

# **Creating the Canadian Archives of Women in Science and Engineering**

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# Retrieving the History of Women Scientists and Engineers is Essential

## To:

- ▶ Provide women scientists and engineers *with an accurate and inspiring understanding of their past;*
- ▶ Develop a *sense of pride* in the past achievements of those *who came before them*
- ▶ Provide *key role models* to the younger generations
- ▶ Help women in S & E organizations to learn about, and reflect on past policy and advocacy initiatives, to better inform and shape future development.

# My Archives: Content

As the first Chairholder (women in engineering Chair, funded by NSERC and Northern Telecom):

- ▶ Chair reports
  - ▶ Visits to universities and workplaces: ~30/year
  - ▶ Media interviews (~35)
  - ▶ Committees (8–14/ year)
  - ▶ Articles, speeches
  - ▶ Grant applications and reviews
  - ▶ Correspondence
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# Important Documents

## Canadian Committee for Women in Engineering (CCWE): 1990–1992

- ▶ Barriers and Bridges Forums (Ottawa, Vancouver, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, Regina)
- ▶ Briefs and Memoirs received (almost 200)
- ▶ Research on Best Practices: Universities and Companies
- ▶ Final report: April 1992
- ▶ Chair's and CCWE's Correspondence
- ▶ INWES, WISE, ERI

# Artefacts



Meritas-Tabaret Award  
University of Ottawa



Queen's Baton  
(BC Hydro)

# Examples



PEO GOLD Medal

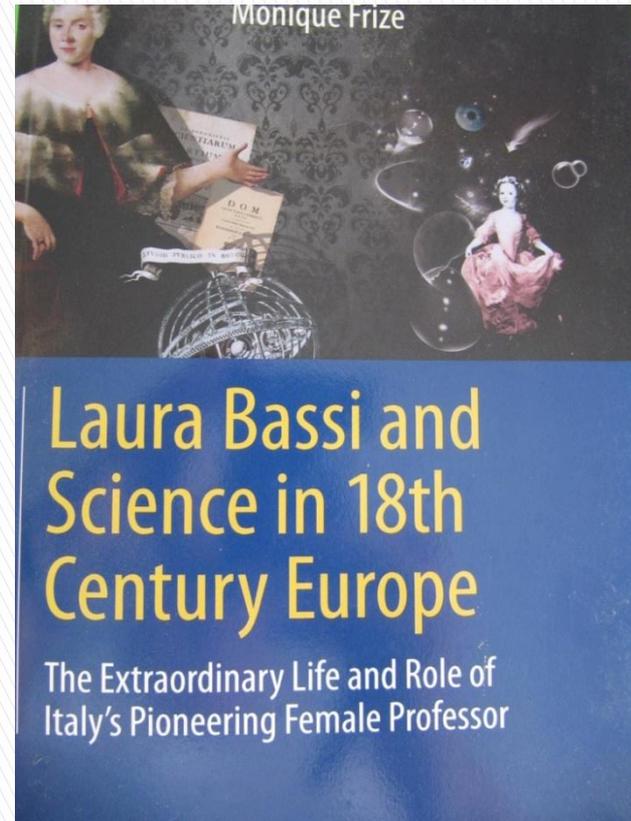
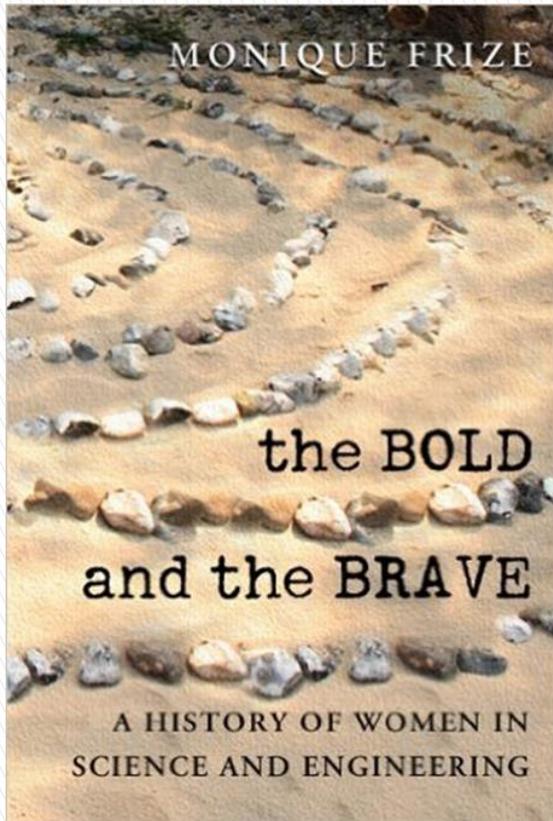


Officer, the Order of Canada

# Why are Archives important for an organization ?

- ▶ They document work, and tell us the story of its members and of the community they serve, their successes, failures, and the issues they considered to be important during various periods of time.
  - ▶ They can develop a sense of pride and commitment to the organization, stimulate enthusiasm and attract new members
  - ▶ They can foster closer links with stakeholders and supporters of the organization
  - ▶ **A better knowledge of their past will enable Women in STEM organizations to design and implement more informed policy and advocacy initiatives**
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# Archival material for books



# Material for Laura Bassi

- ▶ Archives at University of Bologna: Archiginnasio
- ▶ Many Books
- ▶ 2 Theses (Gabriella Berti Logan, U. of Ottawa)

# Material for my Memoirs

- ▶ Chronological description of young years, education, professional life and personal life by time periods and especially with career changes (720 pages). [For archives U. Ottawa.](#)
- ▶ Re-written as stories, containing the most important events and aspects of my life (professional and personal). (~300 pages). [Under review by University of Ottawa Press.](#)

# WHY Donate my archives

- ▶ To provide an understanding of issues faced at different epochs, how obstacles can be overcome, and successes achieved;
  - ▶ To show the human side of the life of a woman engineer or scientist;
  - ▶ Describe struggles, battles, chilly climate, isolation;
  - ▶ Describe positive aspects: new friendships, mentors, networks, honours and recognition.
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# Lessons I Learned

- ▶ Not to throw away any material... let the archive specialist decide what is important'
  - ▶ Organise files with themes (correspondence per year, speeches per location, conferences, committees, media reports and clippings, etc..
  - ▶ Communicate with a historian or archivist to plan the donation;
  - ▶ Donate to archives to preserve records.
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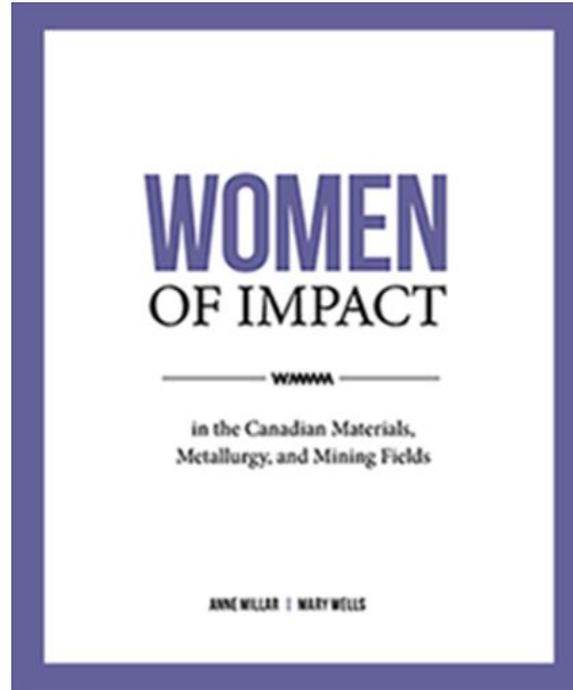
# Launch or participate in an Oral History Project

Key initiatives from Mary Wells and Anne Millar from the University of Waterloo:

- ▶ **Women of Impact, 2015**
- ▶ **Women of Innovation, 2017**

**Three steps: Interviews, conference and publication**

# Book co-edited by Anne Millar and Mary Wells (2015)



- ▶ Based on in-person interviews, book profiles the professional and personal lives of 18 female engineers and scientists who work in mining, metallurgy and materials in Canada.

# Broad based support for initiative

Workshop attracted 45 participants from Ottawa, other parts of Canada, the U.S. and U.K

- ▶ Regional NSERC Chairs for Women in S&E
- ▶ Historians, archivists, librarians and museum curators
- ▶ Policy makers and science journalists
- ▶ National funding agencies (NSERC and SSHRC) and from the private sector (IBM)
- ▶ Chief archivist of the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) Archives

Main recommendations adopted, to serve as basis of a multilayered action plan for the coming years

# Claire Deschênes: How to start to create an archive ?

## 30 years of academic records to archive:

- ▶ ~10 filing cabinets and 5 bookshelves in 4 rooms!
- ▶ Communicate with university archivist to verify interest  
Ex: History of women in Canada fond, Ottawa U.
- ▶ Follow archiving general guidelines  
[Propose\\_a\\_gift\\_of\\_archival\\_material\\_2017-08-11.pdf](#)



# Organise documents and artefacts

Gather personal items : CV, diplomas, academic reports, correspondence, press review, recognitions artefacts...

## Organise files by clusters (main organisations)

- ▶ Prepare a list of file names and artefacts. Determine cluster size
- ▶ Explain how they have been stored, accumulated and organised
- ▶ Determine dates, time range, mandate/mission, main activities and achievements, etc.,
- ▶ Identify confidential information with indication of period

List electronic and audiovisual material



# Questions raised

- ▶ What will the most interesting elements for the future ?
- ▶ Should I dispose of certain elements ?
- ▶ What about laboratory archive files, publications, thesis and books?
- ▶ Electronic filing ?



# Importance of historical research for policy development

## 3 examples of policy goals:

- ▶ Attract and retain more women in science and engineering :  
Need to study the development of *women's participation* in these fields over time and place.
- ▶ « Institutional transformation » in science and engineering education. (Fixing the structure of institutions rather than « fixing » women): Need to study how gender has operated in the *cultures* of science and engineering ( through regulations, programs, values and biases, day-to-day rituals -language, modes of dress, interactions-).
- ▶ Make women full partners in science and engineering research: Need to study how women have been historically excluded or marginalized in the the production of knowledge and what were the consequences of their unequal status

# Thank YOU!

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