

International Women's Day

Profiles of 20 prominent Canadian women
for International Women's Day

Emily Stowe

Emily Stowe was the first female physician to practice in Ontario. Emily fought to be admitted into medical school, after being repeatedly refused entry into The Toronto School of Medicine. She was a suffragist who founded the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association.

Rosemary Brown

In 1972, Rosemary Brown became the first Black woman elected in any Provincial legislature. She later became the first Black woman to run for the leadership of a federal party, the NDP.

Elsie MacGill

Elsie MacGill was the first woman to earn a Master's Degree in aeronautical engineering. She became the first practicing female engineer in Canada.

Viola Desmond

Viola Desmond was a young Black entrepreneur, living in Halifax. She faced down segregation when she was forced from the ground floor of a movie theatre - a white's only section (1846). Desmond was honoured as the first Black woman to appear on Canadian currency.

Michaëlle Jean

Michaëlle Jean was a refugee from Haiti, who worked to become a prominent journalist in Quebec. Jean became the first Black person and only third woman to hold the office of Governor General of Canada.

Adelaide Hoodless

After the tragic loss of her youngest child, Adelaide Hoodless helped found the first Young Christian Women's Association (YWCA) and later co-founded the National Council of Women of Canada

Carrie Best

Carrie Best was the first Black woman to own and publish a newspaper in Nova Scotia. She used her publication to advocate for the rights of Black Canadians, including Viola Desmond. She used her voice to bring change to Canada.

Roberta Bondar

In 1992, Roberta Bondar became the first Canadian woman to travel to space. Bondar was also the first neurologist to travel to space. Bondar is a pioneer in space medicine research.

Senator Anne Clare Cools

In 1984, Anne Clare Cools was the first Black person to be named a Canadian Senator.

Mary Two-Axe Early

Mary Two-Axe was a Mohawk woman's rights activist. She fought many years for the rights of Indigenous women, in her quest to change The Indian Act.

In 1985, as a result of Two-Axe's work Bill C-31 was passed. This bill saw indigenous women who had married non-indigenous men, regain their Indian status.

Emily Carr

Emily Carr was a Canadian painter and author. Carr became a leading figure in Canadian art, in the 20th century. Her works reflected her love of First Nation's cultures and Canada's west coast.

Mary Ann Shadd

Mary Ann Shadd was born in 1823, to "free" slaves in the US. She eventually moved to Windsor, where she established one of the first racially integrated schools. She became the first woman in Canada to publish a newspaper, Provincial Freeman.

Violet King

Violet King was a significant figure in Canadian law. King was the first Black Canadian to obtain a law degree in Alberta and the first Black woman to become a lawyer in Canada (1954). She spoke out about racism and sexism in the workplace.

Kay Livingstone

Kay Livingstone was a journalist, social activist and leading actress. She was an organizer and created the Canadian Negro Women's Association. Her work led to the establishment of the National Congress of Black Women of Canada.

Justice Bertha Wilson

Justice Bertha Wilson was the first woman appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. She took part in many high-profile cases, including a number of key decisions that protected the rights of women and minorities.

Portia White

Portia White was Canada's first significant Black concert singer. She toured internationally and despite facing racism, achieved international acclaim and recognition.

Angela James

Regarded as the "Wayne Gretzkey of women's hockey", Angela James helped lead Canada to 4 Women's World Hockey Championships. She was one of the first women and the second Black person inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.

Buffy Sainte-Marie

Buffy Sainte-Marie is an award winning Indigenous Canadian singer, songwriter, visual artist and social activist. She is a beloved Canadian, whose work has been recognized around the world.

Jean Augustine

Jean Augustine was the first female Black Member of Parliament. In 1995 she made a motion to recognize February as Black History Month and it passed unanimously.

The Famous Five

The Famous Five refers to the group of five Canadian women, who worked tirelessly to bring about the Persons Case. The Persons Case was a constitutional ruling that recognized women as "persons", which meant that women could hold political office and were afforded many legal protections that already existed for men. The Famous Five included Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Edwards, Louise McKinney and Irene Parlby