and that more and more archives and archivists are accepting public education, particularly through exhibitions, as an essential role.

Now to the primary purpose of my letter — to redress an imbalance created by the review in *Archivaria* 20 of the *Women and War* exhibition now on display at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa. As the principal researcher/writer for this exhibition, I wish to take issue with several of the personal opinions and conclusions put forward by the reviewer, Jeanne L'Espérance. Ms. L'Espérance opined that the exhibition was “a rather disappointing failure” leaving the visitor with “a general sense of puzzlement.” She is, of course, entitled to her views. However, I wish to point out that other reviewers have described it as “cause for awe,” as “provocative without being biased,” as “a reminder of

the disservice done to women throughout history,” as “thoughtful” and “as an act of resistance” and so on. Surely these comments, combined with the favourable views expressed in personal letters and the substantial number of visitors to the exhibition, are evidence that others are experiencing a reaction different from that of Ms. L’Espérance.

Personal views will obviously vary depending on the approach taken. I can only assume that since Ms. L’Espérance was writing for *Archivaria* she toured the exhibit looking for things of interest to the archivist. This is certainly legitimate, however, in doing so one risks missing the overall point of the exhibit!

For my part, I am hopeful that this exhibition achieves exactly what it set out to do — to provide an introduction for people who are not familiar with, or likely to have read, the scholarly writing describing the varied roles carried out by Canadian women during periods of conflict. I believe, however, that it goes farther by directly and indirectly posing certain questions about the nature of women’s participation and about society’s perceptions of their involvement.

From a preliminary stage, formal evaluation played a major role in setting objectives, in identifying the target audience, and in shaping the subsequent exhibition. A “front-end” study consisting of a questionnaire and interviews provided a profile of the visitors to the Canadian War Museum and determined both their current knowledge and their attitudes about the roles of women during wartime. The survey results indicated that the largest proportion of visitors were under twenty-one years of age and had a high school education. Only half of all visitors had read or studied Canadian wartime history and their knowledge about the varied roles of women was extremely limited.

A second formative evaluation study, employing a mock-up of one section of the exhibition, helped the exhibition team develop and refine aspects of the text and graphics. Due to constraints on budget and personnel, the plan to evaluate the completed exhibition has not yet taken place.

As with all successful exhibitions, *Women and War* set out to be consistent both with the current or desired institutional image and needs and with current theory and practice. Thus, the exhibition was prepared keeping in mind the role of the Canadian War Museum in promoting interest in Canada’s wartime history and also the minimal presence of any information on women in the museum’s permanent displays. From this perspective, the project served a dual purpose: to gather information on the varied roles of Canadian women during periods of conflict and to identify and assemble material which could be incorporated at a later date into the permanent displays.

On the issue of exhibition theory and practice, all members of the planning team were conscious of the need to present the information in a manner which would assist the viewers to learn on their own while proceeding through the exhibits. Designing for information is a comparatively new step which places more emphasis on the learning which takes place in the exhibition gallery. Thus, the organization of displays to provide the opportunity for the viewer to understand the exhibition through a gradual, logical unfolding of themes, ideas, and facts was deemed essential.

Although a traditional catalogue with more specifics about display items and more extensive analysis of the overall subject might have been useful, there is no evidence to suggest that the existing information is inadequate or the message too subtle for the majority of viewers. A less expensive and less specific record is available in the National

Museum of Man's *Oracle Series* (No. 54) under the title *Canadian Women and War: A Long Tradition*, a complementary publication aimed at the same audience as the exhibition.

As I noted earlier, the primary objective of the exhibition was to bring some of the wartime history of women into public view and to trace the overlooked, oft forgotten, and unrecognized participation by women. While attempting to provide extensive coverage of this long and active tradition, there was never any pretense that the result would be the definitive statement. On the contrary, it was clearly stated on the first panel that the exhibition "highlights a few of the positive and diverse facets of women's wartime experience." It was hoped that viewers would rethink this aspect of our history and some would be motivated to fill the gaps left in the exhibition storyline or in our current knowledge.

In conclusion, I suggest that the degree to which *Women and War* stimulated public interest in this topic can be measured by many things: the debate it has generated among feminists and historians; the response by the museum visitors who made return visits; the schools which included it on their curricula; the increase in donations to the museum of women's wartime artifacts, and by the museum itself, which has extended the exhibition for an indefinite period.

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