

HOW DID WOMEN CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT?

The Métis and First Nations were not the only people fighting to be heard by the federal government. In the 1800s, Canada was a **patriarchal**, or male-dominated, society. Only men were allowed to work and participate in public life, which involved business and politics. Society believed that women belonged in the home, not in public life. At home, they could fulfill their roles as mothers and family caregivers.

Some working-class women took on jobs outside of their household duties. They mainly did this to earn extra income to pay for basic needs. Many working-class women held jobs as domestic help, tutors, or seamstresses. If a woman was married, her husband controlled her wages. Read **Figure 4.26**, an excerpt from the *Upper Canadian Law Journal*. What happened to a woman's rights after she married?

patriarchal a society or government that ensures male dominance

How do these jobs reflect society's views on women's roles during this time?

"The *natural* rights of man and woman are, it must be admitted, equal; entering the married state, the woman surrenders most of them; in the possession of civil rights before, they merge in her husband; in the eye of the law she may be said to cease to exist."

— *Upper Canadian Law Journal*

FIGURE 4.26 An explanation of civil law, or law relating to ordinary citizens, from the *Upper Canadian Law Journal* in 1856, regarding the rights of married women. **Analyze:** What is the status of a woman's rights before she gets married?

If women wanted to participate in public life, they were limited. They could go to school, but not to university. This meant they could not become professionals, such as doctors or lawyers. Some women, including Dr. Emily Stowe, went to the United States to get professional degrees. Women also could not participate in politics since they did not have the right to vote or run for office.

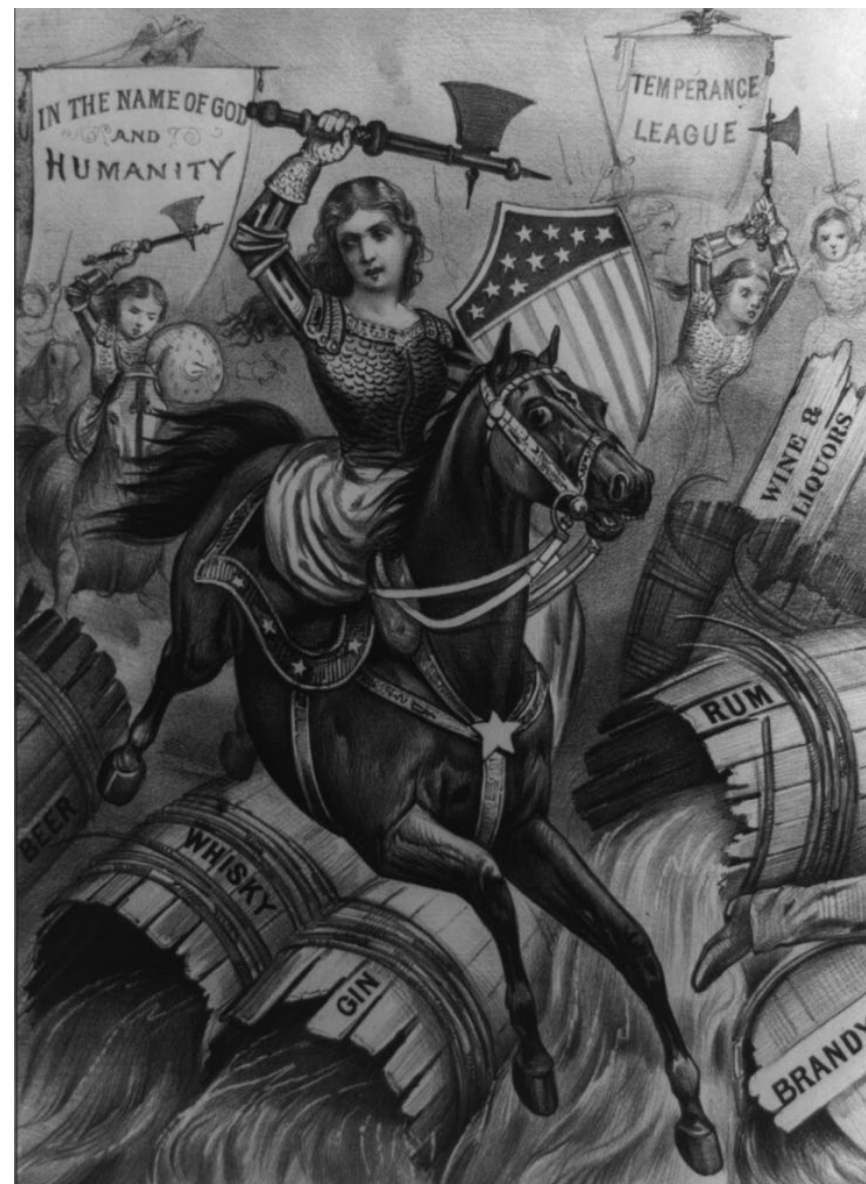
GETTING ORGANIZED

One way women were able to participate in public life was through organizing charities. Many of these charities were sponsored by churches. Churches were still the centre of people's social and cultural activities. The work of religious charities included taking care of widows and poor people, and sometimes involved missionary work in foreign countries. By the mid-1800s, more women had started to set up organizations that pushed for the social changes they thought necessary.

temperance staying away from drinking alcohol

prohibition law forbidding the sale and drinking of alcohol

FIGURE 4.27 An image from 1874 entitled *In the Name of God and Humanity*. **Analyze:** How does the image challenge society's belief that women belonged only in the home?



WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION

In the 1870s, the alcohol industry was growing steadily across Canada. It was very easy for businesses to get licences to sell alcohol. Many local governments depended heavily on the revenue from alcohol sales. Many women became concerned with the increasing number of social issues related to alcohol abuse. These included losing household income to alcohol purchases and increased violence in homes. These issues, together with strong Christian values, led women to form the Canadian Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1874. **Temperance** is choosing not to drink alcohol. The goal of the WCTU was to convince the government to ban the sale of alcohol, or force **prohibition**. Examine **Figure 4.27**, which shows women fighting for temperance. What message do you think the artist wanted to express?

Under the leadership of Letitia Youmans, the WCTU became the largest women's organization in Canada. The members of local WCTU branches were generally white, middle-class Protestant women.

Read **Figure 4.28**, an excerpt from Youmans's biography describing the decision made by the WCTU to present a petition on temperance to a town council. Why was the WCTU looking for a man to take its petition to the council?

"An animated discussion took place at one of the [WCTU] meetings as to who should present the petition to the council. Some proposed a minister ... others suggested ... a lawyer. Another idea was, let us take the petition ourselves. The thought was perfectly appalling to some of our number. 'It will seem so bold.'"

— *Letitia Youmans, Woman's Christian Temperance Union*

FIGURE 4.28 An excerpt from Youmans's autobiography, *Campaign Echoes: The Autobiography of Mrs. Letitia Youmans, the Pioneer of the White Ribbon Movement in Canada*, published in 1893. **Analyze:** Why would some members of the WCTU think the idea of women presenting a petition to a town council was "bold"?

PUSHING FOR VOTING RIGHTS

By the 1890s, members of the WCTU realized that temperance campaigns alone would not convince the government to force prohibition. To put prohibition into action across the country, they would need the right to vote. The right for women to vote is also known as women's **suffrage**.

suffrage the right to vote in political elections

TORONTO WOMEN'S LITERARY CLUB

The WCTU was not the only organization pushing for the right to vote. In 1877, Dr. Emily Stowe founded the Toronto Women's Literary Club. To outsiders, the organization was just a women's book club. But secretly, the organization was Canada's first women's suffrage organization. Read **Figure 4.29**, a quote from Stowe. What does this quote tell you about Stowe's vision for women?

“We should not just watch what is going on politically. It's like trying to learn to swim by watching a frog in a basin. If we want to learn to swim, we must get in the water ourselves. We must be a part of the political life of our country.”

— Dr. Emily Stowe, doctor and activist

FIGURE 4.29 A quote from 1876 by Stowe on the importance of women participating in politics. **Analyze:** What does Stowe mean when she says to women “we must get in the water ourselves”?

In 1883, the Toronto Women's Literary Club changed its name to the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association, Canada's first national suffrage organization. Canada's suffragettes actively campaigned for provincial and

federal support for women's right to vote. However, their campaigns were often met with polite rejection. Examine **Figure 4.30**, which shows the reaction of then-premier of Ontario Oliver Mowat to women's voting rights. What do you think the cartoon reveals about the government's attitude toward the suffrage movement?



FIGURE 4.30 This November 24, 1883, cartoon by J.W. Bengough shows the reaction of then-premier of Ontario Oliver Mowat, throwing away a petition presented by women demanding the right to vote. **Analyze:** What does the artist show you about this interaction?

GOVERNMENT REACTIONS

In 1884, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald stood in the House of Commons and spoke about a bill that would give unmarried women the right to vote. In his speech, Macdonald publicly supported giving unmarried women the right to vote. He also pointed out many other members were opposed to women's suffrage. Ultimately, the 1884 federal bill to give women the right to vote was defeated.

Can Macdonald's support to give women the right to vote in 1884 be considered significant, even though the bill was defeated?

On April 27, 1885, Macdonald once again stood in the House of Commons and spoke about a proposed bill that would give women the right to vote. Read **Figure 4.31**, an excerpt from his speech to the House of Commons. Despite having Macdonald's support, women's suffrage was not popular with other federal politicians. Why did Macdonald introduce this bill, despite the lack of political support?

“With respect to female suffrage, I can only say that I, personally, am strongly convinced, and every year for many years I have been even more convinced, of the justice of giving women otherwise qualified the suffrage.... I had hoped that Canada would have the honour of first placing women in the position she is certain, eventually, after centuries of oppression, to obtain ... of completely establishing her equality as a human being and as a member of society with man.”

— Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald

FIGURE 4.31 A quote from a speech Macdonald made in 1885 in the House of Commons. **Analyze:** Why did Macdonald consider giving women the right to vote as “justice”?

Why were only certain women given the right to vote at first?

In the provinces, the women's suffrage movement experienced some success. In 1884, widows and older, unmarried women who owned property won the right to vote in municipal elections in Ontario. Eventually, the federal government decided that each province would determine which women would be eligible to vote in federal, provincial, and municipal elections. During the 1890s, other provinces followed Ontario's lead and granted municipal voting rights to widows, unmarried women, and women who owned property.

CHECK-IN

- CONTINUITY AND CHANGE** What things have changed about women's rights? What has stayed the same? Use a t-chart to complete your answer.
- CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE** What were the intended consequences of starting the WCTU in Canada? What were the unintended consequences, if any?
- HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** Examine the evidence presented in this section (**Figures 4.26** to **4.31**). Use this evidence to write a bio poem that shows what it was like to live as a Canadian woman in the late 1800s.