

Time Line of Women's Rights

- 1884 Ontario government gives married women in the province the same legal capacity as men. That means they can make legal agreements and buy property.
- 1897 In 1897, after a very long fight, Clara Brett Martin became Canada's first lawyer and the first woman to practice law in the entire British Empire. She overcame editorials opposing women lawyers on the grounds that the physical attraction between them and the judges and juries would be intolerable; She lobbied for a bill in the Ontario legislature that would overturn the Law Society of Upper Canada's regulations barring women because only "persons" could be admitted. She was taunted and ridiculed by classmates, professors, the public and the media simply for enrolling in law school.
- 1900 In Ottawa, the *Dominion Elections Act* sets the rules for who can vote in federal elections stating the qualifications for federal elections the same as for provincial ones. That means minorities who can't vote in provincial elections are also excluded from federal elections. In other words, over half of Canadians, including visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, and women have no democratic rights.
- 1900 Manitoba gives married women right to make legal agreements and buy property
- There was a time when a woman living in Manitoba lost most of her legal rights respecting property when she married. All her property, for example, became legally vested in her husband.
- 1903 Prince Edward Island gives married women the same legal capacity as men.
- 1907 Saskatchewan gives married women the same legal capacity as men.
- 1909 The Criminal Code was amended to criminalize the abduction of women. Before this, the abduction of any woman over 16 was legal, except if she was an heiress. The maximum penalty for stealing a cow was much higher than for kidnapping an heiress.
- 1910 Québec legislation reduced the working hours for women in the textile industry from 60 to 58 hours per week, the first of other legislative amendments to reduce women's work week.
- 1913 The Home and Domestic Employees Union was formed in Vancouver. In 1915, Helena Gutteridge ensured that equal pay was written into the Vancouver Trades and Labour Council constitution. Her work to bring together women's groups and labour activism resulted in BC's first minimum wage act in 1918.
- 1916 Suffrage activist Emily Murphy became Canada's first woman judge in 1916.
- 1916 Manitoba, Saskatchewan & Alberta: women are given the right to vote in provincial elections.
- 1917 BC and Ontario give women the right to vote in provincial elections
- 1918 Women given right to vote in Federal Elections

Time Line of Women's Rights

- 1921 Canada's first woman MP Agnes Macphail began several successful campaigns, including prison reform and the establishment of old age pensions. In the same year, BC passed Canada's first maternity leave legislation.
- 1922 Alberta gives married women the same legal capacity as men
- 1925 The federal divorce law was changed to allow a woman to divorce her husband on the same grounds that a man could divorce his wife - simple adultery. Before this, she had to prove adultery in conjunction with other acts such as "sodomy" or bestiality.
- 1928 Supreme Court of Canada decides that a woman is not a "qualified person" and therefore cannot be appointed to the Senate of Canada. This decision was overturned by the Privy Council in London, England in 1929.
- 1930 Cairine Reay Wilson is the first woman to be appointed to the Senate.
- 1930 Another change to federal divorce laws allowed a woman deserted by her husband to sue for divorce after two years of being abandoned from the town her husband lived in before separation. Before, a woman's legal residence was wherever her husband lived, even if she didn't know where he lived.
- 1940 Quebec: women obtain the right to vote in provincial elections.
- 1941 Québec allowed women to practice law.
- 1947 Canadian women no longer lost their citizenship automatically if they married non-Canadians.
- 1952 Manitoba women were first permitted to serve on juries. New Brunswick women become jurors in 1954 and P.E.I. women in 1966
- 1953 Victoria, BC.:The *Equal Pay Act* mandates that a woman be paid the same wage as a man for doing comparable work.
- 1955 Restrictions on married women in the federal public service were removed. In the past women public service employees were fired upon marriage. This occurred only 45 years after a 1910 report concluded, "Where the mother works, the baby dies."
- 1960 Aboriginal women (and men) obtained the federal vote.
- 1964 Quebec gives married women full legal and property rights.
- 1969 The distribution of information about birth control was decriminalized.
- 1971 Québec finally allows women jurors after eight Québec women were jailed earlier in the year for protesting the all-male jury law. The federal government amended

Time Line of Women's Rights

the Canada Labour Code to prohibit sex discrimination, reinforce equal pay for equal work, and establish a 17-week maternity leave. A year later, the federal government also abolished sex discrimination against potential jurors in criminal cases.

- 1973 The first rape crisis centres in Canada opened in Vancouver and Toronto.
- 1973 Interval House, one of the first shelters for abused women opened in Toronto.
- 1974 The RCMP hired its first woman member, one hundred years after an 1874 magazine stated, "Woman's first and only place is in her home."
- 1975 By 1975 there were five transition houses in BC. This was 73 years after a woman was admitted to an "insane asylum" because she claimed her husband abused her. She was given a gynecological operation to "cure" her - a common practice around 1898.
- 1978 The first "Take Back the Night" march was held in Vancouver.
- 1978 Female flight attendants won the right to continue working after marriage and past the age of 32. In the same year, the law changed so that women could no longer be fired for pregnancy in federally-regulated industries.
- 1983 Rape laws were broadened to sexual assault laws and for the first time made it a criminal offence for a man to rape his wife. Ontario police were directed by the Attorney General to lay charges in domestic violence cases. Before this, men usually faced no consequences for beating their female partners.
- 1983 The Canadian Human Rights Act prohibited sexual harassment in workplaces under federal jurisdiction. Before this, women in these workplaces had no legal recourse if their employers demanded sexual favours.
- 1985 Aboriginal women who married non-status men could retain their Indian status.
- 1989 Supreme Court rules that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination.
- 1995 Income Tax Act upheld: Parent who has custody of children will continue to be taxed on support payments while ex-spouse can claim support payments as deductions.
- 1997 Child Support Rules revised: non-custodial parent is no longer able to deduct child support payments from their income and the custodial parent no longer has to add child support payments as income. [The changes apply to all new support orders, but not to past orders unless changes to them are sought.](#)
- 1999 The Supreme Court ruled that job standards and tests cannot be solely based on capabilities that would favour men. The case was brought by BC forest fighter Tawney Meiorin, who had been laid off from her job after a completely satisfactory job performance due to a new physical fitness test based on men's abilities, and having little to do with the ability to actually do the job.

Time Line of Women's Rights

2004 In the time span of 31 years from when the first women's shelter opened in 1973 to 2004 there has been a 70% drop in the number of men killed by their (usually abused) spouses, ex-spouses or girlfriends. With alternatives such as shelters, hotlines, counselling and restraining orders fewer wife batterers were killed.

In the US the drop in women being killed by their spouses has been less than 25% - less than the overall decline in the rate for non-domestic homicides. In Canada, there has been a similar decline in the rate of male deaths, but the rate at which women continue to be killed by intimate partners "is holding stable".

Did you know?

In 1951, the average salary for a female is \$1,907. That's just 49.5% of the average male salary. In 1997, the average earnings by a female was \$21,167 - or 63.8 % of the average male's earnings.

Origin of the term "Rule of thumb":this has been said to derive from the belief that English law allowed a man to beat his wife with a stick so long as it is was no thicker than his thumb. In 1782 Judge Sir Francis Buller is reported as having made this legal ruling.

Time Line of Women's Rights

- 1909 The Criminal Code was amended to criminalize the abduction of women. Before this, the abduction of any woman over 16 was legal, except if she was an heiress. The maximum penalty for stealing a cow was much higher than for kidnapping an heiress.
- 1983 Rape laws were broadened to sexual assault laws and for the first time made it a criminal offence for a man to rape his wife. Ontario police were directed by the Attorney General to lay charges in domestic violence cases. Before this, men usually faced no consequences for beating their female partners.
- 1955 Restrictions on married women in the federal public service were removed. In the past women public service employees were fired upon marriage. This occurred only 45 years after a 1910 report concluded, "Where the mother works, the baby dies."
- 1978 Female flight attendants won the right to continue working after marriage and past the age of 32. In the same year, the law changed so that women could no longer be fired for pregnancy in federally-regulated industries.
- 1918 Women given right to vote in Federal Elections
- 1974 The RCMP hired its first woman member, one hundred years after an 1874 magazine stated, "Woman's first and only place is in her home."
- 1917 BC and Ontario give women the right to vote in provincial elections
- 1973 Interval House, one of the first shelters for abused women opened in Toronto.
- 1960 Aboriginal women (and men) obtained the federal vote.
- 1997 Child Support Rules revised: non-custodial parent is no longer able to deduct child support payments from their income and the custodial parent no longer has to add child support payments as income. [The changes apply to all new support orders, but not to past orders unless changes to them are sought.](#)
- 1928 Supreme Court of Canada decides that a woman is not a "qualified person" and therefore cannot be appointed to the Senate of Canada. This decision was overturned by the Privy Council in London, England in 1929.
- 1969 The distribution of information about birth control was decriminalized.
- 1952 Manitoba women were first permitted to serve on juries. New Brunswick women become jurors in 1954 and P.E.I. women in 1966
- 1989 Supreme Court rules that sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination.