
“Partners in Service” Exhibit in Alberta

Valerie Footz

On May 9, 2012 the Alberta Speaker unveiled the Partners in Service Exhibit honouring contributions made by the partners of Alberta’s former Premiers. The exhibit noted that while the Premiers hold a demanding and highly visible position and their lives have become part of the Alberta’s documented history, little is known about their spouses all of whom made a significant contribution to the success of their partners. This article contains extracts from the biographical information about the thirteen partners in service featured in the exhibit located on the fifth floor of the Legislature Building.

In one of his last formal duties, retiring Speaker Ken Kowalski hosted the official unveiling of the exhibit honouring the spouses of Alberta’s Premiers since 1905. Speaker Kowalski was inspired to pay tribute to the spouses of Premiers after visits to Washington and California where First Ladies of

individuals who, although they did not serve as elected Members of the Legislative Assembly nonetheless supported and helped shape Alberta as it is today. This permanent exhibit is the first of its kind in Canada.

The unveiling featured short remarks from Speaker Kowalski and Premier Alison Redford while Mrs.



Premier Redford, former Premier Stelmach and grandchild, Mrs. Margaret Getty, and Mrs. Jeanne Lougheed take their first look at the exhibit

Presidents and Governors respectively are recognized for their role. The exhibit adds a new dimension to the understanding of Alberta’s legislative history and features the strength of character required by those

Lougheed, Mrs. Getty and Mrs. Stelmach provided insight into their experiences, talked about the highs and lows of public life, and shared some of their previously unknown contributions and sacrifices. Commemorative booklets were distributed to those in attendance. The event was one of the last public appearances for the Hon. Peter Lougheed, who sadly passed away in September 2012.

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The contributions of the 13 individuals emerged as Legislature Library staff researched and compiled information and photographs. The opportunities and challenges that the spouses of the Premiers have encountered since 1905 are revealing. Beginning with research compiled for *The Mantle of Leadership: Premiers of the North-West Territories and Alberta, 1897-2005*, Legislature Library staff spent months researching the thirteen subjects, drafting and polishing the accompanying text, and securing appropriate photographs.

The first step was to concentrate the research on the partner as an individual. As is expected, information about partners from the early 20th century was difficult to locate. Emphasis was placed on the period of time that their partner served as Premier. Reflective of the times, the focus of the press was not on the spouse or the family. Gradually, the fact that the family, and particularly the partner, is an important support for the Premier has been recognized. As evidenced by the abbreviated biographies in this article, the opportunities for and involvement in more public life increased over the years.

Painstaking searches of census lists, newspapers and archives yielded perplexing problems and discoveries. In some cases, years of birth did not agree between appearances on the census or with headstones or family information. For example, primary sources recording Mattie Rutherford's date of birth ranged from 1860 to 1869. In these cases, decisions were made based on the most logical likelihood.

Library staff located descendants for all subjects with the exception of Mary Sifton and, in all cases, families generously loaned rare photographs and shared family histories. Mr. Frank Greenfield trusted us with the only photograph of his grandmother in his possession and subsequently allowed us to reproduce the photograph for the exhibit.

When possible, the subjects themselves were contacted directly for information. Mrs. Strom, Mrs. Lougheed, Mrs. Getty, Mrs. Klein, and Mrs. Stelmach patiently and openly answered questions about themselves and their backgrounds, memories, causes and passions. Each person was able to bring attention to important issues and worthy organizations which in turn benefited from their knowledge and skills. The province has been enriched by the public service of each of these individuals.

Since its unveiling, the *Partners in Service* exhibit has been very well received. It has become a regular stop on public tours and has helped to provide a fuller

Partner	Premier	Term
Mattie Rutherford	Alexander C. Rutherford	1905-1910
Mary Sifton	Arthur L.W. Sifton	1910-1917
Jane Stewart	Charles Stewart	1917-1921
Elizabeth Greenfield	Herbert Greenfield	1921-1925
Florence Brownlee	John E. Brownlee	1925-1934
Marion Reid	Richard G. Reid	1934-1935
Jessie Aberhart	William Aberhart	1935-1943
Muriel Manning	Ernest C. Manning	1943-1968
Ruth Strom	Harry E. Strom	1968-1971
Jeanne Lougheed	E. Peter Lougheed	1971-1985
Margaret Getty	Donald R. Getty	1985-1992
Colleen Klein	Ralph P. Klein	1992-2006
Marie Stelmach	Edward M. Stelmach	2006-2011
Glen Jermyn*	Alison M. Redford	2011-
*Mr. Jermyn's portrait will join the exhibit after Premier Redford's tenure ends		

picture of life in public service. Speaker Kowalski's vision has become reality through the hard work of staff throughout the Legislative Assembly Office with particular credit to the staff of Library Services and Communication Services. Most of all we wish to acknowledge the generous assistance and gracious cooperation of the subjects and their families for their contributions. The following partners are featured in the exhibit.

Martha "Mattie" Birkett was born and raised in Ottawa. At school, Mattie learned needlework, painting, music, and cooking. She met young lawyer, Alexander Rutherford, through her uncle. The couple was married in Ottawa in 1888 and, in June 1895, the family moved west to Edmonton. Mattie Rutherford was active in community life, including as an honorary vice-president of the Alberta Women's Association, whose mission was to promote higher education for women. Later, this group would incidentally fight to save Rutherford House (the Rutherfords' historic home) from demolition in the late 1960s.

Mary Deering was born in Cobourg, Ontario. In 1882, she married Arthur Sifton. In 1889, after spending time in Manitoba and the Provisional District of Saskatchewan, the Sifton family moved to Calgary. Mary was involved in a number of organizations, including the Women's Volunteer Reserve and the Victorian Order of Nurses as well as being patroness of the Women's Hospital Aid, Royal Alexandra.

Jane Sneath was born in Simcoe County, Ontario. Jane was active in her community and church. In 1890, she married Charles Stewart, who was

at that time farming in the area. A year after the destruction of their farm by violent weather in 1905, the family moved to the area around Killam, Alberta. Jane was an active member of the Red Cross during the First World War and also cared for those suffering from the Spanish influenza during the 1918 epidemic.

Elizabeth Harris was born in Adelaide Township, Ontario. Elizabeth was very talented and taught music to local children. In 1900, she married Herbert Greenfield at the home of her parents near Adelaide. In 1906, the family moved to a homestead near the settlement of Edison, Alberta. As part of a group within the community, Elizabeth was instrumental in turning an old sawmill cookhouse into a one-room school. In addition, she was involved in founding the Westlock Agricultural Fair and the local chapter of the United Farm Women of Alberta.

Florence Edy was born in London, Ontario. Florence graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree from McMaster University in 1909. She met John Brownlee at a skating rink while she was at university. She moved with her family to Calgary and enrolled at Calgary Normal School. She taught for a short time in a one-room school near High River, Alberta. On December 23, 1912, Florence married John Brownlee. She was the first spouse of a Premier of Alberta to hold a university degree. She often assisted the Dean of Women of the University of Alberta by hosting events at the Brownlee residence.

Marion Stuart was born in Glengarry County, Ontario. In 1908, her family settled in Alberta's Scotstoun area. Shortly after their arrival, Marion became responsible for the care of her siblings while her father worked in Calgary. When she was no longer required at home, Marion left for Calgary to help her aunt operate a boarding house. In about 1915, she returned to Mannville in the Scotstoun area, where she would later meet Richard Reid. In 1919, the couple was married in the local school. Family was important to Marion, and her home was a gathering place for her immediate and extended family.

Janet "Jessie" Flatt was born in Puslinch Township, Wellington County, Ontario. In 1902, in Galt, Ontario, Jessie married William Aberhart. In 1910, the family moved to Calgary when William received an offer as a school principal. Jessie Aberhart assisted with political campaigns and was a proponent of women's participation in politics. She had a reputation of being generous and gregarious and was known for her philanthropic activities. In addition to her active involvement with the Red Cross, Jessie Aberhart served as a member on the board of the Calgary YWCA and as a member of the executive of the Women's Canadian Club.

Muriel Preston was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. In 1920, she moved to Calgary with her mother and she attended the Sacred Heart Convent. Muriel was a concert pianist with qualifications from the Royal Academy of London, England. She later became the musical director for William Aberhart's Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute and his radio broadcasts. It was through her involvement with the Bible Institute that she met Ernest Manning. The couple was married on April 14, 1936 and Premier Aberhart gave the bride away. Muriel Manning was active in the Social Credit Women's Auxiliary and, in 1968, was named an honorary councillor of the Social Credit Auxiliary.

Ruth Johnson was born on her family farm in the Bow Island, Alberta. Ruth was the first spouse of a Premier of Alberta to have been born in the province. She took her first year of schooling in Sweden and subsequent education in Bow Island. On October 27, 1938, in the United Church in Bow Island, Ruth married Harry Strom. The two had met for the first time at the Strom home when Ruth was 12 and renewed acquaintance when she was 17 at church. She later served as a deaconess at the Evangelical Free Church. Ruth was involved in the Social Credit Party, including serving as vice-president of the Strathcona-West Ladies' Auxiliary of the Social Credit League.

Jeanne Rogers was born in Forestburg, Alberta. She studied ballet and voice as a young girl. Jeanne attended the University of Alberta where she met Peter Lougheed. In 1951, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree. The couple was married at Edmonton's Metropolitan United Church in 1952. Jeanne Lougheed has been celebrated for her hard work behind the scenes for many cultural and educational organizations, including the National Ballet of Canada and the Calgary Art Gallery Foundation. She was appointed a Fellow of the Banff Centre for Performing Arts in 2004. She has served as a director of several companies. The William Watson Lodge, a recreational facility for individuals with disabilities, was her brainchild.

Margaret Mitchell was born in London, Ontario. In 1955, at London's St. Matthew's Anglican Church, Margaret married her high school sweetheart, Donald Getty. Margaret had been a cheerleader at Sir Adam Beck Collegiate in London, where Don Getty played on the football team. After their marriage, the couple moved to Jasper Place, Alberta, where Don played as a quarterback for the Edmonton Eskimos. Margaret Getty was actively involved in the community, visiting hospitals, schools and seniors' residences. She served on numerous boards such as Government House Foundation and the Alberta Hospital Edmonton and carried out fundraising for a variety of causes, including cystic fibrosis and women's emergency shelters.

Colleen Hamilton was born in Victoria, British Columbia. In 1972, she married Ralph Klein in Calgary. Colleen Klein's Métis heritage is a matter of great pride to her, and in fact she is the first person of Métis origin to be the spouse of a Premier of Alberta. Colleen has been very devoted to causes involving children and aboriginal concerns. She was instrumental in starting the Kids Kottage Foundation in Edmonton and chaired the Alberta Children's Forum. She has also been involved with the health and wellness of Alberta's aboriginal communities, participating in the Aboriginal Health Conference and Crossroads Women's Sharing Circles.

Marie Warshawski was born in Lamont, Alberta. In 1973, at Protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Krakow, Alberta, Marie married Ed Stelmach. Marie Stelmach held executive positions with a number of organizations, including the 4-H program in her community, the Lamont Further Education Council, and the Andrew Library Board. Marie has assisted many charities, particularly those that assist children and the elderly, and has served on numerous boards, including the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital Foundation and the Canadian Red Cross, Alberta division.



A portrait of each partner is located on the west side of the fifth floor of the Legislature Building