

Backhouse awarded Persons Case GG Award

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Law Society Bencher Constance Backhouse has been honoured with a 2013 Governor General's Award.

Backhouse was one of five women to receive the award on Oct. 29, at an annual ceremony commemorating the Persons Case, a historic decision that legally recognized women in Canada as 'persons'.

In a statement about the award, His Excellency The Right Honourable David Johnston acknowledged Backhouse as "not only a brilliant scholar, [but] an activist, teacher, mentor, and leader.

"Her unshakeable commitment to gender equality and social justice has helped to make Canada a better place for women and girls."

Backhouse, a distinguished professor and research chair at the University of Ottawa, focuses her scholarly work on exposing inequalities, promoting understanding and facilitating change.

The Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case was created in 1979 to mark the 50th anniversary of the decision. The 2013 awards celebrate the 84th anniversary.

In 1927, five Alberta women brought the Persons Case to court. Two years later, they became 'persons' under the law when Canada's highest court of appeal declared that the definition of the word included both women and men.

The decision made it possible for women to serve in the Senate and it paved the way for women's increased participation in public and political life.

The Alberta women — Emily Murphy, Louise McKinney, Irene Parlby, Nellie McClung and Henrietta Muir Edwards — became known as the 'Famous Five'.

The awards were presented at Rideau Hall. The 2013 winners are:

- Constance Backhouse
- Nahanni Fontaine
- Susan Kathryn Shiner
- Julie Lalonde (Youth Recipient)
- Cherry Smiley (Youth Recipient)

Backhouse is a member of the Order of Canada and the Order of Ontario. She has been an elected bencher of the Law Society since 2003.

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