

Recently my daughter-in-law Barbara unearthed some paintings from her mother's collection by an artist named Emily Sartain, whom I recalled was a distinguished painter of wildflowers and had a connection with our club. It transpired that Barbara's mother, a keen horticulturist, had once commissioned Sartain to paint a picture for her.



Sartain was born at Goring Heath, Oxfordshire in 1903, and educated in London, England. She demonstrated her gift as a watercolourist at an early age and, concentrating on delicately crafted floral portraits, turned professional in 1931. The following year her career took off when HM Queen Mary, wife of George V, purchased her first exhibited painting – a study of delphiniums and antirrhinums - at an exhibition of the Society of Women Artists- in London.

After contributing to numerous exhibitions in Britain, she came to Vancouver in May 1939 to visit her sister, and during her visit became fascinated with the wildflowers in the area. Unable to undertake the return journey home due to the outbreak of WW2 in September, she stayed in Canada throughout war, taking Canadian citizenship, and holding exhibitions in British Columbia and Alberta to raise money for war charities. Her success continued in the post-war years. In addition to her exhibitions, Sartain gave radio broadcasts about Canadian wildflowers, in which she took a great personal interest, particularly in those species threatened with extinction.

As with most well-known artists in the region she was drawn into the orbit of the Island Arts and Crafts Society and contributed to the Society's 1948 annual exhibition. Sartain maintained her links with the Society, and, in later years, with the Victoria Sketch Club.

Returning to England in 1951 to complete a pre-war commission, she exhibited freely throughout Britain, and her show in the Coronation Year of 1953 received widespread attention. She held all the medals which the Royal Horticultural Society awarded for flower painting and contributed five pages to the Society's Royal Autographs Album, which bore the signatures of both British and Swedish royalty. Her flower pictures were published in a variety of forms in both Britain and Canada,



In 1956 Sartain returned to Canada to continue her studies of the Canadian flora. With her passion for the preservation of wildflowers undimmed, she was on hand to assist the Royal BC Museum in the preservation of the Thetis Park Nature Sanctuary.

By now renowned internationally for her fine workmanship and careful detail, Coutts Hallmark commissioned her to paint the official flower of each Canadian province as part of the 1968 National Centennial Celebration.

Gifted at embroidery and needlework, Sartain also painted animals and landscapes and experimented with oils. However, her first love remained the wildflower, of which she produced some 5,000 --mainly commissioned-- watercolour portraits.

Sartain was of Huguenot descent, related to Chevalier John Sartain, the famous etcher and engraver of Philadelphia, and her style was considered to resemble that of Pierre-Joseph Redoute and other great French botanical painters.

She died in Victoria in 1990.

*~John Lover*