

# Florence Bird

1908 - 1998

*...my ideal was to write of important things, and to know what I was talking about. I wanted to improve things for women – and I believe I made a contribution. —Florence Bird, interview with the Ottawa Citizen, 19 January 1998.*

Journalist, feminist and pioneer in women's rights, Florence Rhein was born in Philadelphia and educated at Bryn Mawr College. She moved to Montreal in 1931 after marrying journalist John Bird. In 1937, she and her husband moved to Winnipeg where she began her own practice of journalism under the name Anne Francis. During the war years, she pub-



lished a weekly column for the *Winnipeg Tribune*. She began working for the CBC in 1941 and continued in the Corporation for 26 years. In 1946 the Birds moved to Ottawa where Florence became a member of the Parliamentary Press Gallery and worked as a CBC radio producer of a series of documentaries in seven countries of Europe. She was also a news commentator on the national and international services of CBC until 1967.

At Prime Minister Lester Pearson's invitation, she left journalism to take on the position of chairperson of the newly created Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1967-70). Its hearings and subsequent report are widely recognized as a pivotal point in the progress of the social, economic and legal status of women in Canada. In recognition of her many and diverse contributions to the advancement of women—before, during and after her work with the Royal Commission - she was honoured with the Governor-General's Persons Award in 1985.

Ms. Bird served on a number of Canadian delegations to the United Nations, primarily concerned with women's economic rights and the situation of women in developing countries. She was also a special consult-

ant for CIDA to the governments of Jamaica and Barbados (1975-7)

She was appointed to the Senate in 1978 and served till her mandatory retirement in 1983. There, as in previous stages of her life and professional career, she was recognized as an eloquent and passionate advocate for social justice.

Following her time in the Senate, Ms. Bird served for two years on the Advisory Council on the Status of Refugees (1983-5). She actively pursued her many areas of interest, including the Group of 78, almost to the time of her death in 1998.