

# *The Birth of STO/ERO*

Excerpted from material first published in 1993 in the STO/ERO Book of Memories

by Arthur McAdam (1899-1993), First President of the Superannuated Teachers of Ontario (STO/ERO), 1968-69

*I* would like to tell you about the birth of STO/ERO. To begin, I shall use a saying I heard when I was a boy: "It was the last straw that broke the camel's back." We shall leave the camel with its driver, but we shall retain the last straw.

In 1965, the Canada Pension Plan was introduced to take effect on January 1, 1966. Premier John Robarts determined that this pension should not be stacked on top of pensions to which the Ontario government contributed and which it guaranteed. At a meeting with the Ontario Teachers' Federation

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(OTF) he proposed that the teachers' contributions to the Canada Pension Plan be paid out of the 6% contribution to the Teachers' Superannuation Fund. When a teacher retired, that person would receive a pension earned by the combined contribution – in no case would it be less than a regular superannuation pension. If the combined pension were more than a regular pension, the teacher would get the benefit.

At about the same time, the government voted to compute teacher pensions on the best seven years' salaries – a real improvement since salaries were rising. But when OTF enquired what the government intended to do for those already on pension because they had contributed the 6%, too, the answer was "Nothing."

NOTHING? Nora Hodgins, Secretary of OTF, was perturbed. For 20 years the welfare of these people had been part of her responsibility. For them to be ignored

was of great concern to Nora. She lamented to me that the superannuated teachers were not organized. If they were, their numbers and expertise could be combined with OTF and maybe the government could be persuaded to do something for those who had taught on low salaries and had low pensions.

I listened attentively because I was one of those whose pension was computed on the best 10 years' service. Her plan seemed reasonable and I thought that as long as she was perturbed there was a chance we might achieve something! Having thought over what Nora had said, I wrote to her outlining a plan for the organization of the superannuated teachers.

In a teachers' meeting, if you dared to move a motion or offer a constructive suggestion, you found yourself with a job...in due time I received a letter on OTF stationery: By motion of the OTF Executive, I was instructed to form a committee and proceed to organize the superannuated teachers!

I discussed the matter with Norman McLeod and he agreed to help. We formed a committee of 10. OTF adopted us as one of its committees and paid our expenses and let us use its facilities. We owe a great deal to OTF for its help. Without it we could not have started.

We drafted a letter to all superannuated teachers stating our purpose, the form of a proposed constitution and the objectives for such an organization. This was approved by OTF. The letter asked each person to submit the name of a retired teacher who had been a member of that person's former affiliate and who consented to be nominated for election to an organization of retired teachers. This letter was mailed to every superannuated teacher in Ontario. We did not receive 4,000 nominations, but there was a mail bag full!

Cameron, Ontario  
September 26, 1966.

Dear Miss Tyrrell -

At the last session of the Legislature the Teachers' Superannuation Act was amended so the pensions issued after Jan 1, 1966 be computed on the best seven years of service. At that time an impression was gained that pensions issued before that time might be adjusted. However nothing has been done. In conversation with Miss Hodgins I got the impression that the lack of action on the part of the government may be due the failure of pensioners requesting improvement in their pensions.

It seems that some sort of organization of pensioners is necessary to put forward their views on pensions. With this thought in mind I wrote to Miss Hodgins and proposed that a pensioner from each of the Federations meet with me to formulate proposal that could be submitted to a general meeting of pensioners to be called later this Autumn.

In this original letter written by Art McAdam in Cameron, Ontario on September 26, 1966 he asked Marion Tyrrell to join him at a meeting of pensioners representing the various Ontario teacher affiliates to formulate a proposal regarding the improvement of pensions.

The nominations were sorted into five piles, one for each affiliate of OTE. The six names receiving the most nominations in each group were put on a ballot. The Teachers' Superannuation Commission sent the ballot to every superannuated teacher and requested that the person vote for any four nominees. The four names in each group receiving the most votes were declared elected. This made a Senate of 20 members – a Senate elected by all of the superannuated teachers.

*That was the strangest election  
ever held on earth*

*But no one started a riot or  
bought votes with a bottle's  
worth.*

*So without the blare of trumpet  
or shouts from them that  
remain,*

*Silently down from many a  
town the curious senators came.*

A day was set for inauguration. When all were assembled an executive was elected. Someone nominated Art McAdam as president; someone moved that nominations close. In like manner, Norman McLeod was elected vice-president and Marion Tyrrell secretary-treasurer.

STO/ERO was born!

IMAGE SCANNED FROM RTO/ERO ARCHIVES