

S. J. McKee Archives



Westman Coalition on Equality Rights in the Canadian Constitution fonds

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Part Of: RG 5 Western Manitoba Manuscript Collection

Description Level: Fonds

Accession Number: 9-2004

4-2011

GMD: multiple media

Date Range: 1987-1999

Physical Description: 1.2 m textual records

9 video tapes

History /

Biographical:

In 1988, Sheila Doig was the Rural Liaison Coordinator for the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women. That winter, she travelled to Crystal City, Manitoba, to meet with a group of women that included Verna Menzies. At the meeting, the women were concerned about the efforts of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to amend the Constitution so that Quebec would sign on. They believed that the amending document, The Meech Lake Accord, would jeopardize women's rights under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Thus began a chain of events that resulted in the formation of The Westman Coalition for Equality Rights under The 1987 Meech Lake Accord. The group became known simply as The Westman Coalition. During the years 1988-1990, these women—almost all grassroots rural women with no special training in things constitutional—met with and lobbied politicians, other feminists, and the public in order to change Meech Lake or defeat it.

There were many high points to this campaign. Sheila conducted an extensive tour of rural and northern Manitoba, recruiting women to express their concerns in writing to Ottawa. The Coalition presented briefs to the Manitoba hearings and to the Charest Commission. They were only permitted to appear at the latter after they picketed the hearings in Winnipeg and demanded that women be heard. They were courted by the national media for comments, and became adept at handling interviews and public appearances.

After much turmoil, in June 1990, Meech Lake was defeated in the Manitoba legislature by Elijah Harper on behalf of Aboriginal peoples, who had largely been left out of the constitutional debate. The Coalition was there to support him and to show the face of women, who also felt that they had not been heard.

This should have been the end of Canada's constitutional debate, but Prime Minister Mulroney was determined to succeed where others had failed, and so a new process (the Charlottetown Accord, as it became known) was soon under way to bring Quebec into the fold by amending the Constitution. This time there was endless consultation with the public, and the women scrambled to respond to the many commissions and hearings. There were the Spicer Commission, the Manitoba hearings, the Dobbie/Beaudoin committee and so on. Finally, there were five (and later, six) constitutional conferences to be held around the country. Ordinary Canadians would be invited to apply to attend, and they would be chosen randomly.

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The women were invited to 5 of the 6 conferences. Just a coincidence of random selection? Or a consequence of their high profile in the debate? They thought the latter. In any event, Terri Deller, Kady Denton, Paula Mallea and Sheila Doig all attended at various venues and advanced the position of women on equality rights and on the other issues on the table.

A high point of this second campaign was the visit to Brandon of Marcelle Dolment from Quebec City. As one of the few vocal feminists in Quebec who opposed the new Charlottetown proposal, she was a precious ally. She came to meet with the women, forge solidarity, and show that French and English, Quebec and The Rest of Canada, were capable of meeting and coming to agreement.

Sheila conducted another rural tour in 1992, and also attended the Annual General Meeting of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, where she felt she was given short shrift.

The women were discouraged on many fronts during this campaign. They were out of pocket many thousands of dollars, and the promised funding from the Secretary of State for the Status of Women was finally denied. As well, despite herculean efforts to put their position to politicians and the media, the women felt again as though they were not being heard.

By this time, the Coalition had developed a position on all of the salient issues under the Charlottetown process: property rights, distinct society, an interpretative clause, equal representation of women in the Senate, the economic agenda and the Canada Clause. In the summer of 1992, Canadians were finally shown the text of the Charlottetown Accord and were told that they would be voting on it in a referendum, even though the text was not in its final form.

The women waged a final campaign asking people to vote "No" to the Charlottetown proposals. Politicians, business leaders, many academics and constitutional experts were saying that "No" would mean immediate Quebec separation and the breakdown of the country. The same had been said of Meech Lake. The women of the Coalition did not believe that the country was so frail, and they were proved right. On October 26, 1992, the country voted "No".

Secretary of State finally came through with funding to cover the Coalition's many expenses, thanks largely to the efforts of M.P. Lee Clark.

Sheila Doig was awarded the prestigious Governor General's Award in Commemoration of the Person's Case for her work on behalf of rural women. Paula was given the Manitoba Human Rights Award for her work on the constitution.

All of the women who were involved in the Meech and Charlottetown campaigns felt that their lives had been changed by the experience. Like ordinary Canadians everywhere, they did not believe that they could have any real influence over constitutional affairs, much less national politics. They knew nothing about constitutions or the law of the Charter, but they educated themselves on the issues, and became articulate and incisive advocates. They were fearless in front of Prime Ministers and news anchors. They entered corridors of power that they had never thought possible. They were, then and now, a force to be reckoned with.

The Westman Coalition became Women for Equality (WE) after the Charlottetown campaign. They met for many years every week to discuss the issues of the day. Then, as various members dispersed, the group waned. A new crisis threatening the equality rights of women, however, would surely revive what was once a powerful grassroots lobby.

Custodial History:

Paula Mallea was using the records in accession 9-2004 to write a book on the Westman Coalition on Equality Rights ("The Fight for Women's Rights: Meech, Charlottetown and Manitoba women" published 2005). Once she was finished with the records, her husband, former president of Brandon University John Mallea, delivered three boxes of records to the Archives in 2004. A small number of photographs were donated later.

The records in accession 4-2011 were originally in the possession of Shiela (Doig) Kingham. They were given to Terri Deller who donated them to the McKee Archives in 2011.

Scope and Content:

Accession 9-2004 (96 cm textual records, 9 video tapes - 1987-1993) contains the records of the Westman Coalition on Equality Rights in the Canadian Constitution including newspaper clippings 1988-1991, dealing with the Meech Lake Accord and the Charlottetown Accord and the failed ratification of both; meeting notes and agendas of the Coalition 1987-1993; miscellaneous documents dealing with Canadian constitutional reform circa 1988-1993; documents related to the Manitoba Task Force on Meech Lake; correspondence 1987-1993; budget matters; rural tour by Coalition members; constitutional proposals development and submitted by the Coalition; miscellaneous files relating to Meech Lake and Charlottetown; a file dealing with Manitoba first-wave feminist Nellie McClung; and published commentary on the Charlottetown Accord.

Accession 9-2004 also contains 2 video tapes of an interview conducted with Elsie McLaughlin, niece of Nellie McClung, as well as 7 additional video tapes consisting of panels with Coalition members, information sessions, Meech Lake workshops, the Westman Coalition meeting with Jean Chretien and Sheila Doig receiving the Governor General's Award.

Accession 4-2011 (6.5 cm textual records - 1989-1999) consists of the records of the Westman Coalition on Equality Rights in the Canadian Constitution including notes on the origin and activities of the Coalition; a grant application - 1992 - by the Coalition; Coalition proposals and lobbying strategies concerning the Meech Lake Accord; a brief to the Special Committee on the Companion Resolution to Meech April 1990; a brief to the Manitoba All-Party Task Force on the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord, April 1990; a brief to the Dobbie Commission, November 1991; correspondence, clippings and e-mails concerning Coalition activities; book drafts - history of the Coalition - Paula Mallea, February 1996 and spring 1996; a brief to the Manitoba Legislative Task Force on Canadian Unity [nd]; copies of letters "Rural Tour" 1992; and several published sources on constitutional matters.

Notes:	History/Bio information provided by Paula Mallea. See Paula Mallea, <i>The Fight for Women's Rights: Meech, Charlottetown and Manitoba Women</i> (Kagawong, Ont.: Paula Mallea, 2005).
Name Access:	Paula Mallea Shiela Doig Shiela Kingham Mary Annis Terri Deller Kady Denton
Subject Access:	women's rights
Storage Location:	2004 accessions 2011 accessions
Related Material:	Brandon Chapter - Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women
Arrangement:	For accession 9-2004 Box 1

Box 1

- File 1 Meech Westman Coalition
- File 2 Correspondence 87-91
- File 3 Clippings 87-88
- File 4 Budget meech
- File 5 Rural Tour Meech
- File 6 Final Document 1990
- File 7 Minutes and Correspondence Meech
- File 8 Meech lake Correspondence
- File 9 Correspondence
- File 10 Meech – Our Own Stories

Box 2

- File 1 Meech cartoons
- File 2 Meech Effects on Economy
- File 3 Meech proposed legislation and early Responses
- File 4 Meech Charest Committee
- File 5 Analysis and Clippings 1989
- File 6 Clippings January - February 1990
- File 7 Clippings March - April 1990
- File 8 Clippings May 1990
- File 9 Clippings June 1990

Box 3

- File 1 Meech – General Information – members, terms of reference
- File 2 Nellie McClung
- File 3 Coalition Financial
- File 4 Coalition Financial
- File 5 Manitoba Task Force on Meech
- File 6 Books on Meech
- File 7 Miscellaneous Meech
- File 8 Miscellaneous c. 1990
- File 9 Meech miscellaneous

Box 4

- File 1 Shiela's (Doig) Rural Tour fall 87'
- File 2 Actions for Change - women
- File 3 Charter of Rights
- File 4 WE Meetings 1993
- File 5 WE & WC correspondence
- File 6 Meech WE analysis
- File 7 Addresses
- File 8 Petition

Box 5

- File 1 Meech miscellaneous
- File 2 Westman Coalition 1987
- File 3 Women for Equality 1993
- File 4 Womens' Centre

Tapes and recordings

Box 6

Box 6

- File 1 Meetings 1992
- File 2 Correspondence 92-93
- File 3 Fundraising general
- File 4 Minutes 1992
- File 5 Miscellaneous
- File 6 Charlottetown documents for book
- File 7 CBC Commentary 1992
- File 8 Charlottetown Bulletins
- File 9 Referendum

Box 7

- File 1 Charlottetown & referendum clippings
- File 2 Charlottetown – Manitoba task Force
- File 3 Charlottetown Conferences
- File 4 First Peoples and the Constitution 1992 – Report
- File 5 Report of the special Joint Committee on a Renewed Canada 1992
- File 6 Charlottetown – Lobbying
- File 7 Charlottetown – Rural letters
- File 8 Charlottetown – correspondence
- File 9 Press Releases 1992

Box 8

- File 1 WC Brief 1991
- File 2 Charlottetown – clippings March 92-November 92
- File 3 Published Analysis and Commentary on Charlottetown
- File 4 Published Analysis and Commentary on Charlottetown
- File 5 Published Analysis and Commentary on Charlottetown
- File 6 Photographs and Press clippings related to the activities of the organization