

# The Supreme Court of Canada



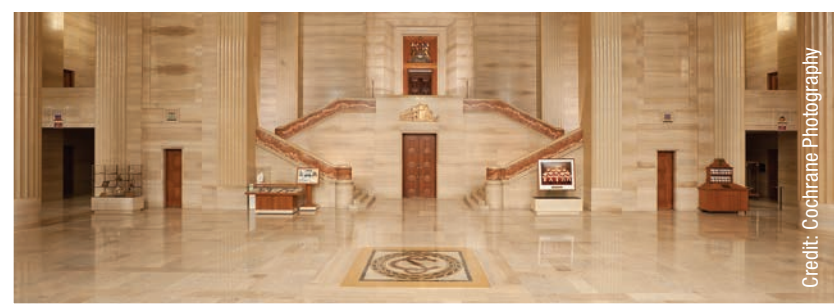
Credit: Philippe Landreville



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## THE COURT BUILDING

The Supreme Court building was designed by Ernest Cormier, a renowned Montréal architect who also designed the Quebec Court of Appeal building in Montréal, the Government Printing Bureau in Gatineau and the central building of the University of Montréal. Situated just west of the Parliament Buildings on a bluff high above the Ottawa River, and set back from busy Wellington Street by an expanse of lawn, the building provides a dignified setting worthy of the country's highest tribunal.

There are two flagpoles at the front of the building. The Canadian flag is hoisted daily on the pole to the west. A flag flies on the other pole only when the Supreme Court is sitting.

Two statues have been erected next to the steps of the building: *VERITAS* (Truth) to the west and *IVSTITIA* (Justice) to the east. Both were sculpted by Toronto artist Walter S. Allward, the creator and architect of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial in France.

## THE HIERARCHY OF COURTS IN CANADA

The Supreme Court of Canada, which was created by an Act of Parliament in 1875, is Canada's final court of appeal. It serves Canadians by deciding legal issues of public importance, thereby contributing to the development of all branches of law applicable within Canada.

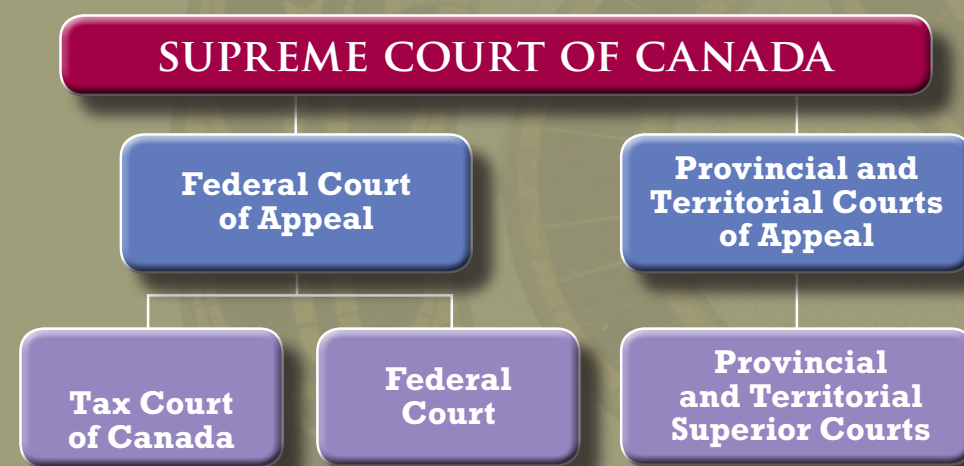
The Court hears appeals from three sources:

- appeals with leave;
- appeals as of right; and
- references by the Governor in Council.

The Court's hearings are open to the public.

In some cases, the Court will render its decision orally at the conclusion of the hearing, but most of the time it reserves judgment to enable the judges to write detailed reasons. Decisions of the Court need not be unanimous: a majority may decide, in which case the minority will give dissenting reasons. Each judge may write reasons in any case if he or she chooses to do so.

The Court's judgments are published simultaneously in both official languages in the *Canada Supreme Court Reports*. Access to judgments is also available via the Court's Web site.



## THE COURTROOM

The Main Courtroom, reserved for the use of the Supreme Court, occupies the centre of the building on the first floor.

The Main Courtroom measures 12 metres by 16 and has black walnut walls between fluted pilasters. Six tall windows open to the naturally lighted interior courtyards, which also serve as buffers to protect from outside noise.

The groundwork for a modern courtroom was laid in 2007 with the installation of computerized audio-visual equipment and a new lectern, as well as wireless Internet connections. Display monitors for counsel and the media were added, and laptop computers were embedded in the bench desktop for the judges' use. The new lectern can be raised and lowered to accommodate counsel of different heights and those in wheelchairs. In addition, new cameras have been installed along with an improved lighting system.



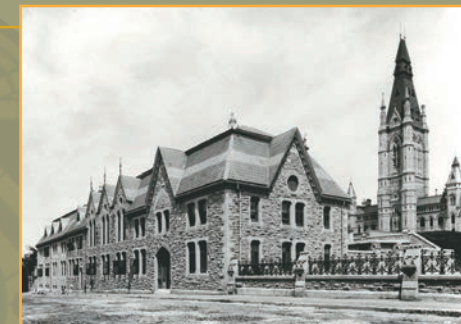
Credit: Philippe Landreville

## TIMELINE

**1875**  
The Supreme Court of Canada is created by an Act of Parliament.

**1876-1881**  
The Court sits first in the Railway Committee Room in the Parliament Buildings, then in several other rooms as they become available.

**1882**  
The Court moves to a small two-storey building, which no longer exists, at the foot of Parliament Hill on Bank Street.



Credit: Library and Archives Canada

**1927**  
The number of Supreme Court judges increases from six to seven.

**1933**  
The right of appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the United Kingdom is abolished in criminal cases.

**1939-1941**  
Construction of the new Supreme Court building (current location). Queen Elizabeth lays the cornerstone in the presence of her husband, King George VI, on May 20, 1939.



Credit: Library and Archives Canada

**1946**  
The Supreme Court of Canada moves to its current location.

**1949**  
The right of appeal to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in the United Kingdom is abolished in civil cases. The number of judges increases from seven to nine.



Credit: Larry Munn

**1982**  
The Honourable Bertha Wilson becomes the first woman appointed judge of the Supreme Court of Canada. The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* comes into force.



Credit: Roy Grogan

**2000**  
The Right Honourable Beverley McLachlin becomes the first woman appointed Chief Justice of Canada. She is also the longest sitting Chief Justice since the creation of the Court, having served in that function for almost 18 years.

**2017**  
The Right Honourable Richard Wagner appointed Chief Justice of Canada on December 18, 2017.



Credit: Laforest & Sabourin

## THE JUDGES

The Supreme Court of Canada consists of nine judges, including the Chief Justice of Canada.

The judges are appointed by the Governor in Council. Any judge of a court of appeal or other superior court of a province or territory, or any lawyer of at least ten years' standing at the bar of a province or territory may be appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The *Supreme Court Act* requires that at least three of the nine judges be appointed from among the judges of the Court of Appeal or of the Superior Court of Quebec or from among the lawyers of that province. Traditionally, the Governor in Council has appointed three judges from Ontario, two from the Western provinces or Northern Canada and one from the Atlantic provinces.

The judges must devote themselves exclusively to their judicial duties. A judge holds office during good behaviour until he or she retires or attains the age of 75 years, which is the mandatory retirement age for judges of the Supreme Court of Canada.

Should the Governor General die, become incapacitated, be removed or be absent from the country for a period of more than one month, the Chief Justice or, if the Chief Justice is unavailable, the senior judge of the Supreme Court, would become the Administrator of Canada and exercise all the powers and authorities of the Governor General.



Credit: Laforest & Sabourin