

inated mostly by elderly white men, her political interests didn't miss the unusual involvement of highly intelligent women in a town to the south of her hamlet of French Settlement.

In Tweed, women were making political history.

It was in 1967 that Tweed voters elected an all-female municipal council, a rarity even to this day.

"When I think back in my life, in 1967 Tweed was the first council in Canada to have a first (all)-woman council. We made history nationally as the first all-woman council. It garnered very positive attention. My God-mother Dora Courneyea served on that council led by Barbara Allen."

Dombrowsky was 10 at the time and remembers being impressed with the all-woman council.

"I think it had an impact on me in terms of my potential beliefs and possibilities. I grew up in a community with women in representative roles. It helped form an understanding in me that it was possible for a woman to have these representative roles," she said.

Even by today's standards where women occupy elected office regularly at more senior levels of government, rural ridings like Hastings and surrounding areas are still largely led by mostly-male councils, she said.

"I have over 20 municipalities in my riding. None of them are headed by a female. That's why I was so thrilled when Hastings County Warden Margaret Walsh was elected as the first-ever warden there," said Dombrowsky.

As the young Dombrowsky moved up the ladder of separate school, many Sisters nurtured her love for oratory in front of the class, a skill she would later cherish each time she rose in the provincial Legislature to debate the issues.

"I will always be grateful for the time and energy they spent with me. They always insisted I was going to be a speaker. As early as Grade 1, they recognized my skills as a public speaker. They helped cultivate that through the years," said Dombrowsky.

Sister Mary Teresa, an English teacher at Nicholson Catholic College, was instrumental in Dombrowsky's development.

"She taught me about being respectful, poise, presenting myself well and speaking clearly."

In the 1970s, Dombrowsky said she was inspired by another strong female role model who helped plant the political seed which grew into a worthy ambition to represent others.

●
**"ONLY 16 PER
CENT OF
REPRESENTATIVES
(MPPs) OF
ONTARIO ARE
FEMALE, YET
55 PER CENT OF
THE POPULATION
OF ONTARIO
IS FEMALE."**
●

The late Lillian O'Connor of Marmora was a member of the Catholic Women's League, the first chairwoman of the Hastings-Prince Edward Roman Catholic Separate School Board, a Liberal provincial MPP candidate and, in her spare time, raised 14 children.

"I saw her as a woman who was well-respected and loved by her family and as a woman who represented her faith in the community," said Dombrowsky. "She was the example of how you could blend all areas of your life. She dared to go where woman had not gone before in this area."

With such strong female influences, Dombrowsky took her first leap toward political representation and placed her name on the municipal ballot for trustee in 1985 against Michael Cassidy and Edmund Courneyea.

Dombrowsky won by one vote and made history as the first woman from Tweed and area to earn a seat on the separate school board which she later chaired.

For 14 years, she worked in the trenches and learned the challenges of running a large institution fraught with problems including lack of cash as the province pulled back education funding.

Fast forward to 1999 when Dombrowsky entered the record books by defeating all comers in HFLA riding to become the first woman MPP.

Once again, as Dombrowsky took her seat for the first time in the provincial Legislature, she drew upon her experience and instincts to meet the challenge at hand.

From submitting a private member's bill on water taking permits to fighting for services at Lennox and Addington hospital, Dombrowsky soon emerged as a fighter and just as quickly earned a reputation as a force to be reckoned with on the Opposition side of the Legislature.