

Charlotte Whitton honored by Ottawa

by Harry Hinchley

Charlotte Whitton was honored, Friday when an historical plaque was unveiled in the Council Chambers in Ottawa City Hall.

The inscription on the Ontario Heritage Foundation plaque reads:

CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH WHITTON, Q.C., C.B.E., 1896-1975. The first woman mayor of Canada's capital, 1951-56 and 1961-64, Charlotte Whitton was born in Renfrew, educated there and at Queen's University. In 1920 she became secretary

of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare (later the Canadian Welfare Council) and the first executive director, 1926-1941, worked energetically to improve the condition of indigent mothers. Fiercely and controversially, Charlotte Whitton represented Canada on the League of Nations Social Questions Committee and investigated Alberta welfare practices for the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, of which she was a lifelong member. She wrote prolifically on a variety of subjects including lumbering on the Ottawa, and Canadian women in war. Her many distinctions included honorary degrees from Smith College, Queens and Acadia Universities.

Charlotte (Lottie) Whitton was well known in Renfrew where she grew up and had many friends. At the same time she ranks as one of our great Canadians. Twice, in successive years, 1951 and 1952,

she was chosen by writers of the Canadian Press as Canadian Woman of the Year. Seven times she represented Canada at Geneva, Switzerland as delegate to Social Questions Section of the League of Nations.

In 1953, she went to England to represent Ottawa at the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth. In 1941 when she was given the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by Queen's University she was cited as the University's most distinguished graduate.

Charlotte Whitton was born in Renfrew on March 8, 1896 and she was educated in local schools. After winning several scholarships at Renfrew Collegiate she went on to Queen's University. Here she had a brilliant career as a student, journalist, administrator, debater and athlete which were fields in which she later was to distinguish herself. She graduated in 1917 with the degree of M.A.

After leaving University she became Assistant Secretary of the Canadian Council of Child Welfare (which later became the Canadian Welfare Council). For many years she followed welfare work and she made valuable contributions to the work of this organization. She wrote many articles and pamphlets on welfare and was one of the founders and for many years editor of the publication Canadian Welfare. She travelled extensively on Council work and she addressed many meetings and conferences on social welfare both in Canada and in the United States. Of her services it was said that "she put the Social Welfare of Canada on the basis of a science."

In 1922, she became Secretary to the Hon Thomas A Low who was federal member for South Renfrew and Minister of Trade and Commerce in the Mackenzie King cabinet. In this position she received

valuable political training which was useful when she entered city politics in Ottawa.

In 1950 she was elected the first woman controller of the city of Ottawa. In 1951 on the death of Mayor Goodwin she became acting mayor in August and in October she was voted by Council to the office of Mayor. In 1951 she ran for Mayor of Ottawa and was elected for a two-year term by the highest vote ever recorded in the city.

In 1934 Charlotte Whitton was made Commander of the Order of the British Empire. In 1935 she was awarded the Jubilee Medal and in 1937 the Coronation Medal. She received countless other awards and honors and her abilities were recognized not only in all parts of Canada but in the United States as well.

Yet never throughout her distinguished career did she forget Renfrew and the

Ottawa Valley. She wrote many articles for The Mercury and other periodicals on various phases of life in her old town. She wrote the book "A Hundred Years a fellin" which was the story of lumbering in the Ottawa Valley as carried out by Gillies Brothers of Braeside. She often addressed meetings in Renfrew and she often spoke of humorous events in her days in Renfrew.

She willed many of her possessions to the McDougall Mill Museum in Renfrew and they now form an extensive display in her honor. In this display, among many souvenirs and citations, is a faded little document in a simple frame which long hung on the wall of Charlotte Whitton's private office.

It is an old certificate from Renfrew Public School to certify that Lottie Whitton had been awarded Honor Promotion when being passed from Grade I to Grade II.

Last ride to Renfrew

Charlotte Whitton, one of Renfrew's most famous daughters and a former Ottawa mayor, will be officially buried Saturday in Thomsonville Cemetery.

Miss Whitton died January 25 in an Ottawa hospital and entombment was in an Ottawa vault for the winter. As requested in her will, the driver of the hearse taking her body from Ottawa to Renfrew for burial will be her former chauffeur — Donat Lafond.

The official welcoming party — consisting of town council and president Helen Roach of the Renfrew Business and Professional Women's Group — will meet at the fairgrounds at 10.50 am Saturday.

The party will then move by motorcade to the cemetery. The general public is invited to join the motorcade at the fairgrounds or at the cemetery, says Mrs Frank Ryan, a sister of Miss Whitton.

The funeral parade will move down Coumbes Street, proceed left at the Raglan-Hall intersection and down Raglan Street South to the cemetery. Canon Serson Clarke will conduct the May 17 service.

Interment is scheduled for 11 o'clock. Following the burial, a private reception will be held for personal friends of Mrs Ryan at the home of Lillian Handford on Raglan Street South.



Charlotte Whitton's funeral Saturday morning brought many friends and relatives to Renfrew. Shown here are Renfrew Mayor Norm Wilson, Reeve Audrey Green, Ottawa Mayor Lorry Greenberg, a nephew, Stephen Whitton and his two sons.

Friends fulfill Charlotte's wish

As Ottawa residents celebrated the Festival of Spring, Miss Charlotte Whitton, former mayor and long time politician, was quietly buried in Renfrew.

The motorcade from Ottawa arrived at the Renfrew fair grounds at 10.45 am. Saturday. The hearse bearing Miss Whitton's body was driven by her former chauffeur Donat Lafond.

The long line of cars made its way slowly along Coumbes Street, then south on Raglan Street to Thomsonville Cemetery.

The short funeral service was conducted by Canon Serson Clarke. A Renfrew piper played at the end of the service.

Many well known citizens and politicians gathered at the grave side. These included

Ottawa Mayor Lorry Greenberg, Senator George McIlraith, Renfrew Mayor Norm Wilson and Renfrew Town Councillors, as well as Miss Whitton's nieces and nephews, Bart Whitton, Stephen Whitton and Mrs Margret Mills, numerous grandnieces and grandnephews.

Two Renfrew girls in army cadet uniforms stood at attention as the casket was being lowered. Bouquets of violets were dropped onto the casket by the cadets. Miss Whitton's favorite flowers had been gathered where she played as a child.

In the August 7, 1958 issue of the Mercury Miss Whitton wrote about Renfrew to commemorate one hundred years of

municipal government here. The story began with:

The Bonnechere flowing through thee,
The Laurentian Hills around,
O bonnie wee Scots clachan!
Where is thy equal found?

With sharp narrative detail she describes the early life of people in the Second Chute, their deeds, legacies and their cemeteries.

Appropriately enough she ends the story with a final wish; one recorded in her will and carried out last Saturday morning. And when I come to die
May I rest in the hills of Renfrew
Beneath a cloud free sky.