

Barbara Annie Mercer

Barbara Mercer was born on August 30th, 1921, in Saint John, NB.

Her father was a bank manager who was born in Lancashire, England, and emigrated to Canada in 1912 when he was 23. Her mother was born to English parents in British Guiana (now called Guyana) and who emigrated to Canada with her family in 1913 when she was 22.

Barbara mainly grew up in the small Nova Scotia fishing villages of Mahone Bay and Lunenburg, (home of the “Bluenose”), but her family also lived for a while in St. John, NB, and Montreal, QC. She had two sisters, one older and one younger. At 17, Barbara became the 1938 Nova Scotia Junior Women’s Tennis Champion.

In 1942, Barbara obtained a BA in Economics from McGill University. After graduating, she joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and served as a wireless operator, stationed in Newfoundland, until the end of the Second World War. As part of her duties, she learned to be proficient in Morse Code. After the war, she attended the University of Toronto, where she earned an MA in Economics under a program for veterans subsidized by the Federal Government.

Barbara worked for many years as an economist for both the Canadian Federal Government and the United Nations, in Ottawa, Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Cambridge (England), Geneva (Switzerland).

Barbara started her career in Ottawa with the Canadian Federal Government in the late 1940s. After a number of years, she was seconded by the Canadian Government to work as part of the Colombo Plan in Kuala Lumpur. The Colombo Plan had been established in 1950 by a small subset of Commonwealth countries to provide a framework within which international cooperation efforts could be promoted to raise the standards of the people living in southeast Asia. Its mandate was to facilitate bi-lateral arrangements involving foreign aid and technical assistance for the economic and social development of the region.

At Cambridge, she worked for the Department of Applied Statistics between 1963 and 1966, where her responsibilities included research and tutoring University of Cambridge Economics undergraduates.

In Geneva, she worked on the staff of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. UNCTAD is the part of the United Nations Secretariat dealing with trade, investment, and development issues.

Barbara returned to Ottawa in the early 1970s, where she rejoined the Canadian Public Service working in the Department of Finance. As a Director in the Department, she was one of the key officials helping de Havilland develop the Dash 7, the STOL (short take-off and landing) regional

airliner which was being subsidized by the government of the day. She was very proud of that project, having worked hard to get the necessary Cabinet approvals for the corporate structure and for the funding for the new crown corporation, de Havilland Corp. In her day, there were very few women at senior levels in the public service of any level of government in Canada, and to become a Director at the Department of Finance in Ottawa was a notable achievement.

During this time in Ottawa, Barbara learned to speak French. (She liked to say that, at one time at least, she could “speak” three languages: English, French and Morse Code.)

After Barbara retired in the early 1980s, she moved from Ottawa to the West Coast to be near her sister who lived in Vancouver, eventually buying a house in the Bonniebrook area of Gibsons, where she lived until moving into Totem Lodge in Sechelt in early 2011.

In her retirement, she volunteered for many years for Talking Books, Meals on Wheels, and at the Gibsons Library. Over the years, she took great pleasure in playing tennis, baseball, golf, and bridge, and was an avid reader who built up an impressive personal library.

She never married, but maintained some very long-term friendships, and enjoyed the company of her many nieces and nephews. Barbara loved dogs, and while living in Ottawa she was a keen owner of Malamutes. At Bonniebrook, she had instead a succession of Keeshonds (also known as “Dutch Barge Dogs”,) all of whom she called “Peet”.

Barbara Mercer passed away at Totem Lodge in Sechelt on January 19th, 2018 at the age of 96.