

“Dr. Margaret Angus”

by

Sarah Morgan



Sarah Morgan and her prize winning presentation at the Perth Heritage Fair, 2015.

Introduction



Grant Macdonald, *Portrait of Margaret Angus*, 1966
(Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Gift of Dr Margaret Angus, 2007 (50-016) Photo credit:
Bernard Clark)

Margaret Angus: an author, a historian, a graduate and a mother of two. Her interest in historic preservation resulted in the documentation and preservation of so many historical buildings and the development of local and national heritage. Why did she do this? How did she do this? What inspired her? And most importantly, how is she remembered today?

Growing Up

Margaret Sharp grew up as the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant

Sharp in Chinook, Montana, in 1908. As Margaret grew up she was getting noticed for her beauty and for the pretty clothes that she would wear, but she wanted to be noticed for her intelligence and strove to use that gift to her advantage.

Well, her advantage did pay off and she went on a full scholarship to the University of Montana. There she ended up finding her “one and only” in the Drama Department: a young Scotsman, Mr. William Angus, who was the Director of the Drama Department in the University. They were married in Fort Benton, Montana, in 1929 and Margaret graduated one year later. Barbara Angus, their first child, was born of February 17, 1931.



Margaret Angus in going-away outfit, 28 August 1929
(Family Collection)

In September 1932, they moved to Ithaca, New York, where William entered the Ph.D. program in Drama at Cornell University and their son, James Angus, was born on February 16, 1933. It was there, during the Great Depression, that Margaret got her first job working at the Publications office of the School of

Agriculture at Cornell. The family moved again in 1935 to DeKalb, Illinois, where William was Professor of Drama at Northern Illinois State Teachers College. The family's final move was their most successful: to 220 Albert Street Kingston, Ontario, in 1937, when William was appointed to the English Department at Queen's University. William was busy with all of his work and, soon enough, Margaret would be too.

Drama Department

With William's career blasting through the roof in the English Department, he also founded what is now the Drama Department at Queen's University and that's when Margaret started to get involved. She assisted William in the production of the plays and she acted in the plays.



Margaret and William Angus rendering Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930) at the Agnes Etherington Arts Centre event in 1968.

(Illustration from Joan Finnigan and Frank Johnston, *Kingston: Celebrate This City*, p. 54)

Most importantly, Margaret collected the costume and dress donations for his plays. While she was collecting the costumes, she put aside those dresses that were too

valuable to cut up and make into costumes. Almost by accident she built up a collection, what is now the Queens University Collection of Canadian Dress.

Collection of Canadian Dress

In 1963, she was officially recognized as the curator of the collection. One of the remarkable aspects of the collection is that it has been all accumulated through donations. In it, there are over 2000 items that include shoes, dresses, fans, hats, and handbags. The ages of these items span the late 18th century to the late 20th century. She felt that what she was doing was very important to Canadian history, and now we know that she was right. Indeed, the collection is a valuable part of the university today. This was only one of the many important things she did to impact how we think about Canadian history.



Margaret Angus modelling an item from the Costume Collection
(Agnes Etherington Art Centre)

Old Stones of Kingston

Margaret wasn't only interested in the history of women's clothing: she was also interested in the history of the older buildings in Kingston. Flashback to the time when she was collecting the costume donations: she would ask her donators about

their home and became very fascinated in the home's history.

Throughout her years, she fell in love with the "Old Stones of Kingston." She would take pictures of them to use in her slide-shows for lectures, and had been writing about them for 20 years. Slowly, she realized that she had gathered material for a great book. Her book was published by the University of Toronto Press in 1966 entitled, "The Old Stones of Kingston." It was a huge success and was in such a demand that it was re-printed six times!



Margaret Angus and her "Old Stones"

Margaret dedicated her time to doing volunteer work researching Kingston's beloved buildings and finding resources to ensure their preservation. Eventually she set up her business as a historical consultant, doing studies and reports for the federal government, the provincial and municipal governments, and other institutions and private individuals.



William Angus hooding Margaret Angus at Queen's University convocation in 1973
(Family photo)

In 2002, at a testimonial dinner for the establishment of a scholarship in her name, the senior officer of Heritage Canada described her as "the best historical researcher in Canada."

The Order of Canada

Margaret Angus was appointed as a Member of the Order of Canada on April 30th, 1992 and received the award from the Governor General on October 21st, 1992. The nomination reads, "She has taught many of us to value and fight for our heritage (which is hers by adoption) and to enrich our lives by doing so." The Governor General of Canada's online archives describes Margaret as a lively historian, a well-respected scholar, and a spokeswoman who is responsible for the proclamation of the Ontario Heritage Act. It goes on to say that the result of her work has been a variety of thriving heritage preservation activities in Canada.

Closing Statement and Final Thoughts

Margaret Angus was an author, a historian, a graduate and a mother of two -

and SO much more! Her interest in historic preservation was the reason why countless buildings were preserved; why she created a costume collection at Queens University; and why she wrote many books about Kingston and Canada's history. She didn't do this for herself. She did it because she realized that we weren't cherishing the great artefacts that were right in front of us. For that, we are all grateful.

You may be wondering why I chose Margaret Angus as my topic. Not only did I choose her because of all of the amazing things that she did, she was also my great grandmother and is a huge inspiration to me today.



Margaret Angus at 96 (Family photo)

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