

**Frances E. Willard – Founder of the World's
Women's Christian Temperance Union**



Mrs. James Esselmont plants a "Frances Willard" tree in the rock garden in Stanley Park, September 28, 1939 [City of Vancouver Archives Tr P23]

Women and the Vote in British Columbia

On September 28, 1939 here in the Stanley Park Rock Garden, one of the largest gatherings of city women of that decade assembled to witness the local Vancouver district Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) plant a white camellia tree with a plaque commemorating the centenary of the birth of their founder American suffragist Frances Elizabeth Willard. Participating at this international event were the American Consul General Paul Josselyn, Vancouver Mayor James L. Telford and numerous other international, national and local leaders of the W.C.T.U. including many prominent B.C. women of that era. This impressive international event was both filmed and broadcast to Canadian and American audiences.

Frances Elizabeth Willard

Born in Churchville, New York, September 28, 1839, Frances Willard was destined to become a strong advocate for women's rights. As an educator, reformer and women's suffragist, Frances was elected secretary of the Chicago, Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.) in 1874 its founding year and its second president in 1879, a position she held until her death. In 1883 she formed and was elected president of the World's W.C.T.U. the largest worldwide organization of women in the 19th Century.

The B.C. Women's Christian Temperance Union

Frances Willard helped to found the B.C. Provincial W.C.T.U. while visiting Victoria on July 3, 1883 the only Canadian Union to be officially opened by its founder. Under her leadership women were to achieve both social and electoral reform. Two years after her visit to Victoria the first women's suffrage petition was presented to the B.C. Legislature, however, it was not until April 5, 1917, following the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta (1916) that women were to gain the vote in B.C. Provincial elections. On January 1, 1918 the electoral franchise was extended nationally to women in Canadian federal elections.