



SELF-GUIDED TOURS:

## Women's History



*Fort Edmonton Park is located in Treaty 6 territory, as well as the traditional lands of the Métis people.*

**How to use this guide:** Fort Edmonton Park encourages you to use this guide as a starting point to exploring the park. You will find small tidbits of information as well as suggestions of buildings to visit and questions to ask the costumed interpreters you will find on site.

© 2010 By Katherine Fraser and Jennifer Weir

### 1846 Fort- Why is she here?

*While the fur trade was a male-dominated institution and women were included in the Fort Edmonton community based on their relationships with men, female contributions to fur trade society were nonetheless unique and essential.*

**“Country Wives”:** European women did not come to Rupert’s Land (now Western Canada) until the early to mid-1800s, late in the fur trade era. However, “country” marriages occurred early on between indigenous women and Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) employees. For example, John Rowand, Chief Factor of Fort Edmonton, married a mixed-blood woman Louise Umphreville, with no priest or Church involved, and their marriage produced seven children. How do you think this “country marriage” compared to a “Church marriage” in Eastern Canada or Britain?

**A Vital (though unofficial) Work Force:** At Fort Edmonton, women were important to such activities as raising children, planting and harvesting crops, provision and preservation of food, making leather garments and other invaluable household tasks. Company employees valued both the companionship and valuable domestic skills of an indigenous wife. In what other activities do you think women participated?

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** in Rowand House (#5) about the lives of the **Rowand Daughters**. Also, ask an interpreter at the Cree Encampment (#18) who owns the tipis?



Margaret Rowand

**BE SURE TO VISIT** Men’s Quarters (#13) to see the crowded residences where Company labourers and their families were housed. Also visit the Cree Encampment (#18) to learn about the lifestyle of indigenous women living near Fort Edmonton.

### 1885 Street- Who is she?

*The first European women settlers to the west began to arrive during the early 1870s and women played an important role in establishing prairie settlements.*

**The Victorian Woman:** For the new settlers, a woman was the picture of purity and seen as physically and financially dependent on men. There was an important distinction between the private “domestic” world of woman and the “public” business world of men. Settler women were expected to marry and make home and children their first concern. How do you think this compared with local Métis women’s roles and expectations, considering their indigenous roots?

**A Need for Women on the Frontier:** The shortage of marriageable (that is, ‘white’) women in the west in the 1870s led to requests for female immigrants. Once settled, most women’s lives did focus on activities in the private sphere—the traditional unpaid labour of the home. Women in the Edmonton area though were able to become more involved in the public world by running boarding houses and through participation in social reform and charity organizations. Are there still remnants of these roles today?

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** at Ottewell Homestead (#22) about the life of **Frances Ottewell** or ask an interpreter at the McDonald House (#44) about Métis woman **Emma McDonald** to learn about the similarities and differences of their experience.

**BE SURE TO VISIT** Mrs. Kernohan’s Millinery (#26) to see an example of women’s entrepreneurship in 1885 and visit Bellerose School (#23) to see one of the few acceptable places for (unmarried) women to work.



## 1905 Street- *Where is she going?*

*As Edmonton grew from a town to a city and developed into a modern metropolis, women began to take a greater role in commerce and public life.*

**Women in the Workplace:** During this era, women's job opportunities in Edmonton included positions as telephone operators, shop clerks, prostitutes, typists, teachers, nurses or as students at the co-educational University of Alberta (est. 1908). Career advancements though were often limited and women were still expected to quit work once married. What jobs can you see women doing on 1905 Street?

**The Fight to Win the Vote:** Many middle-class women were determined to bring about social reform such as prohibition of liquor and child welfare. In order to have a voice, these women recognized that they must become equal partners in the political process and thus win the right to vote. Why do you think some intelligent women opposed suffrage?

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** near or at the Fire Hall (#63) about **Constable Annie Jackson**, and how her work was different from male constables. Also, ask an interpreter at the Henderson House (#51) about **Peggy Henderson**, a woman who was both a farm wife and a practicing midwife.

**BE SURE TO VISIT** Rutherford House (#54) to experience the similarities and differences between a domestic maid and a Premier's daughter. Visit the Telephone Exchange (upstairs in the Post Office Block #59) to discover women's roles as telephone operators - the "hello girls."

## 1920 Street- *How does she change?*

*After the First World War, compared to the beginning of the decade, women's political and societal roles had changed greatly, including winning the national vote in 1917.*

**The Persons Case:** Possibly the greatest Canadian fight for female equality since suffrage began in 1927 when five Albertan women, Emily Murphy, Irene Parlby, Nellie McClung, Louise McKinney and Henrietta Muir Edwards, argued that females ought to be legally recognized as "Persons". These women became known as the "Famous Five" and, in 1929, the Judicial Committee of England's Privy Council ruled that women indeed should be acknowledged as persons. What are some further important moments in women's history that have occurred since the 1920s?

**Changes in Style:** During the 1920s, skirts became shorter and hair was bobbed as fashion morphed to a boyish waif look. What other changes in ladies' fashion have you seen through the park?

**ASK AN INTERPRETER** about the legendary **Edmonton Grads**, a women's basketball team who won the first women's world title in basketball in 1924 and then just kept on winning! Also, ask an interpreter at the Midway (#82) about the "**Chautauqua girls**" of the 1920s.

**BE SURE TO VISIT** Alberta Government Telephones (#79) to see the continuing role of women as telephone operators in rural Alberta, and visit Mellon Farm (#81) to learn about the lifestyle of a woman in a 1920s farmhouse of average means.

*Thank you for visiting  
Fort Edmonton Park!*

*Did you find this helpful?  
Please give us feedback by filling out a  
comment card!*