

Parkwood National Historic Site

Adelaide McLaughlin



Adelaide Louise Mowbray was born on February 9, 1875 in Kinsale, Ontario. Her farmer father was Ralph Mowbray and her mother was Victoria Nutting. Their ancestors were Scottish and came from United Empire Loyalist stock. Her mother could trace her lineage back to the Mayflower—the famed ship that brought the first British colonists to Plymouth, Massachusetts. For obvious reasons, her nickname given by Sam McLaughlin was “Always-Late Mowbray.” She attended teachers college at Ottawa Normal School. After graduation she worked as a schoolteacher in Whitby, Ontario.

One Sunday, Robert Samuel McLaughlin was visiting his uncle’s family in Brougham and spotted Adelaide while attending church. He later recalled, “The only person I really saw in the church that day was a vision of beauty in the choir.” Adelaide had only two dates with Sam before he proposed, and they were married in February 1898. The marriage took place at the Mowbray family farm, and they took a week-long honeymoon in New York. Adelaide and Sam would stay married until she died in 1958.

After the honeymoon, Sam and his bride set up housekeeping in a home on King Street in Oshawa, Adelaide giving up her teaching career. They did not wait long to start their family. Eileen was born in 1898, followed by Mildred in 1900, Isabel in 1903, Hilda in 1905, and Eleanor in 1908. At the time of their marriage, Sam was a prosperous young man working in his father’s company the McLaughlin Carriage Company. About ten years later, he and his brother George would talk their father into starting to build automobiles.

Women like Adelaide were not satisfied to just stay at home. She used her skills and societal influence in creating ways to benefit society through charitable work. One of the charities that was especially important to Adelaide was the Oshawa General Hospital. She led the fundraising drive to open the Hospital in 1910. She was the first President of its Ladies Auxiliary, regaining the office in 1912 and held it every year until her passing in 1958. One of her innovative fundraising techniques was the Talent Dollar project which gave each member of the Ladies Auxiliary one dollar from the treasury with the instruction to “make it grow” and return

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both the dollar and any proceeds at the end of the year. Profits from this program ranged from one to ninety dollars. In her charity work, Adelaide used her charm and considerable public speaking and organizational skills to help many organizations. She was active in the Girl Guide Association and not far from her roots in education, founded the Home and School Association in Oshawa.



Adelaide was a gracious lady who had a real joie de vivre. She would always beat her husband at billiards and was a serious golfer. She was President of the Canadian Women's Senior Golf Association from 1937 until 1956, as well as being a life member of the Toronto Ladies Golf and Tennis Club and the Seigniori Club in Quebec. She also enjoyed the more sedate indoor games of bridge and Scrabble. She was a fierce competitor who insisted on collecting any bets—no matter how small. In quiet hours, she excelled at needlepoint.

Adelaide loved flowers and studied their varieties and grew to be an expert on them. For many years, she was the hostess at Parkwood's annual Chrysanthemum Tea, a gala event welcoming hundreds of guests. As she oversaw all of the activities of her home, the gardens and greenhouses at Parkwood were especially important to her.

