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The Day (Some) Women Achieved Equality in Canada

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Today, we celebrate the 1929 Persons Case on the anniversary of a ground-breaking case which the Supreme Court of Canada declared women to be "persons" under the law. Well, not *all* women.

October 18 is now celebrated as Persons Day, and the Governor General's Awards in [Commemoration of the Persons Case](#) are awarded each year to mark the historic decision. The *Famous five* women whose courage culminated in earning the right to vote and the right to run for federal office from the British Privy Council, the highest level for legal appeals in Canada at the time, was a milestone victory that did not extend to all.

Let us take a leisurely stroll through the vestiges of suffrage in Canada.

The woman suffrage movement in Canada had its [beginning in 1878](#) under the leadership of Dr. Emily Howard Stowe, who co-founded the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association. During the decade 1890-1900, bills for the provincial enfranchisement of women were introduced into the legislatures of Ontario, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Québec. They were all defeated.

In 1910 Alberta granted municipal franchise to widows and spinsters, but not to married women. The Keystone Province, Manitoba, was the first to afford women the right to vote in provincial elections in 1916, spurred in part by the absence of soldiers during the First World War. The question was put to a referendum of the electors of British Columbia in 1916, and female suffrage was passed by a large majority. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia soon followed. Curiously, Québec women were granted suffrage in federal elections thanks to Ottawa's overreaching, but their provincial rights were denied successively in 1918 and 1920.

Despite the exclamation point that [Status of Women Canada](#) has placed on this 1929 ruling for women's voting rights, the struggle for equality was not over yet.

Only in 1940 would the [women of Québec](#) be able to cast a vote in their own province.

Racial exclusions against Chinese and Indo-Canadians were lifted in 1947. Japanese-Canadians had to wait another year.

The *last* Canadians to be afforded the right to vote were its *first* inhabitants. The [right to vote was extended unconditionally to First Nations](#) people in 1960 (for federal elections). Their provincial suffrage was only recognized a decade later -- notably in Alberta (1967) and Québec (1969).

The [Governor General's Awards](#) in Commemoration of the Persons Case, which were created 100 years after the movement started, will be awarded today to five fabulous Canadians who have lived up to the commitment and strength of the *Famous five* before them. This is a feat worth celebrating -- in [commemorative awards](#), on [Canadian bank notes](#), and in [statues on Parliament Hill](#).

It is also worth giving credence to the struggles that continued for 40 long years after this 1929 monochromatic victory. It is noble to celebrate the start of women's suffrage, but it would be more appropriate and inclusive to celebrate the date voting rights were afforded to *all* members of the fairer sex. The women (and men) who kept the fight for fairness going deserve not only to be recognized but feted in the same decadence as the *Famous five*, in order to fully demonstrate the value of equality they stood for.

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