

Ella Parks (1874 - 1939)



Ella Parks at easel

Ella Maud Johnston was born to Emma and Alfred Johnston of Southfield. She graduated from Birmingham High School in 1894 and married Edgar A. Parks two years later. They lived on Pierce Street and had no children. After a long illness, Ella Parks died in 1939 and was buried in Greenwood Cemetery.

The unique thing about Ella is her love of painting. Ella learned to paint from her aunt, Sarah Beddow, from an early age. It is not known if she ever received any formal training, but throughout her life, she was awarded approximately 150 prizes. She was most proud of her inclusion on Wayne State University's list of Michigan artists. She was even featured in a DIA exhibition of Michigan artists.

Ella Parks left something very special behind: a log of her paintings. Many times she would note the title of the work, the medium, who she sold it to, for how much, and in what year. As a historian and one who prides herself on her organizational skills, I greatly appreciate her meticulous note-taking. She even recorded what Christmas gifts she was going to give to whom from 1900-1912.

Frequently, those gifts were her paintings. Posthumously, someone added to the log when the remainder of her paintings were sold or gifted.



One of Ella's watercolors, Florida Christmas Berries (Lia Lavallee)

Why I was inspired: Ella shared her talent with those around her and the community supported her.

--Submitted by Brittany Phalen