



The Road to Representation: Milestones for Nova Scotia Women

1758 Nova Scotia Legislature forms. It is an assembly of 22 men with property, elected by 260 men like themselves. Most citizens are denied the vote.

A few women cast votes in the early days of the province's elected assembly. This was an oversight: some women had property, and at the time, there were no racial or gender disqualifications for voting.

1851 More than 90 years later, women are officially forbidden to vote.

1884 The federal government introduces the Married Women's Property Act recognizing the rights of married women to hold property.

1887 The municipal franchise is granted to widows and spinsters in Nova Scotia, extending the vote to women rate-payers in local elections.

1893 A bill for the full enfranchisement of women – the right to vote -- is defeated in Nova Scotia.

1894 Once again, a bill for equal franchise is defeated, by one vote.

1895 A bill for partial franchise for women is defeated, by nine votes.

1917 Under the *Military Voters Act*, nurses and the wives of servicemen abroad receive the right to vote in federal elections.

Premier Murray killed the provincial Suffrage Bill, saying, "the enhancement of such a measure at the present time would serve no useful purpose."

Women are granted eligibility for appointment to school boards in incorporated towns.

The *Barristers and Solicitors Act* passes, permitting women to study and practice law on the same terms as men.

- 1918 Most women are granted the right to vote in federal elections. In Nova Scotia, most women can now participate in provincial elections. However, Asian and Aboriginal women are denied suffrage, until 1948 and 1960 respectively.
- 1920 Women in Nova Scotia can now run for political office. Grace McLeod Rogers is a candidate in Cumberland County, and Bertha A. Donaldson in Pictou County. Both were unsuccessful.
- In Wolfville, Laura Haliburton Moore is the first Nova Scotia women elected to a municipal council.
- 1921 Agnes Macphail is the first female Canadian Member of Parliament, winning the United Farmers of Ontario federal nomination over 10 men.
- Women can now be elected to legislative offices federally and in most provinces.
- 1928 Following the petition for Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, and Henrietta Muir Edwards, the Supreme Court of Canada decides that women are not persons under the terms of the British North America Act, and therefore cannot be appointed to the Senate.
- 1929 After the "Person's Case" is heard at British Privy Council (court of appeal for the Supreme Court of Canada), Canadian women are legally persons!
- 1930 Cairine Wilson, from Ontario, is the first woman appointed to the Senate.
- 1935 Martha Black becomes the second women to be elected to Parliament -- 14 years after Agnes Macphail.
- 1937 Mary Teresa King-Myers is elected to Halifax County Council.
- 1951 Aboriginal women are now permitted to participate in band elections.
- 1957 Ellen Fairclough is appointed Secretary of State -- and the first woman in a federal Cabinet.
- 1960 Progressive Conservative Gladys Porter, former Mayor of Kentville, becomes the first Nova Scotian woman elected at the provincial level.
- 1962 Chief Mary Ellen Pierro is the first female elected chief in Nova Scotia at Wagmatcook First Nation in Cape Breton.
- 1970 Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada is tabled.
- 1971 Canada Labour Code Amendments includes protection from discrimination based on sex and marital status.

- 1974 Liberal Coline M. Campbell is the first woman to hold a Nova Scotia seat in Parliament.
Liberal Melinda MacLean is the second woman elected at the provincial level.
- 1979 The First mayor of the Town of Bedford was Francene Cosman, who later became a Liberal MLA and Cabinet minister.
- 1980 New Democrat Alexa McDonough become's Canada's first female party leader.
- 1983 PC Maxine Cochran wins a by-election. It's the first time two women have held seats at the same time in Nova Scotia. She later holds several Cabinet posts.
- 1984 A breakthrough at the federal level -- 27 women sit in the House of Commons, the highest number in history. Six are appointed to Cabinet.
For the first time in a western democracy, federal leaders of the three parties participate in a televised debate on issues of concern to women.
Jeanne Sauvé is the first woman Governor General of Canada.
PC Cora Etter is elected at the provincial level.
Daurene Lewis of Annapolis Royal becomes the first Black woman mayor in North America. In '88, she is the first Black woman to run in a Nova Scotia provincial election.
- 1988 PC Marie Dechman and Liberal Sandy Jolly secure provincial seats.
Liberal Mary Clancy wins a federal riding.
Ethel Blondin-Andrew is the first Aboriginal woman elected to the House of Commons.
- 1989 Marie Dechman is the first woman Deputy Speaker of the House.
Audrey McLaughlin becomes leader of the Federal NDP party – first woman to lead a national political party.
- 1991 After fall elections, more than half of Nova Scotia municipalities have female mayors, including Moira Ducharme, Halifax's first woman mayor.
Rita Johnston becomes leader of British Columbia's Social Credit Party and the first female provincial premier of Canada.
- 1993 Five women now sit in the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly -- a provincial record for female representation but still second last in the country.
Lynn Jones is the first African Canadian candidate to run for federal office in Nova Scotia. She ran for the NDP but did not win the seat.

Kim Campbell becomes the first woman Prime Minister of Canada.

Catherine Callbeck of Prince Edward Island is the first elected woman provincial premier of Canada.

Jean Augustine is elected to Parliament, representing the Etobicoke-Lakeshore (Ont.) Riding. She is the first African Canadian woman to sit in Canada's House of Commons

1998 NDP Yvonne Atwell is the first African Nova Scotian woman elected to the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly.

1999 A record number of female candidates run in the provincial election: of 47 just 5 are elected.

2000 Helen MacDonald is elected leader of the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party.

2003 House of Commons has 63 women, about 20 per cent of 301 seats.

Thirty-six female candidates run in the provincial election; 6 win seats.

2006 Number of women in the House of Commons edges up to 65 (21.1 per cent).

A record 49 women run in the provincial election. Nine win seats – 17.3 per cent of the 52 seats.

2007 A by-election bumps the number of women in the Nova Scotia legislature to 10 – 19.2 per cent of 52 seats.

2008 After the October Federal election, women held 68 of the 301 seats in the House of Commons – just over 22 per cent.

2008 October municipal elections: one less woman is elected as mayor and the same amount of women become councilors as in the 2004 election -- 21 per cent of 438 positions. Women also comprise 43 of the 91 people (47 per cent) elected to school boards.

2009 In June, the Nova Scotia New Democratic Party wins a majority government with 31 seats – 9 women. The Liberals elect two women and the Progressive Conservatives, one. Twelve women in the 52-member legislature is a historic high of 23 per cent, yet far from fair representation for 52 per cent of Nova Scotia's population.

Updated July 2009. Special thanks go to Louise Carbert and Naomi Black for their edits and additions.