

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR FEBRUARY 24, 2025 CELEBRATES J.J. MORRISON

James J. Morrison, often referred to as J.J. Morrison, was a significant figure in Ontario's agricultural and political spheres in the early 20th century. Born in 1861 on a farm near Arthur, Ontario, Morrison's life and work profoundly impacted the province's farming community and beyond.

Morrison spent his early years on the family farm, where he gained a deep understanding of the challenges faced by farmers. This firsthand experience fueled his passion for advocating on behalf of the agricultural community. At the age of 25, he moved to Toronto, but after struggling to make a living, he returned to the farm with his wife, Margaret Blyth, and their four children. They had five more children after moving back. Morrison became involved in local township councils, school boards, and the Arthur Temperance Lodge, where he began organizing farmers.



Morrison emerged as a key voice for rural communities, dedicating his life to improving their business and living conditions. In 1914, he played a pivotal role in founding the United Farmers of Ontario (UFO), an organization aimed at uniting farmers to achieve common goals. The UFO quickly gained traction, and in 1919, it achieved a surprising victory in the Ontario provincial election, forming a government under the leadership of E.C. Drury. Although Morrison declined the premier's office, he was instrumental in shaping and implementing the government's reform agenda during its four-year tenure.

As the Secretary-Treasurer of the UFO until 1933, Morrison was a tireless advocate for cooperative efforts among farmers. He helped establish the United Farmers' Cooperative Company. Initially, his farmhouse served as his office, but he eventually moved back to a small office in Toronto. His first task was to secure a better price for binder twine, leading to an order of 100 tons of twine from a company in Ireland. The UFO then set up 40 branches to dispense supplies from the head office, marking the beginning of the co-ops as we know them today.

Morrison's influence extended beyond the UFO. He was a key figure in the creation of several significant social legislations in Ontario, including the Mothers' Allowance Act, the Minimum Wage Act for Women, and increased workers' compensation benefits. His efforts also contributed to rural electrification, the establishment of the Province of Ontario Savings Office, and the initiation of North America's first major reforestation project.

In addition to his legislative achievements, Morrison was a mentor to many, including his daughter, Rae Luckock, who became one of the first female MPPs in the Ontario Legislature. His legacy in agricultural education and advocacy is commemorated through various honours, including his induction into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame in 1962 and the establishment of the J.J. Morrison Memorial Lectureship in Agricultural Economics by the Ontario Federation of Agriculture in 1956. In 2018, after being nominated by Senator Rob Black, Morrison was also inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Morrison passed away in 1936, but his contributions to the agricultural community and his vision for cooperative efforts among farmers continue to be remembered and celebrated.

Submitted by the Wellington North Cultural Roundtable