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It's Our History, Our Country

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 by *Ronald Wolf*

It was a year that changed Canadian politics forever. On Jan.6, 1936, just 16 years after women fought for and won the right to vote, Barbara McCallum Hanley, 1882 -1959, became the first mayor in Canada. Her town was Webbwood, Ont.



Thirteen was not an unlucky number for Mrs. Hanley. She defeated her opponent, R. E. Streich, by 13 votes - 82 to 69. Her "victory speech" as reported in The Sudbury Star was as follows: "I had a four-square platform. I promised to do the best I could. It makes me feel very meek, indeed, to be the first woman mayor of Webbwood. I feel that it is a great responsibility."

Born in Magnetawan, Ont., she moved to Webbwood, west of Sudbury, in 1909 to work as a schoolteacher. She married Joseph Hanley, a Canadian Pacific Railway foreman, in 1913. She subsequently served on the public school board from 1923 to 1935, and then served one year on the town council.

She stepped down as mayor in 1944, and served for four more years as the town clerk and treasurer before retiring.

In her term of office, and as a member of the Sudbury District Municipal Association, Mrs. Hanley was strongly in support of the establishment of a home for the aged in the Sudbury district. She met with officials of the Ontario Department of Public Welfare in Toronto in late 1943 to urge that such a home be built as a post-war project.

Hanley retired as mayor after eight consecutive terms and was appointed clerk - treasurer of Webbwood, a position she filled for four years before retiring from active municipal work.

Hanley died in Sudbury Memorial Hospital on Jan. 26, 1959, at the age of 76. Funeral services and interment were at Burk Falls, the village of her childhood in the Parry Sound district.

Many women have followed in the footsteps of Mrs. Hanley to head civic governments in Canada. But there is only one "first" and only one municipality in Canada that can claim the distinction.

Once again this event is a first for Canadians. After all, it's our history, our country.

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