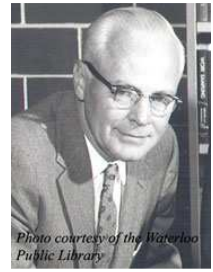


Gerald Hagey

It is difficult to know where the University of Waterloo would be if Gerald Hagey had not failed his final year at high school in Hamilton in the early 1920s.



Hagey's father told him he had a choice – get to work or complete his high school studies at Waterloo College.

Hagey enrolled in the tiny Waterloo College in 1923, at a time when it was just beginning to offer university courses. He not only got his high school diploma there, but went on to complete a university degree before taking a job in 1928 as a sales clerk with B.F. Goodrich in Kitchener.

Hagey worked at B.F. Goodrich for many years rising to the position of national advertising director by the 1950s, but then his mind began to wander back to education.

He became involved with the board of Waterloo College and in 1953 was invited to become its president.

Hagey had a dream in the mid-1950s – a radical vision – that would eventually transform Waterloo and change the nature of post-secondary education in Canada. Hagey wanted science and engineering students to be able to work in industry while they were completing their university degrees.

The idea first began to percolate while he was manager of advertising and public relations at Goodrich. His American counterparts were pre-testing commercial advertisements through door-to-door surveys. The Canadian office couldn't afford the programme, so Hagey pondered whether university students would be able to do the work.

"It would produce revenue for the students who did it. It would produce revenue for the college. And it was of benefit to the advertiser, on the basis that I had developed it," Hagey recalled much later in an interview.

This type of education was a controversial idea at the time but Hagey and his supporters eventually established a co-operative school of engineering called the Waterloo College Associate Faculties in the summer of 1957, with Hagey as its first president.

In 1959 Hagey resigned his position with Waterloo College, which eventually became Wilfrid Laurier University. Under Hagey's leadership the Associate Faculties evolved into the University of Waterloo, one of the largest universities in Canada, respected around the world for its co-operative education.

When asked whether the University of Waterloo would exist today without his efforts, Hagey, who retired from UW in 1969 said, "It's very hard to say whether or not it would have been started or not. It certainly wouldn't have been started for some years to come."

Hagey received many honours during his lifetime. In 1969, the Hagey Hall of the Humanities was named in his honour and later the University established an annual lecture series in his name. He was named Kitchener-Waterloo Citizen of the Year in 1969 and was invested as a member of the Order of Canada in 1986.

After retiring due to a battle with cancer that involved the removal of his larynx, Hagey remained active and even taught himself to speak again using a technique he learned after his surgery. Gerald Hagey approached the loss of his larynx with the characteristic strength he displayed throughout his life saying, “I was fortunate that I was able to take it in my stride and accept it as a challenge.”

Hagey, who eventually died of pneumonia at the age of eighty-four, was well-known for his positive approach to life:

“If you can’t do anything about a situation forget about it. If you can do something, do it, and do the best that you can to correct it. Don’t be a worrier. It doesn’t do any good.”

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library.