

Over the course of almost a year that I worked with Hazel McCallion on her autobiography, *Hurricane Hazel: A Life with Purpose*, I was often struck by the significance of numbers throughout her life.

There are record numbers that will likely never be broken: 12 consecutive mayoral victories, 36 years as the longest-serving big-city mayor in Canadian history, routinely getting more than 90 per cent of the vote, and retiring at age 93, still sharp as a tack.

There are important numbers like the year of her birth 1921, which was, ironically for the future politician, also the first time Canadian women were allowed to vote in a Canadian federal election. The long life of this pioneering woman (don't call her a feminist!) has spanned from a period of incredible inequality to near equality for women in politics and business; two areas where Hazel blazed trails.

Or 21, her age when she was put in charge of building North America's first synthetic rubber plant in Sarnia during World War II. Or 250,000, a number representing the people evacuated from their homes under her leadership during the Mississauga train derailment in 1979, the largest peace-time evacuation up to that point. And zero, as in zero debt the city held for the majority of the years she served as mayor of the sixth-largest city in Canada with a population of 750,000.

And there are fun numbers, like 11 representing the number of Stanley Cups won by her beloved Toronto Maple Leafs. Hazel has been alive for each and every one of those victories and very few fans can make that claim. Indeed, most Leaf fans today have not been alive for even one Stanley Cup!

But one number, a seemingly innocuous number, puts an exclamation point on her legacy and that number is 35,000. Each and every day, 35,000 more people *come* to work in

Mississauga than *leave* to work elsewhere, namely Toronto. Think about that for a moment.

Mississauga is a city with a strong economy unto itself. It's not some mere bedroom community. Sixty-two Fortune 500 U.S. companies, 50 Fortune Global 500 companies, 96 multinationals from Germany and 71 from Japan have offices in Mississauga. Because of these companies and Canadian firms in Mississauga, it really is a city where you can live, work and play. As Hazel herself says in *Hurricane Hazel*, she never had any intention to build a giant "bunkhouse" for Toronto. And she certainly succeeded.

Another interesting aspect of her legacy that is often overlooked is the enormity of the task, and the speed at which it was completed. Most famous mayors known for city building - like New York's Fiorello La Guardia or Chicago's Richard J. Daley or Montreal's Jean Drapeau or Toronto's Nathan Phillips - did so incrementally by comparison to Hazel because their cities evolved over a much longer time. Hazel basically took a collection of towns, villages and farmland and built the entire thing lock, stock and barrel over three decades.

There's a reason the *Globe and Mail* calls Mississauga "The City that Hazel Built" and *Toronto Life* magazine says it's "as if she waved a wand and a city was built." Hazel is always quick to say it's been a team effort; from councillors, city staff and residents all having input into building a city where so many different peoples and cultures can live in safety and harmony. But if it was a team effort, I think everyone knows who the team captain was.

It's worth exploring this building aspect a little further because it's part of her psyche. Until working with Hazel, I never really thought about how fast things were achieved in our city. But soon after sitting down and talking with her, I quickly realized she is a builder at heart; always looking ahead not behind.

For a writer, this became one of the more challenging parts of the book project: her tendency is to look ahead and not overly reflect on past events; and certainly not dwell on what has happened and cannot be changed. Fortunately, her life has been documented so extensively in newspapers, magazines and video that most of the high points were covered and with a little research and prodding I was able to get her to reflect on important past events. Some of these events were quite painful, including the death of her beloved husband, Sam, and the judicial inquiry which threatened to oust her from office over allegations of conflict of interest.

In *Hurricane Hazel*, she shows parts of her personality that the general public may be seeing for the first time. With Sam's

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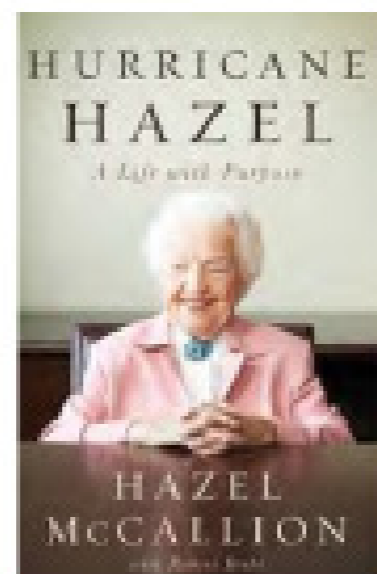
death, she reveals the pain and the raw emotion involved when a loved one falls into the grip of Alzheimer's disease. As for the judicial inquiry, the tough-as-nails, street-fighting politician acknowledges she took her eye off the ball and made mistakes, but she was never in conflict and she did what she did to try to build Mississauga further, and better.

Mississauga is a diverse, progressive and award-winning municipality from the shores of Lake Ontario right up to the country's largest airport in the heart of the Greater Toronto Area. We became a location of choice for companies wanting to expand globally into the North American market with culturally diverse communities, a strong and growing economy and access to a skilled and talented labour force. And who has been so intrinsically linked to this city and who has been its biggest cheerleader? Hazel, of course.

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche observed that human connections are the "invisible threads that are the strongest ties." Hazel has known that her entire life. "I ran on a program of planning for people way back when I first ran for Mayor of Mississauga and I think that's what we've done," she says. "We didn't go for dome stadiums and large sports facilities, etc. we built communities where we provided all the services like libraries, baseball diamonds, soccer fields, all the things people need. And we created jobs— so people can live and work here." She was the People's Mayor, and probably still is.

After *Hurricane Hazel* was published, we did some book signings and I was amazed by her "rock star" status and how many people remember personal stories about her from years ago.

One of the more memorable ones was a father introducing his two young sons to her and saying, "Boys, when I was your age, there was a huge explosion after a train derailed and we were all in danger and this woman was in charge of getting us out of our homes to safe places to live. When the danger was over and we got back home, I remember her driving a golf cart up our street because she'd sprained her ankle. She talked to my parents and all the people on the street and asked if we were okay and if we needed anything." Then he ended the story with a line I heard from countless numbers of people: "Thank you, thank you for all your service." How many politicians today are thanked so profusely and so routinely? Very few.



The first mayor of Mississauga, Dr. Martin Dobkin, once said Hazel is "probably the most unique politician Canada has ever produced." And I think he's right. There won't soon be another like her.

If you're interested in purchasing Hazel McCallion-signed copies of *Hurricane Hazel*, contact Robert Brehl at [bob@abc2.ca](mailto:bob@abc2.ca).

By Matthew Wilkinson, Historian, Heritage Mississauga

## Elections and the "Changing of the Guard" are not new in Mississauga

While 2014 marked the finale of Mayor Hazel McCallion's remarkable 36-year tenure as Mayor of Mississauga, and the beginning of a new era under the leadership of Mayor Bonnie Crombie, elections and a "changing of guard" are not new in our community.



Joseph Wright, [www](http://www)

Before incorporating as the Town of Mississauga in 1968, the highest public office in Toronto Township was that of Reeve – the predecessor to the modern office of Mayor. Toronto Township elected its first Reeve back in 1850 – Joseph Wright. Back then elections were held every year, and 1851 saw the election of Reeve William Thompson, a retired colonel and veteran of the War of 1812. Joseph Wright was returned to office the following year, 1852, and served until 1856.

Between 1850 and 1967, some 39 people (38 men and 1 woman) served as Reeve of Toronto Township. After incorporation, there were two Mayors of the Town of Mississauga (Mayor Robert Speck had also served as Reeve prior to the Town). The City of Mississauga, formed in 1974, has had four Mayors to date. And this does not include the Reeves and Mayors of Port Credit and Streetsville, who served independently of Toronto Township/Mississauga prior to the 1974 amalgamation.

While Mayor Hazel's emergence and development of Mississauga is undeniable and the accolades well deserved, the "changing of the guard" also gives us a moment to reflect and remember the service of those who preceded her, and to wish Mayor Crombie success for the future.



Mayor Bonnie Crombie, [www](http://www)