

# Manning matriarch saw Alberta's history unfold



Calgary Herald Archive  
**Muriel Manning died Friday  
in Calgary at age 95.**

**M**uriel Manning, the matriarch of Alberta's most famous political family, died Friday in Calgary's Rockyview General Hospital. She was 95.

The wife of Alberta's longest-serving premier — former Social Credit leader Ernest Manning — and mother of Reform party founder Preston Manning had been an accomplished musician and an active participant in the political, religious and social life of Alberta for 50 years.

In a recent interview, she said: "I've seen the most interesting times in Alberta's history: the Depression, the war years, the oil years and the boom."

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*Calgary Herald Saturday April 22, 2006*

# First lady of Alberta dynasty wrote the book on public life

## Muriel Manning dies peacefully in hospital at 95

JASON FEKETE  
AND GRAEME MORTON  
CALGARY HERALD

**M**uriel Manning, the matriarch of Alberta politics and wife of the province's longest-serving premier, died Friday at the age of 95.

Wife of late Social Credit premier Ernest C. Manning, and mother of Reform party founder Preston Manning, Muriel died peacefully at the Rockview hospital.

"We'll be celebrating her life, not mourning it," Preston told the Herald late Friday. "She was a wonderful woman and had a very long life."

Preston said his mother was only ill for a few weeks and he was thankful for her life and the way she left this world.

He reminisced that she actively participated in the religious, political and social life of the province for decades. She also was "a very shrewd judge of character," he said.

"She knew a lot of political people," he said, noting several prime ministers such as Arthur Meighen, Mackenzie King, R.B. Bennett, Pierre Trudeau and Joe Clark.

"She had strong opinions of all of

them — not always flattering."

A memorial service will likely be held Wednesday or Thursday, he said.

Ray Speaker, a Social Credit MLA of nearly two decades who served in the Manning government, said Muriel was "always elegant."

"We've lost a gracious first lady of Alberta," Speaker said. "She was a lady. She was a leader."

Muriel was a key player during her husband's 25-year reign over Alberta from 1943 to 1968, Speaker said, noting she influenced the premier in both his political and religious life.

She may be best remembered for her decades of directing the music for the Back to the Bible Hour radio broadcast. But Speaker said her attributes far exceeded music.

Cliff Fryers, Preston Manning's former chief of staff, said Muriel was "an extremely accomplished person in her own right, a concert pianist."

"She played an exemplary role and was of tremendous value as a help-mate to Ernest throughout his life."

Former provincial ethics commissioner Bob Clark first met Muriel when he was a young Social Credit MLA in the early 1960s. He remembers her love of wearing big hats.

"She had very good political instincts. And I think Preston has a lot of her outgoing nature in him," Clark said.

Muriel was born in Saskatoon on March 30, 1911, and came to Alberta with her mother at the age of eight.

An accomplished pianist, at the age of 14 Muriel was asked by William Aberhart to replace his organist, who had moved away, for his meetings and broadcasts.

Ernest met Muriel at "Bible Bill" Aberhart's Prophetic Bible Institute in Calgary, where he would become the first graduate.

Ernest and Muriel married in 1936 and had two sons, Keith and Preston.

After taking the political reins of the province from Aberhart, Ernest carried on with his national Back to the Bible Hour radio broadcast every Sunday.

Keith passed away in 1986, and Ernest died a decade later.

Muriel is survived by Preston, his wife Sandra, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

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# TOP NEWS



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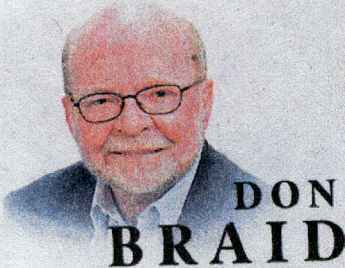
**Muriel Manning, wife of former premier Ernest Manning and mother of former Reform party leader Preston Manning, celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Alberta Social Credit Party last year at the Calgary Zoo.**



SATURDAY, April 22, 2006 Calgary HERALD

# Rock-solid Prairie woman and ultimate political spouse





## DON BRAID

**A**lmost unnoticed last August, old Social Crediters trooped to the Calgary Zoo to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the party's first election victory in 1935.

Muriel Manning was there in her wheelchair. She didn't stand when her turn came to speak, but onlookers thought her mind was as keen as ever.

"She wasn't even able to get up, but she repeatedly said, 'I know I shouldn't say this, but I'm going to say it anyway,'" recalls former Social Credit cabinet minister Bob Clark.

"She always had a very sharp political mind and a view on most things."

Almost until she died Friday at 95, Muriel Manning still had the spark and vivid personality that made her one of the most famous people in Alberta for decades.

And she certainly was sharp, especially when it came to protecting her husband, the late premier and senator Ernest Manning, and later her son, Preston.

Preston Manning once told me that his father tended to be trusting, while his mother was more watchful.

"If she met somebody she didn't like, she'd say, 'He's a rat no matter how nice he seems,'" Preston said during an interview for a book about his Reform party.

Muriel was the ultimate political spouse who watches shrewdly while her husband speaks, and then reports on loyalties and undercurrents.

She was at least as good at this as the modern champion of the art, Colleen Klein. And Preston once said that his wife, Sandra, has the same wary eye.

Tall and striking, Muriel Manning was a wonderful musician who played the piano on Canada's Back to the Bible Hour, providing artistic counterpart to her husband's brimstone sermons.

Ernest C. Manning and Muriel Preston met in 1927 at the Prophetic Bible Institute run by William Aberhart, the first Social Credit premier.

They provided a deeply religious upbringing for Preston, first in central Edmonton and then at their 900-acre farm at Horse Hill, 15 kilometres north-east of the city.

As the first family of both religion and politics, the Mannings were the most public couple in Alberta. But they kept their private life strictly

screened from public view.

To my knowledge, only one journalist, Arthur Hailey, ever gained access to their home for a visit.

Hailey, who would become famous as the author of the novel *Airport*, reported a happy, almost idyllic family life in a beautiful farmland setting.

Mrs. Manning "spoke warmly of their younger son, Preston," Hailey wrote. "He has been distressed, Mrs. Manning said, by the number of younger students who have abandoned their faith."



Then Muriel Manning showed that although she was deeply religious, she was not a prophet. She said she didn't believe Preston would follow his father into politics.

Hailey also alluded to a great sadness in the family's life, the cerebral palsy that afflicted Preston's older brother, Keith.

Preston adored Keith and included him in activities with his friends whenever possible.

"Preston cared for him all the time," a family member once told me. The Mannings were shattered when Keith died of

cardiac arrest in 1986 at age 47.

Muriel Manning, like many Socred women of the age, happily accepted a supporting role for women in politics.

She penned perky, encouraging articles in the Socred newsletter, *The Busy Bee*, on party problems and the need to keep organizing.

But nobody who knew her doubted the depth of her intelligence or imagined that she was in any way subordinate.

She was a rock-solid Prairie woman formed in the days when wives ran the homesteads and the families with firm authority.

When a person dies, the most presumptuous thing a writer can do is suggest what she would have liked to happen.

But in this case I'll risk it: Muriel Manning would have loved to watch her son walk back into the premier's office her husband occupied from 1943 to 1968.

"  
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"

**PRESTON  
MANNING, ON HIS  
MOTHER, MURIEL**



# Manning family's matriarch

A chapter in Alberta's history has closed with the passing of Muriel Manning, wife of the province's longest-serving premier Ernest.

Muriel died Friday peacefully, in hospital. She was 95. She is survived by her son Preston and his wife Sandra, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

The matriarch of the Manning family was born in Saska-

toon, and moved to Alberta in 1911 at the age of eight. She was a teacher and an accomplished musician. She participated in politics, religion and the social life of this province for the past 50 years.

Her husband, Ernest, was part of the Social Credit revolution that swept into power in 1935. Her son Preston founded the Reform Party. Muriel Manning will be missed.

Calgary Herald Saturday, Apr. 22/2006




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The Calgary Sun, Saturday, April 22, 2006 NEWS 7

# Manning matriarch dies

Wife of ex-premier Ernest, mother of Preston passes away at 95





**MURIEL AND PRESTON MANNING**

**By TODD SAELOHOF**

Calgary Sun

Alberta's lost its longest-serving first lady yesterday, as Muriel Manning, wife of former premier Ernest and mother of former Reform party leader Preston, died at Calgary's Rockyview General Hospital. She was 95.

Friends and former co-workers of the Manning family, including Reform party co-founder Ray Speaker, were saddened by the news.

"She was a lady with a lot of energy," Speaker said. "She had a strong opinion on all kinds of



subjects, and she was a great supporter of her husband.”

The two were married April 14, 1936. Ernest, the former Social Credit premier, passed away in 1996. In 1998, Muriel was on hand in Ottawa to unveil the stamp of her husband, who held the office of provincial leader from 1943 to 1968.

Speaker said last summer, Muriel gave a 15-minute speech at an anniversary party for the Social Credit — without notes. “She was of clear mind right up to the end,” Speaker said.

Ezra Levant, publisher of the *Western Standard*, called the Muriel a key cog in the mould-

ing of Alberta.

“In a way, she helped give birth to the modern Alberta by being a key supporter to Premier Manning,” said Levant, who was once Preston’s parliamentary assistant.

Manning leaves behind son Preston, who was with his mother when she died, said a family spokeswoman. She and Ernest also had a son Keith, who died in 1986. Funeral arrangements have not yet been announced.

— *with files from CP*

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## MEMORIAL

# Muriel Manning celebrated

JASON FEKETE

CALGARY HERALD

**A**lberta said goodbye Thursday to a woman described as the first lady of provincial politics.

Muriel Manning, wife of Ernest Manning, the province's longest-serving premier, and mother of Preston — an Alberta political icon in his own right — was remembered in Calgary at a memorial service as a woman who shaped the political, religious and social scene in Alberta for five decades.

"We're here to celebrate (her life), not really to mourn anything," Preston told the Herald moments before the service, attended by close to 200 people at the First Alliance Church.

"She had a long, long association with the life of the province" he added. "It's encouraging that people do remember those contributions."

Muriel died last Friday at the age of 95 following a short illness, a decade after her late husband passed on.

## Muriel Manning

She is survived by Preston, his wife Sandra, five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Thursday's service featured a video and musical tribute with pictures from throughout the matriarch's life, including her youngest years in a Saskatchewan convent, Ernest's 25-year rule over Alberta between 1943 and 1968, and the retirement years at their Arizona winter home.

The video was paired with tunes that she often played during her 50 years as music director for the Back to the Bible Hour radio broadcast. Songs included Joy Unspeakable, Beneath the Cross and Master the Tempest, and Abide With Me.

Sandra and two of Muriel's granddaughters revisited most of the 95 years through her own memoirs.

They recalled, in Muriel's words, Ernest's proposal to her in 1936 at the Rimrock Room in Calgary's Fairmont Palliser.

Born Muriel Preston in Saskatoon on March 30, 1911, she came to Alberta



Grant Black, Calgary Herald

**Preston Manning greets Irene Laing after the memorial service for Manning's mother, Muriel, in Calgary on Thursday.**

with her mother at the age of eight.

By the time she was 14, the accomplished pianist was asked by William Aberhart to replace his organist for meetings and broadcasts. Ernest met Muriel at (Bible Bill) Aberhart's Prophetic Bible Institute in Calgary.

Granddaughter Andrea Manning-Kroon remembered Muriel as "very astute" and a person who dearly loved her lifelong partner.

"Grandpa's political years sharpened her ability to judge character," she told those gathered. "Her steadfast support for him never wavered."

Muriel, she said, lived a life of "service and commitment" to God, her husband and family.

Sandra, through the matriarch's

memoirs, recalled that Ernest's retirement from provincial politics in 1968, and from the Senate of Canada in 1983, were two of "the best days" of Muriel's life.

"We welcome the freedom, peace and quiet of retirement," she wrote in the memoirs.

The hymn *In the Sweet By and By* wrapped up the memorial service.

Her musical legacy, however, will live on through the establishment of the Muriel Manning Memorial Music Studio, which will be constructed on the campus of Calgary's Alliance University College, a Christian educational institution.

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# Manning was matriarch of western politics

VICTOR OLIVIER

## DIED

Alberta's longest-serving first lady **Muriel A. Manning**, 95, after a brief illness, in Calgary, on April 21. She was born to Mary and William Preston in Saskatoon, and educated at Catholic schools in Prince Albert, Sask., and Calgary, where she was introduced to the world of music. She was an accomplished pianist by the time she attended Crescent Heights High School in Calgary, and it was there that she and her mother became acquainted with William Aberhart, the school principal, who also taught a Bible class at Westbourne Baptist Church. When Aberhart founded the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute and started working in Christian radio broadcasting, he chose 15-year-old Muriel Preston to play the piano for his radio ministry and public services. She eventually became the musical director of Aberhart's Radio Ministry and fulfilled that role for 50 years. It was also here that she met Ernest Manning, Aberhart's executive assistant, who at age 27 ran for public office, and in 1935 was elected to the Alberta legislature as the youngest cabinet minister in Aberhart's new Social Credit government. The two were married in 1937, and for the next 46 years they worked together as a political team. Ernest was elected premier in 1943 and served for the next 25 years. He served another 13 years when he was appointed to the Senate, in 1970. In addition to accompanying her husband as Alberta's first lady, Muriel Manning represented the province at numerous conferences and conventions and participated in the 1998 Ottawa unveiling of a postage stamp honouring her late husband's quarter-century of provincial leadership. Muriel Manning was also a strong supporter of another politician, her youngest son,



Muriel Manning was not only Alberta's longest-serving first lady, as wife of the late former premier Ernest Manning, but her son Preston (shown) became founder of the Reform and Canadian Alliance parties

Preston, who became the founder and leader of the Reform Party of Canada and the Canadian Alliance.