

On Whom the Muses Smile: Life of an Ontario Artist

Bertha May Ingle (1878 – 1962) was an artist who grew up in Owen Sound, Ontario, but lived most of her adult life in Toronto. She painted landscapes and portraits in an impressionist style, and had a special affinity for painting portraits of children.

Our title comes from an adaptation of a few lines of Wordsworth, written in an unknown hand, which has come down to us with a photograph of Bertha as a young woman, sketching or painting outside the door of a log house. The inscription reads:

“For deathless powers to Art belong,
And they like Demi-gods are strong
On whom the Muses smile. “



Figure 1: Bertha Ingle at work, date unknown. Family collection.

The information available about her life is fragmentary. Although she labeled her photographs, she seldom labeled her paintings and drawings. She kept extensive notes on her readings, but there is no surviving diary. We are fortunate that from time to time she

made introspective or autobiographical notes, and that she saved the drafts of her letters in notebooks.

Another source of information is family tradition. Her grandnieces and grandnephews are now in their 60s and 70s, and remember her last years vividly. Most of the family collection of her work passed eventually to her Toronto niece, Elinore Beattie, the daughter of her sister Kate.

Bertha May Ingle was born on April 13, 1878, in Puslinch, Ontario, the eldest of five children of Robert Ingle and Mary Little. The first years of her life were spent in Puslinch, but at the end of 1880, Robert Ingle purchased a farm in Proton Township, Grey County. Bertha's earliest memories were of farming life. In a late autobiographical note, she wrote:

“Looking back, it is not strange, but a little sad, that I remember so few spoken words. For almost every child hungers for the words that open up the worlds of feeling and understanding. But I have pictures, great galleries of them. One of the very first, vivid as yesterday, is of being outdoors in the summer twilight, the air cool and moist against my face. The cows had been milked and were standing chewing peacefully. The sun was set, but the western sky was still aglow. I stood near my father, who was standing very tall and still. Suddenly I sensed excitement, though no one moved or spoke. And then I too saw it, a great clumsy looking form, rearing up and climbing high on the snake fence. It sat there black against the orange and red of the sky, its nose lifted and scenting to right and left. Then it climbed down again and leisurely sauntered off toward the great swamp near by. It was a bear. I was about four and that was seventy-five years ago.”

Farming in Proton Township was hard, and turned out to be insufficient to support the growing Ingle family. In 1884 they moved into Owen Sound, where Robert had obtained a position with a mill store operated by Jno Wright and Co., on Poulett Street.

As a child in Owen Sound, Bertha contracted a serious illness, possibly typhoid or poliomyelitis. She recovered after a long convalescence, but was left partially lame. Because of her illness, her formal education came to an early end. In the next few years, protected and perhaps over-protected by her family, she spent long hours reading and writing, drawing and painting.



Figure 2: Bertha as a child. Family collection.



Figure 3: Ingle family, about 1898. Counter-clockwise from bottom left: Kate, Robert, Mary, Roy, Ettie, John, Bertha. Family collection.

By the middle of the 1890s, she knew that she was an artist. We can only guess at how she began. Her father, Robert Ingle, was a gifted amateur. She may early on have known Emma Scott (later Emma Scott Raff), who was listed in the 1891 census as “Artist, Painter” The earliest dated piece of Bertha’s in the family collection is a September 1893 entry in her mother’s autograph book. A letter written in 1895 by her friend Herbert N. Casson congratulated her on winning several prizes for her pictures, and encouraged her in her dream of earning enough to travel to a large cultural centre to study art. The occasion was the North Grey Fall Exhibition of September 1895.



Figure 4: Report from the North Grey Fall Exhibition. The Owen Sound Advertiser, September 20th 1895

Bertha kept a photo of an artist at work, identified on the back as “Mr. Woodhouse in his studio in Owen Sound.” It is very likely that this was Harry Valentine Woodhouse, a Canadian-born American artist, who lived in Owen Sound in a period spanning 1901, and he may have given her lessons. She also made a note of “painting at the Bell’s”, which seems to refer to a time in 1896-1898, possibly at the house of artists Helen and Catherine Bell, whose niece Helen D. Smith was a friend of Bertha’s. As well, she was part of a circle of friends whose bond may have been their interest in art. The person in the centre of Figure 5 is Kate Andrew, a well-known Owen Sound schoolteacher and artist.



Figure 5: Five friends. Celia Cromar, Bertha Ingle, Kate Andrew, Helen Smith, Kate Moore, about 1897. Family collection.

The year 1898 was eventful. From Herbert Casson's letters, we know that Bertha embarked on a series of lengthy sketching and painting visits with friends or relatives. She was in Erin, Ontario in May and June; she was staying in Eden Mills in June, July and August; and in the autumn she was staying in Churchville, with the family of her great-aunt Rachel Burton. Here are notes of her mind's images from around this period:

“Markdale, at the Davis farm
Heralds – Children's shelter
The farm at Churchville horses, dog, shooting, mushrooms
Aunt Rachel gathering up the goslings in her white apron; old goose flapping wings on her back.
Sketching by the river in Churchville
The curious steer”

“Heralds” was a Children's Aid Society shelter of which Mrs. F. B. Herald was the matron. It had moved in 1897 to a new location at the corner of Jackson and William Streets, now 9th Street and 5th Avenue West – the same corner where it is believed that the Ingle family was living at the time. Some of Bertha's early portraits of children may be connected with Heralds.

Also in 1898, Robert Ingle left his employment at Wright's, and began working for the CPR. According to family tradition, when Mary Ingle realized that her husband would spend much of his time away from home because of his work for the CPR, she resolved

to move the family to Toronto. She began the project by travelling herself to Toronto in the spring of 1901, and obtaining employment, possibly as a garment worker. Her short term plan was to make enough money to pay for their lodging, and to try to find places for her younger daughters, Ettie and Kate. Her sons, John and Roy, were already employed, some of the time in shipping on the Great Lakes. Mary Ingle seems to have carried out the plan successfully, as over the next few years the Ingle family rented lodgings at a succession of addresses in Toronto: 24 Phoebe Street, 67 Esther Street, 76 Esther Street, 55 Trinity Square, 784 Euclid Avenue, 98 Baldwin Street, 160 Robert Street, and finally 230 Robert Street, from 1911 until 1921. The move to Toronto also resulted in higher aspirations for John and Kate, who both attended Albert College in Belleville in the first decade of the century.

Bertha's aspirations were already high. With the move to Toronto she began a more formal study of art. She was fortunate to be able to study with Farquhar McGillivray Knowles, R.C.A., and held a private graduation exhibition at the Margaret Eaton School of Literature and Expression, at the end of 1906. She became an associate of the Knowles studio. In this capacity she obtained positions as an assistant teacher of art over the next few years. She taught at Westbourne School for Girls, at 278 Bloor Street West, and it was probably there that she met her lifelong friend, Kathleen Jean Munn, who also studied with Farquhar McGillivray Knowles.



Figure 6: Bertha (second from left) with her Westbourne School art students, about 1907. Family collection.

In 1908-1909 she taught as an assistant at Ontario Ladies' College in Whitby; the regular assistant art teacher was Florence McGillivray who may have been on leave at the time. There she acquired the affectionate nickname, "Lady Bertha". She also taught at Pickering College in Newmarket.



Figure 7: Art room at Ontario Ladies' College, 1908-1909. Bertha is in the second row, fifth from the right. Mr. Knowles, Director of the College of Fine Arts, is in the back row, third from the right. Family collection.

Bertha visited Quebec with a group of artist colleagues in the summer of 1907 or 1908, or perhaps both years. The pencil and oil sketches and paintings from this period have markedly different subjects from the domestic scenes and pastoral landscapes of her graduation work, and show a considerable amount of experimentation.

A list of pictures on the side of a pencil sketch may date from a little later, since she is known to have visited Sturgeon Lake in the summer of 1908:

- Quebec market
- Sunset Toronto
- By the Roadside
- Churchville
- Little Champlain
- St
- Sous le Cap
- Lower Town Quebec
- Twilight – Lindsay
- Sunset north
- Storm on Sturgeon
- Lake

Sunset Lake Simcoe
Stormy
Bubbles
Feeding the Baby

In November of 1909 Bertha M. Ingle exhibited a painting in the Thirty-first Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts in Hamilton, and another in November of 1910, in the Thirty-second Annual Exhibition in Montreal. In March of 1910, she had two paintings in the Annual Exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists in Toronto.

In the summer of 1914, following the wedding of her sister Kate and Stanley Lindabury in Toronto, Bertha travelled with her mother by train to British Columbia, to visit family, particularly her brother John, by then a CPR station master at Tappen, BC. Mary Ingle returned to Toronto at the end of the summer, while Bertha remained in BC until at least the beginning of October, sketching and painting. She was back again in 1915, this time at Cambie station, near Revelstoke, BC, with its magnificent scenery of mountains and glaciers. Bertha loved living in the mountains, and later wrote to her friend Emil Heiring, a young artist in California:

“You need not think I could be so easily shocked at your primitive mode of living. I have “roughed it” several times, with my brother in the mountains of British Columbia. Once I had my sleeping apartment in a box car that was “fitted up” a bit, and one night a freight train bumped me down quite a grade where I had to remain until morning with my feet higher than my head, until my brother had a “pusher” pull me up on the level again. And I actually climbed one of the mountains to the very top. I am not boasting -- it was really a modest climb with a made trail all the way – but still quite an achievement for me who am not athletic. The mountain was nine thousand feet high. I do not know at what altitude we started but it took all day from early morning until after dark to make it. How I enjoyed that day. I am sure nature intended me for an outdoor life.”

In 1921, Robert Ingle, now retired from the CPR but working part-time as bookkeeper for the lubricant company, Kargo Compound, was able to purchase a house at 6 North Markham Street (later Rossmore Road), in the Seaton Village neighbourhood of Toronto. It became necessary for Bertha to earn money more steadily to help support the family. Beginning in 1922, until 1949, her pictures appeared regularly on the cover of the Red Cross Junior magazine, edited in Toronto by Jean E. Browne. The start of this series coincided also with a larger life change, the beginning of several years of teaching at the Ontario Ladies' College (OLC).

Bertha's major teaching assignment at the Ontario Ladies' College (OLC) took place in 1922-1927. Her duties included living at the college, teaching art, and acting as faculty advisor to the Art Club. From the December issue of *Vox Collegii*, the College literary magazine:

“The Queen City also claims Miss Ingle as a resident. She was at OLC a few years ago and we are glad to have her back teaching art ... The Art Club of 1922 aims to

make the year one of marked advancement, and Miss Ingle, our Art teacher, cooperates splendidly in all our undertakings.

Through the kindness of Reva Richardson, several of the Seniors and Junior members motored to a delightful spot near Pickering, in the early fall. Here we enjoyed an abundance of good things provided for our lunch, which we ate in picnic style, soon after arriving.

After lunch each of our party chose a subject to sketch, and spent a happy afternoon, getting back in time for dinner.”

Ontario Ladies' College provided a varied set of educational opportunities for young women of the day. For example, in the 1910s it was possible in six years to obtain academic credit for secondary school and two years of university; at the other extreme, a student could attend for a year or two and take a selection of courses determined by the her own interests, preparation and ability. The Calendar did admonish that “students who are specialists in Music and Fine Art, residing in the College, will be expected to take one or more literary studies for the profitable employment of their time, unless they can show that their time is otherwise fully occupied”. The list of departments included a College of Literature and Science for academic subjects, a large music department known as the Ontario Conservatory of Music, a School of Expression, a Commercial College, a College of Fine Arts, and a College of Domestic Science and Art. The College of Fine Arts was one of the smaller departments, with faculty consisting of a Director, who would visit periodically, and a resident teacher. In the period 1922-1927 the Director was T. G. Greene, O. S. A. Enrolment in Fine Arts was modest, and standards were apparently high. Although a Gold Medal for highest standing in Senior Art was advertised, it was seldom awarded. Reva Richardson received a prize for highest standing in Senior Art in 1923, and went on to study art in Toronto.

Early in this period, Bertha executed a large formal portrait of Mrs. John James Hare, wife of the founding Principal of the College and Lady Principal for a short time. Mrs. Hare had left the College some years earlier and had died in 1922, but Bertha must have known her while teaching at OLC in 1908-1909. The painting was presented to the Board of Directors in June of 1924 as part of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations. It hangs still in the main hallway of the College building (now called Trafalgar Castle School), directly opposite an earlier portrait, painted by Florence McGillivray, of Rev. Dr. Hare himself.

The teachers of art also taught classes to students in the more popular domestic science stream. From the 1926-1927 yearbook:

“Although the Art Class was not as large as in former years, the display of finished work was very creditable. The customers at our annual S. C. M. Bazaar can tell you of the lovely articles sold there, and everyone knows of the lovely posters which have been so promptly and willingly drawn for every occasion.

The Senior Household Science Class, accompanied by Miss Ingle, and others of the faculty, enjoyed the privilege of being shown through the home of Mrs. R. S. McLaughlin, Oshawa. This was a distinct treat for all of us, and will not be forgotten.

Miss Ingle also inaugurated a new series of lectures in Interior Decoration, and the rooms of the Household Science Class were soon noticed to be blossoming forth in all sorts of untold and unheard of beauty.”



Figure 8: Picture from 1926-1927 yearbook, Ontario Ladies' College. Town of Whitby Archives, Whitby Public Library.

One notable and much-beloved student was Hama Kobayashi, of a prominent Tokyo family, who had come to OLC to further her study of music and household science. Bertha made a portrait of Hama in pastels, today in the possession of the Beattie family. While at the school, Hama contracted influenza, and to everyone's sorrow she died in Oshawa General Hospital, in December 1925.

According to family tradition, Bertha was at one point commissioned to paint a portrait of the writer and poet Charles G. D. Roberts. If this is true, it is most likely to have occurred after February 1925, the time when Roberts returned to Toronto from living in England. There is some mystery about the picture which fulfilled the commission, but it may be connected with an image of Roberts which appeared at least twice in the Toronto Telegram, marking the occasions of his seventy-fifth birthday on January 10, 1935 and

his knighthood in June of the same year. Another portrait, probably painted at a later date, is in the possession of the family.

Bertha was still in Whitby at the time of her parents' 50th wedding anniversary in April 1927. However, she left at the end of the academic year. We do not know why she left at that time. She may have been worried about her mother, who was suffering from a bout of ill health, which may already have been diagnosed as cancer. Her sister Kate had just moved with her children to Vancouver. And although Bertha often spoke of her love of teaching, she may have started to become weary of it. She left, but kept in touch for many years with her friends at the school.

In the early summer of 1928, Bertha's brother John and his family came for a visit from California. Bertha accompanied them on their return journey. There was talk of her looking for work, either commissions or teaching. In September, John wrote to his parents:

"I was able to get in touch with Mr. Sanger who had some business dealings with me last fall and he is having his wife set for a painting starting in the morning and as he is very highly connected Berty will get a good deal of work at a good figure if she cared to stay ... Bert is very popular here and has met some nice people and I am sure she would do well if she arranged to come back here later."

Bertha was fascinated by the grandeur of the Pacific, and became deeply engaged in portraying children and other pleasure-seekers on the beach at Santa Monica.

She was still in California near the end of October, when her brother suffered an attack, which according to family tradition was one of acute appendicitis, and died. Three weeks later, Bertha was called back to Toronto, because her mother's illness had taken a grave turn. She was present at the death of her mother at the end of November, 1928.

Bertha was devastated by these deaths. She had been very close to her brother, and her mother had been an immense force and influence in her life. She assumed the care of her beloved father from that point onward. More sorrow came when Roy's wife Lucy Ingle died of appendicitis in February 1929, and Roy, now a grandfather himself, came to stay for a while with Robert and Bertha. He would visit for extended periods for many years thereafter, until he remarried in 1947.

Early in 1930 she wrote to her cousin Frances Ingle, regarding a recent purchase of a radio, at the house which had just become 6 Rossmore Road:

"... bought us one about a month ago, and I find it a splendid investment for both of us. Before we had it, Father would read and read until his eyes were so tired that he was almost ill, and when he could read no more, he did not know what to do with himself, but now the radio fills the gap full, and I am so relieved, because I can work or go out if I wish knowing that he is safely occupied. He cannot stand late hours so we go out very little, and I do not need to have people in so much now with the radio. Saturday night I had four friends to dinner, and was so tired yesterday I could hardly

move. I like everything in perfect order in the house but it is hard to manage without sufficiency of either strength or money.

I have almost given up reading for a time as I need some glasses, but I had "Precious Bane" by Mary Webb, and a volume of Conrad's letters given me for Christmas, both of which I enjoyed very much. I read the Count of Monte Cristo several years ago and was of course fascinated to the end. The Black Tulip we have in the bookcase but I have not read it yet. It seemed a big undertaking without glasses.

Having to be housekeeper, hostess, cook, laundress etc. etc. does not leave the artist much of a chance, but occasionally I try to work up some of my California sketches. Mostly studies of children playing on the beach -- a most difficult subject, but I love it. Lately I heard a very interesting lecture on modern French art, by a French woman. Ideals seem to be changing rapidly, don't you think, or perhaps not ideals, but modes of expression. So far I cannot justify what is called by some "the cult of the ugly". It seems to me that many are trying to express the inexpressible in line and color, but it will be most interesting to watch the developments to come."

In 1932, Bertha wrote to Miss Nettie Burkholder, who had been Lady Principal at Ontario Ladies College during her first assignment there in 1908-1909. Miss Burkholder had moved to Edmonton in 1912 to become the Secretary of Alberta College. In her reply, Miss Burkholder provided an introduction to an Edmonton art dealer:

"There is a gentleman who has quite a large Art store here, who will undertake the sale personally, so that you do not need to come. I am enclosing his card. He asks that you send him a small water color, which he undertakes to return to you safely. You are to write him particulars regarding the pictures you wish to send, and he will write to you how he will manage the exhibit. No one need come to see to the sales, for he will undertake all that work himself. Mr. Higgins is a thoroughly reliable man and well respected. He is an Englishman with considerable knowledge of Art, Frequent exhibitions of collections of Art work are to be seen in his store, and I am sure he will be as able to do you credit and sell your pictures, as any one here. ... If you decide to send your pictures I shall try to interest all my friends in their beauties, for I remember how well you used to paint."

We do not know whether the exhibition took place. It may have been prevented by the fact that Robert Ingle suffered a serious stroke in 1933. Kate and her children came for an extended visit from Vancouver to help, but returned in the summer of 1934.

Bertha donated two paintings (both depicting rural landscapes near Churchville) to the William Perkins Bull collection, compiled in the early 1930s as a tribute to the history and natural beauty of Peel County. Her middle name appears in the catalogue as *Maylaw*, an adopted name she also occasionally used when signing paintings.

Bertha and her father visited California in late 1936, a stay which seemed to do him some good. But he suffered at least one further stroke, in 1937, from which he never recovered. All indications are that he remained the sweet-natured gentleman of earlier

years, despite his disability. Nevertheless, Bertha's decision to assume the care of her father was also a sacrifice. According to family tradition, she attracted proposals of marriage throughout her life, and seemingly declined them all; but there is evidence that one received in the late 1920s was declined with some regret, and the consciousness of choosing.

Following her father's death in 1941, Bertha remained in the house at 6 Rossmore Road; Robert had transferred the property to her name in 1931. It was semi-detached, built shortly after the turn of the century, about 20 feet wide, with two and one half storeys. The back of the ground floor of the house was taken up by a kitchen, lit by a west window. The kitchen held a gas range, a wood-burning stove, a sink under a narrow window that looked out on the garden, a large pantry set into the wall, an oak farmhouse buffet with massive old china dishes, and a white kitchen dresser with drawers for papers and painting supplies. The massive kitchen table in the middle served as eating place for all but formal meals. On those days when the kitchen became a studio (for the first half of the day) the table was pushed toward the buffet, and the easel set up in the light of the kitchen window.

From a letter to Frances Ingle, end of 1945:

“And what a blessing the war is over, and men getting back to peaceful living, some of them anyway. Last summer my nephew John Lindabury wrote me from Vancouver, asking if I could take him and his wife and baby in until they could find a place to live here. He was an instructor in the Air Force for three years, and is now taking a five year course in architecture at Toronto University. It was not easy, but I arranged to let them come, and they were here a whole month – looking everywhere, for living quarters. Finally they bought a bungalow that was nearly completed, and finished the painting etc. after they moved in. Two days before they left my house, John's sister Elinore, with her baby, and husband, who was just back from India (also in the Air Force) arrived from Winnipeg, and were here eleven days. ... I was so tired after those two months of hard work that I am just now beginning to feel ambitious again. I have more painting to do than I care for – would prefer more leisure – but there is a good market just now. Very little work coming from Europe, so I am making hay while the sun shines, not that I really care much about the money, or anything, as I did once. I miss my dear beautiful Father, and my Mother, and brother John.”

Following these post-war accommodations, she took in roomers to help make ends meet. Sometimes this was a form of social work. She occasionally pointed out with amusement the parallel with Emily Carr and *The House of All Sorts*, and declared that she could write a book about the people who had stayed at 6 Rossmore. By the mid-1950s all of the roomers were women, and many became friends. They paid between \$14 and \$18 a month each, for a room with cleaning and bed linen service, and space in the small refrigerator on the ground floor.

There was a park at Rossmore Road and Vermont Avenue, with swings and a wading pool for the children of the neighbourhood, who were numerous. Bertha knew all the neighbourhood children, and treasured them. Some of the paintings now in the family collection are portraits of children who lived nearby.

In the last ten years of her life, Bertha spent much time with family, particularly with Kate, who was back in Toronto and who visited once or twice a week, but also her cousins Jean and Ailsa Little, who lived across the street, and the Beattie family. She would invite the children to stay with her, one at a time, and take them to the Toronto Zoo, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Canadian National Exhibition. She accompanied the Beattie family to a spacious and charming (rented) cottage at Oliphant in the Bruce Peninsula in the summer of 1952, and spent much of the time sketching, and working on a painting of the children in the woods behind the house. Part of the attraction must surely have been the chance to return to Owen Sound, where she had grown up.



Figure 9: "Concentration". In the garden at 6 Rossmore Road. From slide, taken by Ailsa Little, 1952. Family collection.

Toward the end of the 1950s, the artist Tom Lima, who had lived in the Rossmore neighbourhood as a boy, re-established contact. He and his friend Jim Imrie, a sculptor originally from Wales, included Bertha in their circle, and conceived the idea of taking her to New York. This they did in April of 1960. The trip was a great success. She bought a hat in New York, in a shop full of lovely hats, all one price, \$2.98! She said it brought her more compliments than any other hat she had ever had. “The boys” had insisted on her buying it for the Easter Parade.



Figure 10: New York hat. Family collection.

By the next year Bertha was becoming more frail, and more easily tired. Her family worried that looking after the house might be becoming too much for her. The following undated note must have been written following a proposal from the Beattie's that she should sell her house and move in with them:

“Think!

Live one day at a time.

Take care of feet, teeth, eyes.

Get enough rest and enough outdoor exercise.

Maintain freedom and independence.

Paint as much as I can, but keep up the house. Elinore and Norman have the kindest intentions, but cannot realize what a home can mean to a single old woman *when she is old*, and all her roots are in one spot --- familiar. One unkind word and I should feel *unwanted* in their home.

People with the creative instinct, such as musicians, writers, artists, sculptors, are extremely sensitive to pressures from outside themselves. They have happy moments, but far more unhappiness. I have everything *in myself* for peace and happiness, because I love beauty in every form, including people, but I will not be victimized by the savage element in them, if I can help it.”

By the end of 1961 she was suffering from a number of ills. She wrote in her New Year’s letters:

“I had rather a bad time last year so far as health is concerned. I thought I was becoming too dependent on my cane, so I stopped using it, and overdid the walking without it – result Bursitis. Jean phoned my cousin Dr. McCannel, who was then medical director of Riverdale hospital. He came over and brought me some red pills – also he sent a doctor friend who is a bone specialist. He in turn sent a man with an X-ray machine, also a physio therapist, so I was embarrassed with attention. Jean and Ailsa brought me tempting meals, until my sister borrowed a wheelchair from the “Crippled Civilians”. After that I managed to fend for myself. I used the chair for a month, when, to my delight, my leg recovered. All it needed was rest. ... I am just now beginning to feel like my old self again.”

However, the recovery did not last, and she was diagnosed with cancer near the beginning of March, 1962, confirming her worst fears. She fought the illness valiantly, but at last, weakness prevailed, and she was taken in great pain to Women’s College Hospital, where she died on October 20, 1962, at the age of eighty-four. She is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Toronto.

Her sister Kate organized an exhibition and sale of some of Bertha’s paintings two years later. Those which remained are held mainly by members of the Beattie family. Ranging from very preliminary sketches to finished drawings and paintings, they number in the hundreds.

Herbert Casson had early on advised Bertha not to study the old masters before finding her own way. This was good advice, because her technical skill was second nature to her. Her own way would today be classified as impressionist, and representational. She made pictures of scenes, real or imagined, in which she found beauty or interest. She would analyze what she saw, in terms of form, composition and colour, and try to render it with simplicity and economy, on paper or canvas, beginning with sketches in pencil or oils. She displayed a masterly command of colour harmony, and often conceived of a painting, from the start, in terms of its palette of colours.

She summed up her artistic aspirations in a letter written in early 1930 to Emil Heiring:

“I am glad you like the little watercolor of course, though I do not feel it deserves all the admiration you express. I want to express so much more than just the surface effects, and they are difficult enough, you know. Can anything be much more elusive than light and movement? But I love them well enough I think never to grow tired of trying.”

And often, she succeeded.

Mary E Thompson and J David Beattie December 2013 All Rights Reserved