



## First Nations, Métis and Indigenous Women in what is now known as Canada.



It is no accident that very few voices or stories of Indigenous women have ever made it into Canadian history textbooks. Colonists, who were European men, used their own patriarchal lens as the framework to evaluate who held power when interacting with Indigenous cultures. This myopic misconception affected who they chose to interact and negotiate with. It was beyond their comprehension to think Indigenous women would be leaders or in positions of power (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Furthermore, the first written documentation of life in what is now Canada was conducted by Jesuit Priests (Indigenous foundations, 2009). Whether they had the same Eurocentric patriarchal blind spot or whether the power Indigenous women had in their communities was threatening to men of the cloth, many Indigenous women's contributions and stories were not recorded.


This absence in Canadian history has affected how society views Indigenous women and even how they view themselves (Indigenous foundations, 2009). Canada is not alone, colonization has had global impact. In fact, New Zealand Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains that Indigenous women were originally "classified as objects, along with the New World's flora and fauna" (1999, p. 62). The fallout of this sub-human, racist and sexist practice has had an enduring effect on how Indigenous women are seen and treated in the judicial system, in hospitals when they need medical treatment, in educational institutions and in every other aspect of life (Indigenous foundations, 2009).


These nine women along with many others deserve to be in history books. Despite racism and sexism, they became explorers, lawyers, artists and activists. These women won the battle against violence and oppression. With the odds stacked against them, their voices were not silenced. Many stories like these - of strength, brilliance and greatness - have been around since time and immemorial. It is time we learn them.


| Year       | Name  |
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| 1780s-1800 | <p data-bbox="363 1150 574 1224"><b>Molly Brant</b><br/>Leader/Warrior</p>  <p data-bbox="607 1524 1167 1545">Image: <a href="https://www.friendsofinnerharbour.com/august-update-2019/">https://www.friendsofinnerharbour.com/august-update-2019/</a></p> <p data-bbox="363 1598 1284 1629">Born in approximately 1736 as Kanyen'kehà:ka. She died 1796.</p> <p data-bbox="363 1682 1479 1797">Known in English as Molly Brant or sometimes Mary Brant. Her life as a leader among the Mohawk which included helping in negotiations and relationship building began when she was a teenager.</p> <p data-bbox="363 1850 1430 1923">There is controversy as to whether she was literate, but she did straddle the Mohawk and colonial worlds.</p> <p data-bbox="363 1976 1430 2007">In 1754, she accompanied a delegation of Mohawk elders to Philadelphia to</p> |



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|                    | <p>discuss fraudulent land transactions.</p> <p>Kanyen'kehà:ka/ Brant united large groups of Mohawk and were seen as 'Loyalists' of Britain in the fight against the Americans during the American Revolution. In the fall of 1777, Brant moved to Niagara, where she served as an important diplomat, helping the British by advising and interceding with their Indigenous allies.</p> <p>Following the war in 1783, Brant and her family settled in what is now Kingston, Ontario. The British Crown granted her land and a large pension for her wartime service and loyalty.</p>  |
| <p>1780s-1810s</p> | <p>Charlotte Small<br/>         1785-1857<br/>         Explorer/Guide/Interpreter</p>  <p><small>Image: <a href="http://www.experiencemountainparks.com/charlotte-small-woman-of-historic-significance/">http://www.experiencemountainparks.com/charlotte-small-woman-of-historic-significance/</a></small></p> <p>Born in Île-à-la-Crosse, northern Saskatchewan. The Cree woman is married to David Thompson (Explorer and surveyor) at the age of thirteen.</p> <p>Pregnant and with other small children in tow, Charlotte Small guides Thompson and his team of men west to survey and map Canada – One of their treks leads to the opening of the trade route, Howse Pass. Through long and terrible winters, it was Small who hunted, caught and prepared rabbits – keeping Thompson and his crew alive.</p> <p>She spoke English, Cree and French and also acted as interpreter, liaison and cultural guide for her husband. Small travelled over twenty thousand kilometers with her husband. However, Thompson alone is credited with surveying and mapping large parts of Canada.</p> <p>They travelled and lived in Rupert's Land until 1812. At that time, he retired (13 in total) from the fur trade and moved his family near Montreal, Quebec. She had eight more children, but never completely adjusted to life in the urban south.</p> |

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| <p>1920s-50s</p> | <p><b>Charlotte Edith Anderson Monture</b><br/>Military Nurse/Activist/Midwife</p>  <p><small>Image: <a href="https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/charlotte-edith-anderson-monture">https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/charlotte-edith-anderson-monture</a></small></p> <p>Born on Six Nations Reserve in 1890.</p> <p>1910 – Is forced to go to the U.S. for nursing training. She had applied to a number of nursing programs in Canada but was denied entry. Canadian colleges were not admitting Indigenous students to many of their programs.</p> <p>1914- Graduated first in her class and became the first Indigenous registered nurse in Canada.</p> <p>She worked in New York until the U.S. joined the first world war. She then served in the United States military in hospitals on the front lines.</p> <p>The Military Service Act of 1917 meant Monture qualified to vote in Canada's federal elections – meaning she was one of the first Indigenous women who was able to vote federally in Canada. (Indigenous women did not earn the right to vote until 1960).</p> <p>After the war, Edith continued to advocate for better Indigenous health care. She worked as a nurse and midwife until 1955 on her reserve.</p> <p>1996 – she died at home on Six Nations, three days before her 106<sup>th</sup> birthday.</p> |
| <p>1970s-80s</p> | <p><b>Pitseolak Ashoona</b><br/>Artist/Storyteller</p>  <p><small>Image: <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pitseolak_Ashoona">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pitseolak_Ashoona</a></small></p> <p>1904-1983</p>  |

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|              | <p>Gave birth to 17 children, but some died in childhood and some as with Inuit custom, some were adopted out. Married at 18 years old. Her husband was a hunter and died young. This left Pitseolak to raise her children. They had very little. Pitseolak made parkas and socks to scrape by and support her family.</p> <p>She then learned print-making – which helped ease the pain of her many losses. Ashoona went on to be an influential and important Inuit artist. She explained that one of her series – called the Cape Dorset Collection depicts life in her communities, pre-contact.</p> <p>She created more than 7000 images and had her own exhibit in 1974 in Montreal and is recognized as the first Inuit artist to create autobiographical work. She influenced future generations of artists, as well as the modern Inuit print movement.</p> <p>She influenced generations of artists who follow.</p> |
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| <p>1930s</p> | <p>Mary Two-Axe Earley<br/>         Activist/Trailblazer</p>  <p><small>Image: <a href="https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/44154053/mary-two_axe-earley">https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/44154053/mary-two_axe-earley</a></small></p> <p>Born on Kahnawake Reserve in 1911. Her mother died when she was young and she was raised by her grandparents on the reserve.</p> <p>She moved to New York and married a non-Indigenous man. Because of the Indian Act (established in 1876), it meant that she lost her 'Indian Status'. Services like health care, education, owning property, voting in band elections and burial on reserve land were no longer her right.</p> <p>1969 - her husband died and she returned to the reserve to live in her</p>  |

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|                  | <p>grandmother's house. This was met with resistance by the band council. In 1975 they planned to evict her. The same year, Mary took her story to the International Women's Year conference where it received press and attention.</p> <p>1983- Mary fought for her rights and those of Indigenous women at the constitutional conference.</p> <p>1985- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms took effect and Bill C-31 was passed. This restored Aboriginal status and rights to many Indigenous women.</p> <p>On July 5, 1985, Mary regained her Aboriginal status at a special ceremony.</p> <p>1993 - At the age of 83, Two-Axe testified at the Federal Court of Canada - continuing to fight for status and rights of Indigenous women.</p> <p>Mary died at the age of 85 and was buried on her land. Although seemingly a basic human right, it was a battle she fought for years to achieve.</p>  |
| <p>1960s-90s</p> | <p>Alanis Obomsawin</p> <p>Artist/Director/Producer/Writer/Activist/Filmmaker</p>  <p>Image: <a href="https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-nations-doc-maker-alanis-obomsawin-mourns-loss-of-trick-or-treaty-star-1.2754706">https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-nations-doc-maker-alanis-obomsawin-mourns-loss-of-trick-or-treaty-star-1.2754706</a></p> <p>1932-</p> <p>Born in Abenaki Territory (New Hampshire), Obomsawin moved back to her mother's territory of Odanak, north of Montreal when she was 6-months old.</p> <p>Her family moved when she was six and was forced to learn French in order to attend the local school. They were the only Native family in the community.</p> <p>In the late 1950s, after learning English, her third language, she performed as a singer and a storyteller and performed in prisons and schools, and at music festivals.</p> <p>Discovered by the National Film Board whilst she was raising funds and awareness of the inequities between Native and non-Native children, she was hired as a consultant in 1967.</p> |

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|                         | <p>Since then, has created more than 50 films. Alanis Obomsawin is recognized as one of the best Indigenous directors in the world and is also one of the most important documentarians in Canada.</p> <p>Alanis's films depicted the hardships and inequalities of Indigenous children in Canada. She</p> <p>Her goal was always to educate through and to tell unheard stories through the medium of film.</p>   |
| <p>1970s-<br/>2000s</p> | <p>Roberta Jamieson<br/>         Activist/Lawyer/ Ombudsman</p>  <p><small>Image: <a href="https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/roberta-jamieson">https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/roberta-jamieson</a></small></p> <p>She is Mohawk and a member of the Six Nations on The Grand River.</p> <p>1970 – first attended McGill University with the intention of studying medicine. But changed to law when she became involved in the political fights for the rights of Indigenous people.</p> <p>1976 – she graduated from law school at Western University. She was the first Indigenous woman to earn a law degree.</p> <p>1989 – Became Ontario's first woman ombudsman</p> <p>In 1982, Jamieson became the first non-parliamentarian appointed to a House of Commons committee. Her work was on a special task force on Indian Self-Government.</p> <p>She has and continues to develop and promote non-adversarial ways of resolving conflict.</p> <p>In 2004 she became president and CEO of 'Indspire' – an organisation that awards scholarships and bursaries to Indigenous people and to create not a 'seat at the table', but a whole new table entirely.</p> |

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| <p>2000s</p> | <p>Cindy Blackstock<br/>Social Worker/Child Rights Activist/Professor</p>  <p>Image: <a href="https://theyee.ca/News/2016/01/29/Cindy-Blackstock-Interview/">https://theyee.ca/News/2016/01/29/Cindy-Blackstock-Interview/</a></p> <p>1964-</p> <p>Born and raised in Gitksan First Nation, in Northern British Columbia.</p> <p>Blackstock earned a BA at UBC, two Master degrees (McGill and Loyola University, Chicago) and a PhD from University of Toronto</p> <p>1998 - Executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada –which offers a reconciliation-based public educational supports grassroots and education initiatives.</p> <p>In 2007 Cindy’s organization, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, filed a Human Rights complaint against the Federal government’s discrimination against First Nations children.</p> <p>Jordan’s Principle - In 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal ordered the federal government to immediately recognize some 165,000 First Nation children’s right to access federal support on par with their non-Indigenous peers. The landmark ruling is an attempt to recognize the vast disparity and to provide Indigenous children with medical and health services.</p> <p>She continues to be the voice for Indigenous children’s rights. She is also a professor at McGill University’s school of social work</p> |
| <p>2015</p>  | <p>Autumn Peltier<br/>Activist/Environmentalist/Waterkeeper</p>  <p>Image: <a href="https://www.womenofinfluence.ca/2019/11/05/meet-autumn-peltier-14-year-old-internationally-recognized-clean-water-advocate-and-the-anishinabek-nation-chief-water-commissioner/">https://www.womenofinfluence.ca/2019/11/05/meet-autumn-peltier-14-year-old-internationally-recognized-clean-water-advocate-and-the-anishinabek-nation-chief-water-commissioner/</a></p> <p>2007 -</p>  |

Peltier is from Wikwemikong First Nation/Manitoulin Island. She was introduced to the boil-water advisory issues for people living on reserves at the age of eight from her mother and aunt.

In 2016, at the age of nine she was chosen to present Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau with a ceremonial copper water bowl. Despite being told to silently present a gift to Trudeau, she spoke out and told him she was “unhappy with the choices you have made”. Her brave decision garnered her publicity and international recognition.

In 2017 and 2018 she was nominated for the International Children’s Peace Prize. She has spoken of the Sacredness of Water at the United Nations World Water Day and been a keynote speaker at subsequent assemblies.

In 2019, Autumn was named Chief Water Commissioner for the Anishinabek Nation which is an advocacy group for 40 First Nations across Ontario.