

Mina Benson Hubbard

Mina Benson Hubbard's story begins in 1870 on Cavan Road outside of Bewdley, where she was born to an Irish immigrant family. The youngest of seven children, one of Mina's daughters recalls her as being "[...] very beautiful and elegant with a [...] fiery nature underneath amazing self-control." It would be this fiery nature that propelled her forward on the adventure of a lifetime through the Labrador wilderness just after the turn of the 20th century.

As a child, Mina attended the rural school S.S. #15 until she was 14 years old and was later sent to Cobourg, where she boarded in town while attending the local high school, Cobourg Collegiate. After finishing her schooling, Mina returned to the countryside, where she was a schoolteacher for a decade first at Benson's Corners and later at Glourourim.



Source: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/mina-benson-hubbard>

Just before the turn of the century, Mina decided a new career was in order and moved from Bewdley to New York City, where she trained as a nurse. While working in a hospital in New York she met her future husband, Leonidas Hubbard Jr., while he was recovering from typhoid fever.

Hubbard Jr. was an explorer and journalist who worked for the outdoor magazine "Outing," which took him on many camping trips and expeditions. His final fateful journey was in 1903 when he attempted to trek across the Labrador peninsula with his best friend Dillon Wallace, along with Job Chapies, Joseph Iserhoff, Gilbert Blake, and guide George Elson. Sadly, due to lack of proper preparations, Hubbard Jr. died from starvation and exhaustion in Labrador's

interior before they could complete their journey. When Mina received word of his death by telegram months later, she was devastated. Further devastation followed when Wallace wrote "The Lure of the Labrador Wild," which Mina felt sullied Leonidas' reputation.



To vindicate her husband, Mina embarked on her own journey across Labrador in 1905. Wallace, too, decided to retrace the journey, and their respective adventures were turned into a race by the media. Mina and her crew, which included George Elson, set off on June 25, 1905 aboard the same boat as Wallace and his crew. Mina confided in Elson that she wanted to complete the journey ahead of Wallace and "write a book to set the record straight about our achievements."

Source: <https://ridingwithcarl.wordpress.com/2019/11/13/mina/>

The group had only two months to travel nearly 900 kilometres of wilderness to reach their destination of Ungava Bay and make the final steamer leaving the George River Post during the last week of August. Mina was better prepared than her husband was for the journey and had the benefit of nicer weather. The two canoes she and her crew travelled with were packed as tightly as they could be, with various supplies ranging from two silk tents to 200 pounds of bacon and 393 pounds of flour. Mina also brought her two Kodak cameras, which she used to document the journey. She took over 300 photographs and kept field notes and detailed observations of the flora and fauna of Labrador's interior, as well as the annual caribou migration.

Her previously mentioned fiery nature could be seen in her habit of wandering off into the wilderness on her own, much to the dismay of her travelling companions. There are records showing that Elson kept a close eye on her, and to Mina's amusement, instances such as her disappearing over a large hill just as an intense storm broke had the men sweating with terror. After this incident, she was made to swear to never take off on her own again for fear of losing her to weather or predators.

As she journeyed, Mina took measurements of the landscape, which allowed her to correctly map the region's lakes, rivers and tributaries. Previous maps by Arthur Low were not as accurate, and their inaccuracies were part of the reason her husband's journey was unsuccessful. As the earliest Canadian woman to launch and complete an expedition with explicitly scientific goals, Hubbard was recognized for her scientific contributions and was



Source: https://sfoonline.barnard.edu/ice/print_grace.htm



Fig. 4. "Washing-Day."

Source: <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/SCL/article/view/12758/13711>

later made a Fellow of Britain's Royal Geographical Society in 1927. The maps she created were used until the 1930s, when aerial photography allowed for more accurate photos.

Mina's crew reached the Hudson's Bay George River Post on August 27, 1905, after traversing fast moving water, dangerous rapids, and dealing with capsized canoes. Wallace's

crew followed weeks later. After returning home from her expedition, Mina gave public lectures, wrote essays, and in 1908, published "A Woman's Way Through Unknown Labrador," which detailed her journey. She later moved to and remarried in England, but returned to Canada frequently. In her sixties, she reunited in Canada with George Elson, who had become a great friend, and they travelled north together one last time.

Throughout her life, Mina continued her love of exploring and would frequently set off on solo walks near her home in England. It was on one of these walks to a nearby quarry that Mina was tragically struck and killed by a train near her home in England at the age of 86. A plaque commemorating Mina now stands near the old Benson home in Bewdley, and in 2018, Mina was designated as a National Historic Person for her impact and contributions to Canada's history.

References: (starred entries mean that we have a copy in our library!)

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