

WILPF and The Clapham Film Unit present

# These Dangerous Women

A Heritage Lottery Funded project

**Mina Benson Hubbard Ellis**

**1870-1956**

Sheila Triggs and Pat Pleasance

**“took on responsibility of Hon. Treasurer of the International Women’s Congress in the Hague”**

Mina Benson was born to a farming family near Bewdley on the Rice Lake Plains, in Ontario, Canada. She trained as a nurse in New York and met her husband Leonidas Hubbard (1872 – 1903) when she nursed him through typhoid. They married in 1901. They shared an interest in boating and hiking and outdoor adventures, and spent their honeymoon on a five months camping trip.

Two years later in October 1903 Leonidas Hubbard went on an expedition into unchartered interior of Labrador with Dillon Wallace and George Elson (a Scots-Cree guide). Hubbard died of starvation while his companions were seeking help.

In 1905 Mina mounted an expedition to complete her husband’s work, and because she felt that her husband’s name had been blemished by Wallace’s account of the original expedition. She took George Elson and other Metis Cree as her experience guides and companions. In spite of misogynistic press coverage the expedition was successful and was completed in record time.

Mina Benson Hubbard kept a diary as she was planning to write a book. She wrote two articles about her expedition, one for *Harper’s* magazine, in 1906, and started giving lantern slide lectures. In the spring of 1907 she travelled to England and continued to give lantern slide lectures. She met the publisher John Murray, who published the book that she had written about her expedition, both in Britain and in Canada: “*A woman’s way through unknown Labrador; an account of the exploration of the Nescaupée and George Rivers*”, by Mrs Leonidas Hubbard Junior.

Mina met Harold Thornton Ellis (1875 - 1935) in England and they went to Canada to be married on 14 September 1908. She returned to England with her husband and subsequently had three children: Mirval Jane 1909 - 2006, John Edward, 1911 - 1961, and Margaret Shipley 1913 - 1998.



Harold Ellis was a well-to-do Quaker from a Liberal family and as a non-combatant went to the Netherlands to work with refugees during the war. Meanwhile his twin sisters, Edith and Marian (later Lady Parmoor) were actively campaigning for peace. Edith spent a spell in Holloway for refusing to pay a fine for not submitting a leaflet to the censors. Together the sisters financed the No-Conscription Fellowship and supported the families of Conscientious Objectors, establishing the "News Bureau" for pacifists.

Mina was not a Quaker but became a pacifist and an anti-imperialist. "Mrs Hubbard Ellis took on the responsibility of Hon. Treasurer of the International Women's Congress in the Hague". She features in "*Towards a Permanent Peace*" published following the meeting at The Hague, in the summer of 1915. However by the time of the Women's International League (WIL) AGM in October 1915, [Mrs Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence](#) had become the WIL Treasurer, and Miss Marian Ellis (Mina's sister-in-law) was on the WIL Committee. Mina, however remains a subscribing member until 1918, and was living in London according to the Electoral Register for that year.

Mina and Harold grew apart and the marriage was strained. They divorced in 1924 and Harold went to live abroad with a new wife.

As her children grew to adulthood Mina considered returning to Canada, but eventually decided to remain in London, although she made a number of visits to Canada and the United States, where she had many connections.

One such connection was the grave of Leonidas Hubbard in a New York cemetery. A letter to the New York Times in November 1935 by an admirer of Leonidas Hubbard complained that there was no memorial on the grave, and Mina was incensed. She organised not one plaque but three, recording the achievements of Leonidas, herself, and George Elson, their guide.

In 1936 Mina, aged 66, was honoured by an invitation to go to Canada to give a prestigious lecture about her expedition.

During 1936/37 she had an ambitious new project. She wanted to provide a Canadian cultural centre in London, and decided to embark on a series of lectures about Labrador to raise funds. Unfortunately she was unable to gain sufficient support for her scheme in London, and in the end it had to be abandoned.

In her later years she enjoyed the companionship of her daughter in law, Betty Cawkill, who had been briefly married to her son, John. The child of that marriage was Judith, and it was to her grandchild that Mina left the majority of her estate in a trust.

Her death was the result of a tragic accident on a railway crossing in 1956, when she was run down by a train.

