



Silenced: The Untold Story of the Fight for Equality in the RCMP

Bonnie Reilly Schmidt

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When thirty-two women were hired as mounted police officers in 1974, it was a media sensation. After all, these were not the brawny heroes of Canadian history, or the dashing and handsome Mounties portrayed in over two hundred Hollywood movies. Women were thought to be afraid of guns and incapable of protecting themselves. Training officers at the RCMP's academy wondered if the women were capable. Could they march? Could they lift weights? Would they cry? The original uniform (pumps, a pillbox hat and a shoulder bag for a revolver and handcuffs) did little to further equality, and if a female officer complained of harassment, supervisors actively and openly pushed her to resign.

The move to put women in uniform was neither a beginning nor an end to women's journey toward equality in the RCMP. Women have served in the RCMP since 1873, providing social services, searching female gold smugglers and tending to prisoners. For decades, Mountie wives were scrutinized, vetted and subject to regular inspections of their housekeeping. A Mountie's wife must be a silent worker, always upholding the values of the RCMP. Although the RCMP promoted itself as a gender-neutral organization in 1974, the fight for recognition was about to become heated.

In 1978, after a female Mountie was shot in the line of duty for the first time, male Mounties questioned the ability of women to make split-second, life-and-death decisions. Despite overwhelming resistance, the women of the RCMP managed to assert their equality as police officers on their own terms, breaking ground for women's rights in Canada.

Drawing on first-hand accounts from forty-five male and female RCMP officers, news reports and archival resources, historian and former plainclothes RCMP officer Bonnie Reilly Schmidt offers an in-depth look into the history and propaganda of this iconic institution. *Silenced* is the compelling true story of how women transformed not only their role in the RCMP, but our very notion of what it means to be Canadian.

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