

On Thursday, October 5, 2006 at 2 p.m., the Ontario Heritage Trust and the Sarnia Kiwanis Foundation unveiled a provincial plaque commemorating The Honourable Pauline McGibbon in Sarnia, Ontario.

The bilingual plaque reads as follows:

PAULINE MCGIBBON 1910-2001

The first woman to hold a vice-regal office in Canada, Pauline Emily Mills, was born in Sarnia, Ontario in 1910. After local schooling and a degree at Victoria College, University of Toronto, she married Donald Walker McGibbon in 1935. A life-long volunteer and supporter of the arts, Mrs. McGibbon became president of the Dominion Drama Festival in 1948 and national president of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire in 1963. She was the first woman to lead such organizations as the Canadian Conference of the Arts (1972) and the National Arts Centre (1980). In 1974 McGibbon was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Ontario (1974-80) where she focused on culture and the arts. She was honoured as a Companion of the Order of Canada (1980) and a member of the Order of Ontario (1988). Once described as "Ontario's Eve" for all her 'first woman' achievements, the Honourable Pauline McGibbon dedicated her life to the betterment of her community, province and nation.

PAULINE MCGIBBON 1910-2001

Première femme à occuper une fonction vice-royale au Canada, Pauline Emily Mills est née à Sarnia, en Ontario, en 1910. Après avoir fait ses études primaires et secondaires dans les écoles locales et obtenu un diplôme du Collège Victoria à l'Université de Toronto, elle épousa Donald Walker McGibbon en 1935. Bénévole et défenseur des arts pendant toute sa vie, Mme McGibbon devint présidente du Festival national d'art dramatique en 1948 et présidente nationale de l'Ordre impérial des filles de l'Empire en 1963. Elle fut la première femme à diriger des organismes comme la Conférence canadienne des arts (1972) et le Centre national des Arts (1980). En 1974, Mme McGibbon fut nommée lieutenant-gouverneure de l'Ontario (1974-1980) et, dans le cadre de ces fonctions, elle mit l'accent sur la culture et les arts. Elle fut nommée Compagnon de l'Ordre du Canada (1980) et membre de l'Ordre de l'Ontario (1988). Surnommée l'« Ève de l'Ontario » pour toutes ses « réalisations de femme pionnière », l'honorable Pauline McGibbon a consacré sa vie à améliorer sa collectivité, la province et la nation.

Historical background

The Honourable Pauline McGibbon served the Province of Ontario with distinction in her viceregal role for six and a half years – the first woman in the British Commonwealth to hold such a position. She was also the first woman to serve as the director of four major Canadian corporations: George Weston Ltd., IBM Canada Ltd., Imasco and Mercedes-Benz Canada Inc. McGibbon went on to overcome gender stereotypes and to attain senior positions in post-secondary institutions and the arts, as well as in business and government.

Early life and family influences

Pauline Emily Mills was born on October 20, 1910, the only child of Alfred (Fred) William Mills and Ethel Salina (née French), at Sarnia, Ontario. Pauline's father ran a clothing and dry goods store in Sarnia, in partnership with his brother Edgar. Fred was active in the community affairs, was an outgoing personality and loved music. He sang in the Sarnia Male Choir, which won honours at the Canadian National Exhibition in 1932, and in the choir of the Sarnia Central Baptist Church. Pauline's mother, Ethel, has been described by contemporaries as a strong personality and no doubt exerted a lasting influence on her only child. When Fred Mills died in 1938, Ethel continued a portion of the family business for another decade. She was described in a Sarnia obituary as a "community worker, businesswoman and music lover."¹ Ethel's special interests were music and education. A baby grand piano sat in the parlour, a reflection of her interests and an indication of the family's socio-economic standing. Ethel was a member of the Sarnia Music Club and president from 1926 to 1935. She was the organist of Central Baptist Church for a number of years and volunteered for several local choirs and orchestras. She served on the executive of the Lambton County Music Festival for over three decades and was its first female president.

Ethel championed the teaching of music in schools and was the second woman elected to the Sarnia Board of Education. She served as its chair for over two decades. She was credited with helping maintain good relations between the board and its teachers, and was honoured by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation with its Lamp of Learning award. The board established a scholarship in her name. Ethel also served as a director of the Children's Aid Society, and throughout her life professed a strong belief in the importance of contributing to the welfare and cultural improvement of her community – a belief Pauline would embrace with passion. One contemporary noted: "Ethel Mills really set the stage of Pauline's appointment as Lieutenant-Governor. I don't mean that Pauline didn't have the talent. She did ... tons of it ... and she came by it honestly."²

¹ Norma West Linder and Hope Morritt, *Pauline: a warm look at Ontario Lt.-Gov. Pauline McGibbon*, (Sarnia, Ontario: River City Press, 1979), p. 73. Hereafter Linder and Morritt, *Pauline*.

² Linder and Morritt, *Pauline*, p. 76.

Pauline attended Lochiel Street Elementary School, just two blocks from her home, and later the Sarnia Collegiate Institute and Technical School (SCITS). During school breaks she worked at her father's store. After finishing secondary school, Pauline attended Victoria College at the University of Toronto. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in modern history in 1933.

Pauline met Donald (Don) Walker McGibbon at SCITS and the two became high-school sweethearts. Don also attended the University of Toronto's Victoria College and graduated in 1932 with a degree in political science and economics. He returned to Sarnia and took a position with Imperial Oil, one of the community's major employers. Pauline and Don married in Sarnia on January 26, 1935. They would have no children. Pauline once told her lifelong friend, author Marian Engel, "I never had any maternal urge. Even when I played with dolls I made them into grownups."³

In 1940 Don was transferred to Imperial Oil's comptroller's office in Toronto. Following an advanced management course at Harvard Business School in 1948, he was promoted to Treasurer and became a vice-president in 1974, one year before his retirement. Over the years, Don served as president of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Dominion Drama Festival, vice-president of the Ontario Arts Council and chairman of the board for Victoria College, Toronto.⁴ Don strongly supported Pauline in her many volunteer activities. In 1976 she told *Macleans Magazine* that her husband "kept saying that I was a more interesting person to live with because of the things I did."⁵

Volunteer work

In 1935, in the midst of the Great Depression, a married woman, particularly one whose husband enjoyed secure employment, was not encouraged to enter the labour force. To do so at that time, would be seen as competing with others, mostly men, who had families to support. Such thinking was common at that time. Pauline was not interested in raising a family nor did home life appeal to her. She soon turned, perhaps following her mother's lead, to volunteer activities. Her special interests were the improvement of community services and the fostering of culture, particularly the theatre arts.

Shortly after her marriage, Pauline learned that a new junior chapter of the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE) was forming in Sarnia and decided to join. The IODE had originally been created in 1900 to promote the British Empire, but by the 1930s was dedicated to improving the lives of children and youth through the betterment of community educational, health and social services. Among the first efforts of the Alexander Vidal chapter of the IODE

³ Marian Engel, "Pauline McGibbon: the woman behind all those 'First Woman' jobs," *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1974.

Hereafter Engel, "Pauline McGibbon," *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1976.

⁴ Linder and Morritt, *Pauline*, pp. 59-65; *Canadian Who's Who*, 1987, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); "'Ontario's Eve' was a feminist in deed," *Toronto Star*, 16 Dec. 2001.

⁵ *Macleans Magazine*, Apr. 1976; quoted in Linder and Morritt, *Pauline*, p. 65.

was the creation of a book lending service for patients at the Sarnia General Hospital and the making of layettes for the babies of unwed mothers. Given her willingness to volunteer her time, her hard work and her energy, it is not surprising that McGibbon rose within its ranks – eventually becoming national president in 1963 – and in the process gained a reputation as a tireless and dedicated worker.⁶

Ms. McGibbon's interest in education led her to become the first president of the Children's Film Library of Canada in 1948 and, a decade later, vice-president of the Canadian Association for Adult Education. She also served as the first woman president of the University of Toronto Alumni Association in 1952 and was a member of the Senate of the University of Toronto (1952-61). In 1971 she became the first woman chancellor of the University of Toronto and the first woman governor of Upper Canada College (1971-74).

McGibbon showed an interest in the theatre and performed in some amateur productions in her youth. In 1948 she was contacted by the Dominion Drama Festival and asked if she would like to serve as its unpaid secretary. She later told Marian Engel: "I was scared. I was film officer of the IODE and I didn't then know you could do two things at once. I asked Don about it. He said it would be difficult because Park [Jamieson, its head] was such a perfectionist – and that sold me."⁷ Pauline was not one to back away from a challenge, and this evolved into a lifelong commitment to Canadian theatre. In 1957 she became president of the Dominion Drama Festival and recipient of the Canadian Drama Award.

Shortly after becoming Lieutenant-Governor Pauline told the graduating class of Lambton College, Sarnia:

... there came a period when the concept of volunteer work was treated with amusement and sometimes even with contempt. It was called dilettante activity suitable for people – mainly women – who didn't have enough real work to do. And it was said to be a hangover from the nineteenth century, a 'cultural lag' phenomenon that should be progressively phased out because everything necessary should be done for other people through progressive social legislation.

Now, however, we have realized not only that government cannot do it all, but that, in a healthy society, they should not do it all. We know now, that community and neighbourhood group participation is essential to keep the human dimension in urban and economic development, and that social services are no substitute for human contact and sympathy....

⁶ Engel, "Pauline McGibbon," *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1976; Linder and Morritt, *Pauline*, pp. 65 and 71-73; *Canadian Who's Who*, 1987.

⁷ Engel, "Pauline McGibbon," *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1976.

Volunteerism ... is something that our way of life is predicated upon. In North America we are brought up to believe, and I feel rightly so, that if one is contributing some of his or her free time to improving our way of life, it indicates a sense of obligation to community, province or country.

I would only add that the gift of self to others enriches all. It is through helping others to overcome alienation, to find their true identity and to feel they are loved and valued, that you yourself become most truly human.⁸

The Commonwealth's first woman Lieutenant-Governor

There was a good deal of speculation early in 1974 that the Liberal government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau was looking for a woman to become the next Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.⁹ Those who knew Pauline McGibbon saw her as an excellent candidate. She was a self-assured and accomplished individual, and was well known in social and cultural circles. Another factor in her favour was that, while she was a woman, she had no link with what some saw as an increasingly strident feminist movement. Pauline herself confessed that she did not consider the possibility of being named Lieutenant-Governor until Don called her from cooking dinner one evening to answer a telephone call from the Prime Minister.¹⁰ At age 64, when most people are contemplating retirement, McGibbon was about to take her first salaried job. She would turn back most of her \$35,000 annual salary to cover office expenses; \$200 per month she invested for her retirement.¹¹ She accepted the post with enthusiasm, becoming the first female viceregal representative in the entire Commonwealth. She looked forward both to the social aspects of her new role and to the possibilities of being better positioned to advance the arts.¹² In 1979 Trudeau extended her five-year term by another year.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario is deeply involved in the constitutional and community life of the province. The constitutional responsibilities are to swear-in the Executive Council, outline the Government's plans in the Speech from the Throne, provide the Royal Assent needed for bills to become law, approve orders-in-council and appointments recommended by Cabinet, and to prorogue or dissolve each session of parliament. The community role is comprised of representing the people of Ontario and acting as the province's official host, welcoming world leaders and diplomats. The Lieutenant-Governor hosts or attends hundreds of community events throughout Ontario.

⁸ Quoted in Linder and Morritt, *Pauline*, pp. 71-72.

⁹ "The Queen's lieutenant," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 19 Jan. 1974, p. 06.

¹⁰ Engel, "Pauline McGibbon," *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1976.

¹¹ Graeme Smith, "Ontario lieutenant-governor was a pioneer for women," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 17 Dec. 2001, p. A11.

¹² John Slinger, "Mrs. McGibbon, 'a beggar for the arts,' new Queen's representative in Ontario," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 18 Jan. 1974, pp. 1-2.

While in office, McGibbon chose to focus on culture and the arts. With her serene and unflappable personality, she handled the job as though it was second nature to her. She especially enjoyed ceremonies celebrating the theatre. In 1978 she gleefully took the controls of a mechanical shovel at the groundbreaking for Massey Hall in Toronto. She brought this down-to-earth attitude to the role, and a genuine sense of caring that those she met continually remarked upon. As Marian Engel noted, Her Honour's staff of three secretaries were not simply helpers, but people to be introduced to an old friend.¹³

As Lieutenant-Governor she travelled extensively throughout Ontario, attending ceremonies and special events, hosting receptions, giving speeches, and meeting as many Ontarians as she could with her customary warmth and enthusiasm.¹⁴ In a retrospective, McGibbon was credited with "entertaining more people [1,005 receptions] giving more speeches [497] and receiving more visitors [92,294] than any of her predecessors."¹⁵ In 1979 the Pauline McGibbon Cultural Centre in Toronto was opened and named in her honour. At the end of her term in office, the Ontario government established the Pauline McGibbon Honorary Award in Theatre Arts as a lasting recognition of her special interests. At the same time, the federal government promoted her from Officer to Companion within the Order of Canada.

Later years

Once freed of the responsibilities incumbent upon a representative of the Crown, Her Honour returned to advocacy efforts with renewed vigour. In 1981 she was named a director of the Mount Sinai Institute, a Toronto medical research facility, and became chair of the Ontario selection committee for Rhodes scholarships in 1983. McGibbon returned to her earlier business interests, becoming the first woman director of George Weston Limited in 1981 and a director of Mercedes-Benz Canada Inc. two years later.

McGibbon's passions remained volunteerism and the theatre arts. She became a director of Massey Hall and of Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto, and vice-president and honorary patron of volunteers for the latter. She became the first woman chair of the board of trustees for the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in 1980 and, four years later, chaired the Toronto International Festival. Following her term as Lieutenant-Governor, McGibbon was granted honorary degrees by McMaster, Carleton and Windsor universities. In 1985 she became the honorary chair of the Sarnia Kiwanis Foundation as it embarked on the challenge of converting her old elementary school into the Lochiel Kiwanis Community Centre. She became the first

¹³ Engel, "Pauline McGibbon," *Chatelaine*, Oct. 1976.

¹⁴ According to an article in the *Toronto Star*, Pauline hosted 1005 receptions, gave 497 speeches and welcomed 92,294 visitors to her office during her term as lieutenant-governor. Warren Gerard, "'Ontario's Eve' was a feminist in deed," *Toronto Star*, 16 Dec. 2001, p. A19.

¹⁵ Victor Olivier, "Pauline McGibbon," *The Report Newsmagazine*, 21 Jan. 2002.

life member of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce in 1980 and was made a member of the Order of Ontario in 1988.

In May 1995 Ms. McGibbon suffered a serious stroke that left her unable to speak. Don, her husband of 61 years, died the following year. Pauline's health gradually declined and she died on December 14, 2001, at the age of 91. She was buried next to her husband at Sarnia Lakeview Cemetery.

Final remembrances

Pauline McGibbon made a lasting impression on her community, her province and her country. Lieutenant-Governor Hilary Weston said of Pauline at her memorial:

Pauline's inspirational for a generation of Canadian women. At a time when a woman's role was more circumscribed, she confounded expectations by dedicating herself to a life of exemplary public service, and support and encouragement of the arts.¹⁶

Governor General Adrienne Clarkson described her as "one of the most vital and giving women in Canada," and added:

...her work for the Dominion Drama Festival and her groundbreaking appointment as Ontario's first female lieutenant-governor gave hope and encouragement to the generations of women who were struggling through the second wave of feminism towards true equality.¹⁷

When asked in 1980 what she would like to have inscribed on her tombstone, she replied: "I never thought about it. Off the top, that I was the wife of Don and the first woman Lieutenant-Governor in Canada, in the British Commonwealth."¹⁸ Long-time friend, scholar and literary critic Northrop Frye perhaps penned the best epitaph for Pauline McGibbon. She was, he wrote, "useful as a precedent-breaker: her career is peppered with the phrase 'first woman,' as though she were Ontario's Eve."¹⁹ The Honourable Pauline McGibbon dedicated her life to the betterment of her community, province and nation.

¹⁶ Richard Brennan, "McGibbon remembered for mix of 'warmth, dignity,'" *Toronto Star*, 23 Dec. 2001, p. A7.

¹⁷ Warren Gerard, "'Ontario's Eve' was a feminist in deed," *Toronto Star*, 16 Dec. 2001, p. A19.

¹⁸ Graeme Smith, "Ontario lieutenant-governor was a pioneer for women," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 17 Dec. 2001, p. A11.

¹⁹ Warren Gerard, "'Ontario's Eve' was a feminist in deed," *Toronto Star*, 16 Dec. 2001, p. A19.

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