

pre-video

In recent times, Alberta has become home to a growing number of female politicians, and it's a big deal, increasing gender representation in politics across the province. But to understand how Albertan women first began holding political office, you've got to travel back, way back, to December 29, 1876.

life

In the small town of Netherton, England, a baby girl was born. Her parents christened her Hannah Rolinson, although she soon came to be known as "Annie." Annie grew up attending an all-girls school. Upon graduation, she took charge of her family's business after her father's passing.

At the age of twenty three, Annie married a handsome civil engineer named William "Bill" Gale. The couple later had two children together. By this time, Annie's sister Ada had moved to Canada and often wrote home, inviting Annie's family to come. The offer was alluring, as Annie had a great sense of adventure, and it was a promising career opportunity for Bill.

In the new year of 1912, the Gales packed up their belongings and boarded the ship for Canada. Their destination? Calgary, a burgeoning new city on the prairies.

Annie soon became involved in her new hometown. She found the poor quality and high prices of vegetables in the city to be outrageous, when there were millions of acres of unsurveyed land in the prairie surrounding Calgary. To combat this problem, Annie joined the Vacant Lots Garden Club and founded the first Consumers' League, where she became instrumental in the establishment of a municipal farmers' market.

By 1916, Annie was a prominent and well respected figure in Calgary. At this time, women had gained equal franchise to men at the municipal office, and with this arose the question: who was best fit to represent women on city council? Given her involvement in the public sphere, Annie became a natural candidate. In the beginning, she was reluctant to run, but she was soon endorsed by the Federated Ratepayers' Association and a number of influential figures in the city. Incredibly, Annie won her seat in 1917, placing sixth on the ballot. She had become the first woman ever elected to any municipal office in the British Commonwealth.

Annie's reputation as a reformer grew quickly. She had opinions about the way things were run and wasn't afraid to voice them. Through persistence, Annie dismantled monopolies on the sale of milk, which made safe milk more available to children across the city. She pressed for public attention towards the foul conditions at the local jail when neither the mayor nor commissioners thought much of it. Furthermore, Annie stood at the forefront of progressive health care legislation, bringing medical care to women in rural areas.

Outside of her duties on city council, Annie always found time for those treated unjustly around her. Hearing of her compassion, people from all walks of life sought out Annie in her home for help with their troubles. It didn't matter who she was fighting for, Annie worked with a tenacious sincerity.

As quickly as she gained supporters, Annie also gained enemies. She clashed often with public health officials and was changing the status quo that they worked to maintain. Her opponents knew that Annie could not be defeated at the elections. Thus, they pressured her husband instead, eventually pushing him out of civil engineering altogether.

Although Annie was a fighter, how could she continue on City Council when her husband had been forced to resign? When her third term as an alderman came to a close, Annie took a position in the Calgary Public School Board as a trustee, where she continued to advocate health and wellness issues within the school system.

After William left his job, his years of asthma and an onset of depression left him ill in 1925. Ever devoted and anxious for her husband's health, Annie requested a three month leave to tend to him in Vancouver. However, a three month leave turned into a resignation. Annie never returned to Calgary, leaving a void in the city where she used to be.

She remained in Vancouver until her passing in 1970 at 93 years old. Annie Gale is buried in Capilano View Cemetery, BC.

impact

Today, a junior high school and boardroom in Calgary's municipal building are named in Annie's honor. Annie Gale's efforts to encourage women to take an active role in politics is reflected in our female

politicians across Alberta. Without her, women might have stayed behind the scenes for a long time, despite the law giving them the right to hold office.

inspiration

While I was researching Annie's life, I often wondered, "did she ever get burnt out from doing so much?" But then I came across something that she said. "The work is its own reward." Annie's attitude about her work struck me. Giving wasn't a sacrifice to her. It was something that contributed to the betterment of humanity, and she found her purpose in doing it.

plans

Annie's story has helped me realize that there are more ways to give than I had ever considered. Once I understood that, I was itching to start making a difference where I could. When opportunity struck last year, I grabbed hold of it and began volunteering with the Calgary Public Library. Since then, I've only been gaining momentum, organizing school spirit days and creating displays for Black History Month. Recently, my teacher told me about the Agape Market we were going to hold during parent teacher conferences. It was a chance for parents to buy used clothing and household goods at a reasonable price, while helping the Women In Need Society. I was ecstatic. My classmates and I worked for days to sort and label all the donated items. I volunteered to come after school hours to help run the market.

In May, I'm being invited to be a leader-in-training at a Rotary Youth Leadership Camp. And I'm not stopping there. I hope to work with organizations that support disadvantaged kids once I enter high school. Mrs. Annie Gale reminds me that change is the culmination of a lifetime of meaningful work, and I have a long life ahead of me.

the end