



The Canadian
Accounting
Hall of Fame

Le Temple
de la renommée comptable
du Canada

Sheila Fraser – inducted 2022



Sheila Fraser was born in Dundee, Quebec in 1950, to a family of Scots extraction; she was the oldest of six children. She was one of only a few women in her commerce class at McGill University, and she later recalled receiving a letter from an accounting firm to which she had applied for a position saying they couldn't hire her because there was a limit on the number of women they were employing that year. However, she joined Clarkson Gordon (now EY) in Montreal, one of a staff of 150 people, and qualified as a CA in 1974.

She transferred to the Québec City office in 1977, and in 1981 became the firm's second female partner. One of those with whom she worked there Denis Desautels, who became Auditor General of Canada in 1991; it was he who hired her as Deputy Auditor General, Audit Operations, in 1999. At that time she did not expect to get the top job, although Desautels's term was scheduled to end in two years - outsiders had always been preferred.

Despite that pattern, Sheila became the Auditor General of Canada in 2001, the first woman to hold the position (although her predecessors in that office happened to include her grandfather's cousin, John Fraser, who served from 1905 to 1919). Her staff of 650 people audited federal departments and agencies, and most Crown corporations.

Soon after taking office she was tasked by Prime Minister Jean Chretien with investigating why, according to a Toronto newspaper, an advertising firm had been paid \$550,000 for a report that could not be found. She reported that over a four-year period \$100 million of taxpayer money had been diverted from government coffers to Quebec advertising agencies with close ties to the Liberal party in return for little or no work. This led to Prime Minister Paul Martin, who followed Chretien, to establish the Gomery commission to conduct a public enquiry on the sponsorship program. Sheila was quoted as saying "The sponsorship stuff made me mad. It upset me; I'm a taxpayer too. I know how much restraint there was on spending in those years, and how difficult it was to do programs because of cutbacks and program reviews. And then to see money being spent seemingly on transactions of no value – hundreds of thousands of

dollars to transfer a cheque from a department to a Crown corporation – I don't take that stuff lightly."

Another high-profile issue was her call for an RCMP investigation into former Privacy Commissioner George Radwanski and top officials in his office. This included Radwanski's "reign of terror", under which public funds were used for personal expenses, regulations were disregarded, executives received unjustified bonuses and raises, and documents were falsified to cover up overspending.

Yet these were far from the only controversial issues with which Sheila had to deal. Others included the living conditions of indigenous people, Employment Insurance Program surpluses, cost of the Canadian Firearms Registry ballooning out of control, and funding for the G8 and G20 summits held in Canada.

During her tenure as Auditor General she contributed to the accounting profession by serving as Chair of the CICA's Public Sector Accounting Board (2004/5), as a Public Member on the International Public Sector Accounting Standards Board (2009-13), and on committees of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Committees (INTOSAI - an umbrella organization for the external government audit community, with special consultative status with the United Nations. 2001-11).

When her tenure ended she served on the boards of two major public companies – Manulife Financial Corporation (2011-21) and Bombardier (2012-17) – and chaired the audit committee of each. She also served three other accounting organizations:

- IFRS Foundation (monitoring body of IASB): Director and VP; also, member of Due Process Oversight Committee (2013-19).
- International Federation of Accountants: Director (2019-20).
- Canadian Public Accountability Board: Director (2019-20).

She was inducted as an Honorary Witness at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission event in June 2012. At that time she said:

"During my time as Auditor General I tried to bring the truth to the absolutely unacceptable conditions of First Nations on reserves to our Parliament and to Canadians in general. My only regret was that I wasn't able to report more progress at the end of 10 years."

She expressed hope and conviction that the work undertaken by the TRC could reach those she could not and provide a better understanding and education of the Aboriginal situation.

Over the years her contributions to the broader community included serving as VP and Treasurer of Québec City's bid to be host city of 2002 Winter Olympic Games; as Director of the

International Institute for Sustainable Development, Experimental Lakes Area and of the Ottawa Food Bank; and as Co-Chair of the Elections Canada Advisory Board (2013-18).

When she was inducted as an Officer of the Order of Canada, in 2018, her citation read:

“Sheila Fraser has served our country with dedication and integrity. Through her work as auditor general of Canada, she is credited with bringing about significant policy changes within the federal government and enhancing public service accountability. A champion for transparency and compassion, she remains committed to the advancement of Indigenous issues and was invited to serve as an honorary witness to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She also served on a number of provincial, national and international accounting and audit organizations.”

Other honours she has received include:

- *Ordre des CPA du Québec* - FCA (1994); also Lifetime Achievement Award – “In recognition of her great merit and extraordinary contribution to the visibility of the profession throughout her career” (2019).
- *Institute of CAs of Ontario* - FCA (2000); also its Award of Outstanding Merit (2009).
- *Reader’s Digest Poll of Most Trusted Canadians* - #3 in Canada (2011).
- *Regroupement des CPA de Québec* - CA Emeritus Award (1993).
- *Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal* - “To recognize contributions and achievements by Canadians” (2012).
- *Canadian universities* – No fewer than 18 universities, from Newfoundland and Labrador to British Columbia, have recognized her achievements with an honorary doctorate. (2004-17).