



MARIE CURTIS

1912 – 2006

Marie Curtis was no shrinking violet: throughout her years of public life, she was known as a serious, feisty, and plain-spoken woman. She fought vigorously for the issues she believed in and had many successes along the way.

Born in Midland, Ann Marie McCarthy (Curtis) was raised by an aunt in St. Louis, Missouri, but returned to Canada in her late teens where she worked for several years in a Toronto hat factory.

When she married her husband Bryce Curtis in 1933, they settled in the pre-amalgamation village of Long Branch.

A newspaper headline stating that seven teachers had been fired prompted Curtis to begin her life in activism and public service. She was elected president of the local Home and School Association and was successful in bringing kindergarten classes to the school. She began to attend local council meetings to learn more about the business of politics. In 1952, she learned that the position of Deputy Reeve was being filled by acclamation because the incumbent had no competition; Curtis decided to run against him and won. It was a testament to her popularity in Long Branch that she continued to be re-elected until she retired in 1962.

During her time in office, storm sewers were installed on every street, roads were paved and many apple trees planted throughout the community. Retired Mississauga Mayor Hazel McCallion recalled of Curtis: "If you wanted a job done, call Marie... When she was active, I was just a junior in local politics and I always admired her and had great respect for her."

Although she was a popular figure in Long Branch, it was on the newly-created Metro Council that people beyond her community began to learn more about Curtis. She was the first woman to sit on the powerful executive committee with Metro Chairman Fred Gardiner. She has been described as having politics that were both populist and conservative. After the

devastation of Hurricane Hazel, Curtis assisted homeless victims to relocate and a new park was created where their homes had once stood.

After retiring as Reeve, she continued to serve for an additional six years as Executive Director of the Association of Mayors and Reeves in Ontario (the forerunner to the Association of Municipalities of Ontario).

David Crombie, former Mayor of Toronto, was very aware of Curtis and commented at the time of her death in 2006: "She was absolutely a stormy petrel, as they used to call them in those days... She was a doughty defender of her municipality, no doubt about it. I'm an old Swansea guy from the waterfront, and Marie Curtis was one of my mom's heroes."

The thirty-five acre park at the mouth of Etobicoke Creek, which she helped to create, is named in her honour. There was discussion at the time about what the name of the park should be. According to Curtis's daughter Joan McGee, "First they were going to call it Curtis Park... then [former Ontario premier] Les Frost told Fred Gardiner that they would have to call it Marie Curtis Park, because there was only one Marie Curtis."

Inducted into the Etobicoke Hall of Fame in 1988