



*Isabel M. Priestly, founder of the Yorkton Natural History Society and original editor of **The Blue Jay**.*

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# RETROSPECTIVE: ISABEL M. PRIESTLY

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The communities that knew Isabel M. Priestly registered shock and sorrow at her sudden and completely unexpected death on 23 April 1946. Generous tributes appeared in the weekly newspaper, the *Yorkton Enterprise*, and in other newspapers throughout Manitoba and Saskat-

chewan. In addition to this editorial recognition there were personal tributes from individuals from far and wide. The following Retrospective section is a selection from these tributes paid at the time of Mrs. Priestly's death.

## Yorkton Mourns Death of Mrs. "Bob" Priestly

[from *Yorkton Enterprise*, 25 April 1946]

Citizens of Yorkton were profoundly shocked and expressions of sincere sorrow and regret were heard on all sides when word circulated Tuesday that Mrs. "Bob" Priestly had died suddenly that morning from a cerebral hemorrhage. Although Mrs. Priestly had resided in Yorkton for little more than a decade her friendliness, benevolent mind and energy to execute good, made her one of the best known and most highly respected women in the community. The sincere sympathy of a host of friends goes out to her husband and family in their hour of sorrow.

Isabel M. Adnams was born in Newbury, "Berks," England on July 23, 1893. She was a Canadian soldier's sweetheart and war bride of the first global conflict. On New Year's Eve in 1918, she was married to Robert J. Priestly and shortly afterwards they set out together for their future home in the New World.

**First Lived At Calgary** For seven years they resided at Calgary where Isabel Priestly quickly became enamored with the natural beauties of the prairies and snow-capped mountains of her adopted land. Here, following an early training toward a Botanical Research degree, which the 1914-18 war prevented her obtaining, she was seized with the urge to investigate nature, a quality she practised throughout the remainder of her life.

In 1920, the Priestlys moved to Victoria where Isabel Priestly discovered in that most westerly part of Canada a climate, topography and people almost identical to her native land. But she loved it not as the open spaces and cherished more the warmer friendliness characteristic of the wheatland people. She was naturally happy when her husband's work took them to Winnipeg with their young family in 1929.



*Bob and Isabel Priestly.*

While in Winnipeg, for six years, "Bob" Priestly was associated with the Fourth Estate as "desk editor" with the *Winnipeg Free Press*. While "Bob" devoted much of his leisure time to the pursuits of the illusive pig skin as a rugby executive, Isabel Priestly received enjoyment from the furtherance of her studies in natural history. In Winnipeg she found a wide field to work on, but demands of her growing, busy, family somewhat limited her explorations.

**Came To Yorkton In 1935** It was in July 1935 that Mr. and Mrs. "Bob" Priestly, their two sons Frank and "Mike" and daughter Diana came to

Yorkton. Here "Bob" was engaged in operating the Sifton Bureau, handling news and newspapers for their three prairie outlets, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Regina Leader-Post* and the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*.

Yorkton had no exclusive tobacco and news shop then and "Bob" conceived the idea to branch out into this line, retaining his position with the Sifton interests. Unfortunately the choice of time for such an exploit was inopportune. The depression grew worse and eventually "Bobshop" disappeared.

**Husband To Regina** In 1941 "Bob" became associated with Yorkton's

radio station CJGX and quickly won promotion, eventually becoming its popular manager. His service in this capacity terminated at the end of November 1946 when he accepted a position as Occupational Counsellor with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Regina.

Unable to secure a home in Regina, Mrs. Priestly and "Mike" remained in Yorkton and on every occasion possible "Bob" returned to be with his family. The Easter season was one of these occasions.

Recently Mrs. Priestly had been suffering from sinus trouble. She had been to see a specialist on Thursday and complained of the loss of sight from her right eye. It is now believed this was the first indication of her fatal ailment.

**Happy Easter Homecoming** Mr. Priestly arrived for the Easter vacation Friday noon. Their son Frank had come earlier in the week from the University of Alberta. Mrs. Priestly did not let her "minor indisposition," as she called it, prevent her preparation for Easter and continued with her household duties. On Monday she did her wash as usual and Monday evening entertained friends. It was shortly after midnight when the family retired.

Mrs. Priestly had been in bed less than an hour when she called to her husband for aid. Almost immediately she sank into a coma and failed to rally. The family doctor [C.J. Houston] was summoned and Mrs. Priestly removed to the Yorkton General Hospital where she passed away shortly after seven o'clock that morning.

Her son Frank had left the night previous for Winnipeg to visit friends but was reached by telegram aboard the east-bound train in sufficient time to transfer at Minnedosa and return to Yorkton. Unfortunately he arrived too late to be with his mother before she

expired.

### **Key Worker Of Benevolent Society**

Mrs. Priestly took a keen interest in the work of the Benevolent Society almost from the time of her arrival in Yorkton and, at the time of her death, was serving as its treasurer. In fact one of the last things she did was handle the money from the sale of violets by the Benevolent Society which took place on Saturday. At the Christmas season she was possibly the leader in preparing and packing the hampers of The Enterprise Empty Stocking Fund.

Mrs. Priestly was also the president of the Yorkton Natural History Society and had labored long for this organization. Especially active was she in connection with the work of Ducks Unlimited and much of the success of this organization in Yorkton is attributable to her untiring efforts.

"The Blue Jay," official bulletin of the Yorkton Natural History Society, which was published in cooperation with the Saskatchewan Provincial Museum, owed its origin and very existence to Isabel M. Priestly, its editor. This was a work characteristic of the woman and the copies which she so carefully prepared will live on as a monument to her untiring efforts on behalf of our little feathered friends.

In addition Mrs. Priestly served throughout the war years as President of the Consumers Branch of the War-time Prices and Trade Board.

Besides her husband Mrs. Priestly is survived by two sons, Lieutenant Frank, who served overseas and who is now working toward an electrical engineering degree at the University of Alberta; "Mike" at home; and one daughter, Diana, who after serving throughout the war with the Royal Canadian Navy is studying at the University of British Columbia in Victoria. Her mother Mrs. I.M. Adnams resides in Victoria, B.C.

# Kenny Says...

[By KEN MAYHEW, Associate Editor, *Yorkton Enterprise*, 25 April 1946]

... The untimely passing of Mrs. "Bob" Priestly is not only a shock but removes from the earthly scene a fine character. It takes from the stage of our community a performer of benevolence and a friend of all nature.

Isabel Priestly had become an integral part of the life of Yorkton. Hers was the willingness to help, which went out to almost every good cause.

The office of the "home-town newspaper" can usually be depended upon to be the "nerve centre" of any community. In this respect *The Enterprise* is not the exception to the rule. Whenever hearts beat faster, because of some good or charitable work, the graph of such impulse is almost always recorded in what eventually becomes the "files" of that newspaper. Consequently we find compiled in Yorkton's history many good works of the gracious lady we mourn, as we scan through issues of this newspaper dating back to 1935.

It was the good fortune of the writer to know Mrs. Priestly intimately almost from the time of her arrival in Yorkton in 1935. I knew her as the wife of a friend and colleague and maybe even more so from our association together in community enterprises. She possessed a flare for writing and few issues of this newspaper, in recent years, "went to bed" without some article which had been written by Isabel Priestly. Maybe it was only a "local" about an approaching tag day, as appeared in

our last issue, or possibly it might be a dissertation on wild life, but whatever it was it was well done.

The work of Mrs. Priestly with the Natural History Society served as a distinct contribution to not only those of this era but to posterity. Her research for Ducks Unlimited, Tom Main, their chief engineer, told me, was of inestimable value. ... Mrs. Priestly was an authority on many subjects of wild life and her counsel was frequently sought.

In connection with her association with wild life, she never called it work, she originated and edited the fine publication "Blue Jay." This work was carried on in collaboration with the Saskatchewan Museum. Just recently the issue for the first quarter of 1946 appeared and won wide acclaim. It is sincerely hoped someone will carry on this fine work which Mrs. Priestly had so well under way. Few realize that the "Blue Jay" has a subscription list of close to 500 and that its records were taken as authoritative, not only by our own Saskatchewan University but by all leading ornithological and botanical institutes in North America.

But it was her work with the Yorkton Benevolent Society of which I was most familiar. It is a type of work which seldom brings recognition and certainly no reward except the knowledge one has of performing the labor of love. In this great task Isabel Priestly was untiring.

Throughout the year – 365 days –

the women of the Yorkton Benevolent Society are at work for the good of the citizens. Maybe it is a deserted wife who needs food or clothing or maybe just a word of cheer and advice. Or perchance young children are neglected by their parents and need some kindly care and guidance. Maybe it's a home where Santa Claus can't call some Christmas Eve unless help is forthcoming. It is in cases like these that kindly help goes out from the good women of the Yorkton Benevolent Society and Isabel Priestly was always in the van of such missions of mercy.

Isabel Priestly served as treasurer of the Yorkton Benevolent Society and as such her work was unceasing. Through good times and bad there are always those who need help. And usually money is a very important part in providing needs for unfortunates. The Violet Day last Saturday was a part of her work. Prior to the street sale these little paper flowers had to be made into bouquets. Such necessitates much work. Isabel Priestly had labored late and long to accomplish this task. The returns from the tag day brought satisfaction for this work because it provided the wherewithal for the Benevolent Society to carry on its charities.

Each Christmas season *The Enterprise* carries on a campaign for funds to provide Christmas cheer for Yorkton kiddies who otherwise might go without a visit from Santa Claus. This money is used to buy candy, nuts, fruit and toys and then the good women of the Benevolent Society do the packing and ship them off to Santa at the needy homes.

Before these parcels can be dispatched much work has to be done in hunting down needy cases and preparing the list of names of the deserving. The age, sex and home

address is always necessary in every case. Besides it is well to know the wishes of the little tots. Just what is it they want Santa Claus to bring? It was here, in my opinion, Isabel Priestly did her greatest work. She was most painstaking in her thoroughness to prepare these lists. Before me as I write this column is tangible proof of her work. The detail so carefully arranged ... the writing so legible. Isabel Priestly is gone but next Christmas morning many a little heart will be gladdened because the kindly lady left behind Santa's instructions.

I recall with fond memory an evening Mrs. Priestly and her son "Mike" spent at our home during the last Christmas season. The Benevolent Society, through The Enterprise Empty Stocking Fund, had sent the Sisters and children at Sacred Heart Academy some Christmas goodies. To show their appreciation a group of children paid us a visit with Brother Justin, principal of St. Joseph's College. These children had carefully arranged a program of carols and recitations in both Ukrainian and English for our enjoyment. Throughout their visit Mrs. Priestly sat in keen delight at this, for us, novel offering. When they had gone she was loud in her praise of the fine work which the Sisters were doing and expressed delight that such an institution was situated here to carry on this good work.

The work Mrs. Priestly did at the time of national registration and her untiring efforts for the consumers branch of the War-time Prices and Trade Board are other highlights in her community service.

Despite her many efforts she never expressed fatigue or lack of enthusiasm for the cause. She was al-

always bright and merry and fond of a little joke.

Only a week ago she was in *The Enterprise* office. A kindly lady had donated two pairs of silk stockings to The Enterprise Empty Stocking Fund after the Christmas season. It had been planned to raffle these off. It was in this connection Mrs. Priestly had been called.

"If you cannot arrange the raffle," she said, "maybe you will soon be able to wear them yourself. I've heard rumors of styles for men as enjoyed in the Elizabethan age returning."

Born in England, Isabel Priestly was intensely British but she was a Canadian before anything else. Loyalty to her adopted country was indeed a very part of her being. As a girl in her early twenties she had fallen in love with a Canadian soldier whom she met in England at the time of the First Great War.

On the first gay New Year's Eve England had enjoyed in four years (Dec. 31, 1918) she married "Bob" Priestly and they came to Canada. Here she established a good Christian home and their union was blessed with three children. War returned to the British people in September 1939. Isabel Priestly quickly and without ostentation rallied to the call.

She gave all she had to offer. Frank, her oldest son, and Diana, her only daughter, both little more than children, quickly joined the services. Frank served with distinction with the Canadian army and won his commission in the field. Diana also served faithfully and well as a Wren with the Royal Canadian Navy. Meantime Isabel Priestly worked on almost every war charity Yorkton mustered where women could work.

Christmas last saw her family reunited for the first time in a number of years. Little did they then realize this was to be their last time together. Isabel Priestly believed in education and persuaded Frank and Diana to complete their college training before taking their respective places in commercial life. Frank went to the University of Alberta; Diana to the University of British Columbia. Meanwhile "Mike" continued his studies at Simpson school. "Bob," her husband, returned to his duties in the Department of Veterans Affairs at Regina.

Now she is gone. Suddenly in the prime of life she was cut down without warning and taken from us. It seemed fitting that her hour of parting should have come in the morning; the sun had scarce been up an hour when she slipped quietly away. Earth was at springtime. The trees were ready to send forth their green splendor for the first peacetime spring in seven years. Little blades of green fresh grass were replacing the earth's dull carpet. Birds, maybe even a Blue Jay, were chanting their most heavenly song. Nature was coming into its most resplendent season. Good Friday was over. Easter was at hand. Isabel Priestly knew, more than ever before, the charms of nature which far surpass all the pleasures of this earth.

"Man is incomprehensible without nature, and nature is incomprehensible apart from man. For the delicate loveliness of the flower is as much in the human eye as in its own fragile petals, and the splendor of the heavens as much in the imagination that kindles at the touch of their glory as in the shining of countless worlds."

# Funeral Service for Mrs. "Bob" Priestly

[from *Yorkton Enterprise*, 2 May 1946]

The sacred edifice of Holy Trinity Anglican Church was filled to capacity on Friday afternoon last ... the profusion of floral tokens bore testimony to the popularity of the departed.

The members of the Anglican W.A. (Womens' Auxilary) and the Altar Guild lined the pathway to the church for the funeral cortege ... Departing briefly from the customary beautiful Anglican funeral ritual Rev. Wm. Grazier, the rector, paid tribute to the character of Mrs. Priestly:

"Our hearts go out today to a father and family who are bearing with great fortitude the shock of very sudden bereavement... Nothing could have been more unexpected for few were more active and energetic among us than she was. It was her buoyancy of spirit and active interest in so many worthy endeavors which featured her life and made her such a valued citizen of this community. As such we shall do well to remember her and copy her example.

She took her part in the life and work of her church in a highly practical, yet most unassuming way. Ever

the peacemaker, she was far above the petty things which so often mar the efforts of those who band themselves together to achieve a common objective.

Mrs. Priestly was a rare character, one who put something into the lives of all who came to know her. Her love for, and her knowledge of, the world as God made it, was a natural expression of the many virtues she possessed.

We recall with great appreciation the efforts she put forth to extend that knowledge to others, and her work in this respect is known far beyond the boundaries of this country. Whatever Mrs. Priestly did she did well.

Few were more busy than she, yet she never pleaded it as an excuse for not undertaking any worthwhile service she could render.

This community will sadly miss her, but the memory of her valuable and useful life among us will long be cherished by us, and with the greatest admiration for the good example she has left us."



There is far greater beauty in a wild flower growing in its natural setting than in any wild flower plucked. Let us remember Nature's garden is one we share with others. Isabel Priestly, 1943. *The Blue Jay* 1:24.



# Living Memorial Would Perpetuate Memory of I. Priestly

[Tribute by C. STUART FRANCIS of Torch River, Saskatchewan, in *Yorkton Enterprise*, 9 May 1946]

When Isabel Priestly organized the Yorkton Natural History Society, she built better than she knew, for that was just the inspiration needed to give many nature lovers the chance to express their ideas and knowledge, to be passed around to all the others, over these wide prairies for their benefit, and I am sure to the benefit of nature's children as well.

Now that Isabel Priestly can no longer guide the destinies of our natural history society, and can no longer inspire us to greater efforts along this line, it is up to all of us members to dig in and endeavor to make our society an even bigger and

better organization, both for the benefit of all nature, and to prove to Isabel Priestly that her very earnest efforts were not in vain. I have been thinking that it would be a fine idea if all us "Lovers of Nature" all over the west took some united action to show our appreciation of her work by taking action to have a forest reserve or provincial park, such as the Duck Mountain Park, or some lake or river named after her memory.

[Note: Priestly Island, one of the largest islands in Reindeer Lake, was named for her by the Canadian Board on Geographic Names, effective 5 July 1956 — see *The Blue Jay* 14:74, 1956.]

## Wild Wings

[By B.W. CARTWRIGHT, *Winnipeg Tribune*, 4 May 1946]

On Wednesday last, at a much too early age, Mrs. Isabel M. Priestly of Yorkton, Saskatchewan, died suddenly. She was a remarkable woman. She was a dynamic force in the study of natural history and had that rare ability to inspire others to heights of scientific achievement which they had no idea they possessed. She was a member of the botanical section of the Natural History Society of Manitoba some years ago, until she and her husband moved to Yorkton, Saskatchewan.

We soon learned about her impact on that community in the daily press. She organized the Yorkton Natural History Society and gathered around her a group of enthusiasts who proceeded to make natural history in their community. They not only founded the Yorkton Natural History Society but they published the "Blue Jay," in which they recorded their observations in the fields of ornithology, mammalogy, botany and entomology with that scientific exactitude that is the only basis on which man can deal with nature.

Mrs. Priestly had other community interests which she discharged with the same conscientious ability but her influence on students of natural history will last for a long time — for a very long time — and if anyone arises from her coterie that can carry the torch which she held so high —

then the Natural History Society of Yorkton, which had taken leadership in Saskatchewan, will be a fair candidate to take the leadership in Canada in their chosen field. Naturalists in the west are going to miss Mrs. Priestly and they are going to miss her badly.

## In Woods and Fields

[By W.H. MOOR, *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 April 1946]

This column records with regret the recent death of Mrs. Robert J. Priestly, editor of "The Blue Jay," the nature magazine published by the Yorkton Natural History Society. She

made a great contribution to nature study interest and information in Saskatchewan, and her suggestions and criticisms were always kindly and constructive.

## Well Known Western Naturalist Is Dead

[*Western Producer*, 16 May 1946]

Recently death came very suddenly to one of Yorkton's best known and public-spirited citizens, Mrs. R. Priestly, who suffered a cerebral hemorrhage. Many readers will know Mrs. Priestly as president of the Yorkton Natural History Society and editor of "The Blue Jay," a natural history publication.

Mrs. Priestly brought to this enterprise a lifetime's interest in nature beginning at her home in

Berkshire, England. She came to Canada as a bride after the last war and her first home was in Calgary. Later in Winnipeg she became an active member of the Manitoba Natural History Society and when the Priestlys moved to Yorkton, a small group of friends began making excursions each weekend to study the birds and so a society was formed there. It was Mrs. Priestly's fondest, but unfulfilled, wish that more natural history societies might be formed in Saskatchewan.



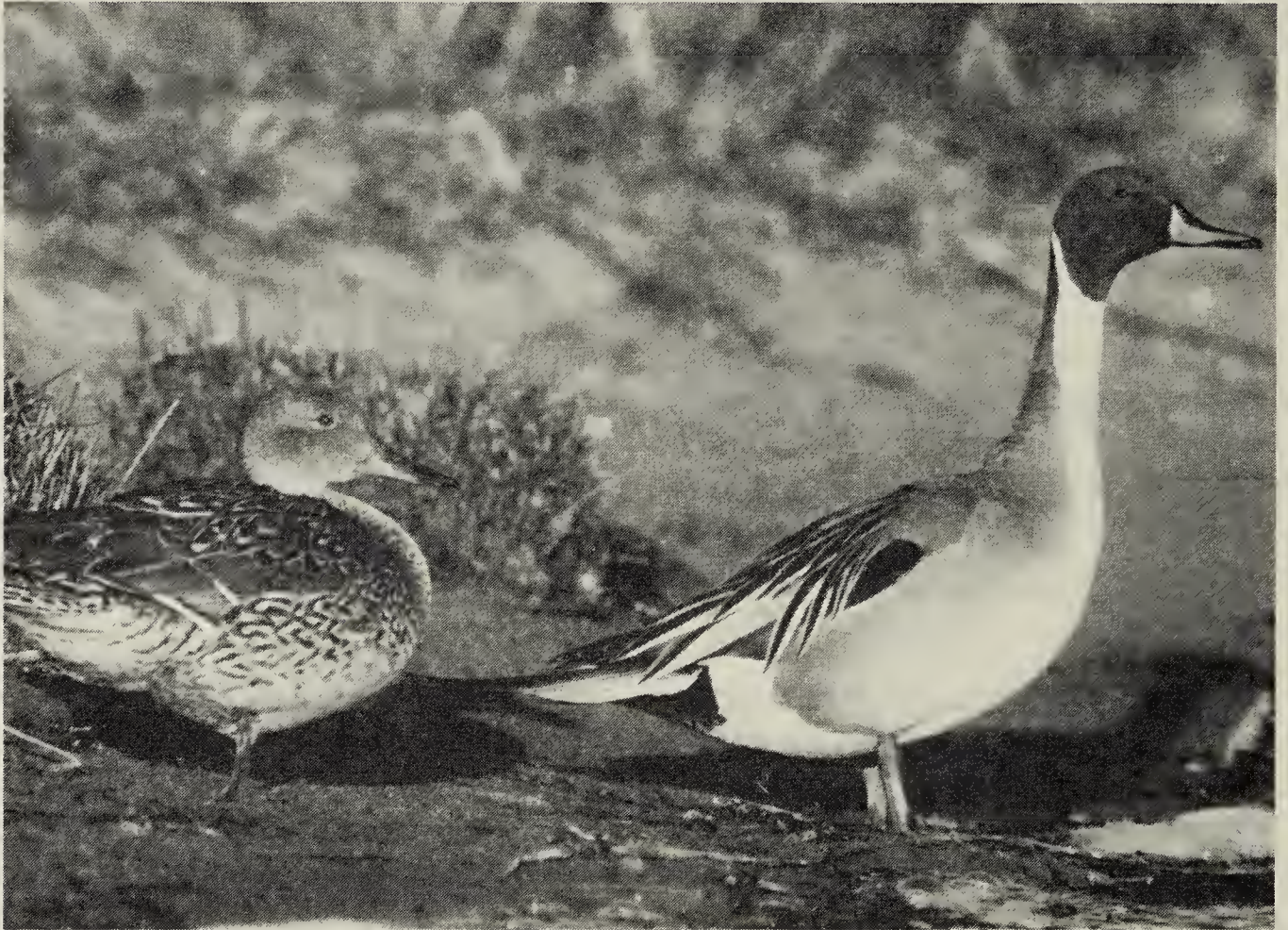
There is no need for a natural history society to be an alarmingly highbrow affair. Isabel Priestly, 1943. *The Blue Jay* 2:1.

# Yorkton Citizens Are Great Readers

[*Regina Leader-Post*, 25 April 1946]

A valuable donation of 100 books on nature subjects, which belonged to the late Mrs. Isabel Priestly, was made to the library this year by her husband, R.J. Priestly, formerly a Yorkton resident. Mr. Morrison said arrangements are being made to

build a memorial shelf to accommodate the books. He said it had been suggested that these books will be used exclusively for reference purposes as they are of considerable value.



*Pintails*

*G.W. Beyersbergen*