

Short Biographical Sketch of

Mabel Berta Williams

Mabel Berta Williams was born in Ottawa, Ontario on February 18, 1878. She was a descendant of Lewis Williams, who received the original crown grant of property along the Rideau River east of Bank Street, and known for many years as the 'Rideau Gardens'. It directly opposite the Billings Homestead, which lay on the south side of the River.

Mabel Williams was a graduate of Toronto University, and entered the Public Service of Canada on January 5, 1901. She was assigned to duties in the office of the Minister of the Interior (Hon. Clifford Sifton), where she remained until the summer of 1911 when she became a member of the original National Parks Branch of the Department. During the intervening period, she had been an associate of J.B.Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks from 1911 to 1936. Mr. Harkin joined the Interior Department on December 2, 1901, as private secretary to the Minister.

During her 20 years as a member of the 'Parks' Branch, Miss Williams served as a publicity writer, and authored many interesting and entertaining publications describing Canada's National Parks, and also the production of numerous motion picture films, the negatives of which were filmed principally by W.J.Oliver. She also assisted in other facets of national park administration.

In April, 1931, Miss Williams voluntarily retired from the Parks Branch at a time that the Department was undergoing a period of severe retrenchment sponsored by the Prime Minister, R.B.Bennett. She lived for a period in England, where she wrote a popular book on the Canadian national park system 'Guardians of the Wild, published by Thos. Nelson and Sons. She also rewrote some of her early park booklets and had them published in Saskatoon, Sask., by H.R. Larson.

Mabel Williams spent her declining years in London, Ontario, residing at 100 Ridout Street, South. She indicated great interest in the compilation of a history of the national park system, which was undertaken in 1969 by a former associate, W.F.Lothian, and provided the latter with much valuable information about the early years of the National Parks Branch.

She is survived by two nieces, Mrs. Ruth Wertheimer of Toronto and Frances Girling of London, Ontario. Mrs. Wertheimer's address is 27 Maclean Avenue, Toronto, Ont.

W.F.Lothian, March 20, 1984

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