

THE FAMOUS FIVE AND THE "PERSONS CASE"

As BPW women, we must always remember our sisters who came before us, and the struggles they faced so that women could be where they are today. In 2004, on the 75th anniversary of the "Persons" case, long-time BPW member Kathy Laing, now a BPW Virtual club member in Ottawa, wrote this article about the Famous Five and the "Persons Case".

By Kathy Laing, BPW Virtual

In 1997 Francis Wright of Calgary (now President and CEO of the Famous Five Foundation) set up a foundation to raise funds for the commissioning and creation of monuments commemorating the success of the Famous 5 and the Persons Case. She succeeded in her efforts and sculptor Barbara Paterson winner of the monument contest created five individual high bronze sculptures.

The first sculptures were unveiled in Calgary at the Olympic Plaza on October 18th, 1999 with plans underway for the second sculptures to be unveiled on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on October 18th, 2000. As many of you know only statues of Prime Ministers and Royal persons had been allowed on the Hill but through the efforts of parliamentarians and senators an exception was made for the Famous Five.

In January 2004, a small notice appeared in the Ottawa Citizen newspaper inviting interested women to a meeting of the Ottawa Committee of the Famous Five Foundation so I decided to attend. The Ottawa Committee was formed to assist in the arrangements for the unveiling of the statues on Parliament Hill. Subsequent to attending the first few meetings, I was asked by then-President Margaret Pronyk (now deceased) to represent BPW Canada at further meetings and associated events.

Although as a former Manitoban, I had heard about Nellie McClung many years before, although it wasn't until I joined BPW Ottawa in 1979 that I became informed about the Famous Five and the Persons Case. This came about when one of our long time members, Sophie Steadman (as well as four other Canadian women) received the Persons Award in 1980. This was the second year that the awards were given by the Governor-General and since then the awards are presented yearly on the 18th of October.

At that time, I also learned that in 1938 the Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs arranged for the installation of a bronze plaque at the entrance of the Senate Chamber on Parliament Hill in recognition of the Famous Five. I am sure that all members will feel pride in knowing that our organization was able to show appreciation of the tremendous accomplishments of these five courageous women in a tangible



way.

Now back to the events leading up to the unveiling of the statues on Parliament Hill. The first event was the Famous Five tea on Sunday October 15th at the Chateau Laurier. On the 17th, a breakfast was held with Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Beverly McLaughlin at the Museum of Civilization, and in the evening an Interfaith Worship Celebration at Christ Church Cathedral.

On Wednesday the 18th, then-Governor General Adrienne Clarkson presented the Governor General Persons Day Awards at Rideau Hall to six women this year - the sixth award given to an outstanding young woman. A reception followed, after which we, the attendees, were bussed to Parliament Hill for the unveiling of the statues presided over by the Prime Minister of Canada, the Governor General and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Entertainment was provided prior to the unveiling. The large crowd of citizens and dignitaries cheered as the statues were unveiled. After the unveiling, a reception for relatives of the Famous Five and volunteers was held in a tent on the Parliament grounds.



Later in the afternoon, the Honourable Gildas Molgat, Speaker of the Senate in the Hall of Honour, Parliament Buildings hosted a reception for the Famous Five Foundation and guests. The evening ended with a dinner at the Chateau Laurier for the Ottawa Committee of the Famous Five Foundation, in recognition of the work of the committee members.

It was a busy four days but a wonderful experience. I feel very lucky and honoured to have been part of this momentous occasion which I attended on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs.

Irene Parlby