



Behind the Man: John Laurie, Ruth Gorman, and the Indian Vote in Canada (Legacies Shared)

Ruth Gorman

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Behind the Man: John Laurie, Ruth Gorman, and the Indian Vote in Canada is the unique "biography" of Alberta political figure John Lee Laurie, a key proponent of Aboriginal rights in the 1940s and 1950s. Before 1961, the Aboriginal people of Canada could only vote in federal elections if they agreed to become "Canadian," that is, to leave their reserves, give up their treaty rights, and leave behind their homes, farms, and families. Laurie was instrumental in securing amendments to the Indian Act in 1961 which gave Aboriginals the unfettered vote.

Ruth Gorman worked tirelessly alongside Laurie during these years and was herself a major force in mobilizing public opinion in support of the Aboriginal vote. Out of modesty and concern for the social constraints of her day, though, Gorman did not lay public claim to these efforts and remained a passionately vocal supporter of John Laurie for the rest of her life. By 1998, she had been working on a book about Laurie for several years, but, nearing the end of her life and overwhelmed by the project's scope, she persuaded Frits Pannekoek to assist her in seeing it to completion.

As Dr. Pannekoek began to sort through Gorman's many boxes of material, he quickly realized that this book was both a biography and an autobiography; the story was as much Gorman's as it was Laurie's. In the tradition of her era, Gorman had taken the position of "the woman behind the man," but she was nonetheless proud of her life's work, and found an "acceptable" way of telling her own part in the story.

Behind the Man introduces Ruth Gorman as one of Alberta's most interesting female historical figures - a career woman struggling to balance home life and work obligations, overcoming frustrations at her hard work being overshadowed by a more visible figure, and reminding us that there is always more than one point of view when it comes to recording history.

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