

*Outstanding Women*

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## *C. B. Crawford*

Born in Ingersoll on May 2, 1910, Catherine Betty Crawford grew up with an interest in art that was to continue all her life and make her one of Oxford County's best-known watercolourists. As a teenager, Betty took art lessons with Gordon Payne, a resident artist in Ingersoll. "He was a good teacher. He didn't teach anything that I later thought was a wrong steer. Ingersoll was very fortunate in having a resident artist."<sup>1</sup> After completing high school in Ingersoll, Betty was faced with the choice of attending the Ontario College of Art and becoming a professional artist, or keeping painting as a hobby and earning her living in another field. Although she had always wanted to attend the Ontario College of Art, friends and relatives discouraged her from doing so. Except for commercial art, painting in those days was considered by very few as a career. Such a career lacked economic security, something people in the Depression years demanded. Commercial art held no appeal for Betty, for she regarded art as personal expression and she felt uncomfortable with the thought of painting to satisfy someone else's demands. Thus, she decided to pursue her interests in art as a hobby. She was offered a Latin scholarship from the University of Toronto and graduated in 1934 with a degree in Latin and Greek. She returned to Ingersoll to be a supply teacher but disliked it so intensely that she quit.

In 1941, she accepted a position as chief librarian at the Ingersoll Public Library, a position she held until her retirement in 1972. To break the routine of the library, Miss Crawford started an Art Club. The group was greatly encouraged by the London Art Gallery, which loaned paintings and sent artists to speak at the library. The Ingersoll Art Club was relocated in the Ingersoll Creative Arts Centre and by 1980, the Centre had grown to

over 100 members.

Meanwhile, Miss Crawford's own art developed. Workshops in foreign countries, including England, provided an opportunity to experiment with her art while enjoying a trip overseas. "Hobby holidays" became the normal pattern for her vacations, which she always planned with painting in mind. Such holidays took her to Greece; "the colours are so vibrant, the air so clear,"<sup>2</sup> she said once. Greece, especially, was an inspiration. The brilliant colours, coupled with a life-long love of Greek art, made a memorable vacation.

In the summer Miss Crawford often attended art schools. Through the years Betty studied under some very prestigious instructors at schools that included the Elliot O'Hara School of Watercolor in Maine, the Doon School in Kitchener, and Queen's University in Kingston. At the Doon School in 1954 she studied under Group of Seven artist, Fred Varley. "He was a stimulating teacher," she remarked later. "He was very philosophical. He did not use any regular teaching methods. He could show you things in your art that you didn't realize were there. It was just listening to him talk that made the difference. He was encouraging to me. We had a sense of rapport between us, and I think that helped me, that he thought I could paint."<sup>3</sup>

One summer was spent studying with an artist near Orillia who was noted for her wood block prints. Through her, Betty became interested in print-making. In 1951, she was elected to the Canadian Society of Painters and Engravers, which is a highly-regarded professional artists' organization. Betty was highly honoured by this event though she returned to watercolour as her primary interest.

Miss Crawford has appreciated her retirement from the Ingersoll Public Library as an opportunity to devote more time to her painting, both at home in Ingersoll and on holidays. When travelling, she makes sketches in a note-

book. These sketches might be reworked when she has more time; others are left as they are if she feels they say everything she wants them to express. Whenever she can, however, she paints in her favourite manner, which involves directly painting watercolour on location. This direct method lends a greater sense of immediacy to her work, and is also the way she most often chooses to work at home. She prefers working outdoors where she enjoys being able to produce a painting quickly with watercolours. "It goes back to my childhood when I went for long walks in the woods...You can have more fun with watercolours than any other media, I think."<sup>4</sup>

#### Footnotes

- 1 London Free Press, Saturday, November 22, 1975, p. 63.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Interview with C. B. Crawford, Wednesday, July 9, 1980.
- 4 Ibid.

#### Bibliography

Files of the Local History Department, Woodstock Public Library.  
Interview with C. B. Crawford, July 9, 1980.  
London Free Press, Saturday, November 22, 1975.