

# The Famous Five

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1. *Attach an image or photo of each of the Famous Five women.*
2. *Attach a complete list of sources consulted.*



Name and Background	Accomplishments for women's suffrage and the role of women in society
Henrietta Mair Edwards	
Nellie McClung	

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Name and Background	Accomplishments for women's suffrage and the role of women in society
Louise McKinney	
Emily Murphy	
Irene Parlby	

## THE FAMOUS FIVE

**NARRATOR:** I would like you to meet five Canadian women. They are all dead now, but they were very important to Canadian history, especially to women. They are called the FAMOUS FIVE. There is a big statue of them in Ottawa, the nation's capital.

Let me ask you all a question. ARE YOU A PERSON?  
[wait for answer]

YES! Of course you are a person! But women haven't always been persons. In fact, it's thanks to the Famous Five that women in Canada are persons.

Meet the woman who started it all, Emily Murphy.

### EMILY MURPHY

Hello! My name is Emily Murphy. I was born in Ontario and my parents were rich. The Prime Minister was a family friend. Three of my brothers became lawyers; one became a doctor; I became famous. My parents let me do all the things my brothers did like fish, ride and play cricket. When I was 19, I married a young, handsome Anglican priest and had three daughters. I started writing books about a character I called Janey Canuck. I told about my travels and people I met. Lots of people bought these books. I became very interested in the terrible hardships suffered by poor women. So I wrote about their lives, too.

My husband became very sick and we moved out west. I was shocked to learn that women were forbidden to own property. I was even more shocked to discover that women themselves were owned by their husbands as if they were a piece of property. In Alberta, where we lived, there were no laws to protect children. I decided to spend my life working for the rights of women.

I made hundreds of speeches all over Alberta. I got laws changed. And I was the first woman to be made a Judge in the British Empire! The first day in court, the lawyer on the other side of the case said,

### LAWYER

“You can't be a judge in a court. You aren't even a person! You are only a woman!”

## EMILY MURPHY

I immediately took this to the Supreme Court of Alberta and they ruled that a woman in Alberta is a person.

I got all my friends to fight with me to try and get the federal law in Ottawa changed so that women all over Canada would be considered persons. It was called the PERSONS CASE. Four of my friends, Nellie, Irene, Louise and Henrietta, and I fought the government for years. Finally, we succeeded. In October, 1929 women were declared to be persons! That also meant they could be members of the Senate, part of the government. Everyone expected I would be the first woman senator. But it was not so. I imagine they figured I would make too much trouble for them.

However, all the newspapers called us THE FAMOUS FIVE and now there is a statue of us in Ottawa.

Now I'd like you to meet my friends who signed the petition that led to women becoming persons.

## HENRIETTA MUIR EDWARDS

Hello! I'm Henrietta Muir Edwards. I was the oldest of the Famous Five. In fact, I was 80 years old when the Act passed in 1929! I died two years later.

I was born in Montreal, also in a rich family. When I grew up I became very interested in women helping women, and joined the women's movement. I became very active in religious organizations and started the first magazine in Canada for working women. I was an artist, too. After I married a doctor, we moved to Saskatchewan and had three children.

The wife of the Governor-General and I founded the National Council of Women and the VON, the Victorian Order of Nurses, more than 100 years ago.

I worked so hard to make laws for women fair that everyone said I knew more about the law than the Chief Justice of Canada. When my friend, Emily Murphy, asked me to sign the petition that asked the Supreme Court to say women were persons, I was happy to do so.

## NELLIE MCCLUNG

Hello! If you drive south of Owen Sound near Chatsworth you will see an historic plaque, a sign at the side of the road, with my name, Nellie McClung, on it. That's because I was born in Grey County near Chatsworth in 1873.

My family moved to a farm in Manitoba and I went to Teachers' College. I started teaching when I was 15! But I didn't get paid that first year, just my room and board. The farmers' crops had been ruined by hail. But I met the minister's wife, whom I liked so much that I decided I'd like her for my mother-in-law. So later that year I married her son, Wes McClung. It was the best thing I ever did! He was a wonderful husband and father to our five children.

I was very upset by the way many other women were treated. The law said that husbands owned their wives and children and could do anything they liked, even beat them. Many men got drunk all the time. So I joined the WCTU, an organization that fought against drunkenness, and for good lives for women and children. I made hundreds of speeches, wrote many books and articles for newspapers.

I also fought hard to make it legal for women to vote in elections. Friends and I put on a play called "Women in Parliament". I played the part of the premier and the men in the play were poor things who couldn't vote and couldn't talk in public. The play was a great success! After women got the vote, I was the first woman to be elected a Member of Parliament. We lived in Alberta then. Emily Murphy knew I would sign her petition about women becoming persons. I was active in public life until I died.

I believe women's and men's duty is to raise children and to work to make the world they live in better and better.

## LOUISE MCKINNEY

Hello! I'm Louise McKinney and I was born in Ontario. I was a teacher there and in the United States. Then my husband and I moved to Alberta. Like Nellie McClung, I was very active in the WCTU and in teaching about the dangers of alcohol abuse. When women were allowed to be Members of Alberta's parliament, I was the first woman elected.

I was also the only woman to sign the paper called the Basis of Union that made the United Church of Canada. I did a lot of public speaking and I fought for laws that helped immigrants, widows, women whose marriages had broken up and for stricter liquor control laws. I was the second person to sign Emily Murphy's petition.

## IRENE PARLBY

Hello! My name is Irene Parlby and I was born in England. I lived in many countries, but when I was 29, I came to Canada to visit a friend in Alberta. The "wild west" was much more exciting than England, so I married an Englishman who was a rancher and we stayed in Canada.

I became the President of the United Farm Women of Alberta and worked for the improvement of the health of farm families. I was elected a Member of the Provincial Parliament with a special interest in the education and health of farm children and women.

I was terribly interested in the decision that women were persons and could be named to the Senate of Canada, so I signed Emily's petition, too. I was a very popular public speaker before the days of radio. Since I lived to 1965, and was 97 when I died, I gave many speeches on radio and even on television. I always fought for the rights of women and children.

## NARRATOR

And there they are! Canada's FAMOUS FIVE! Five women who dedicated their lives and careers to the betterment of women and children. We have to remember to continue their struggle.

## Milestones for Women in Canada (1900 - 1945)

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1900	The Married Women's Property Act allows a wife to own her own property separately from her husband and to control her own wages and profits. She is also jointly responsible for the support of their children.
1900	Teaching is the only profession open to women that leads to a pension.
1911	The Saskatchewan Deserted Wives' Maintenance Act requires husbands to pay support if they deserted their wives or forced them to leave.
1912	The Manitoba Illegitimate Children's Act allows an unwed mother to bring court action to require the child's father to pay child support and expenses.
1912	Carie Derick is the first woman in Canada to become a full professor at McGill University in Montreal.
1913	On July 31, Alys McKey Bryant is the first woman to pilot an airplane in Canada.
1914	On January 28, Nellie McClung stages a mock "Women's Parliament" in the Walker Theatre in Winnipeg to debate the question of whether men should be allowed to vote. The mock parliament uses humour to point out the unfairness of not allowing women to vote.
1915	Nurse Elizabeth Smellie is the first woman to be appointed Colonel in the Canadian Army, becoming head of the Canadian Army Nursing Corps.
1916	On January 29, Manitoba is the first province in Canada to extend to women the right to vote and to run in provincial elections (except for Aboriginal women and some minority groups).
1917	On September 20, the Military Voters Act extends the federal vote, until the end of the war, to women in the services and to those women who had close relatives in the armed services of Canada or Great Britain.
1917	Roberta MacAdams and Louise McKinney are the first women elected to a provincial legislature, being elected to the Alberta Legislature on June 7.
1917	In April, British Columbia women are given the provincial vote.
1917	Alberta is the first province to adopt a minimum wage law for women.
1917	Under the Military Voters Act, nurses in the armed forces are given the vote.
1918	On April 26, Nova Scotia women are given the right to vote and hold public office.
1918	On May 24, The Women's Franchise Act is passed, allowing women the right to vote in federal elections.

## Milestones for Women in Canada (1900 - 1945)

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1919	On April 17, the women of New Brunswick are given the right to vote in provincial elections.
1920	In the Dominion Elections Act, the right to vote is established for all women, and the right for women to be elected to Parliament is made permanent.
1921	Agnes MacPhail is the first woman elected to the House of Commons.
1921	In British Columbia, the first maternity leave legislation is passed (six weeks leave).
1925	In Newfoundland, women over 25 are given the right to vote.
1925	Federal Divorce Law allows women to obtain a divorce on the same grounds as men.
1928	Canada's Olympic team includes women for the first time.
1929	On October 18, as a result of the "Persons' Case" of the Famous Five, the British government recognizes Canadian women as persons under the law. Up to this date, according to the British North America Act, women were not considered persons "in matters of rights and privileges," and could not be appointed to the Senate.
1939	To encourage women to join the workforce during World War II, child care centres and tax benefits are provided for the duration of the war only.
1939-1945	Record numbers of women are employed in traditionally male work as part of the war effort.
1940	On April 25, Quebec women are granted the right to vote.

\* Assignment: Create a "poster" using publisher that shows a milestone!

Sources: Timeline of Canadian Women's History: from Moira Armour and Pat Stanton .  
*Canadian Women in History: A Chronology*, 2nd ed.

Manitoba Women's Directorate, Celebrating Women's History:  
<[http://www.gov.mb.ca/wd/publications/whm/cwh\\_time.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/wd/publications/whm/cwh_time.html)>

National Library of Canada, Celebrating Womens' Achievements:  
<<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/women/h12-309-e.html>>