

Norma Walmsley

1920 - 2011

Norma Walmsley was a resourceful feminist, a strong community leader and an unmatched fundraiser. Some of her biggest achievements include co-founding of MATCH International Women's Fund and rebuilding Wakefield's historical covered bridge after it burnt down.

Norma was born in Elm Creek, Manitoba, in 1920. During the Second World War, she enlisted in the Women's Division of the Royal Canadian Air Force, becoming the 74th woman to do so. By the end of the war, she had risen to the rank of Officer in Charge of Women's Division Supplies for Canada and Overseas. She then enrolled at McGill University and, in 1955, became a professor of Political Science at Brandon University. There, she founded the Brandon University WUSC (World University Service of Canada) committee and met the love of her life, Joan Garnett.

In 1967, Garnett and Walmsley moved to Wakefield, Québec. It is there that Norma invested herself fully into the feminist cause. Without pay, she and Suzanne Johnson-Harvor founded MATCH International Centre in 1976, known for many years as MATCH International Women's Fund (now known as Equality Fund). The Organization specializes in funding grassroots women's rights organizations in the Global South. It is also one of the only NGOs that works on sustainable development from a feminist perspective. She was also an active member of UNESCO and many non-governmental organizations involved in international development.

When a covered bridge built in 1915 burned in her adopted town of Wakefield, Norma immediately took matters into her own hands. By working tirelessly to amass donations, a brand-new covered bridge was inaugurated fourteen years later, returning a gem that was thought to be forever lost.



In 1977, she was a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal, and in 2002, a recipient of the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal. In 1983, she received an honorary doctorate from Carleton University and, in 1988, from Brandon University. In 1987, she received the Governor General's Persons Award, and in 1993, she was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada. She was also recognized as an honorary life member of the Canadian Commission for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ottawa-Gatineau Society for International Development, and the Gatineau Valley Historical Society. She died in January 2011 at the age of 90.