



John Albert (Bert) Hughes
1879 - 1949

John Albert (Bert) Hughes, part of the third generation of his family to be born in London Township, was the second of five children of whom only three survived childhood. He attended public school at SS #8 London. Upon completion of some short courses at the Ontario Agricultural College, he moved to the adjacent farm at lot 24 concession 9 of London Township. In 1921 he married Sarah Winter and they had two children Maryon Olive and Thomas Winter.

Bert Hughes was a dairy farmer who was concerned with the well-being of the farmers in his area. His involvement with the London District Milk Producers Association began in 1922. In 1925, this association was recognized as the bargaining group for the area dairy farmers. It dealt with the local dairies to set prices for milk and cream producers and it also focused on the associated transportation contracts. Bert was president of this group from 1926-1948 and became its honorary president until his death in 1949.

In the 1920's, many district milk-producer associations came into existence, but with the exception of Toronto and Hamilton, few worked in a co-ordinated manner. This developed into a hodge-podge of prices and contracts, or lack thereof, across the province. In 1931, provincial Ag. Minister T. L. Kennedy offered his government's assistance to Ontario milk producers, but only after they functioned as a province-wide association and only if they were willing to resolve their own problems. In 1932, following a series of joint producer association meetings, the Ontario Whole Milk Producers Association was formed. In 1933 this association developed its first province-wide agreements on milk prices and transportation issues.

Mr. Hughes, as a charter member of this group, represented the London District Association. This body met in Toronto once every three months and the executive met at least once a month. In 1936 Bert was elected 2nd vice- president, following in 1937 as 1st vice-president, and ultimately as president from 1939-1944. During his time on this board, membership increased from approximately five thousand to over seventeen thousand dairy producers by 1944. Whole milk consumption increased by 40% between 1938 and 1943 while farmers were forced to work under price controls imposed by the War Control Act.

The Ontario Whole Milk Producers Association or League, as it was now called, was concerned with price negotiations, quality assurance, quotas, and transportation issues. By 1944, eleven years after its inception, the League had been instrumental in achieving: price increases for producers from 75 cents per hundredweight in 1933 to \$2.50 in 1944; the establishment of year-round quotas which were respected by both producers and distributors; uniform transportation charges; and better quality assurance. Milk was now being sold on a 3.5% butterfat basis. Pasteurization was now in place, TB testing was in effect, and a Bangs disease-eradication program was being carried out. All of this led to an improved consumer respect for whole milk as a nutritional beverage.

In 1938, the Toronto producers formed what they called a "Milk Foundation". This group was charged with promoting milk consumption and increasing the awareness of its benefits through education to the public. In 1946, the seven locally formed Milk Foundations merged to form the Ontario Milk Foundation Inc. Bert was its first president from 1946 until 1948. Today, this function continues and is carried out by both the Dairy Farmers of Ontario and Canada through their high-profile advertisement campaigns.

By 1937 a number of farmers in the counties surrounding Toronto began to contemplate the formation of an umbrella group of agricultural organizations based on the concept of an urban chamber of commerce. Bert suggested that this format might have merit within Middlesex County. In 1938, the Middlesex Chamber of Agriculture, later to become the Middlesex Federation of Agriculture, was formed. Bert Hughes was its first president.

While agriculture and dairy farming were the mainstays in Bert's life, his community was not over-looked. He was a member of the Ilderton United Church, serving on its Board of Stewards during the building of the manse, he was a member of the Henderson Masonic Lodge and he was a director of the Ilderton Farmers Co-op.

From the early 1900's and up until 1922, the United Telephone Company Ltd., a locally owned private company with approximately 300 customers, provided telephone service to the Ilderton area. In late 1922 a severe sleet storm leveled most of its lines and the owners were not prepared to raise the capital necessary to repair their lines. At a meeting in early 1923, United's former subscribers decided to buy the remaining assets and form a municipal telephone system. Provisional commissioners elected at the first meeting were T. H. Hedley, Chas. Ferguson, and J. A. (Bert) Hughes. The London Township Municipal Telephone System commenced operations that year and by 1925 was reporting a total of 450 telephones. Most of the phones were located in the villages of Ilderton and Hyde Park with the rest scattered throughout the township. The system, which prospered during the 1920's, lost a considerable number of subscribers during the Depression Years but rebounded by the end of World War II. Bert Hughes was elected yearly, as one of three commissioners of the system, from 1923 until his death in 1949. He acted as the secretary-treasurer for the system and was appointed to the board of governors of the Western Counties Telephone System. This body represented the many private telephone systems in western Ontario at that time. In 1944, following twenty-three years of service to the telephone system, Bert received his membership in the Telephone Pioneers of America and in 1948 was presented with a life membership.

John Albert (Bert) Hughes recognized the need for progress in agriculture and rural life. Today we honour his accomplishments in these endeavors by inducting him into the Middlesex Agricultural Hall of Fame.