

Carolyn Wilkins: Launch of the new exhibition “A Noteworthy Woman”

Remarks by Ms Carolyn A Wilkins, Senior Deputy Governor of the Bank of Canada, at the Launch of the new exhibition "A Noteworthy Woman", Bank of Canada Museum, Ottawa, Ontario, 29 November 2018.

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Thank you all for being here for the opening of *A Noteworthy Woman*, our temporary exhibition about the imagery on Canada’s new \$10 bank note. The process to choose the first Canadian woman to be featured on a regular bank note was exciting, and it inspired many. We received more than 26,000 submissions.

This exhibition retraces our journey with Canadians to collect ideas. It tells the story of the 12 amazing women who, in the end, were considered for the honour, and of Viola Desmond and her lasting legacy as a human rights icon in Canada.

The artifacts in the exhibit are evocative reminders of Viola Desmond’s life and the time in which she lived. The focus has, of course, been on that day in a movie theatre in Nova Scotia in 1946. A successful business woman was denied a seat downstairs, was arrested and jailed, then ultimately convicted and fined for doing what was right in a system that was wrong.

Yet, that day in the theatre was not the first time Viola Desmond had experienced systemic racism. She had always dreamed of opening her own beauty salon, but the 1930s was not a time when a woman—and especially a black woman—could easily succeed. Nova Scotia beauty schools would not accept her, so Viola trained in Montréal and the United States. She then returned to Halifax to open her own studio in 1937, during the depths of the Great Depression. Viola Desmond had been an inspiration for years before she bought that fateful movie ticket.

Our exhibition includes mementos from Viola Desmond’s business and seats from the movie theatre where her public battle began.

More poignant still is Viola Desmond’s free pardon, granted in 2010 by the government of Nova Scotia, which recognized that she was innocent of the conviction that had remained on her record for 63 years. She never got to see justice served. It is a pleasure and honour to have Wanda Robson here today to share this moment dedicated to her sister.

The exhibition also highlights other design features of the vertical \$10 note, which centre on the theme of human rights and social justice. You will find an image of an eagle feather, an excerpt from the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and an image of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, where Wanda Robson spent the first new \$10 note 10 days ago.

We could not leave out of the exhibition the important stories of the 11 inspirational women who were also considered for the bank note. These remarkable women overcame barriers, created significant change and left Canada better because of their contributions.

Soon, many Canadians will carry a Viola Desmond note in their wallets. But the lessons of her life must continue to be told. That’s why I’m glad that, through this exhibition, people will be able to learn more about her history, and Canada’s history. It is by interpreting our past that we inform our future.

I hope you’ll spend some time touring the exhibition, and the rest of the wonderful museum we have here. Many Canadian stories are among the displays.

With that, I’d like to thank Ken Ross and the entire Museum team for their hard work in bringing

this exhibition together, and to introduce the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Status of Women. The partnership between the Government of Canada and the Bank in designing a new bank note has brought us to this historic moment. We are grateful the minister could be here today.