








Women & Legal System




Prior to Confederation, women were not equal to men under the law. Many women have worked and sacrificed to change laws, protect laws and to become part of the legal system - giving voice where there once was none. As a result of the steadfast work of the following nine women and countless more like them, Canada is closer to gender equality than ever before. These women fought sexism and racism to create new laws, and went on to become the first women lawyers and judges with the focus of repairing the harm sexist laws inflicted on women and their children.

Please note that the information contained in this section comes from a variety of sources, all of which are listed in the References section.

Women	Biographical Information
<p>Clara Brett Martin 1874-1923 Toronto</p>  <p><i>Miss. C. B. MARTIN.</i></p> <p>Osgoode Digital Commons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Despite being victim of significant acts of sexism against her, Clara Martin earned her LLB from University of Toronto ● 1st woman to practice law as barrister and solicitor in the British Empire ● Encouraged young women in the law profession by hiring female articling students ● Lobbied for female suffrage, to have a separate court for women with the Toronto Police Court ● Fought for women's rights and the Law <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Legal disadvantages of married women ○ Supremacy of paternal rights in child custody (Fathers' rights deemed more important than mothers' rights when it came to custody) ● Reputation as a "path-breaker in the field of equal intellectual rights for women" (Backhouse, 2005)
<p>Helen Gregory MacGill 1864 (Hamilton) -1947 (Chicago)</p>  <p>PABC - The Canadian Encyclopedia website</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● First woman to graduate from Trinity College (now University of Toronto) ● First woman in the British Empire to earn a degree in music ● Wrote and self-published book 'Daughters, Wives, and Mothers in British Columbia - Some Laws Affecting them' (she rewrote it 8 times) ● Founding member Vancouver Women's Press Club in 1909 (branch of Canadian Women's Press Club) ● In 1911, she led initiative to buy a building 'Vancouver Women's Building' (1st of its kind) = office space, meeting space for women's groups, 'dime-a-day' childcare ● July 1917 First female judge in British Columbia and appointed to the 'Juvenile Court of Vancouver' = 1st woman juvenile judge ● Served 1917-1929 and 1934-1945 ● In 1938 became the 1st woman to receive honorary Doctor of Laws from

	<p>the University of British Columbia</p>
<p>Violet King 1929 (Calgary) - 1982 (New York)</p>  <p>Glenbow Archives / NA-5600-7760a</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of 3 women in her Faculty of Law class and the ONLY woman to graduate that year • 1953 received her LLB degree = 1st black Canadian to obtain a law degree in Alberta and the only woman to graduate in her class • 1954 called to the Alberta Bar = 1st black woman lawyer to practice law in Canada • She would often speak openly and publicly about racism in the workplace • 1976 - 1st woman appointed to an exec position for the YMCA in the US(executive director of the National Council of YMCA's Organizational Development Group) • 1998 - inducted to the National YMCA Hall of Fame
<p>Jeanette Corbiere Lavell 1942 (Wikwemikong) -</p>  <p>OEA-OAS/Flickr CC - The Canadian Encyclopedia website</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Jeanette Corbiere, an Anishnaabe, married David Lavall in 1970, she lost her legal status as Indian (section 12(1)(b) of Indian Act) • Filed a legal suit against federal government - violation of the 1960 Canadian Bill of Rights (as it discriminated against women on the basis of sex) • She persevered without support from National Indian Brotherhood • 1971- Founding member of the Ontario Native Women's Association (ONWA) • 1971-1973 - fought to overturn sex discrimination in the Indian Act -1 Section 12(1)(b) eventually lost with the Supreme Court of Canada decision • Opened the door for subsequent court cases - Lovelace v. Canada • 1985 - Lavell regained her Indian Status with the passing of Bill C-31 (repealed section 12(1)(b) of Indian Act) • Received many awards such as the 2009 Persons Award and 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award from Indspire and is featured in the Museum of Human Rights in Winnipeg • 2017 - became member of the Order of Canada
<p>Bertha Willson 1923 (Kirkcaldy Scotland) - 2007 (Ottawa)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1957 became the first female associate and partner at Osler, Hoskin & Harcourt, a Toronto Law firm • Created the first in-firm research department in the Canadian legal industry • 1975 - 1st woman appointed to the Court of Appeal of Ontario • 1982 - 1st woman Supreme court of Canada (a month before the Canadian Charter of Rights & Freedoms) • 1982-1991 - Served as Supreme Court judge • 1988 - participated in striking down the Canadian abortion law

 <p>The Canadian Encyclopedia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 1988 - appointed a commissioner on the Erasmus-Dussault royal commission on native issues ● Led a decision that allowed for battered wife syndrome to be used as a defense ● 1991 - elected 'fellow of the Royal Society of Canada' ● 1991 - Companion of the Order of Canada ● Earned 29 honorary degrees
<p>Darlene Johnston</p>  <p>Peter A. Allard School of Law</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Member of the Chippewa Nawash First Nation in Ontario ● 1st indigenous woman to attend U of T law school - became professor ● Academic Director of the Indigenous Legal Studies program (UBC) ● 2005 - Co-founded GRASAC - the Great Lakes Research Alliance ● 2008 - designated the Indigenous People's Counsel (Indigenous Bar Association) ● Has written 2 books: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The Taking of Indian Lands in Canada: Consent or Coercion? ○ Litigating Identity: The Challenge of Aboriginality
<p>Michelle D. Douglas 1963 (Ottawa) -</p>  <p>The Canadian Encyclopedia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● One of the first female officers in the Special Investigation Unit in the Canadian Armed Forces ● Discharged from the Forces after being coerced into divulging she was a lesbian ● Aug 1989 - filed a complaint against the military to the Security Intelligence Review Committee = recommended that her discharge was unfair and her security clearance and position be reinstated - military refused to do so ● 1990 - filed lawsuit against Canadian army for compensation and to challenge the discriminatory policy against gay and lesbian service members ● 1992 - first day of Douglas's trial the military settled = 100 000\$ awarded ● She became the founding president of the Foundation for Equal Families ● Chair of the 519 Community centre in Toronto ● Member of the Advisory Board of the Sexual Diversity Studies program at UofT ● 2000-2019 - director of international relations at the Department of Justice ● 2019 - executive director of the LGBT Purge Fund (part of the official apology by Justin Trudeau for the military's LGBT purge)
<p>Mary-Woo Sims</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Became co-chair of the Campaign for Equal Families that fought for Bill 167 - end discrimination against same-sex relations Ontario ● Founding member of Women Against Violence Against Women

 <p>Twitter @sims_marywoo</p>	<p>(Vancouver)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was the Chief Human Rights Commissioner of British Columbia and fought to expand the Human Rights Code to include gender identity, social condition 1993 - awarded the "Honouring our Heroes" award from the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto • Awards received by Gay Asians of Toronto • Received the 'Chinese Canadian Pioneer' Award by the Chinese Canadian National Council
<p>Jean Lumb 1919 (Nanaimo) - 2002 (Toronto)</p>  <p>The Canadian Encyclopedia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jean Lumb was the only woman in the delegation to speak with PM Diefenbaker, in 1957 to lift the restrictions to family reunification for Chinese-canadians • She played a big role in challenging/or in fighting the discriminatory law that prohibited asian permanent residents from bringing family members to Canada • 1965 - became chair of the Save Chinatown Committee (to stop destruction from city's land expropriation) • 1969 - the Plan for Preservation of Chinatown was adopted • Founding director of the Ontario Restaurant Association • Founding director of the Chinese-language TV broadcaster Chinavision • First Chinese Canadian woman on the boards of Women's College Hospital, the University Settlement House and the Rotary-Laughlen Centre • Lumb became the 1st Chinese Canadian woman & first restaurateur inducted as Member of the Order of Canada in 1976
<p>Sheila Watt-Cloutier 1953 (Old Fort Chimo - Kuujuaq) -</p>  <p>Chris Windeyer - The Globe and Mail</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raised with the traditional Inuit teachers, Watt-Cloutier wanted to improve the social conditions of the Inuit • 1990 - commissioned by the regional health board to study alcohol and substance abuse in northern communities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Led to the creation of Silatunimut: The Pathway to Wisdom = argued for a system of self-government, cultural preservation and investment in community infrastructure and resources • In 2005, Watt-Cloutier, filed a petition related to climate change to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) = world's 1st legal action on climate change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Argued that greenhouse gas emissions from US violated Inuit's human rights under the 1948 American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man ◦ This led to other actions linking global warming with the violation of rights of Indigenous people • She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for environmental and

	<p>political activism in 2007</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watt-Cloutier wrote, in 2015, 'The Right to be Cold: One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic and the Whole Planet'
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