

## **Martha Harris**

**1854 - 1933**

Born in 1854 in old Fort Victoria, Martha Douglas was the youngest daughter of Sir James Douglas, the Governor of the Colony of Vancouver Island. In 1878 she married Dennis Reginald Harris, a land surveyor and businessman.

With the firm encouragement of her father, Harris was sent to England for schooling, where she studied drawing, elocution, French, composition and music. She also received drawing and needlework lessons in Victoria.

The multi-talented Harris was a writer, publishing stories for children and accounts of Aboriginal history and folklore, an interest stemming from the Cree background of her mother, Lady Amelia Douglas. Her interests also extended into textiles, and she became accomplished in weaving and lacemaking, founding local guilds in both these crafts. She also practiced basketry, and her extensive collection of Aboriginal basketry remains in the Royal British Columbia Museum. Additionally, she learned wood carving from George Selkirk Gibson, an artist from Edinburgh.



In 1887 Harris studied painting with Georgina de L'Aubiniere, a distinguished French artist residing in Victoria at that time and chose to specialize in still-lives and portraits. Active in the arts community, she was a charter member of the Island Arts and Crafts Society, founded in 1909. She was a regular exhibitor with the Society between 1910 and 1927. Her portrait, painted by fellow Society member Joseph Carrier, was shown at the 1911 annual exhibition.

Martha Douglas Harris died in Victoria in 1933, and was buried in Ross Bay Cemetery.