

Lillian Clarke Sweeney, artist and noted wood carver and sculptor, was associated with our Club for over half a century. One of the 56 Charter members who founded the Island Arts Club in 1909, she was later one of the stalwarts who bridged the transition of the Island Arts and Crafts Society to the Victoria Sketch Club in 1956.

Born in Winnipeg in 1884, she became a resident of Victoria in 1904, where she married William Sweeney in 1912. Under her maiden name of Clarke her work had hung in the Club's first Annual Exhibition in 1910, and she remained a faithful contributor until 1927. She exhibited at the Vancouver Art Gallery in the 1937 Vancouver Island Exhibition, and this versatile lady became a staff artist at the BC Provincial Museum of Natural History and Anthropology in 1936.

Lillian showed her talent as an illustrator in co-operating with her sister, writer Frances Ebbs Canaran, in publishing "Tale of a Belgian Hare," a 1914 book dedicated to the little children of Belgium deprived of their homes and heritage during the German invasion.

In 1956, members the newly formed Sketch Club organized a party to honour Lillian Sweeney for "keeping the Club together by means of her charm and personality and generosity in allowing winter Monday meetings at her home and in providing tea and encouragement." The following year she was elected Club president.

Sweeney was a particularly gifted oil painter (see oil-on-card illustration below). Representing the Victoria Sketch Club, she took the "best oil" in a 1958 competition with eleven other provincial art clubs. Two of her paintings were presented to the Government to hang in the Provincial Library.



She was not only a fine wood carver, but equally adept at sculpture, and was commended by the Smithsonian Institute on her work for the Museum, which included all manner of paintings and models, including dioramas of Indigenous life. She had a complete collection of British Columbia birds and carved to meet orders from across the province.

On her death in 1961, the Museum paid her the following tribute: "During her years of service as an artist on the Museum staff, she produced many life-like models of fishes, mushroom, flowers, and prehistoric animals. Her images of native fishes have never been excelled, despite the advent of plastics and more modern techniques and her painting dioramas of native life will continue to be used in schools of the province for years to come."

~ John Lover

