

Bertha M. Ingle's life was a story of art and family devotion.

Birth: Born 1878, the first child of Robert and Mary Ingle – four more children were to follow.

Childhood: In her earliest years the family farmed in Puslinch township and then Proton township, but when Bertha was 6 years old they moved to Owen Sound, a busy port city where there was a thriving artistic community. To her family she was Bert, or Bertie, and that remained true her whole life.

Teenage years: She suffered a serious illness in 1889 (aged 11), after which her parents felt she should not return to formal schooling. Over the next decade, spending much of her time at home, she found her calling as an artist, winning three prizes for her paintings in the 1895 Grey County Fall Fair.

New Horizons: With Robert being away from home a lot working for the Canadian Pacific Railway, Mary Ingle decided the family would have more opportunities in Toronto, and they moved there in 1901.

Formal Art Education: In Toronto, Bertha became a student, and shortly thereafter an Associate, of the Farquhar McGillivray Knowles Studio. Both Farquhar McGillivray Knowles and his wife Elizabeth Annie were accomplished artists and well-connected members of Toronto Society. There Bertha was exposed to impressionism, which became an important element in the development of her personal artistic styles. She held a private exhibition of her work in 1906 at the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression.

Spreading her wings: While continuing to live with her parents, Bertha accepted assignments as a teacher of art from about 1906 in several Schools and Colleges, including one year (1908-09) at Ontario Ladies' College (OLC) in Whitby, where McGillivray Knowles was the non-resident Director of Art. In 1907 she travelled to Quebec with a group from the McGillivray Knowles Studio, her first experience of a visual and cultural ambience outside Ontario. The style of her work from Quebec is distinctive and insightful. In 1909 and 1910 she exhibited works at the Annual Exhibitions of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts (RCAA) and Ontario Society of Artists (OSA).

Westward Ho!: Her younger siblings found work in Toronto; two of them (John and Kate) were eventually enrolled at Albert College in Belleville. Bertha was especially close to her brother John. Like his father, he joined the CPR, and was sent to British Columbia where in 1913 he was stationmaster at Tappen, near Salmon Arm. Bertha and Mary visited BC during the summers of 1913, 1914, and 1915, Bertha revelling in the wild and rugged scenery. Always she enjoyed the outdoors, and she often sketched and painted 'en plein air', wherever she went.

Setting Roots: The Ingles lived in a series of rented houses during their first 20 years in Toronto, but in 1921 Robert was able to buy a house for the family at 6 North Markham St (later Rossmore Rd), a semi-detached in the Seaton Village area, near Bathurst and Dupont. This would be Bertha's home base for all her remaining years.

Back to OLC: Bertha was appointed Art teacher at OLC for five years, 1922-27, the major teaching assignment of her career. But by 1927, her mother Mary was ill and needed care at home, possibly a factor in Bertha ending her teaching.

A Life Choice: Bertha had many suitors over her adult life, but never married. In a note to her sister Kate in her later years she told of making a conscious choice at one point to care for her father, rather than to accept an offer of marriage.

California: John had married and they lived for a while in Glacier, BC, where the first of their two sons was born in 1920. But in 1923 they moved to Santa Monica, California where John found a better job. In 1928 they drove from there to Toronto to visit with Robert and Mary; Bertha accompanied them on the drive back and stayed for a few weeks in Santa Monica, finding yet another distinctive artistic challenge, the seaside sunshine and leisure, captured in a collection of paintings and sketches.

Sorrow upon sorrow: In the fall of 1928, while Bertha was still in Santa Monica, her beloved brother John died suddenly (probably of appendicitis). Shortly afterwards, she was called back to Toronto by train and she was present when Mary died of cancer. These losses were enormously difficult for her - yet she continued to find energy and take solace in her painting. Early in 1929, there was another family death, the wife of her brother Roy.

It fell to Bertha to care for her father from that time forward. The ownership of the house was transferred to her name in 1931. Robert suffered at least two strokes (in 1933 and 1937), and died in 1941.

Family welcomed: At the end of WWII, Bertha generously accommodated for many weeks the young families of a nephew and a niece while they looked for longer-term housing. Kate and Bertha spent much time together from 1951 on, and they also had cousins also living on Rossmore Rd with whom they both shared many hours. Bertha was close to family throughout her life, and this carried on through all the years till her death from cancer in 1962.

Artistic Legacy: Bertha worked hard to improve her art through her entire adult life. A brilliant colourist, she sought to capture light and movement and also the emotional feel of natural scenery of all kinds. In her hundreds of portraits, her consistent goal was to represent the mood and character of her subjects, something she could often do with only a few well-executed brush strokes. We have a great many of her preliminary studies and well as more finished works – it is striking how even the initial efforts with a subject capture expression and feeling, making them works to be treasured in their own right.