

Remembering Ellen Harris, ZI President 1960-1962

The late Ellen Harris (1904-1967) was President of Zonta International from 1960-62. She hailed from the Zonta Club of Vancouver, British Columbia (Canada) where she and a small dedicated group of Zontians achieved extraordinary things in the 1950s and 60s. Approximately five women formed the core of the local club and together they raised funds for a number of worthy institutions in the city that are still active to this day.

Mrs. Harris's contribution to the work of Zonta both locally and internationally was preceded by a long distinguished career. In the 1920s and 30s, Ellen Harris played an instrumental role in organizing the Children's Theatre Group in Winnipeg, where she grew up. As a radio broadcaster with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, she was the host of "Morning Visit" from 1944 to 1952. Ellen Harris established herself as a public figure in Vancouver and throughout the province and participated in a number of other radio programs and broadcasts. She was also the President and driving force behind the BC Ballet Society. Dance was one of her passions.

In addition to her professional work, Mrs. Harris raised a son - Richard Colebrook (Cole) Harris - and a daughter, Susan Lorraine Pond. Her children, now retired, remember their mother traveling the world during her Zonta International Presidency and have donated Zonta-related correspondence, photos and other memorabilia to the University of British Columbia (UBC) Special Collections Archives. Some of these photos, reproduced below, illustrate the early sixties as they were for middle-class women – hats, gloves, fur stoles and the occasional tiara!



President Ellen Harris (right) with Mrs. Vern Staaf on a visit to Sweden in 1961



Left to Right – Katherine Jacobson, Incoming Governor Vivienne Worley, Outgoing Governor Beverly Augustine, Conference Chair Ellen Harris, Helen Jones, Chair of Transportation riding the “Zonta Hitching Post” shuttle at the District 12 convention in Lamarre (state?/year?)

The organization's mission and work, however, was clearly consistent with Zonta's mission which still remains to advance the status of women worldwide. Mrs. Harris dined with Heads of State and other dignitaries and, on one occasion, invited Eleanor Roosevelt to the opening ceremonies for UBC's International House for which the Zonta Club of Vancouver, along with the Marpole Rotary Club, had raised most of the funds.

Though Ellen Harris' work with Zonta was exciting and of significant benefit to the local and international community, her Presidency was also extremely demanding physically. She was not a robust woman and, according to her children, the toll of travel and other responsibilities contributed to her early death at the age of 63.

The Zonta Club of Vancouver invited Mrs. Harris's daughter, Susan Pond, speak at its 2003 annual general meeting where she recounted her mother's work with the organization. The Vancouver club is proud to have had this distinguished woman serve as international president and its members are inspired to continue her work toward advancing the status of women worldwide.

Contributed by Gisèle Yasmeen, Ph.D., President, Zonta Club of Vancouver, 2014