



It's Our History, Our Country

Written by: Ronald Wolf

Nellie McClung

A pioneer of women's rights - Oct. 20, 1873



If you are from the female gender and sit have sat or are planning to sit in the Canadian Senate, then you should thank Nellie McClung for helping you get there.

She was born Nellie Letitia Mooney in Chatsworth, Ont. In 1873, she later moved with her family to a homestead in the Souris Valley of Man.

McClung was a Canadian feminist, politician, and social activist. She was a part of the social and moral reform movements in Western Canada in the early 1900s.

In 1927, McClung and four other women: Henrietta Muir Edwards, Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney and Irene Parlby, who together came to be known as "The Famous Five" (also called "The Valiant Five"), launched the "Persons Case," contending that women could be "qualified persons" eligible to sit in the Senate.

The Supreme Court of Canada

ruled that they were not. The five put forward a petition, in 1927, to clarify the term "Persons" in Section 24 of the British North America Act 1867.

This section had served to exclude women from political office. The petition was successful, clearing the way for women to enter politics in Canada. Between 1904 and 1911, Nellie McClung, her husband Wesley (a druggist) and their five children resided in Manitou, Man.

The women's rights movement in Winnipeg embraced her. An effective speaker with a sense of humour, she played a leading role in the successful Liberal campaign in 1914. She lived in the West for the rest of her life in Manitou, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary and Victoria. McClung was the grandmother of outspoken Alberta judge John McClung.

The Manitou house in which McClung and her family lived has been re-located to the Archibald Historical Museum in La Riviere, Man. where it has been restored.

When arguing for the support of equitable divorce laws, of which she was a long time supporter, McClung once said, "Why are pencils equipped with erasers if not to correct mistakes?"

Her great causes were women's suffrage and the temperance. She understood that the First World War had played an important role in broadening the appeal of women's suffrage because the manpower shortages required widespread female employment, making the image of the sheltered female more obviously inappli-