



Gertrude Mulcahy



Gertrude (“Gert”) Mulcahy was the first woman CA to be recognized as an FCA in Ontario; she was also the first to have a national profile, but her path to prominence was not easy or straightforward. The traditional “male” professions in Canada were almost exclusively male before the First World War, and it was only in 1922 that two women earned their Canadian CA designations, one in British Columbia and the other in Nova Scotia.

But it was not until the Second World War that women got their first real break: CA firms had to employ women as audit clerks to fill the void left by hundreds of men who entered the armed forces or contributed to important war work on the home front. In addition to continuing audit and other work, the staffing challenges from 1939 to 1945 were compounded by a tremendous increase in special work which accompanied wartime conditions, such as the preparation of briefs for submission to the Board of Referees under the Excess Profits Tax Act. Special assignments also arose out of various wartime orders, such as the Salary and Wage Control and Price Control, and special costing work under war contracts.

Gert graduated with a B.A (Hons.) degree from the University of Toronto in 1940 and, having liked her accounting courses, started her career as an auditor with the Bank of Canada. She moved to Clarkson Gordon in the early 1940s, as one of the fifty or so “Lady Audit Clerks” who were hired for the firm’s offices in Toronto, Montreal, and Hamilton, although according to the firm’s history *The Story of the Firm, 1864–1964: Clarkson, Gordon & Co.* few attempted the CA course of instruction and only three, one being Gert, graduated as Chartered Accountants in due course. Gert happened to be a great-great-granddaughter of the founder of the firm, Thomas Clarkson, her great-grandmother being his first child Betsy, born in England in 1823 before he emigrated to Canada in 1832, after the death of his first wife. Gert became a CA in 1947.

After the war, however, when the men returned to the firms from overseas, it became clear to the women that there was little opportunity for advancement in the firms. Gert took a position with the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants (CICA), where she served in a key role: Secretary to the Board of Examiners, which each year set the final examination for those from across Canada who were entering the CA profession. In that role, she started to meet a number of unusually talented accountants, who served on the Board or were involved in setting and marking questions.

From that position, she progressed to become the CICA’s Director of Research during the 1960s and early 1970s. In this position she was responsible not only for Accounting and Auditing Standards for Canada, but also for the CICA’s program of published Research and Audit Technique Studies, and the studies issued by the three-nation (Canada, UK, and US) Accountants International Study Group. A major challenge in the 1960s was the conversion of the previous “bulletins” issued by the Accounting and Auditing Research Committee into the loose-leaf *CICA Handbook*. During this period, she

represented Canada on the international stage as global interests expanded, and she started to receive national and international acclaim for her commitment and outstanding contributions to the accounting profession. For the ten years 1963 to 1973, she edited the monthly “Research” column in the *Canadian Chartered Accountant* magazine.

In 1973, it was decided that it was too onerous for one standard-setting committee to deal with both accounting and auditing, and with published studies, so separate Accounting Standards and Auditing Standards Committees were formed, and a discrete studies group was established, with the CICA’s research staff being divided between the three areas. Gert became the Accounting Research Director, and from then until her retirement from the CICA continued to build her reputation through technical writings, speaking engagements, appearances as guest lecturer at universities across Canada, and participation in meetings and conferences in Canada, the US, and Great Britain. One such speaking engagement was the Howard Ross Memorial Lecture at McGill University, which she was selected to deliver in 1982. These activities won her high praise from both accounting professors and business communities. Her career and published works established Gert as a role model for the many women now in the accounting profession.

Gert received the CICA’s rarely awarded Presidential Certificate of Merit on her retirement in 1983. She then joined Touche Ross & Co. in their National Office in Toronto and continued her research work there for several years.

In addition to being the first woman to be elected a Fellow (FCA) by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario (ICAO), in 1962, with fewer than 3% of the members receiving this recognition, she became the first woman to receive the Institute’s Award of Outstanding Merit, in 1990. This recognized long-term outstanding service of extraordinary quality and was the Institute’s highest award; it had been established in 1984, and just three more women were honoured with it before it was discontinued in 2013, with the merger of the three national professional accounting bodies.

She was elected a member of the ICAO Council in 1985; ICAO members recognized the value of her input by overwhelmingly voting for her during the following four years.

In addition to the above awards from her profession, Gert was recognized for her broader community efforts. In 1977, she received the Queen’s Jubilee Medal; in 1992, she was feted as a Woman of Distinction by the YWCA of Metro Toronto; and in 1993, she was elected to the Orillia Hall of Fame (whose recipients have included a former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, James Bartleman; Stephen Leacock and Mazo de la Roche, noted authors; a former Premier of Ontario, Leslie Frost; and Glenn Gould, the pianist; all being, at one time, Orillia residents).

Gert Mulcahy died in 2015, at the age of 97.