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M.B. Williams and the Early Years of Parks Canada

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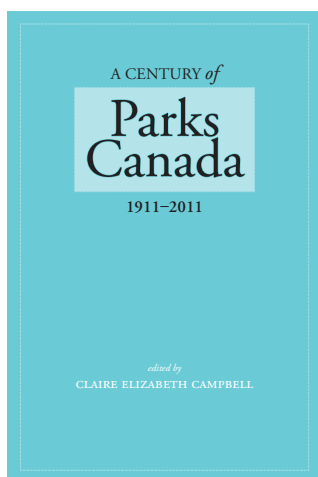
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A CENTURY OF PARKS CANADA

1911-2011

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M.B. Williams and the Early Years of Parks Canada



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I remember, I remember the place where “Parks” was born
The dirty wind was where no sun came creeping in at morn
Yet nine never came a wink too soon, nor brought too long
a day

For working under J.B.H. was less like work than play.
There were Maxwell, Byshe and Johnson and good F.H.W.
Wise A.K. and witty F.V. and quiet M.B. too.
There were piles and piles of dusty files about leases, lots and
land
Way back when business was polite and memos were writ by
hand.

The opening of “An Interminable Ode,” a poem read to J.
B. Harkin at a party following his retirement as first com-
missioner of national parks in Canada. Portions of the poem
begin each section of this chapter.¹

In a scratchy tape-recorded interview conducted by her niece in 1969, Mabel Williams recalls how she had first come to work with the Canadian Dominion Parks Branch almost sixty years earlier. She was working in Ottawa in 1911 as a clerk for the Department of Interior, cutting out newspaper clippings that related to the department's business. It was the sort of low-level position available to a single woman of the day, even one in her thirties and university-educated. (She had been one of the first female students at the University of Western Ontario, and a member of the University of Toronto's "Double Duck Egg" class that graduated in 1900.) One day, Williams was visited by her boss, James Bernard Harkin, the private secretary to Minister Frank Oliver. Do you ever get sick of politics, he asked. "I'm fed up to my teeth now," she said. He told her that he was to be commissioner of a new branch devoted to national parks, and wondered if she would like to join him.

"What in the world are national parks?" Williams asked.

"Blessed if I know," Harkin replied, "but it sounds easy."²

It's a lovely story, when you know what followed. James B. Harkin directed the Parks Branch, the first agency in the world devoted to national parks, through its first quarter century and became the parks' greatest advocate. The Branch and the system it oversaw flourished in those decades. And Mabel – M.B. – Williams rose in the 1910s from clipping newspapers to helping formulate and communicate the Branch's philosophy. In the 1920s, despite a recurring, poorly diagnosed illness that kept her bedridden for long periods of time throughout her entire life, she explored the parks by foot, by horse, and by car, as research for writing the guidebooks that would be that decade's centrepiece of tourism promotion of the parks, of the Canadian Rockies, and even of Canada itself.

It's also a familiar story in Canadian parks history, but with an important twist. In the standard telling, Harkin is the novice invited to join the Parks Branch by his boss, Oliver; Williams does not appear. That standard version originated in a 1961 booklet of posthumously published extracts from Harkin's personal papers and has been replayed in histories of Canadian national parks ever since.³ The story constitutes an important step in the veneration of Harkin: his initial ignorance of parks, rather than being an impediment, ends up magnifying the extent of his conversion to conservation, symbolizing the



FIG. 1.
PORTRAIT OF M.B.
WILLIAMS, CA.
1929. [LIBRARY AND
ARCHIVES
CANADA/M.B.
WILLIAMS FONDS/
VOL. 1, FILE 21/
E010691281.]

transformative power of parks. Today, Harkin is considered one of our nation's environmental heroes. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society names its highest honour the Harkin Award, for example, and sums up his reputation by stating, "Often called 'The Father of National Parks', J. B. Harkin developed the idea of conservation in Canada."⁴ Nothing, by contrast, has ever been written about M.B. Williams; she has been entirely lost to history.

FIG. 2.
J.B. HARKIN,
FIRST
COMMISSIONER OF
NATIONAL PARKS
IN CANADA, 24
FEBRUARY 1937.
[SOURCE: LIBRARY
AND ARCHIVES
CANADA/
CREDIT: YOUSUF
KARSH/YOUSUF
KARSH FONDS/
E010767606.]



But interestingly, the sole source of the story about Harkin joining the Branch is Williams herself; it was she who lovingly compiled his memoirs and saw them to publication in 1961. Yet it was also she who, when interviewed in 1969, reframed the story as her own. Whether the incident actually happened to Williams or Harkin or both or neither is largely beside the point. Rather, the story – stories – serve as a reminder of the hazards of biography, and most especially the care that must be taken in seeing the history of an organization through the lens of a single person, whether a renowned man

or a forgotten woman. Groups are, almost by definition, the product of more than one person.

Using as a basis M.B. Williams' newly available archival papers and oral interview, and the guidebooks published under her name, this chapter will explore the 1911 to 1930 development of the Dominion Parks Branch, forerunner to Parks Canada.⁵ This period saw the parks system experience a phenomenally rapid maturity: it cultivated a loyal staff, a national and international reputation, a claim to permanent consideration, and most importantly – and unusual for a government agency – a coherent and well-accepted philosophy that would help constantly regenerate all of these other elements. Whereas the Branch was born in 1911 with a staff of seven and a budget of \$200,000 (just 4% of its department's overall budget), with the parks attracting 50,000 visitors per year, by the onset of the Great Depression the Branch had a staff of 44 and a budget of \$1,400,000 (more than 16% of the department's budget), and the parks welcomed 550,000 annual visitors.⁶

Williams' papers and publications do more than document this growth: they help explain it, because she was deeply involved in the development and dissemination of the emerging philosophy of parks, a philosophy that stressed both their humanitarian and commercial value to the nation. In the 1910s, she was instrumental in linking parks to tourism, giving Harkin the ammunition he would need in annual reports, speeches, and newspaper columns to justify parks and spending on them. In the 1920s, she was the chief author of the parks system's series of promotional guidebooks, which taught that parks are the birthright of all Canadians, and that they make one physically stronger, psychologically renewed, spiritually fulfilled, and aesthetically aware. The goal of this chapter is not to argue that M.B. Williams, rather than J.B. Harkin, was the mastermind behind the development of Canadian national parks – to replace one hero myth with another – but instead to use her story to show that the germinating parks philosophy was the product of the entire agency.⁷ More than that, the literature generated by the agency to win over Canadian politicians and the public had the unforeseen effect of also unifying the Branch's own staff around a core philosophy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the experience of M.B. Williams herself, who arrived having no knowledge of national parks but remained their champion, and even compiled her boss's memoirs, long after her retirement.

But [Harkin] cried Gadzooks to his waiting staff, "Ye must
shoulder spade and axe
The House is full of Scotsmen, we must hit them hard with
facts!
Get facts bedad" (with none to be had for who knew of Park's
existence?)
But a newspaperman's life is as good as a wife to stiffen a
man's persistence)
So he drove us forth, east, west, south, north, with noses close
to the ground
Hard on the trail of the Lonesome Facts and at last one fact
was found
But J. B. cried "By the Buffalo's hide, one fact is enough for
me
'Tis a great deal more than I had of yore when I wrote politici-
cly."
And out of that small and modest fact, with the single yeast
of his mind
He fashioned a Tourist Gospel that struck those Scotsmen
blind.
Till even Mr. Meighen said, "That Harkin man is a honey
This is far less painful than taxes, let us give the lad some
money!"

In September 1911, the Dominion Parks Branch set up its office in the new Birks Building on Sparks Street in Ottawa. With just seven employees, most of them transferred from the Forestry and Survey Branches, it constituted about one-hundredth of the overall Department of the Interior. Mabel Williams would later state,

There was little in the new office at Ottawa to serve for guide or inspiration. The files which had been transferred to the new organization were for the most part dreary compilations of correspondence concerning transfers of land in the townsites of

Banff and Field, the collection of rates and telephone charges, complaints concerning dusty roads and the absence of garbage collection. There were few photographs and no books, with the exception of Government records and bulletins. Three thousand miles away from their inspiring reality, it was difficult to visualize these national parks, and far more difficult to realize to what manifold uses they might be put.⁸

In Williams' memory, the very fact that the challenge seemed so daunting – the Branch so small, the lands it was to oversee so vast – helped to bring the unit together. And the staff quickly became devoted to Harkin, as he encouraged both collaboration and independence. The Commissioner “never wanted anything for himself, never wanted to make a sensation. You'd go to a meeting, and he'd always be in the backseat.”⁹ Williams undoubtedly had another reason for growing loyal to Harkin: at a time when the civil service commission actively kept women out of all but the most junior positions, he gave her increasingly important responsibilities and supported her rise in the office.¹⁰

The Dominion Parks Branch had been born in spite of national parks' insignificance, or perhaps even because of it.¹¹ Between 1885 and 1911, Rocky Mountains (Banff), Glacier, Yoho, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes National Parks had been created by a variety of mechanisms, under a variety of regulations, and under no central control. As Williams would later write, “the Government straightaway forgot about them, and for years the reserves were left to look after themselves.”¹² This began to change early in the twentieth century, thanks to two strands of the era's conservation movement. On the one hand, there was a growing societal interest in going back to nature, drawing more attention to the seemingly unspoiled wilderness of parks. On the other hand, the rise of the principle of resource conservation encouraged the development of federal forest reserves, places where forests would be efficiently and scientifically managed so that their timber would be available forever. Since forests hold and protect both water and wildlife, forest reserves became associated with water and wildlife conservation, too. In effect, they took on many of the features that we today associate with national parks, minus the tourism development and the not insignificant difference that their forests were to be regularly harvested. In 1908, when the Canadian

government under Wilfrid Laurier decided that national parks should be administered more centrally, the forest reserve model was at its very peak, so it was natural that the government placed the parks under the care of the division already administering forest reserves, the Forest Branch. Howard Douglas, until then Superintendent of Rocky Mountains Park, was moved to Edmonton and given responsibility for all the parks.

The 1911 *Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act* was meant to formalize the relationship between these two types of government properties. The Act defined parks as distinct entities but *within* forest reserves – bordered by them on all sides, and so literally subsumed by them. (Elk Island and Waterton Lakes had been defined as parks within forest reserves in 1906 and 1907 respectively.) This provided national parks with buffer zones from development and exploitation, but it also had two negative consequences. First, it reduced the size of most existing parks by turning some of their boundary lands into forest reserves. Rocky Mountains Park, for example, was shrunk from 4,500 to 1,800 square miles. Second, it meant that parks would, in the words of Minister Frank Oliver, “look to the enjoyment by the people of the natural advantages and beauties of those particular sections of the reserves, while the regulations regarding the remainder of the forest reserves looks rather to the exclusion of people from them.”¹³ Put another way, parks were defined by virtue of being developed, and reserves by virtue of being undeveloped. The *Forest Reserves and Parks Act* both signalled and made official how insignificant Canadian national parks really were in this period. They could easily have become places separated entirely from environmental concern and dedicated solely to tourism. Indeed, in terms of parks that was the Act’s intention.

What prevented this outcome was that the Act also created a new Dominion Parks Branch. It may seem strange that at the very moment the Laurier government explicitly defined parks as places within reserves, it also severed administrative responsibility for the two. It may seem even stranger that it made the Parks Branch equivalent rather than subservient to the Forest Branch. This decision would lead to considerable confusion in the coming years – but it also supports the notion that the government considered parks and forest reserves as conceptually quite distinct.¹⁴ The new Parks Branch could easily have defined its responsibilities conservatively, as being whatever the Forest Branch was not already doing, in whatever parks already existed.¹⁵

Such an interpretation would have not only been justified, it might have been thought politically expedient. After all, the new Branch was headed by James Harkin, who was closely tied to the Laurier administration but who was taking up his new position in September 1911, the very month that the Conservatives swept Laurier's Liberals from power.

There can be no greater testimony to national parks' obscurity in this era than the fact that Harkin expressed complete ignorance of them (or at least Williams wrote that he did), despite having been private secretary to the minister responsible for parks for the previous decade. Harkin directed his new staff to find out as much as possible about national parks. The American parks were contacted, as were Canadian government departments. Harkin also travelled out west to visit the parks, to the great appreciation of those working and living there. The townspeople of Banff were especially impressed because they had long complained that their concerns were ignored and the park under-managed. The parks commissioner made at least twelve trips to Banff in the 1910s, and the local *Crag and Canyon* reported on every one. As early as Harkin's second visit, the editor was already crowing, "J. B. is a friend of the Canadian National Park. He sleeps, eats, and smokes on the Canadian National Park. In fact he almost gets tiresome the way he talks about this park – stay with it – 'O you J. B.' *Crag and Canyon* is with you now and always."¹⁶ The editor might have expressed reservations had he known that one of Harkin's first letters to the Banff Superintendent quizzed him as to whether a regulation concerning the weight of bread sold within park boundaries was being enforced.¹⁷ The people of Banff would soon be complaining that the parks were being micromanaged from afar.

In M.B. Williams' recollection, Harkin's first task for her was to examine the timber leasing system; she found violations in nineteen of twenty leases.¹⁸ An unsigned Branch memo reported that Forest Commissioner R.H. Campbell's second-in-command had been involved in "a crooked deal" in the years prior to the Parks Branch's creation, selling the parks' timber leases for personal gain. To the memo's author, such corruption signalled that parks and forest reserves were inherently incompatible: "The primary function of the Forestry Branch is to provide lumber. The primary function of the Parks Branch is to provide health, pleasure and patriotism grounds [*sic*] for the nation. The work of the Forestry Branch is closely allied to the business of the lumberman; that of the Parks Branch to that of the landscape artist."¹⁹ Harkin

and his staff grew convinced that the parks suffered by being associated with reserves, that the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act had erred in forcing the Forest Branch and the Parks Branch together in a shotgun wedding. Mind you, the Parks Branch may have launched its timber lease investigation in the hopes of coming to just that conclusion.

So almost immediately after the 1911 Act brought forest reserves and national parks together, work began on pulling them apart. The Act was amended in 1913 to state unequivocally that parks were under the control of the parks commissioner and to allow for the creation of new parks that were not within forest reserves. Further amendments were passed the following year. Also in 1914, Jasper and Waterton Lakes National Parks were enlarged – tellingly, at the expense of their surrounding forest reserves. The Parks Branch and Forests Branch feuded constantly throughout the 1910s, with the former seeking to establish its authority on all matters within parks boundaries and the latter attempting to quash the upstart and at minimum retain control of forest matters within the parks. In the middle of the First World War, Harkin and his Forest Branch equal, R. H. Campbell, even met for a “conference” to carve up responsibilities for the lands they oversaw. But the department’s lawyer – decrying the “foolish repeal” of the old *Rocky Mountains Parks Act* and bitterly criticizing its replacement – pointed out that the present Act gave them no such power.²⁰ The Parks Branch ultimately spent a considerable portion of its energies in its first decade working to overcome the legislation that had created it.

M.B. Williams’ next major project for Harkin after tackling the timber lease issue was to strengthen the justification for parks. Government members who controlled the parks’ budget appropriation gave no thought to them, too often confusing national parks with the urban variety. Williams would recall that after scouring the Parliamentary and Ottawa Public Libraries,

I came across an old volume of the Scenic and Historic Preservation Society of America. And in one of their annual sessions, one old chap got up and said, “You know, when you think of it, these beautiful places are worth money.” He says, “It brings tourists, it brings people in to see them.” And I thought, “Here’s my clue.” And I brought it up to Mr. Harkin and he seized on it. “That’s what we want!” And the words

“Tourist Traffic” had never been mentioned before in the government as a policy.²¹

Tourism had been growing in Canada since the late nineteenth century, and there were a few provincial tourism bureaus by the first decade of the twentieth century, but no federal agency had yet gauged the industry’s significance. In retrospect, it seems natural that the new Parks Branch would be the first to do so. The national parks had been established in large part to draw traffic on the CPR, and more generally to attract tourists to the Rocky Mountains. What’s more, by 1911 attendance to the parks was just starting to rise, thanks to the automobile. When cars had started arriving in the mountain parks at the turn of the century, the government’s response had been to ban them outright. This was in part to protect horseback riders and in part to protect the automobile travellers themselves from hazardous mountain roads. The prohibition lasted until 1910, when cars were permitted on certain roads, and they were soon allowed everywhere, bringing increased visitation to parks in that decade.²²

The economics of tourism could help justify appropriations for parks, but how to induce the tourists to come in the first place? For that, a more philosophical argument was needed. Harkin, Williams, assistant commissioner F.H.H. Williamson, and other Branch staff crafted this together. They propped up their case with the writings of American, British, and Canadian conservationists, naturalists, and civic leaders, but the amalgamation was their own. Harkin would later say of this effort, when in retirement and asked by Williams to share his memories of the Branch’s early days,

You will re-call our first worry was to satisfy ourselves as to whether Parks were worth-while or not. And the worth-while-ness had to be measured in terms of human welfare, first spiritual; second mental; third, physical. No, not exactly that way, we really felt that these were so intimately mixed up in life, that they were mutually dependent. So all three were requisite. You did more than anyone else to provide the proof. And you convinced the rest of us Parks could pay great dividends in these terms.²³

For her part, Williams would credit Harkin, who had been a journalist before joining the civil service, for helping make the team's writing come alive.²⁴ The culmination of their work was a coherent, multifaceted philosophy, one that would serve as the basis for descriptions and defences of national parks for decades to come. The best summary of this philosophy is a long paragraph noteworthy because it concluded two 1914 Parks Branch documents, an internal memo under Harkin's name, "Dominion Parks – Their Values and Ideals," and the agency's first promotional booklet, *A Sprig of Mountain Heather*. That is, the same sentiment was used to inculcate the public and the organization itself with the value of parks. The paragraph read,

To sum up then, Dominion Parks constitute a movement that means millions of dollars of revenue annually for the people of Canada; that means the preservation for their benefit, advantage and enjoyment forever, of that natural heritage of beauty – whether it be in the form of majestic mountain, peaceful valley, gleaming glacier, crystalline lake or living birds and animals, – which is one of our most precious national possessions; that means the guarantee to the people of Canada today and to all succeeding generations of Canadians of those means of recreation which serve best to make better men and women, physically, morally and mentally; the protection of the country's beauty spots equally for the poor and the rich; the preservation of those places which stand for historic events that have been milestones in Canada's development; they represent a movement calculated to arouse and develop that national pride which Canada's history and Canada's potentialities justify. Canada's parks exist to render the best possible services to Canada and Canadians. Their establishment and development is based upon this idea that Canada's greatness as a nation depends so much upon her natural resources of soil, of minerals or of timber as upon the quality of her men and women.²⁵

Throughout the 1910s, this general theme, always bearing Harkin's name, was communicated by the Parks Branch in newspaper columns, magazine articles, and memos to the minister and prime minister. But the Branch chose as its prime forum the lowly annual report. This was certainly unconventional: no other government body so brazenly used its annual report as a means to lobby government and reach the broader public. According to Williams, the ex-newspaperman Harkin did not believe in paid print advertising, and his goal was always to get as much free publicity as possible.²⁶ So Harkin's early annual reports as commissioner, for example, contained series of images of the mountain parks and outlined in detail the commercial and humanitarian benefits of parks.²⁷ The Branch then sent these reports to Members of Parliament and newspapers across Canada – effectively turning a mandatory accounting into a marketing plan – earning favourable responses in both the House and editorial pages. The first report was even quoted at length when the U.S. Congress discussed creation of an American park service in 1916.²⁸ In Harkin's recollection to Williams, the high point of their efforts with these reports was formulating “the famous calculation” that, whereas wheat fields were worth only \$4.91 per acre to Canada, scenery was worth \$13.88.²⁹

The government reacted very positively to the Parks Branch's message, although appropriations did not rise until after the First World War.³⁰ In working to justify the parks' existence, the Branch had effectively achieved the greater accomplishment of simply drawing attention to the parks' existence, something that had not really happened before. In 1919, Liberal member Lucien Cannon sought explanation from Conservative Prime Minister Arthur Meighen as to why the parks were to be given the power of expropriation. “For what purpose are those Dominion parks established?” he asked.

“For Dominion parks,” Meighen answered.

This did not satisfy Cannon, so he tried again: “What is the purpose of a Dominion park?”

Meighen replied, “I do not know that any words could do other than obscure the very plain meaning of the term ‘Dominion Park.’”³¹ This terminological *pas de deux* could only have occurred at the moment when parks were moving from unfamiliar to self-explanatory in the public mind.

And once he had the stuff to spend there soon was the
Heather Pamph
(Poor Mr. Knechtel down on his knees gathering sprigs at
Banff)
And so it went from year to year like a snowball getting bigger
And some of us lost our hair at last and some of us lost our
figger

In 1914, J. B. Harkin had the idea of creating a guide to Banff that would have a souvenir sprig of heather attached to its cover. It was to be the sort of book that people would take home and display on their parlour table, and so advertise the park to others. Harkin assumed that writing *A Sprig of Mountain Heather* would be easy, but when he set to work on it found himself blocked at the very first sentence. He called in the whole office and asked help to get started. Mabel Williams gave him the first lines – “The top o’ the world to you’ is an old greeting in Ireland, but this little sprig of Mountain Heather brings to you in very reality a bit of the top o’ the world” – and eventually much of what followed. Having discovered that Williams had a flair for this kind of writing, the commissioner handed more and more public writing assignments over to her.³²

Not that there was much promotional work in that period: the Dominion Parks Branch may have discovered tourism in the 1910s, but it was not really until the 1920s that it began to actively foster tourism by publishing promotional literature. Because of tightened budgets during the First World War, and perhaps also because Harkin preferred his publicity free, the office in its first decade tended only to publish guidebooks when an opportunity easily presented itself, such as when Alpine Club of Canada President A.P. Coleman wrote *Glaciers of the Rockies and Selkirks* or M.P. Bridgland and Robert Douglas wrote *Description of and Guide to Jasper Park* to accompany Bridgland’s survey of the park.³³ Otherwise, travel guides were a low priority. The parks constantly hounded headquarters for more copies of what few there were – which certainly suggested a market demand – but Ottawa offered little help. When the superintendent at Jasper pleaded for more copies of his park’s guide, he was told that since there were only 850 copies left he should raise their price from 30¢ to 50¢ or even 75¢ as a means of restricting their sale and distribution.³⁴ But the dearth of tourism material was no longer

considered acceptable. By 1920 there were about 100,000 visitors to the Canadian parks each year, with many arriving by car, so the system could no longer depend solely on the tourism literature generated by the railroads.³⁵

It was in this context that Mabel Williams was sent west to explore and write about the parks. Giving the job to Williams indicates either how much faith Harkin was coming to have in her or how relatively unimportant tourism promotion was still thought to be, or both. True, she had proven herself capable in every writing assignment given her. But she had no experience in travel writing and not much in travel. She had passed her fortieth birthday without ever having been to Western Canada, let alone their parks, and was not in the least bit outdoorsy. She also suffered from a number of ailments, including a poorly understood form of anemia; her personnel file shows six sick leaves in the late 1920s, ranging from eight days to three months.³⁶ Things began inauspiciously when at the end of her first day riding through Jasper National Park she got off the horse and fainted.³⁷

Yet Williams ended up riding, hiking, and driving the parks of Western Canada from end to end. From this research she authored a string of guidebooks – all of the travel guides published by the Dominion Parks Branch in the 1920s – beginning with *Through the Heart of the Rockies and Selkirks* in 1921 and continuing through *The Banff-Windermere Highway*, *Waterton Lakes National Park*, *Kootenay National Park and the Banff-Windermere Highway*, *Jasper National Park*, *Prince Albert National Park*, *Jasper Trails*, and *The Kicking Horse Trail*. In retrospect, Williams' timing was impeccable. Of the 1921–22 fiscal year, Harkin declared, “For the first time since the outbreak of the war it was possible to devote part of the appropriation to publicity,” so the Branch could afford to make *Through the Heart of the Rockies and Selkirks* its first mass-market guidebook, available to whoever wanted a copy. The agency's expenditures in the government's printing department jumped in a single year from \$2,000 to almost \$13,000.³⁸

The Branch reprinted at least 10,000 copies of Williams' first guidebook five of the next six years.³⁹ And having convinced the department once to invest in such a travel guide, it was easier to do so again. As Harkin told his deputy minister, “It is a generally accepted axiom that advertising to be successful must be kept up. If we stop advertising these parks I think it probable we shall see a falling off of tourist travel.”⁴⁰ The Parks Branch formed a Publicity Division, which quickly became the foremost government body

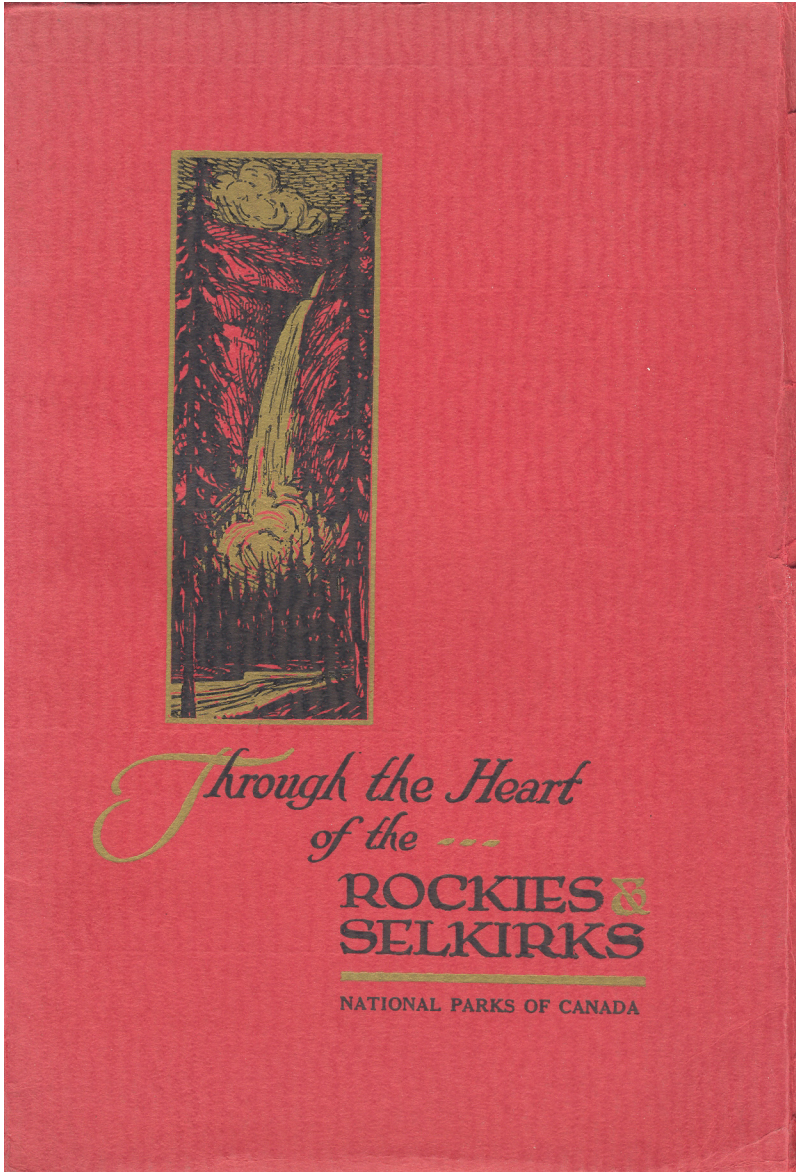


FIG. 3. COVER OF *THROUGH THE HEART OF THE ROCKIES AND SELKIRKS*, 4TH ED. [OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, 1929 (1921).]

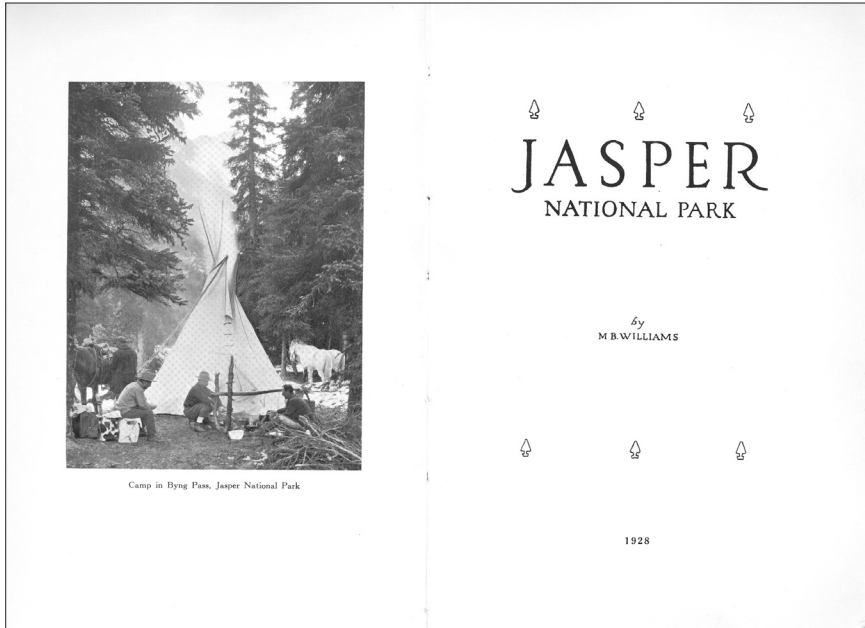


FIG. 4. TITLE PAGE OF *JASPER NATIONAL PARK*. [OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, 1928.]

for promoting Canada through guidebooks, public lectures and slide presentations, and motion pictures. By the end of the 1920s, the Division had twenty-five employees. Ironically, its success helped lead to the establishment of agencies that would ultimately displace it, the Canadian Government Travel Bureau and the National Film Board.⁴¹

All this changed Mabel Williams' career, and her life. Her salary had risen only from \$1,200 to \$1,300 in the 1910s – while, by comparison, Deputy Commissioner Williamson's rose from \$1,300 to \$2,500 – but it climbed to \$1,560 when her job title shifted to “publicity assistant” in 1921, and to \$2,160 when she became “publicity agent” the following year. She was soon overseeing much of the work in the new Publicity Division, and when the agency started making travel and wildlife documentaries, she penned the script for fifty of them. By 1930, she was making \$3,000 per year.⁴² With her first guidebook she adopted the gender-neutral “M.B.” for her writing

career, and, more tellingly, for the life she assumed off the page as well. The travel guides made M.B. Williams an author, and she subsequently identified as one.

Comparing Williams' 1928 *Jasper National Park* with M.P. Bridgland and Robert Douglas's 1917 *Description of and Guide to Jasper Park* helps to demonstrate how her writing built on what little parks literature there was, while moving considerably beyond it, accentuating both the maturing parks philosophy and the related changing approach to parks promotion. The two books are superficially similar, in terms of being text-heavy with many small scattered photographs, predominantly of distant mountains. They have similar structures, with an early chapter on the Jasper region's history followed by area-by-area excursions to sites of interest throughout the park. In the historical chapter, Williams uses some of the very same quotations that Bridgland and Douglas do, from David Thompson, Gabriel Franchère, and Alexander Ross, to define Jasper in terms of Canada's exploration and fur trade history. And yet the key difference between the two books is evident in their very first sentences. Bridgland and Douglas set to work immediately to lay a factual foundation: "Jasper Park is historic ground. More stirring scenes in the upbuilding of Canada have been staged in it than in any other part of the Rockies."⁴³ In contrast, Williams seeks a more relaxed, literary effect, opening with an epigraph from the British socialist writer Edward Carpenter, and then commenting on it:

To make some share of 'the wild places of the land sacred,' is the avowed object of the national parks. Everywhere else the continent over, the swift tide of civilization rushes onward; the land our fathers knew disappears; the ancient forests fall back before the lumberman; waterfalls are impoverished to turn the wheels of industry; the wild game is driven even farther and farther back. But within the boundaries of the great national reservations lie a few thousand square miles, safe and inviolate, so far as it is within the power of man, from change and invasion. Of these national possessions in Canada the greatest is Jasper Park.⁴⁴

This became Williams' trademark device: associating the Canadian national parks with a noted thinker – from Pauline Johnson to Johann Goethe – by way of a quotation and having that lead into a description of how the parks were fulfilling important social, spiritual, or environmental goals. Her style was more artistic and her intent more ambitious than that of her predecessors. Williams treated the Parks Branch's 1920s guidebooks as extension of the 1910s annual reports, using them to develop and disseminate the justification for parks directly to the public.

But the fact that Williams used some of the same quotations in her Jasper book as Bridgland and Douglas had a decade earlier raises an obvious question: how can we know which of the guidebooks were truly *hers*? After all, Parks Branch staff were already accustomed to writing prose as a team but giving credit to one person. And Williams' authorship was indeed treated fluidly at times. Her name appears nowhere on the 1923 *The Banff-Windermere Highway* (although she listed it among her works in her archival papers), but the 1928 *Kootenay National Park and Banff-Windermere Highway*, borrowing heavily on its predecessor, is credited to her. On the other hand, having being listed as author of the 1928 *Prince Albert National Park*, her name was removed entirely from the 1935 edition: a draft typescript pasted in large portions of the original text and also pasted a blank sheet of paper over her name.⁴⁵ Perhaps the best evidence that M.B. Williams wrote the guidebooks bearing her name – besides her rising salary, parks correspondence about the books' production, and her own claims in her archival papers and oral interview – is simply that, whereas it made sense for the Parks Branch to credit most parks literature to Commissioner Harkin, there was no reason to credit the guides to the unknown (and, on the book jackets, unidentified) Williams. Still, one can and should read Williams' guidebooks as not only expressive of her personal opinions but also as indicative of where the Branch's thinking was headed in the 1920s. Her work relied on information supplied by government biologists and geologists, it was produced with the aid of staff photographers and designers, it was vetted by her colleagues and superiors, and, of course, she was heavily involved in shaping the broader parks philosophy and promotional strategy of which it was a part.

Two elements found in M.B. Williams' guidebooks may show how they helped develop and communicate the Branch's values: their celebration of the automobile and their treatment of First Nations. The automobile was

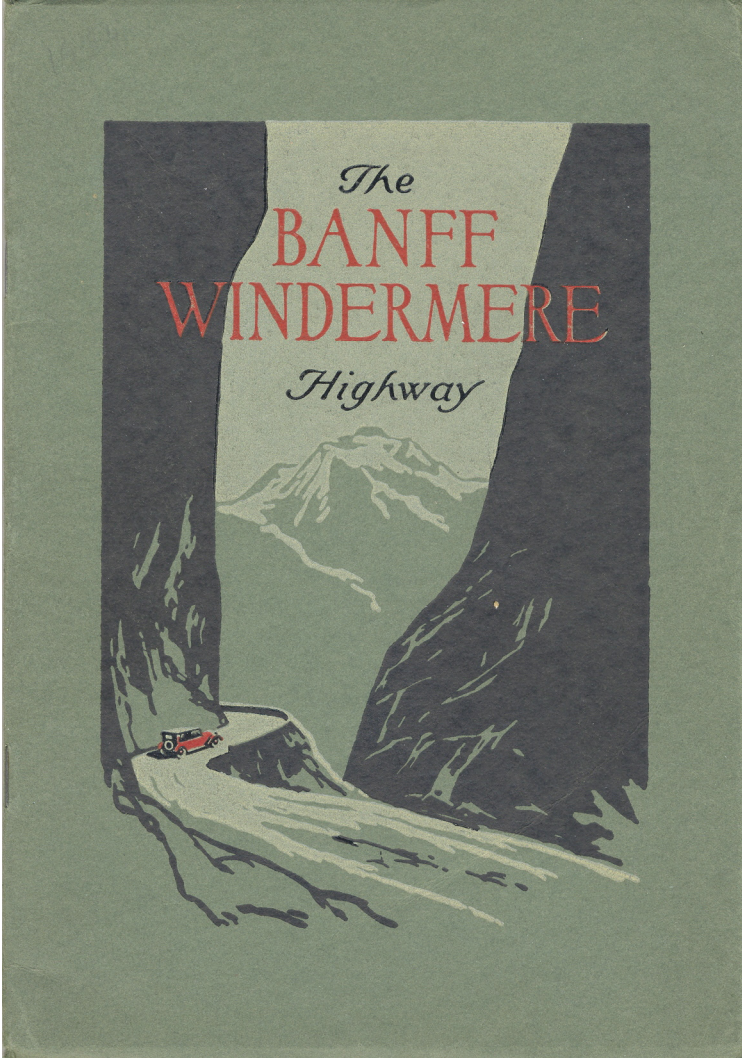


FIG. 5. COVER OF *THE BANFF-WINDERMERE HIGHWAY*. [OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, 1923.]

in a very real sense the impetus for these guidebooks, both because it increased traffic to the parks and because it, unlike the train, spread that traffic throughout the parks. Yet in Williams' first book, the 1921 *Through the Heart of the Rockies and Selkirks*, the car does not really figure; how tourists get to and around the parks is unimportant. But the inroads the Parks Branch had made the previous decade in winning over government led in the 1920s to actual roads: the completion of the Banff-Windermere Highway crossing Banff and Kootenay parks in 1923 and the Kicking Horse Trail from Lake Louise through Yoho to Golden four years later. (John Sandlos discusses 1920s parks roadbuilding in more detail in the chapter that follows.) In Williams' travel guides to the parks along these highways, the roads become symbols of a modern nation working with the individual to achieve personal betterment. *The Banff-Windermere Highway* opens, "The building of a motor highway across the central Canadian Rockies adds one more thrilling chapter to the romance of modern engineering" and ends, "Out of the dreams of a few far-visioned men have come the National parks and the National highways of to-day. Is there not room to believe that the final outcome will exceed all their imaginings and that both are only entering upon their possible service to humanity; that they may in the end prove for all the people to be roads back to a healthier and fuller contact with nature, to a wider and deeper love of country and a richer and more joyous life?"⁴⁶ By the time *The Kicking Horse Trail* was published, there was no need to frame the argument tentatively, as a question – the dream is being fulfilled. Williams rhapsodizes about the automobile:

the "horseless carriage," fantastic chimera for so many centuries of wildly imaginative minds. ... Already, in two short decades, have we not seen it practically revolutionize our way of life, sweeping away with one gesture, the old measures of time and distance, and enabling man, for the first time since he exchanged his nomadic existence for the warm security of the fireside, to escape from the narrow boundaries of his local parish and to enter upon a wider, more joyous, more adventurous life.⁴⁷

The quotation could go on – the entire book is a paean to the automobile – but that is the point: the guidebooks provided Williams with an extensive, targeted, public platform for communicating the Parks Branch’s message.

Earlier guidebooks had already positioned the mountain parks as much in terms of Canada’s history as of nature’s timelessness, but Williams went further in downplaying past native occupation of the parks. In her first book, *Through the Heart of the Rockies and Selkirks*, she states that the parks were long vacant because “the Indians seem to have feared and avoided the mountains.” The Stonies had only entered the Bow Valley “possibly less than a century ago” and the Shuswaps “built their half-buried dwellings at the base of mount Rundle where now the tourist plays golf, but the Indians left few more marks of their habitation than the wild animals.”⁴⁸ Such an argument threads through all her 1920s guidebooks. The aboriginal presence was worth mentioning only because of their alleged legends, which helped give the parks a sense of enchantment. On the second page of *Waterton Lakes National Park*, the reader is told that “The Indians, who, like all primitive peoples, weave stories about the places they particularly love, have a legend that this region was miraculously created.” After recounting it, Williams ends, “A primitive folk tale? Too childish for our rational and scientific minds? Assuredly. Yet certain it is that a special aura of happiness seems to encircle this charming reservation.”⁴⁹ And when the First Nations’ presence was not inconsequential or charming, it was downright harmful: whereas Bridgland and Douglas’s booklet had blamed the decimation of big game around Jasper on workers constructing the transcontinental railways, Williams blamed Indian hunters.⁵⁰ It may well be that Williams did not consider her treatment of natives and their history disparaging, let alone racist, but she must surely have recognized it was convenient: erasing the native presence in the parks allowed her to start the parks’ history with European exploration and the fur trade, better positioning the parks in the broader history of Canadian nation-building and so defining them more easily as part of our national birthright. Williams did not invent this strategy, either in terms of the Parks Branch or the society at large, but she did help entrench it in the parks.

The guidebooks and other promotional work that Williams and the rest of the Parks Branch initiated in the 1920s evidently yielded results: attendance in parks surged from 150,000 in 1921 to 250,000 in 1925 and 550,000 by 1928.⁵¹ Perhaps the greatest surprise was how many of those visitors were

Canadian. Harkin's annual reports had always preached how valuable parks were, not only financially, but also in terms of improving Canadians themselves; in 1916, he described how parks rejuvenated a nation's "human units" during war.⁵² Nonetheless, the focus of tourism in the early years was on visitors to Canada, not from within Canada – an indication that a nation's trade balance was more easily measured than the well-being of her human units. But in the 1920s the national parks were opened up to Canadians: logistically and financially by the automobile, and philosophically and emotionally by the literature the Parks Branch was busily producing. In 1919, Harkin noted the "very substantial increase" of Canadian visitors. By 1927, the commissioner wrote as if Canadian tourists had been favoured all along, saying, "It is especially gratifying to note the large percentage of Canadians among parks' visitors."⁵³ The truth was that the Parks Branch had never expected the parks to so quickly become so much more accessible to so many more Canadians, nor that their own attempts to promote the parks to tourists and the *idea* of parks to all Canadians would be so quickly successful. In her 1936 *Guardians of the Wild*, M.B. Williams would write that "No development in respect of the National Parks and Sanctuaries during the past twenty-five years can have been more gratifying, if less expected, than the wholehearted support the National Parks have finally won from the Canadian people." That book opens with another epigraph by Edward Carpenter: "I see a great land waiting for its own people to take possession of it."⁵⁴ The line served well by this time as something of a mission statement for the Canadian parks system, even if it was a sentiment that had itself waited for the Parks Branch to take possession of it.

So many years, such happy years, under a leader kind
Broad visioned, wise and generous and tolerant of mind
Who never sought for fame or pelf, advancing others not himself!
But history will record his share in building up a land more fair
Praising his dream of man's release through contact with Nature's peace

And men unborn will better be because his heart and mind
could see
That though one half of us be clod, through Beauty we rise
to God.

It is difficult to imagine how Canada's Dominion Parks Branch could have accomplished more in its first two decades than it did. It had made the national parks much more well-known and popular. It oversaw a considerable expansion of the parks system, with nine new parks established. Its staff and appropriation had increased markedly, and it had grown into a government leader in terms of publicity, engineering, and what we today would call environmental or resource management. And it had developed and was communicating to Canadians a coherent philosophy that, not only defined the parks as outstanding examples of Canada's natural landscapes, but also stressed that parks were to be inviolable, that these places being preserved today were being preserved forever.⁵⁵ The parks system's rapid development is in sharp contrast to that of the forest reserve system, which had largely withered away in the same period.⁵⁶

Yet the choices the Branch made in its early years also brought negative consequences. Focusing on a philosophy and defining parks in terms of all Canadians for all time tended to alienate some potential here-and-now allies. The people of Banff, for example, grew furious over how Ottawa managed their town on the basis of timeless principles rather than their more immediate needs. The editor of the *Crag and Canyon*, who in 1913 had promised unending loyalty to Harkin, by 1926 wrote an article that stated in its entirety, "J.B. Harkin, Commissioner of Parks, is registered at the Banff Springs Hotel. Who the hell cares?"⁵⁷ (The sentiment would linger through much of the century, as C.J. Taylor notes in his essay on Banff.) When the Depression hit and a new Conservative government took power in 1930, the Parks Branch learned the hard way the risk of choosing principles over politics. The new prime minister was R.B. Bennett, Member of Parliament for Calgary West, which included the community of Banff. Bennett had long battled with Harkin over his handling of the parks, and his government proceeded to gut the Parks Branch. Thirty-two positions were lost in the Ottawa office, and the prime minister phoned Harkin regularly asking him to resign.⁵⁸ For the entire Depression and the Second World War which followed, the Parks

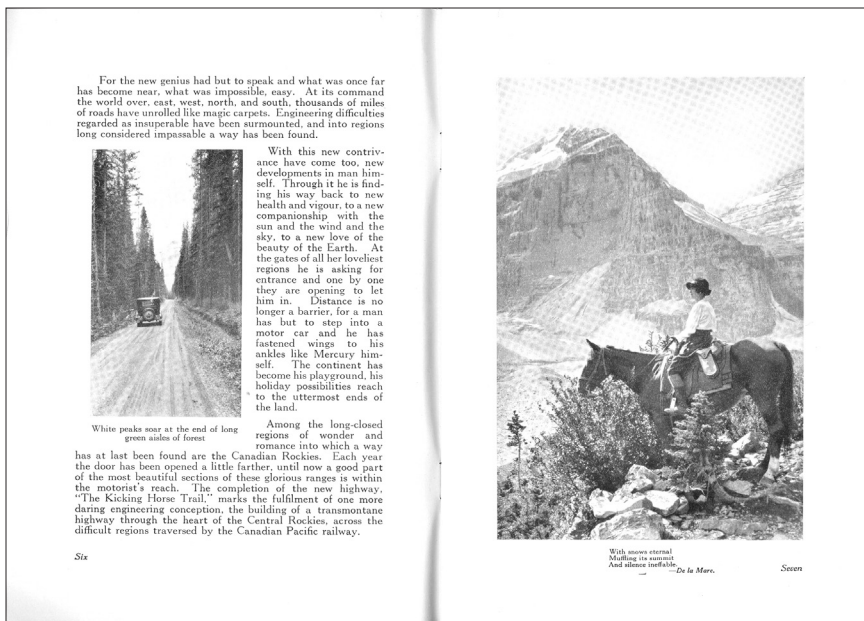


FIG. 6. FROM *THE KICKING HORSE TRAIL*. [OTTAWA: DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, 1930 (1927).]

Branch wandered in the wilderness, its appropriations and its spirit curtailed dramatically.⁵⁹

But the parks system re-emerged in the mid-1940s, thanks in great part to the firm foundation laid in the 1910s and 20s. When the government became more interested than ever in tourism and cultural development, and when Canadians became more interested than ever in exploring Canadian nature, the Parks Branch already had intact an extensive parks system, strong guiding legislation, and a committed staff. Above all, it had a largely understood and accepted philosophy, one that had been simultaneously developed and promoted in the pages of the Parks Branch's annual reports and guidebooks in the 1910s and 1920s.

As for M.B. Williams herself, when R.B. Bennett cut the parks system's staff and budget, she took it personally, because she knew Bennett personally. She was a longtime friend and companion of Mary Bird Herridge, the

stepmother of William Duncan Herridge, who was Bennett's policy advisor and husband to his beloved sister Mildred.⁶⁰ In a letter home to family, M.B. wrote of attending Parliament with Bennett's sister, and having to watch R.B. as he "perspired in gold lace and white satin trousers, cocked hat with the same grim determination with which he raises the tariff and cuts down the Civil Service."⁶¹ Her own job in the civil service was likely safe, given both her seniority – by this time she oversaw a large staff, including all the women in the Parks Branch headquarters – and her proximity to the Bennett family. But when told to lay off most of her staff, she resigned in solidarity.⁶²

M.B. then "ran away"⁶³ to Europe for a number of years, travelling with Mary Bird Herridge throughout the continent and setting up a home in London, England as a base. She continued writing, though she published nothing. But in 1936, as a favour to staff in the Parks Branch, she helped chaperone Grey Owl on his tour of England. That seemed to reawaken her love of the Canadian parks system, and in the space of five months, she proposed, wrote, and saw to publication the first history of Canada's national parks and the Dominion Parks Branch, titled *Guardians of the Wild*. In it Williams never writes about her own work with the Parks Branch; all credit is given instead to "the Commissioner," who possesses the vision and prescience of the Creator. Shortly after Williams published the book, she and Herridge returned to Canada. M.B. continued to try to make her name as a writer – vigorously researching book projects on subjects as diverse as David Thompson and Carl Jung – but as a career it went nowhere. She saw work to completion only when it involved the parks, such as when she compiled Harkin's papers posthumously as *The History and Meaning of the National Parks of Canada* and reworked her old guidebooks in the 1940s and 1950s as *The Banff-Jasper Highway* and *The Heart of the Rockies*.⁶⁴ She lived until 1972, more than forty years after quitting the Parks Branch, but it seemed that only when working on the national parks that she had the passion and commitment to see things through. The devotion for national parks that the Branch had engendered in its first decades was nowhere more apparent than in the life of M.B. Williams, who had done so much to engender it.

NOTES

- 1 “An Interminable Ode,” National Parks Branch file, M.B. Williams papers, R12219-0-3-E, Library and Archives Canada [henceforth, “Williams papers, LAC”]. The poem’s misspellings and patchy punctuation have been corrected here for the sake of readability. The staff members mentioned in the passage above are James Bernard Harkin (“J.B.H.”), Maxwell Graham (“Maxwell”), Frederick Byshe (“Byshe”), Duncan Johnson (“Johnson”), Frank H.H. Williamson (“good F.H.W.”), Abraham Knechtel (“wise A.K.”), Fredericka Von Charles (“witty F.V.”), and M.B. Williams (“quiet M.B.”); all but Knechtel were with the Branch at its establishment in 1911.
- This essay owes a great debt to Williams’ niece, Frances Girling, who passed away in 2010. Frances was in possession of her aunt’s personal papers until 2007, when I assisted her in donating them to Library and Archives Canada. She was very pleased that they were deemed of national interest. (Having had access to the papers before they were catalogued by LAC, and minimal contact with them since, I will reference the titles then listed on the files – titles they may no longer carry.) I wish to thank editor Claire Campbell and the other contributors to this volume, in particular Ian MacLaren, for their aid in writing this chapter. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by the University of Western Ontario’s Academic Development Fund.
- 2 M.B. Williams interview [henceforth, “Williams interview”], conducted by Ruth and Len Wertheimer, October 1969 and June 1970; in possession of the author.
- 3 J.B. Harkin, *The History and Meaning of the National Parks of Canada* (Saskatoon: H.R. Larson, 1957), 5. The incident is cited, for example, in Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998 [1974]), 78; Leslie Bella, *Parks for Profit* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1986), 61; and Paul Kopas, *Taking the Air: Ideas and Change in Canada’s National Parks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), vii.
- 4 Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, <http://www.cpaws.org/about/harkin.php>; accessed 30 September 2009. See also E.J. (Ted) Hart, *J.B. Harkin: Father of Canada’s National Parks* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2010); and Gavin Henderson, “James Bernard Harkin: The Father of Canadian National Parks,” *Borealis* (Fall 1994): 28–33.
- 5 The agency went through a number of names over its history, beginning with “Dominion Parks Branch” for its first decade. I tend to use “National Parks Branch” because that was its most common appellation prior to becoming Parks Canada in 1973.
- 6 See Auditor-General, *Annual Reports*, 1911–30; C.J. Taylor, “A History of National Parks Administration,” unpublished manuscript (no pagination), 1989, table 1; and J.B. Harkin, Commissioner of National Parks, *Annual Report*, 1929–30, 99.
- 7 This is an elaboration of an argument I made in *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935–1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 25–33. Harkin’s biographer

- E.J. (Ted) Hart has taken exception to this interpretation, suggesting that by spotlighting the Branch, rather than its commissioner, I make Harkin “rather ineffectual and even redundant to the parks story” (xvi). While there is no doubt that Harkin played a leading role in the Canadian parks system’s development, it is also perfectly clear in the archival record that many of the policy and promotional documents attributed to Harkin, and which have built his reputation, were written by or with the aid of others. Hart himself cites such cases a number of times, on one occasion crediting it as proof of the “commissioner’s willingness to listen to and adapt the ideas of his colleagues into branch policies” (64).
- 8 Williams, *Guardians of the Wild* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1936), 7.
 - 9 Williams interview. It may be worth noting that Harkin was younger than half of his staff, and only three years older than Williams.
 - 10 A useful summary of women’s position in the Canadian civil service in the early twentieth century may be found in John Hilliker, *Canada’s Department of External Affairs*, vol. 1: *The Early Years, 1909–1946* (Montreal: Institute of Public Administration of Canada and McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 47–49.
 - 11 In understanding this period of Canadian parks history, I have been aided greatly by C.J. Taylor’s “A History of National Parks Administration” and “Legislating Nature: The National Parks Act of 1930,” in *To See Ourselves / To Save Ourselves: Ecology and Culture in Canada*, ed. Rowland Lorimer et al., 125–38 (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies, 1991); R. Peter Gillis and Thomas R. Roach, *Lost Initiatives: Canada’s Forest Industries, Forest Policy, and Forest Conservation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986), especially 62–70; and Peter J. Murphy, “Following the Base of the Foothills’: Tracing the Boundaries of Jasper Park and its Adjacent Rocky Mountains Forest Reserve,” in *Culturing Wilderness: Studies in Two Centuries of Human History in the Upper Athabasca River Watershed*, ed. I.S. MacLaren, 71–121 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2007).
 - 12 Williams, *Guardians of the Wild*, 4.
 - 13 Frank Oliver, House of Commons, *Debates*, 28 April 1911, columns 8083–4. For more on the ideas behind the 1911 Act, see Oliver, *ibid.*, 13 January 1911, columns 1640–1; Owen Ritchie, Barrister, to Frank Oliver, Minister, Department of the Interior, 16 November 1910, RG 39, vol. 259, file 38305, pt. 1, LAC; and RG 39, vol. 259, file 38305, pt. 2, LAC. Though the law was passed just months before the end of the Liberal government’s fifteen-year time in power, its timing does not seem to have been related to the coming election. The coming coronation of George V was said to be putting greater pressure on legislation. See Sir Richard Cartright, Senate, *Debates*, 19 May 1911, 742.
 - 14 R. Peter Gillis and Thomas R. Roach believe that the 1911 act contributed to the fragmentation of conservation in Canada. Although the Forestry Branch retained responsibility for firefighting on Dominion land, including parks, the responsibility for wildlife conservation was turned over to the Parks Branch. Rather than having one organization oversee resources on a more ecological model, the resources were being carved

- up between agencies. Gillis and Roach, *Lost Initiatives*, 66.
- 15 The 1911 Act allowed for the establishment of new national parks, but only within forest reserves. See RG 39, vol. 259, file 38305, pt. 2, LAC.
 - 16 *Crag and Canyon*, 13 June 1913.
 - 17 Harkin to A.B. Macdonald, Superintendent, Rocky Mountains Park, 26 January 1912, RG 84, vol. 80, file U3, pt. 3, 1911–1914, LAC.
 - 18 Williams interview. On suspected corruption in the timber berth system prior to 1911, see Gillis and Roach, 70.
 - 19 Unsigned memo to Harkin, 19 January 1914, RG 84, vol. 80, file U3, pt. 3, 1911–1914, LAC.
 - 20 Rothwell to Deputy Minister of the Interior, 24 April 1917, RG 84, vol. 654, file B2-1, vol. 1, LAC; and surrounding correspondence.
 - 21 Williams interview.
 - 22 See RG 84, vol. 80, file U3, pt. 2, 1908–1911, LAC.
 - 23 Harkin to Williams, 23 November 1941, National Parks Branch file, Williams papers, LAC.
 - 24 Williams interview. Williams and Harkin’s mutual admiration was longstanding. A 1936 review of Williams’ history of the Canadian national parks system, *Guardians of the Wild*, states, “She gives all praise to J. B. Harkin: yet, and this betrays her secret, Mr. Harkin, in June this year, told Mr. Harper Cory that Miss Williams had been an inspiring and dominant factor in the works of the Parks Branch for some twenty years.” Reviews of *Guardians of the Wild* file, *ibid.*
 - 25 Harkin, “Memorandum re National Parks – Their Values and Ideals,” 14 March 1914, Harkin papers, MG30 E169, vol. 2, LAC; and *A Sprig of Mountain Heather; Being a Story of the Heather and Some Facts about the Mountain Playgrounds of the Dominion* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1914), 16. The paragraphs are not quite identical. In the booklet, mention of “living birds and animals” is removed, and “one of our most precious national possessions” becomes “men’s rightful heritage.” As John Sandlos mentions in the following chapter of this book, the passage’s first sentence captures the dual economic and preservationist purposes of parks.
 - 26 Williams interview.
 - 27 Harkin, *Annual Report*, 1913.
 - 28 In a 5–16 April 1916 hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Public Lands, Secretary of the American Civic Association Richard B. Watrous used the report both to detail the commercial and humanitarian value of parks and to demonstrate the important work done by the agency already in existence in Canada.
 - 29 Harkin to Williams, 23 November 1941, National Parks Branch file, Williams papers, LAC. The calculation first appears in Harkin, *Annual Report*, 1920, 3. This was the “small and modest fact” of the poem that begins this section of the chapter.
 - 30 Asked in Parliament in 1916 “What is the use of these parks?” the Minister of the Interior began his reply, “I think they are of great utility. They attract a large number of foreign tourists and cause to be spent in Canada much more money that would not otherwise come into the country.” William Roche,

- House of Commons, *Debates*, 15 February 1916, 844.
- 31 Cannon and Meighen, House of Commons, *Debates*, 12 May 1919, 2303.
- 32 Williams interview. On *A Sprig of Mountain Heather*, see *The Globe*, 14 August 1914; and I.S. MacLaren with Eric Higgs and Gabrielle Zezulka-Mailloux, *Mapper of Mountains: M.P. Bridgland in the Canadian Rockies, 1902–1930* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 104–5 and 152 note 15.
- 33 M.P. Bridgland and R. Douglas, *Description of & Guide to Jasper Park* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1917); A.P. Coleman, *Glaciers of the Rockies and Selkirks* (Ottawa: Dept. of the Interior, [between 1912 and 1917]).
- 34 Surveyor General Deville to Maynard Rogers, Superintendent, Jasper National Park, 4 September 1920, RG 84, vol. 146, file J113-200, pt.2, LAC.
- 35 On the role of railroads in promoting tourism in the parks, see Gabrielle Zezulka-Mailloux, “Laying the Tracks for Tourism,” in *Culturing Wilderness*, 233–59; and E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude, 1983).
- 36 RG 32, vol. 480, file Williams Mabel B., LAC. Also, Frances Girling interview with the author, 28 January 2006. It should be noted, however, that during her paid sick leave in May–July 1929, Williams went to Europe with longtime travelling companion Mary Greene (later, Herridge). See MB 1931, file, Williams papers, LAC.
- 37 Frances Girling interview with the author, 28 January 2006.
- 38 Harkin, *Annual Report*, 1923, 112; 1922, K-121; and 1923, K-119.
- 39 See RG 84, vol. 170, file U113-2, vol. 2, LAC.
- 40 Harkin to W.W. Cory, 3 December 1923, *ibid.*
- 41 W.F. Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, vol. 2 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1977), 15; and Alisa Apostle, “Canada, Vacations Unlimited: The Canadian Government Tourism Industry, 1934–1959,” unpublished PhD thesis, Queen’s University, 2003.
- 42 Attorney-General, *Annual Report*, 1911–1931; and Williams interview. However, beginning in 1926, Williams’ position was listed as “head clerk.” There is indication that Williams was being squeezed out of the senior role in publicity work, and replaced by J.C. Campbell, who in the 1930s became Director of Publicity within the National Parks Branch. After a 1928 trip, Williams wrote her family that “They all seemed glad to see me back in the office. Mr. Harkin welcomed me with both hands and kept me for an hour talking. He wouldn’t have done that if Mr. Campbell had been home for he would have had his head in the door on some pretense. He wants to be in on everything I suppose.” Williams to “dear people,” 11 May 1928, MB1931, file, Williams papers, LAC.
- 43 Bridgland and Douglas, *Description of and Guide to Jasper Park*, 13.
- 44 Williams, *Jasper National Park* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1928), 1. Williams actually alters Carpenter’s quote, which referred to “lands sacred,” plural. As I.S. MacLaren notes, “Whether intentional or not, this alteration makes possible the reading of the

- passage in her context as though ‘land’ and Canada were one and the same.” See MacLaren, “Introduction,” *Culturing Wilderness*, xl note 26.
- 45 RG 84, vol. 184, file U113-100, LAC; and RG 84, vol. 177, file PA113-200, LAC.
- 46 Williams, *The Banff-Windermere Highway* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1923), 5 and 34–35.
- 47 Williams, *The Kicking Horse Trail* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1927), 5.
- 48 Williams, *Through the Heart of the Rockies and Selkirks*, 4th ed. (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1929 [1921]), 7. Please note that in this instance, I did not have access to the first edition of the guide.
- 49 Williams, *Waterton Lakes National Park* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, [1927?]), 6–7.
- 50 Bridgland and Douglas, *Description of and Guide to Jasper Park*, 33; and Williams, *Jasper National Park*, 133.
- 51 Harkin, *Annual Report*, 1922, 1; 1925, 66; and 1929–30, 99.
- 52 Harkin, *Annual Report*, 1916, 5.
- 53 Harkin, *Annual Report*, 1919, 4; and 1927–8, 77.
- 54 Williams, *Guardians of the Wild*, 127, and dedication page. The Carpenter quote also begins the foreword by “William Lyon Mackenzie King” in *Prince Albert National Park*.
- 55 On inviolability, see Taylor, “Legislating Nature”; and my *Natural Selections*, 175–83.
- 56 See Murphy, “Following the Base of the Foothills,” 107.
- 57 *Crag and Canyon*, 24 September 1926.
- 58 Lothian, *History of Canada’s National Parks*, 17; and C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada’s National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 110. The Parks Branch would have suffered some staff losses regardless, because in 1930, natural resources in the western provinces were transferred from federal to provincial responsibility, which reduced staffing across the federal Department of the Interior.
- 59 The system was not completely inactive in that period, of course. On the parks system during the 1930s and the war, see such works as Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915–1946* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995); Waiser, *Saskatchewan’s Playground: A History of Prince Albert National Park* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1989); and my *Natural Selections*, chaps. 2–4.
- 60 Herridge had married William Thomas Herridge – a clergyman, and friend and advisor to William Lyon Mackenzie King – shortly before his death in 1929. Williams dedicated *Guardians of the Wild* to “M.B.H. Best of critics because she is so easily bored.”
- 61 Williams letter, 10 October 1930, MB 1931, file, Williams papers, LAC.
- 62 Biography of M.B. and Ernie Williams, Williams papers, LAC. It should be noted, however, that she had thirty years in, and as such was eligible for an annual retirement allowance.
- 63 This was how she later characterized it. See J.C. Campbell, Parks Branch Publicity Director, to Williams, 20 March 1936, Grey Owl file, Williams papers,

LAC. From a twenty-first century perspective, it is tempting to read in the contours of Williams' life indications of homosexuality. But there is no suggestion of that in her correspondence, while there is evidence of a heterosexual relationship with journalist and parks staffer Alfred B. Buckley. See Buckley to Williams, 18 May 1935, and Williams to "Dearest," 8 June 1936, M.B. to A.B. Buckley 1935 file, Williams papers, LAC. I know nothing of Buckley,

other than that he wrote the deservedly obscure *Choric Ode on the Opening of the Banff-Windermere Highway, June 30, 1923* (Ottawa: Department of the Interior, 1923).

- 64 Not that the texts ever much changed. In both the 1928 and 1948 editions of *Jasper National Park*, the Athabasca glacier is described as 4.5 miles long, but the glacier had in fact retreated almost half a mile in that period.