

# ABOUT Women

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## Manitoba Women Celebrate 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Right to Vote

**M**anitoba women have come a long way in the past 90 years.

It was January 28, 1916, when an amendment to the Manitoba Elections Act made Manitoba the first Canadian province to award women the right to vote and run for office in provincial elections. Most other provinces soon followed suit and in 1918, the Government of Canada granted Canadian women the right to vote in federal elections.

At that time, the suffragist movement was “very much tied to the temperance movement,” says Muriel Smith, a former Manitoba Status of Women minister (1985 – 1988) under the NDP, and a long-time advocate for women’s and human rights. A desire for more control over their lives led many women to begin publicly demanding the right to become equal citizens, added Smith.

Ontario-born Nellie McClung, who taught in Manitoba for several years before moving to Alberta, was a dominant player in the suffrage movement. In 1914, she led a “Mock Parliament” at Winnipeg’s Walker Theatre. The women talked about the horrible things that would happen if men got the vote. This humorous look at role reversal drew a lot of public attention to the suffragists’ cause.

“These were feisty women who were active in the community and ran the voluntary work in the home,” says Smith, who herself has established many political benchmarks for women. Smith was the first female president of the provincial NDP from 1975 to 1977. She later served as Manitoba’s first female deputy premier under the Howard Pawley government in 1981.

She says when the suffragists won the freedom to run for political office – in the beginning, not many women ran. On the economic and employment side, women still faced significant discrimination. “What most male politicians talked about was economics and financial issues, and there were very few women who felt confident in those areas.”

McClung continued her fight for women’s rights and, in 1929, became one of the “Famous 5.” These five amazing women – Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Henrietta Muir Edwards and Irene Parby – brought the Person’s Case to the Supreme Court of Canada, where it was decided that women were persons, and therefore, eligible to hold any federally appointed or elected office, including the Senate.

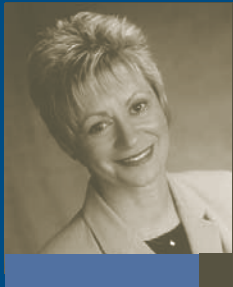
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Starting from top, clockwise:  
Steina J. Stefanson, Agnes Munro,  
Nellie McClung, Thorbjorg Sigurdson,  
E. Cora Hind, Harriet Walker, Lillian  
Beynon Thomas and Margaret Benedictsson

Not all women enjoyed the early victories of the suffragist movement. Just like men at that time, women were excluded on ethnicity, religion and property ownership. It was 1940 before Quebec women could vote and 1947 for Asian Canadians in B.C. Although Manitoba was a leader in women's suffrage, restrictions existed against First Nations men and women. Those participating in elections had to give up treaty status. This stipulation remained until it was lifted in 1952 for Manitoba provincial elections and 1960 for federal elections.

## Minister's Message



I am pleased to welcome you to this edition of *About Women*.

This year's theme, the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women obtaining the right to vote in Manitoba, is reflected in our cover story. It includes an interview with a former provincial Minister responsible for the Status of Women and current political activist. She provides a historical overview of the movement which advocated for women's right to vote, including the role of one-time Manitoban Nellie McClung and the other members of the Famous 5 whose contributions to the Suffrage Movement were monumental.

In another article, a prominent member of Manitoba's large Filipino community speaks about her journey to Canada and what it means to be able to vote in Canada. Since arriving in Manitoba over 30 years ago, she has become a leader in her community, helping recent immigrants adjust to and also celebrate their new lives in Canada.

We have included an item on the Manitoba government's initiatives to address eating disorders in rural and urban communities. This is a particularly important issue since the majority of people affected by eating disorders are women.

This edition of the newsletter also highlights some important changes to *The Minimum Wage Act*, along with application information on grants available for activities promoting physical activity through the Manitoba *in motion* strategy.

I invite you to call or write the Women's Directorate (945-3476 in Winnipeg or 1-800-263-0234) to voice your opinions or share your comments with me.

I hope you enjoy this latest edition of *About Women*.

Nancy Allan  
Minister responsible for the  
Status of Women

# Immigrants

## Welcome the Right to Vote

Virginia Guiang arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba in 1969 with a sense that great opportunities awaited her in Canada. Today, a prominent member of the province's growing Filipino community, Guiang helps new immigrants make the most of these opportunities.

Guiang remembers well the lost, disoriented feeling that came with first setting foot on Canadian soil. Nevertheless, armed with a teaching certificate and a single-minded determination to find work, she landed a position as a teacher/librarian at the University of Manitoba, where she worked until 1999.

At first, Guiang knew little about becoming a citizen, but after discovering the International Centre, she soon learned about the rights and privileges that came with citizenship. Guiang became a Canadian citizen in 1976, and now cherishes the right to vote and the many other human rights we enjoy in Canada.

Soon after arriving in Canada, Guiang befriended some of her new neighbours who were members of the second wave of garment workers to arrive in Manitoba from the Philippines. As the group adapted to life in Canada together, Guiang introduced them to resources such as the International Centre which served as a meeting place for recently arrived immigrants of all ethnicities.

In 1989, Guiang became president of the Philippine Association of Manitoba (PAM). She introduced many programs and initiatives for Filipinos – both newly arrived and those already living in Manitoba. "One of these initiatives," said Guiang, "was holding the citizenship court

## Eating Disorders: A Growing

While no one is exactly sure what causes them, "eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of all mental illnesses" (Cavanaugh, C. 1999). Experts attribute the causes to a combination of personal, social and cultural factors. Anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, as well as bingeing, purging and overeating, can pose serious threats to mental and physical health.

Although teenage girls are particularly at risk, an increasing number of middle-aged women are also struggling with eating disorders. According to the *Annual Review of Psychology*, the prevalence of eating disorders in women 15 to 29 years old is around three per cent. Bulimia patients outnumber anorexia patients two to one.

Dieting is one of the most powerful triggers for developing an eating disorder. Research by L. Berzins (1997) reveals that "the fear of being fat is so overwhelming that young girls are more afraid of becoming fat than they are of cancer, nuclear war or losing their parents." While dieting is frequently used to achieve an ideal body size or shape, focusing on weight loss can actually set you up for failure. For example, someone who's not seeing the desired results may start having feelings of guilt, low self-esteem and a growing distaste for their body. It is, however, important to remember that not all people who diet will develop an eating disorder, and there are many healthy ways to lose excess weight.

Manitoba Health is committed to the prevention, early detection and treatment of eating disorders in Manitoba. To that end, the province has partnered with regional health authorities, community organizations and other





ceremony in this centre, to give more meaning to the Filipinos now becoming Canadian citizens, to make them feel more at home.”

Guiang also began teaching citizenship classes to new immigrants. The classes included information about the political system in Canada, and how it differed from that in the Philippines.

As president of PAM, Guiang embarked on a project to build a new gathering place for the province’s flourishing Filipino community. The Philippine Canadian Centre of Manitoba was opened in Winnipeg in 2004. “We finally realized our dream of providing a meeting place, or second home, for Filipinos,” says Guiang, “particularly newly arrived immigrants who did not know how to start their lives in Canada.”

Currently the second-largest ethnic group in Manitoba, the Filipino community is proud of its accomplishments and its contributions to the province. Among these accomplishments is that Guiang is the first Filipino-Canadian to receive the Citation for Canadian Citizenship and the Order of Manitoba.

Guiang says along with the desire to advance in Canadian society, Filipinos also want to be recognized and accepted for who they are. “We are proud to be Filipinos and we’re also proud to be Canadians.”

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After 1945, a group of women in Ottawa lobbied the government for a greater presence in addressing women’s issues. This eventually led to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. June Menzies, who lived in Winnipeg, did the economic analysis for the Royal Commission, and even before the national action committee was formed, Menzies founded the Manitoba Action Committee on the Status of Women, showing, once more, Manitoba’s leading role in advancing women’s rights.

Nearly a century later, Smith is still working for women’s rights with the United Nations Platform for Action Committee. The goals today include getting gender-responsive budgeting in the provincial budget and de-mystifying the budgeting process for women at the grass-roots level.

Manitoba writer Margaret Laurence believes the famous Person’s Case was an important benchmark for Canadian women. She remarks, with humour:

“I was not a person for the first three years of my life. It was only in 1929, because of the enormous efforts of such women as Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy, that Canadian women were finally legally recognized as ‘persons’. Of course, at three, I wasn’t aware that I had suddenly been promoted into personhood.”

## Danger

stakeholders, including family members, to form the Manitoba Eating Disorders Network. Manitoba Health also recently funded Teen Talk, a health education service for teens, to add body image and self-esteem programs to their existing health curriculum. Manitoba Health also began funding the Eating Disorders Association of Manitoba in 2004. This organization provides public education and support to families and individuals dealing with eating disorders.

In addition, “Well-Connected” was founded in September 2001 with a vision to help rural individuals struggling with eating disorders. The non-profit organization has a resource library and networks with other local and national eating disorder organizations. For more information, check their website at [www.well-connected-mb.org](http://www.well-connected-mb.org)

For more information on eating disorders, see Manitoba Health’s Mental Health and Addictions Branch at their new website at, <http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh/ed.html> Call 788-6659 or toll-free 1-866-626-4862

## The Right to Vote *Fast Facts*

- 1876: Dr. Emily Howard Stowe and her daughter Augusta Stowe Gullen form the Toronto Women’s Literary Club, a cover for suffrage activities.
- 1916: Manitoba is the first Canadian province to give women the right to vote and hold office.
- 1916: Emily Murphy, one of the Famous 5, is appointed the first female magistrate in the British Empire.
- 1918: Women obtain the same voting rights as men for federal elections.
- 1928: The Supreme Court of Canada unanimously decides that women are not persons, and therefore cannot hold office as senators in Canada.
- 1929: The British Privy Council reverses the Supreme Court decision.
- 1930: The Honourable Cairine Wilson (Ontario) becomes the first female senator in Canada.
- 1972: British Columbia’s Rosemary Brown is the first black woman elected as a MLA in Canada.
- 1984: Jeanne Sauvé is appointed as the first female governor-general in Canada.
- 1989: Audrey McLaughlin becomes the first woman to lead a national political party in Canada.
- 1993: Kim Campbell is the first woman to serve as prime minister of Canada.
- 1999: Adrienne Clarkson becomes the first female Chinese-Canadian governor-general.
- 2005: Michaëlle Jean, the first black female governor-general, is appointed.

# Get Active and Get Healthy

Manitoba *in motion* wants you to be more active. According to statistics, 59 per cent of Canadian women are inactive, and that number grows to a staggering 68 per cent as women age. Manitoba *in motion* can help. Physical activity helps you maintain a healthy lifestyle. It increases energy levels, decreases stress and helps prevent the onset of chronic disease. The benefits of physical activity can also improve your mental health and give you a more positive outlook on life.

This innovative provincial initiative, launched in October 2005, is designed to get Manitobans to adopt an active lifestyle through physical activity. With the help of community partners in healthy living, recreation, sport and education, Manitoba *in motion* hopes to increase physical activity in the province by 10 per cent by the year 2010. Your children can also benefit from this active lifestyle program. Healthy Schools *in motion* is encouraging schools to include 30 minutes of daily physical activity for every student. Since its official launch in 2004, 290 schools in Manitoba have registered for the program.

This past fall, more than 166 individuals participated in eight Manitoba *in motion* regional workshops. Enthusiastic representatives from 63 communities, with varied interests and backgrounds, shared in the experience. Many municipal governments also took the opportunity to learn more about the benefits of active living.

Funding is available for community partnerships interested in implementing programs to increase physical activity. For more information on grant applications and eligible projects/activities, visit [www.manitobainmotion.ca](http://www.manitobainmotion.ca) (in the Communities section), or call 945-3648 in Winnipeg, toll free 1-866-788-3648. Deadlines for grant applications are June 1, 2006 and September 1, 2006.



## Minimum Wage Increase

On April 1, 2006, Manitobans earning minimum wage can look forward to a heftier paycheque. An hourly increase of 35 cents will bring the minimum wage to \$7.60 per hour. To preserve the purchasing power of the minimum wage and improve the lives of low-income earners, the province will implement another 40 cent increase in April 2007.

Women in particular, will welcome the increase, because they make up nearly 57 per cent of Manitoba's minimum wage earners (Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, 2004).

# ABOUT Women

About Women is a publication of the *Women's Directorate* that focuses on issues of interest to women and provides practical, timely information they can use. It is available without charge upon request.

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