

Anna Hughes



At a time in history when society was telling women that domestic bliss was the key to their happiness, a feisty Waterloo woman stepped outside the stereotype of a 1950s housewife.

As the first woman to seek a council seat in Waterloo, Anna Hughes approached her nomination pragmatically. “I feel that since women control 50 per cent of the vote there should be a place in council for a woman,” she said.

When the results were in, Hughes had won a respectable 1,741 votes in 1951, placing seventh among thirteen candidates. The mother of two children and president of the North Waterloo Women’s Progressive Conservative Association became the first woman in history to sit on the eight-member Waterloo council.

Hughes went on to serve for almost thirteen years and upon her retirement in 1963 it was written that Hughes “added the woman’s touch and spark to many a mundane council meeting.”

The mayor at the time noted that Hughes had served on every committee and helped “break much ground. You steadily climbed up the ladder and one of these years you would undoubtedly have been a fine mayor, as good a mayor as you were an alderman.”

For her part, Hughes went out encouraging council to diversify and not lean too heavily upon the city’s “university town” image. “You must not overlook the fact that industries are necessary to equalize our assessment. So don’t be pressured into a cultural environment and sell yourselves down the river,” she said.

Hughes retired to take a job as the division court clerk for Waterloo County. When she accepted the post in 1963 she was a widow with two grown children and had moved into an apartment after selling her Dunbar Avenue home.

Hughes approached her job as the county clerk with the same diligence with which she served Waterloo council for so many years. While her official hours were 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., she arrived each morning at 8 a.m. and took work home with the light burning “well past midnight.”

While Anna Hughes entertained further political ambitions, the year she had begun her county clerk job she said: Right now I am most interested in making a success of this job by getting everything going smoothly and in a business-like manner and by conquering the mounds of work that lie ahead.”

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