

# Bertha Mabel Dunham



 Bertha Mabel Dunham, c. 1920: Credit: Ontario Library Association

b. May 29, 1881, Minto Twp. (near Harriston), ON; d. June 21, 1957, Kitchener, ON

## Education:

1908 BA (Victoria College, University of Toronto)  
1908 McGill University summer school for librarian

## Positions:

1898–1904 Elementary teacher, Berlin Model School (now Suddaby Public School)  
1908–1944 Chief Librarian, Kitchener Public Library  
1911–1912 & 1914 Chief instructor at Ontario Department of Education training course for librarianship

## Publications:

Dunham, B. Mabel (1910). "Leaves from the diary of a librarian." *Acta Victoriana* 33: 270-276.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1910). "Methods of reaching the people." *Proceedings of the Ontario Library Association Annual Meeting*: 68-76.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1912). "The Ontario Library Summer School, 1911." *Proceedings of the Ontario Library Association Annual Meeting*: 63-66.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1915). "The library and the school." *The School: a Magazine Devoted to Elementary and Secondary Education* 4, no. 2: 118-120.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1917). "What is the place and use of newspapers and periodicals in our public

libraries in towns." Proceedings of the Ontario Library Association Annual Meeting: 68-76.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1918). "William Wilfred Campbell, 1861-1918: An appreciation." Waterloo Historical Society Annual Report 6: 44-47.

Dunham, B. Mabel (Jan. 1924). "Some 'plain' people of Canada." Canadian Magazine 62: 188-195.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1927). "The public school and the public library." Proceedings of the Ontario Educational Association Annual Meeting held at Toronto, 18th-21st April, 1927: 66-76.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1934). "Kitchener (Berlin) Public Library [history]." Typescript.

Dunham B. Mabel (1937). "Co-operation in the libraries of Waterloo County." Ontario Library Review 21, no. 3: 120-122.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1938). "Waterloo County's library scheme." Ontario Library Review 22, no. 3: 197-199.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1945). "The Mid-European backgrounds of Waterloo County." Ontario Historical Society Papers and Records 37: 59-70.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1945). "The story of Conestoga." Waterloo Historical Society Annual Report 33: 16-23.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1948). "The Pequegnat family." Waterloo Historical Society Annual Report 36: 50-55.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1950). "Beginnings in Ontario." Mennonite Life 5, no. 4: 14-16.

#### *Literary works:*

Dunham, B. Mabel (1924). The trail of the Conestoga. Toronto: Macmillan.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1927). Toward Sodom. Toronto: Macmillan.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1931). The trail of the king's men. Toronto: Ryerson Press.

Dunham, B. Mabel, ed. (1941). So great a heritage: historical narrative of Trinity United Church, 1841-1941. Kitchener: Trinity United Church.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1945). Grand River. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Dunham, B. Mabel (1948). Kristli's trees. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

## **Associations/Committees:**

1920-1921 President, Ontario Library Association

1922-1924 President, K-W University Women's Club (also 1932-1934)

1947-50 President, Waterloo Historical Society

## Honours:

1947 DLitt, University of Western Ontario

1948 Book of the Year Medal for "Kristil's Trees" awarded by Canadian Association of Children's Librarians

In 1953, the City of Kitchener declared her birthday to be 'B. Mabel Dunham Day' in tribute to all her contributions to the city.

The Kitchener-Waterloo Federation of University Women administers the Dr. B. Mabel Dunham Award for female high school graduates.

Dunham is inducted as a member of the Waterloo Region Hall of Fame.

## Accomplishments:

Mabel Dunham was the first trained chief librarian appointed to lead an Ontario public library. She was the third woman to be president of a provincial library association in Canada. She was the first woman to serve on a public board in Kitchener, being twice elected to the public school board. She was one of the early leaders in efforts to train and educate librarians in Ontario before World War I. She helped organize systematic cooperation to distribute books throughout Waterloo County in the late 1930s prior to the formation of a county library service. She was one of the founders of Kitchener's Women's Canadian Club (later president); president (and founder) of the Waterloo Historical Society; and a founder of the K-W Business and Professional Women's Club.

Dunham wrote five books depicting the history and heritage of her region. Her first novels, "Trail of the Conestoga" and "Toward Sodom," described the migration of the Mennonites to the K-W area centered in Berlin (now Kitchener). The "Trail of the King's Men" recounted the arrival of the United Empire Loyalists from the United States. The "Grand River" was an exploration of a river and its surrounding countryside. "Kristli's Trees" was an enjoyable story of a Mennonite boy and his family on a small farm illustrated by Selwyn Dewdney.

Although Dunham made no major contribution to librarianship on a national scale, she greatly influenced its development on a local scale through the force of her personality as well as making a noteworthy literary contribution to regional historical fiction.

## Sources:

Kitchener Public Library holds information on Dunham and there are library board minutes for her tenure. The Ontario Archives has some speeches and correspondence as part of the Ontario Library Association records.

Banting, Constance (Feb. 1928). "Mabel Dunham." Ontario Library Review 12, no. 2: 66.

"Honour to Whom Honour is Due" (1953). Waterloo Historical Society Annual Report 41: 7-8.

Snider, Lillian (Aug. 1954). "Miss Mabel Dunham." Ontario Library Review 38, no. 3: 221-24.

Shoemaker, Dorothy and Grace Schmidt (1989). "Dr. B. Mabel Dunham (1881-1957)." Ex Libris News no. 5: 5-7.

Taylor, Ryan (1981). "Mabel Dunham's Centenary." Waterloo Historical Society Annual Report 69: 13-25 [extensive bibliography].

ELA biography compiled by Lorne Bruce

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