

HUGHES, Olive Margaret. December 13, 1899–December 29, 1936.

UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN (BA 1925, MA 1926), BRYN MAWR COLLEGE (PhD 1934).

Olive Margaret Hughes was the daughter of Martha (Rogers) (1863–1948) and Daniel Hughes (1860–1930), both originally from farm families in Wales. By 1886, when their first child, Eleanor (1886–1960), was born, they had a dairy shop in London and lived there during the nearly twenty-year span when their eleven children were born. Olive was born in London, the ninth in the family where, after the first girl, there were five boys followed by five girls. The other children were Richard (1888–1958), William (ca. 1891–1947), (Daniel) Oscar (1892–1965), Vernon Austin (1893–1970), Lewis Maurice (1894–1957), Blodwen (Dolly) (1896–1911), Winifred (1898–1967), Norah (b. 1902), and Kathleen (1905–1969).

The family migration to Canada began in 1905 when the eldest son arrived in western Saskatchewan, near Maidstone. Most other family members followed during the next several years including the father and another son in 1908; the mother and youngest daughter, Kathleen, in 1909; and finally the eldest daughter, Eleanor, with Winifred, Olive, and Norah in 1912. The Hughes family farmed in western Saskatchewan after their emigration from England.

Olive Hughes began her education in London. After her arrival in Canada at age twelve, she attended the Dee Valley School, a one-room school house some distance from their farm. According to a 1984 account by her younger sister Norah Dodds in a local history, “Mother was getting a little worried because our attendance at Dee Valley School was very irregular due to poor roads and bad weather” (*Chain of Memories*, 80). Thus, in 1914, their mother rented a small house in North Battleford, about fifty miles away, so the four youngest girls could attend school there. Olive attended grades nine through eleven before teaching in the fall of 1917 at the Dee Valley School with a permit from Regina, the provincial capital.

Hughes finished grade twelve in North Battleford and apparently attended Normal School in Saskatoon and then taught. She entered the University of Saskatchewan, also in Saskatoon, in the fall of 1921 at age twenty-one and specialized in mathematics under the direction of G. H. Ling and L. L. Dines. She completed the standard three-year course in 1925, having taken off the year 1922–23. She was granted a BA with high honors in mathematics in 1925. She was vice president and president, respectively, of the university mathematical society during her last two years as an undergraduate, and was an assistant in the department her last year. The summer following her graduation, she studied mathematics at the University of Chicago and then returned to the University of Saskatchewan as a graduate student and assistant in the mathematics department. She received her master’s degree in 1926.

Hughes remained at the university the next two years as an instructor and served as the faculty advisor to the mathematical society at least in 1927–28. She studied mathematics at the University of Chicago again during the summer of 1927.

Olive Hughes’s enrollment at the University of Saskatchewan overlapped with that of her next older sister Winifred, who earned a BA with honors in biology in 1922 and an MA in 1924. Winifred Hughes earned a PhD in biology from the University of Chicago in 1929 and subsequently was professor of zoology at the

University of Alberta. Apparently these were the only Hughes children to receive regular university degrees.

Olive Hughes left her instructorship at the University of Saskatchewan at the end of the academic year 1927–28 to accept a fellowship at Bryn Mawr College. She studied at Bryn Mawr 1928–31, the first two years as a resident fellow. She took mathematics as her major subject and physics as her independent minor. Her PhD was granted in 1934, with her dissertation having been completed in 1931 under the direction of [Anna Pell Wheeler](#).

According to the Bryn Mawr College 1934 commencement program, Hughes was principal of the Islay School District in Alberta, Canada, 1931–34. Records supplied by Allen Ronaghan, a Canadian historian associated with the museum of the school in Islay, indicate that she was there 1932–34, and that she taught grades seven through ten in one room of the two-room school. Mr. Ronaghan contacted three of her former students who commented on some aspects of her teaching at Islay. Their remarks included that she was “very intellectual,” “very well prepared as a teacher,” “kept to herself and did not go out into the community,” “smoked cigarettes in secret,” “read many books,” and “stayed at school late, either preparing her class work or reading her own assignments.”

It is unclear what Hughes did after receiving her PhD in 1934, although Bryn Mawr records show that she was residing on East Chestnut Street in Chicago, Illinois, in 1935. It is possible that she was with her sister Kathleen Hughes, who was working as a commercial artist in Chicago at that time according to the Hughes entry in *Chain of Memories*. Many years after Olive Hughes’s death, a 1950 Bryn Mawr directory listed her address as in care of her sister Winifred in Edmonton, Alberta, about 135 miles west of her last confirmed address in Islay.

An extensive search for information about the date, place, and cause of her death has resulted only in the following, written by her sister Norah: “Her untimely demise in 1936 was due to a bus-train collision” (*Chain of Memories*, 83). The grave marker at the cemetery in Maidstone, Saskatchewan, reads:

In Loving Memory
Olive Hughes, Ph.D.
Born Dec. 13, 1899
Died Dec. 29, 1936

Thesis and dissertation:

1926 A development of plane analytic geometry by vector methods. MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan. Typescript.

1931 A certain mixed linear equation. PhD dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, directed by Anna Pell Wheeler. Printed version, 1935, reprinted from *Amer. J. Math.* 57:861–82. PhD granted 1934.

Publication:

1935 A certain mixed linear integral equation. *Amer. J. Math.* 57:861–82. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 61.0421.02 (F. Rellich); *Zbl* 013.06601 (M. H. Stone).

Sources: PhD dissertation vita 1935; Bryn Mawr College Archives; Maidstone Cemetery; University of Saskatchewan Archives; communications with Bryn Mawr College Alumnae Office, Bryn Mawr College Archives, University of Saskatchewan Alumni Office, University of Saskatchewan Archives, Saskatchewan Vital Statistics Office; communication with Allen Ronaghan, historian; *North of the Gully*, compiled by North of the Gully History Book

Committee, Maidstone, Saskatchewan, 1981; *Chain of Memories*, Maidstone Rural History Book Committee, North Battleford, Saskatchewan, 1984; England Census 1901.

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