

# CHAPTER 2

1896-1939

*Nationalisms and  
Canadian Autonomy*

## **PART 6**

***Women's struggles,  
Catholic Church & education***

# Women's struggles

## ACCESS TO EDUCATION

- After WW1 ended, women still had a role to play in factories, social work and teaching due to industrial expansion.
  - However, women were still paid a lot less than men for the same work.
- Gender inequalities led to the **first feminist associations**. They advocated for:
  - equality of the sexes
  - the legal recognition of women's fundamental rights (such as the right to vote and legal equality)
  - improved public health and a reduction in infant mortality
  - women's access to higher education.
- Women didn't have access to university education in French until 1908.



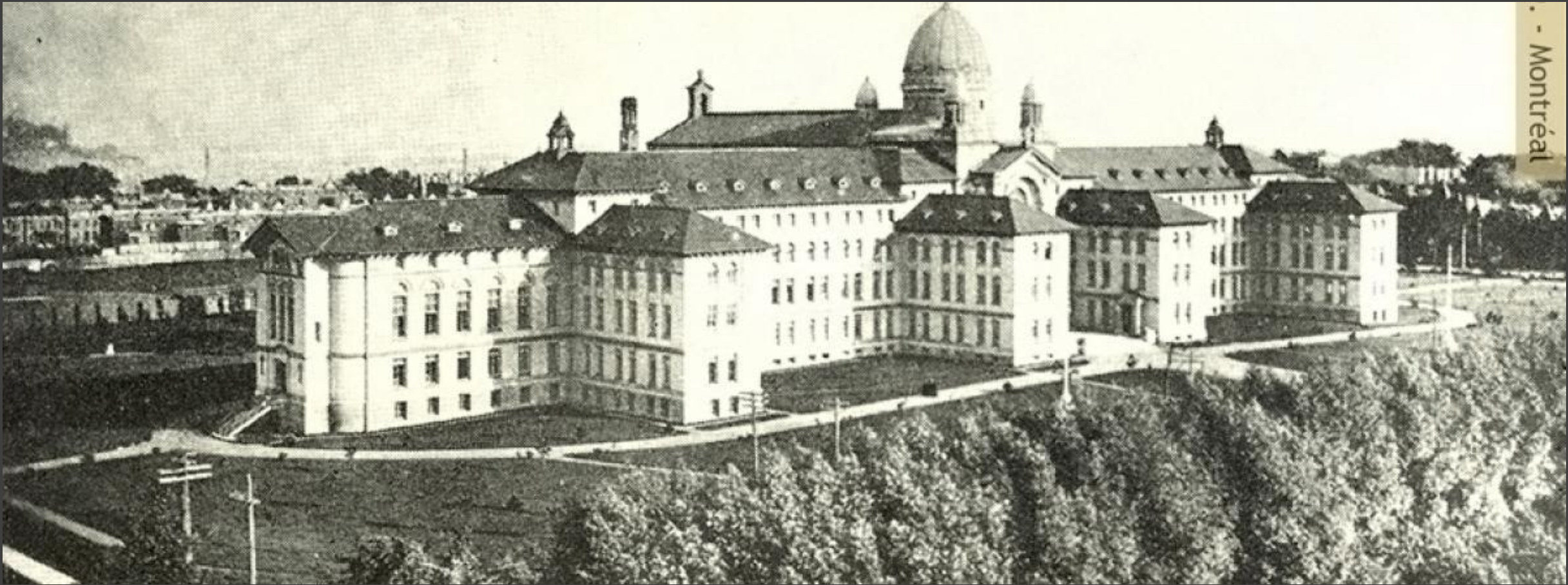
**Marie Lacoste Gérin-Lajoie**  
co-founded the Fédération  
nationale Saint-Jean-  
Baptiste (FNSJB) in 1907, a  
feminist association in  
Québec.

**1922**

**1907**

In 1922, she also headed  
the first delegation of  
Québec suffragettes in the  
Québec Parliament to  
support a bill that would  
have given women the right  
to vote (but it failed).





*The **École d'enseignement supérieur**, opened in 1908, provided Catholic francophone women in Montréal with access to classical studies through an 8-year program that led to a bachelor's degree.*

# Women's struggles

## LABOUR MARKET

- Little by little, a few more women obtained degrees in teaching, medicine, law, journalism, nursing or social work.
- However, the majority of women had jobs in the service sector or in factories, where conditions were terrible.
- In 1937, about 5,000 female seamstresses in Montréal **went on strike** to obtain better working conditions. They achieved:
  - union recognition
  - a 44-hour workweek (instead of 50-80 hours/week)
  - a weekly salary of \$16 (instead of \$7-12.50/week).







# Women's struggles

## LEGAL RECOGNITION

- Between WW1 and WW2, feminists won **several battles** in terms of legal recognition. Here are some key issues:
  - The right of married women to make use of their own salary.
  - The right of married women to belong to a union without the permission of their husband.
  - The right of married women to own personal identification and a passport.
  - The right to open a bank account.



# Women's struggles

## VOTING RIGHTS AND ELIGIBILITY

- **SUFFRAGE = right to vote**
- Feminists' struggle paid off in **1918**, when **Canadian women won the right to vote in federal elections.**
- **Women's suffrage in Québec was obtained in 1940.** The women of the province of Québec were the last ones in Canada to get the right to vote at the provincial level.
- This issue divided society:
  - Some religious leaders and intellectuals feared that women's suffrage would threaten traditional values (like family and faith).
  - Pope Benedict XV supported women's suffrage.
  - Some politicians in Québec supported women's suffrage.

# Women's struggles

## PERSONS CASE

- The *BNA Act* (Canada's constitution at the time) said that only "qualified persons" could be appointed to the Canadian Senate. The Canadian government interpreted this phrase as meaning "men only".
- Several suffragists were outraged and got ready to fight.
- 5 women (nicknamed the **Famous Five**) signed a letter petitioning the Supreme Court of Canada to look into the matter of whether the government could appoint a female senator.
- **In 1928, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that women were NOT "persons".**

# Women's struggles



## PERSONS CASE

- Then, the Famous Five appealed to the Privy Council of England (the highest authority for Canadians at the time).
- **In 1929, the Privy Council recognized that Canadian women were persons and could exercise their civil rights – including becoming a Senator!**
- In 1930, Cairine R. Wilson became Canada's first female senator (*picture on the left*).





*Monument on the grounds of Parliament Hill in Ottawa unveiled in 2000 to commemorate the Persons Case and the **Famous Five** – Emily Murphy, Nellie McClung, Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney and Henrietta Muir Edwards.*





*"This decision marks the abolition of sex in politics.... Personally I do not care whether or not women ever sit in the Senate, but we fought for the privilege for them to do so. We sought to establish the personal individuality of women and this decision is the announcement of our victory."*

Henrietta Muir Edwards, 1929

# Women's struggles

## REVENGE OF THE CRADLE

- During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the **birth rate** among French-Canadian women (in Québec in 1921: 5.29) **was far greater than** that of English-Canadian women (in Ontario in 1921: 3.22).
- This phenomenon was:
  - in part a **lifestyle choice**
  - in part a **response to the Church's encouragement to procreate** so as to outnumber English Canadians.



# The Catholic Church

## MORAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE

- During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Catholic Church still held a **powerful position among the French-Canadian population.**





# The Catholic Church

## MORAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE

1. The Catholic Church was involved in **Québec society**:
  - It formed **labour unions** as a way to both help and control the working class.
2. The Catholic Church was involved in **politics**:
  - It generally supported **conservatives parties** that upheld traditional values.
3. The Catholic Church was involved in the **school system**:
  - It had been **responsible for education in Québec**, without state intervention, since 1875.
  - It could promote Catholic values in schools.

# The Catholic Church

## MORAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE

4. The Catholic Church was involved in **colonizing new regions of Québec to limit French-Canadian emigration to the USA:**
  - It promoted land cultivation.
  - It promoted the notion that rural life was superior to urban life.
5. The Catholic Church was involved in **helping the needy through their work in:**
  - hospitals
  - orphanages
  - charitable organizations.

# The Catholic Church

## COOPERATIVES

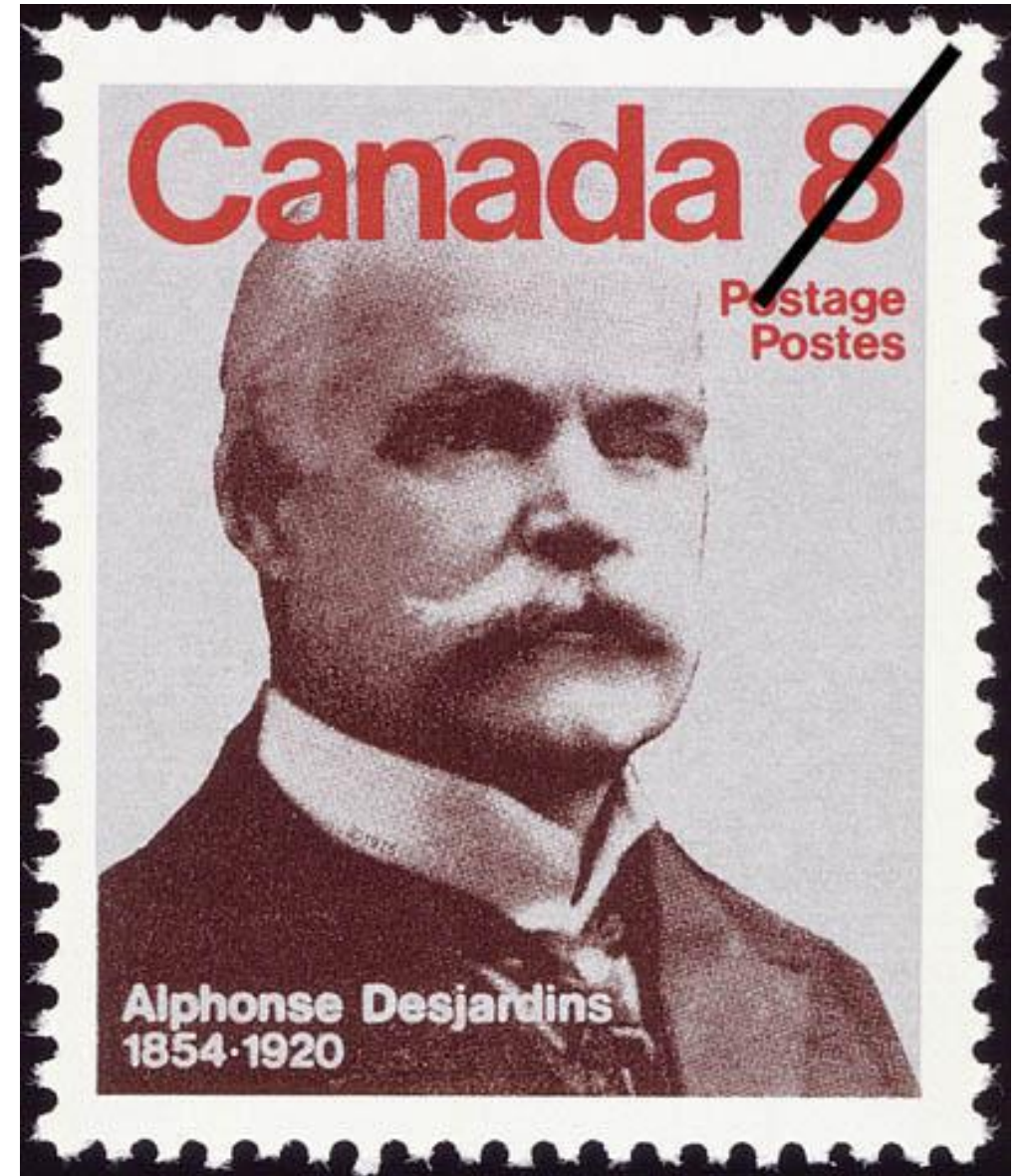
*Associations in which resources are jointly owned and profits are shared among all members.*



# The Catholic Church

## COOPERATIVES

- The Catholic Church **promoted cooperatives**:
  - It was a solution to the many social problems tied to industrialization.
  - It was more conducive to communal life and Catholic values.
- With the support of the clergy, **Alphonse Desjardins** created the first Caisse Populaire credit union in 1900.
- The severity of the economic depression in the 1930s led to an increase in the number of cooperatives in different sectors (farming, fishing, forestry, construction, etc.).







# Education

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND EDUCATION

- In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:
  - fewer children attended school in Québec than in other provinces.
  - while attendance was gradually increasing (↑) in the rest of Canada, it was decreasing (↓) in Québec.
  - within Québec, for children 12 and up, attendance was much higher for anglophones than for francophones.
  - more boys than girls continued their education beyond the age of 12.



# Education

## SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND EDUCATION

- Some **reasons** for these numbers (previous slide):
  - Many young people **dropped out at the end of primary school**, once they knew how to read, write and count, **to work in one of the many jobs created by industrialization**.
  - **School attendance varied depending on the season**, especially in rural areas. For farming families (mostly francophone), children helping out on the farm was more important than attending school.
  - Many francophone families (both urban and rural) could only survive if all members worked. **Longer studies was a luxury that few families could afford.**

**2.50****SCHOOL ATTENDANCE  
IN QUÉBEC AND ONTARIO**

YEAR	QUÉBEC	ONTARIO
1911	69.6%	74.5%
1921	64.8%	81.3%
1931	53.9%	Not available
1941	52.9%	79.9%

Source: Thérèse Hamel, "Obligation scolaire et travail des enfants au Québec: 1900-1950". *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol. 38, n° 1, Summer 1984, p. 48-49.



## **2.52** SCHOOL ATTENDANCE FOR CHILDREN AGED 8 TO 14 IN QUÉBEC, IN 1901

AGE	GIRLS		BOYS	
	CATHOLIC FRANCOPHONES	PROTESTANT ANGLOPHONES	CATHOLIC FRANCOPHONES	PROTESTANT ANGLOPHONES
8 YEARS	88.9%	81.4%	89.4%	81%
10 YEARS	93.6%	100%	94%	96.3%
12 YEARS	82.3%	90.2%	86%	83.7%
14 YEARS	48.3%	73.8%	56.7%	84.2%

Source: Julien, 2008. City of Québec census data, 1901 (PHSVQ/CIEQ).

# Education

## LEGISLATION

- In 1943, Québec Premier Adélard Godbout's government passed the ***Compulsory School Attendance Act***:
  - It required parents to send their children ages 6 to 14 to school or face a fine.
  - It made public primary education free.