

## Bessie Adelaide Fry (Miss) (Mrs. Bessie Fry Symons)

December 24 1884 - January 26 1976

Edmonton Art Club (Life Member)  
Island Arts and Crafts Society  
B.C. Society of Fine Arts (Member 1928 - 1967)  
Vancouver Sketch Club  
Federation of Canadian Artists (Founding Member 1941)  
Vancouver Arts and Letters Club

*(Editor's note: a number of sources give Fry's first name as "Beatrice" (Ainslie, Macdonald, McMann) although I was advised that all references to that name are simply perpetuating an earlier mistake. I reviewed all original exhibition catalogues and other references to Fry, and the name Beatrice is never used. Interestingly, Artists in Canada has two different listings for Fry, one under Beatrice and one under Bessie.)*

Bessie Fry Symons was born in Farringdon (also Farinden), Berkshire, England in 1884. According to a *Rootsweb* file her parents were Joseph Howard Fry (1857 - 1913) and Adelaide Lucy Taylor (1854 - ?), and two brothers and two sisters are listed as siblings. She later married Richard Symons (born c1882 - ?). She studied in England with Frank Spenlove-Spenlove, and was a pupil at the Art Student's League in New York.

Details of her early life are not clear, but she came to Canada by ship, arriving in Halifax (date unknown). She enlisted as a Nursing Sister in the Canadian Army Medical Corps at Montreal on August 28, 1918, aged 33. The enlistment form notes that she had "prior military experience" and that her civilian occupation was "Graduated Nurse". She was living at the Windsor Hotel, Montreal at the time. Her next of kin was given as "Mother - Mrs. Adelaide Lucy Fry, South Fort George, B.C., Canada." The form also gave her religion as Wesleyan, date of birth Dec. 24 1884 at Farinden, Birks, England.

Sometime after the war she moved to Vancouver, where she was a student of F.H. Varley and J.W.G. Macdonald at the Vancouver School of Art.

She exhibited her work at the Jasper Park Lodge in 1932 with Gertrude Lawson.



Fry exhibited in the 1920 Annual Exhibition of the B.C. Society of Fine Arts, held at the Vancouver School Board offices on Hamilton Street. She subsequently showed work with the B.C. Society of Fine Arts in many of their annual exhibitions, including June 1927, May 1929, November 1929, 1936 to 1941, 1942, 1943, 1944 to 1947, 1949, 1951, 1952, 1954 to 1958, and in 1967.

She had a solo exhibition at Jasper, Alberta in 1922, and also showed work at the Seattle Art Museum. She exhibited with the Royal Canadian Academy in 1927, 1930, 1932, and 1933. Between 1927 and 1930 she exhibited work in exhibitions held by the Island Arts and Crafts Society.

In 1928 she served as one of the Jurors for the 1st Annual International Salon of Watercolours held by the Provincial Exhibition in New Westminster. She exhibited at the Vancouver Exhibition in 1930, representing both the B.C. Society of Fine Arts and the Vancouver Sketch Club. She showed work in the *B.C. Artists* Christmas exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1933.

Her painting "Maples in Summer" (exhibited in the 1934 *BC Artists* annual) was chosen by the VAG for a traveling exhibition, titled *Fifty BC Artist Pictures*, that was shown at the Edmonton Art Gallery. Date is uncertain, presumably immediately after the annual while all artworks were available for selection. The show may also have traveled to other galleries.

In 1933 Fry had a solo exhibition of her oil paintings, watercolours, prints, and drawings at the Vancouver Art Gallery. An exhibition catalogue was produced for this exhibition, titled "*Paintings, Prints, and Pastels*", on file at the Art Gallery Library. She had another solo exhibition at the VAG in 1940, for which a list of exhibits is on file at the Art Gallery Library, and a solo watercolour exhibition in 1948 with 29 paintings.

WHO'S WHO IN NORTHWEST ART (1941, Frank McCaffrey, Seattle) provides perhaps the best summary of Fry's life to that time:

FRY, Bessie Adelaide, Hollyburn, West Vancouver, B.C. Painter (water color; oil; pastel); Printmaker (linoleum block color print) -- Born Berkshire, England. Studied in England. Pupil of Art Students' League of New York; Vancouver Sch. of Art (Frederick H. Varley and James W.G. Macdonald); Frank Spenlove-Spenlove. Member: Edmonton Art Club (life member); B.C. Society of Fine Arts, and Arts & Letters Club, Vancouver. Awards: For landscape (oil), \$15, Edmonto, (sic) 1927; For greeting card design, \$100, IODE all-Canadian competition, Toronto, 1926. Work: "Gulf of Georgia" (oil), Normal Sch. Collection, Edmonton; "Flowing North", entrance to Peace Country (oil), Columbian College Collection, New Westminster; "The way to Calumet", alpine meadow (oil), Edmonton Art Gallery. One-man exh.: Jasper, Alberta, 1922; Vancouver Art Gallery, 1932. Exhibitor at Royal Canadian Acad., 1927, 1930, 1932; Seattle Art Mus.; Vancouver Art Gallery; with West Vancouver Artists, 1939. Teacher of art, The Towers (formerly Columbian College), New Westminster, 1926-1939. Summer classes, Jasper, Alberta.

*(Editor's note: Frank Spenlove-Spenlove (1868-1933) was a British figure and landscape painter who "studied in London, Paris, and Antwerp. Founder & principal of Spenlove School of Painting (The Yellow Door Studio) from 1896. RBA 1895." From: The Dictionary of British Artists 1880 - 1940, 1976, The Antique Collectors' Club.)*

She showed work in the *B.C. Artists* annual exhibitions at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1932, 1933, 1934, 1936 to 1938, 1940, 1941, and from 1944 to 1947. She submitted two linocuts to the 1949 B.C. Graphic exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, one of them was selected for the exhibition. "October Study, Jasper" was not. She was living on Read Island at the time. She was a member of the West Vancouver Sketch Club in 1951.



She lived in Wadsley, B.C., and in New Westminster, B.C., as well as on Read Island near Campbell River. In 1960 an article titled "No Sunday Painters Here" was published in the Vancouver Sun in connection with the 50th Anniversary exhibition of the BCSFA, and was mostly a biography of Fry.

She died in Victoria in 1976, age 91. A small monograph on her artwork was published in Victoria in 2002 (see biblio).

## Exhibitions

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

DATE	EXHIBITION	LOCATION
1933 April 21 - 30	<u>Solo Show - Paintings, Prints &amp; Pastels</u>	<u>Vancouver Art Gallery</u>
1940 April 23 - May 5	Solo Show - Oil, W/C, Prints, Drawing	<u>Vancouver Art Gallery</u>
1948 April 6 - 25	Solo Show - 29 Watercolours	<u>Vancouver Art Gallery</u>

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

DATE	EXHIBITION	ARTWORK
1920 September 18 - 25	<u>BCSFA Annual Exhibition</u>	Pyramid Lake, Jasper Park Mountain Solitude Winter Evening
1927 June 10 - 25	<u>BCSFA 19th Annual Exhibition</u>	After Sunset, Northern Winter A Little Lamp to make my Darkness Brave Peaceful Evening, Kent
1929 May 18 - June 8	<u>BCSFA 21st Annual Exhibition</u>	Trees by the Fraser April Evening

1929 Nov. 16 - 30	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>Winter Exhibition</u>	Under the Cedars The Straits of Georgia Spring Study Snowfall on the Mountains West Coast, Vancouver Island Grey Twilight A Little Light in a Grey Day, Jasper A Glacier Hinge Peak, Tonquin Valley Maccarib Peak, Tonquin Vallery The Summit, Maccarib Pass In Tonquin Valley Fresh Snow on the Summit West Coast April Early Morning Deep Pool
1930 May 31 - June 14	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>Spring Exhibition</u>	Winter Night The Little Clearing Early Morning April - West Coast The Source The Little Clearing Head of the Valley
1930 Aug. 6 - 16	<u>VanExh</u> <u>Oil Paintings &amp; Water-colours</u>	A Dogwood Tree Solitude in Summer Spring, New Westminster Summer Evening, Poplar Country The Gateway Young Tulips
1932 May - July	<u>VAG</u> <u>All Canadian Exhibition</u>	Cherry Blossom In the Woods, Midsummer October Study (no information available)
1932 Oct. 5 - 30	<u>VAG</u> <u>1st Annual B.C. Artists</u>	In Horseshoe Bay Maples in Summer, Ocean Park Four O'clock Cedar
1933 Sept. 22 - Oct. 15	<u>VAG</u> <u>2nd Annual B.C. Artists</u>	Industrial
1933 Dec. 1 - 17	<u>VAG</u> <u>B.C. Artists Christmas Exhibition</u>	
1934 Sept. 21 - Oct. 14	<u>VAG</u> <u>3rd Annual B.C. Artists</u>	
1938 April 29 - May 15	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>28th Annual Exhibition</u>	
1942 May 15 - 31	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>32nd Annual</u>	

1942 Nov. 3 - 15	<u>FCA</u> Red Cross Benefit	Reflections
1943 May 15 - June 6	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>33rd Annual</u>	Intermezzo (lino cuts) (no information available)
		After Rain, Banff
		Dogwood by the Creek
		August Morning, Banff
		Under Rock and Root
1946 Sept. 21 - Oct. 13	<u>VAG</u> <u>15th Annual B.C. Artists</u>	Up the Inlet
		Among the Islands
1949 May 3 - 22	<u>BCSFA</u> <u>39th Annual</u>	Coast Range Winter
1949 Nov. 22 - Dec. 11	<u>VAG</u> <u>First B.C. Graphic</u>	Logging on the Islands

## References - MONOGRAPHS

Refer to BIBLIO.

## References - GROUP EXHIBITIONS

**BRITISH COLUMBIA WOMEN ARTISTS 1885-1985** (refer to AGGV85)

### IMAGES OF THE LAND: CANADIAN BLOCK PRINTS 1919 - 1945

1985; by Patricia Ainslie, Glenbow Museum, Calgary Alberta.  
Includes biography and illustrations of works in exhibition

## References - GENERAL

**WHO'S WHO IN NORTHWEST ART** edited by Marion Brymner Appleton

*"A Directory of Persons in the Pacific Northwest Working in the Media of Painting, Sculpture, Graphic Arts, and Handicrafts"*.

1941; published by Frank McCaffrey, Seattle Washington.  
Good reference to Fry.

ISLAND ARTS AND CRAFTS SOCIETY - List of Exhibitors

**FRYE, BEATRICE ADELAIDE (BESSIE) (Mrs. Symons)**

*Royal Canadian Academy of Arts - Exhibitions and Members 1880 - 1979*

Evelyn de R. McMann, University of Toronto Press 1981, ISBN 0-8020-2366-5

### BIOGRAPHICAL INDEX OF ARTISTS IN CANADA

2003, Evelyn de R. McMann, University of Toronto Press, ISBN 0-8020-2790-3  
250 pages; 9 pages of *works cited* referenced to 8,800 artists  
4 references cited for Fry.

**WEST VANCOUVER SKETCH CLUB - LIST OF MEMBER 1947-1977** (refer to WVSC)

## Clippings

"**B.A. Fry** and Margaret Lougheed also have striking examples in the same line."

From "B.C. Society of Fine Arts" by Bernard McEvoy  
*Vancouver Daily Province*, April 28 1928

"**Miss B.A. Fry's** small but choice pastels filled their niche well."

From "B.C. Society of Fine Arts", by Diogenes  
*Vancouver Daily Province*, November 13 1930

"Exhibition of Young Artists at Gallery"

by D.S.M., *Vancouver Sun*, April 22 1933

"In The Domain of Art"

by Reta W. Myers, *Daily Province*, April 24 1933

"Many other well-known artists are represented, including ... Bessie A. Fry ... "

From "Bargains in Art"  
*Vancouver Sun*, December 1, 1933

"Six Shows During April in Gallery"

by unknown, *News Herald*, March 30 1940

"Variety in Art Gallery Exhibit"

by unknown, *News Herald*, April 24 1940

" ... together with oil and watercolour paintings by ... Bessie A. Fry ... all contribute much to this extraordinary show."

From "B.C. Society of Fine Arts Display Sets New High Mark," by Palette  
*Vancouver Daily Province*, May 16, 1942

" ... Among those contributing paintings and drawings are: ... Bessie A. Symons ... "

From "Noted Artists Offer Paintings For Red Cross"  
*Vancouver Daily Province* (presumed), November 1942

"No Sunday Painters Here"

by Nikki Moir, *Vancouver Sun*, May 21 1960