

Grace Hartman

1900 - 1998

Grace Armstrong was born in Markdale, Ontario in 1900. After high school, she enrolled at Victoria College, University of Toronto, where she was president of the Women's Literary Society and vice-president of her year. Ontario College of Education followed university, after which Grace taught English, French, Latin, Phys Ed and Art at the high school level.

She moved to Sudbury after marrying George Hartman in 1938. He was superintendent of power plants for the International Nickel Company at High Falls, near Sudbury, Ontario. George was a distant cousin and was somewhat older than Grace. There was a wonderful partnership, with George being a strong pillar of support for his wife's many activities.

In 1945, Grace was appointed the first woman member of the Sudbury High School Board, a position she held for five years and an event which marked the beginning of her public service career.

In 1950, at the urging of the Sudbury Business and Professional Women's Club, Grace ran for alderman, topping the polls. She shares the distinction with Dr. Faustina Kelly Cook of being one of the first women to serve on Sudbury City Council. They were both elected to Sudbury City Council on December 4, 1950. She served on council until 1954 when she was elected the city's comptroller. She became Sudbury's first female mayor on October 18, 1966 when she was selected by city council following the death of the city's previous mayor, Max Silverman. However, in the municipal elections the following year, she was defeated the city's popular long-time mayor, Joe Fabbro, Silverman's predecessor stood for election again.

Mayor Grace Hartman was in place for Sudbury's centennial celebrations, and she went to work to try "to see Sudbury develop its image along educational and cultural lines, and away from the old picture of a frontier town." One of her most successful projects was to have an amphitheatre built on a tract of land bordering on Ramsey Lake, which had been given to the citizens on the death of Mrs. W.J. Bell. Grace wanted concerts to be held for young and old, resident and tourist, embracing the cultures of local ethnic groups. To this day, the amphitheatre is the site for the annual Northern Lights Festival Boreal, one of Ontario's largest folk festivals. CFUW Sudbury took the lead and worked collaboratively with four other community groups to have the Bell Park Amphitheatre re-named in her honour in 2001. Creating the amphitheatre had been one of Hartman's key projects during her city council term.

She was a founding member of CFUW Sudbury and the first president. In 1955, she was a founding member of the YWCA chapter in Sudbury and later served as President. She was an honorary Life Member of the Business and Professional Women's Club of Sudbury. Grace organized the Sudbury Folk Arts Council and the Sudbury Ethnic Group Programs presenting sing and dancing depicting their cultural life. During Ontario's International Women's Year celebrations in 1975, Grace Hartman was designated one of the 25 leading women of Ontario.

After the death of George Hartman in 1960, she married Arthur Grout in 1969. In the late 1970s, she and her husband retired to Toronto. Grace and Arthur travelled extensively to all four corners of the world, wintering in Florida and summering in Chapleau. Grace's love of dancing continued well into her 80s, when she was still taking dance classes four times a week in Florida. As she told it, "dancing gives me pleasure and exercise."

Mr. Grout passed away and Grace married Mr. Meade. She became blind but never lost her sense of adventure and independence. She travelled from Toronto to Sudbury in June 1982 to receive an honorary Doctor of Laws from Laurentian University where she had once worked in the extension department and where she had established two scholarships, one of which is for a mature woman graduate in the social sciences. In the early 1990s, she again flew alone to Sudbury to receive an award from the Sudbury BPW. She had to ask directions to her gate at the Toronto airport but refused assistance. She gave an outstanding speech to a full house at the cavern at Science North without the benefit of notes, as she could not see to read. It was a very emotional highlight in a life of public service.

Grace died at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto on May 23, 1998. She paved the way for women to run for public office, to chair public boards and to continue their education to the highest level.

