

James Ira Mills Sr.

Biography



Ira Mills served in the Canadian Army in World War I

Service started: 7 Aug 1915

Unit(s): 41561 8th Battery

Service ended: 17 Apr 1919

James Ira Mills from Harrisville, New Brunswick grew up on his father's farm. He was called "Ira."

When the first world war broke out, he enlisted and served with Boyd Anderson's 19th Field Battery. His discharge certificate shows that he held the rank of Sergeant 8th Battery, C.F.A., Canadian Expeditionary Force. He served in Canada, England and France.

Pay records from the war show that Ira and his brother Wilfred sent their pay home to their brother Sanford who continued to operate the farm in Harrisville. Remarkably, both brothers survived the war.

As James Jr. tells the story, his father returned to discover that Sanford was driving a brand new car. It upset Ira so severely that he packed his bags and went out West to a farm near Crossfield Alberta. In Elsie's autobiography, she also mentions Crossfield Alberta, but no reference is made of the reason's behind James' decision to go west.

However, poor health forced him to return to Moncton and it is perhaps a telling observation that James recuperated at brother Wilford's farm on the Salisbury Road.^[1] As it happened, Wilford's wife, Mary (Elliott) was the first cousin of Hilda Steeves, and it was through this relationship that James and Hilda were first introduced (Mary's mother, Lavinia Steeves, married Arthur Elliott).

The courting relationship must have taken place primarily in Dawson Settlement because Hilda was occupied with all the chores at home and could not travel without being accompanied by her father, Michael. Nevertheless, James and Hilda met and a romance ensued. On Hilda's birthday, July 20th 1922, James appeared with a diamond ring and proposed (Hawkesworth. p 4).

This profile draws on material from Elsie (Mills) Hawkesworth's autobiography, *All the Years of My Life*.^[2]

Marriage and Family

Wedding Invitation

Elsie (Mills) Hawkesworth had a copy of the wedding invitation written in Hilda's handwriting: *Mr. Michael C. Steeves* requests the pleasure of your company at the marriage of his daughter Hilda Evelyn to Mr. James Ira Mills Wednesday, September twentieth Nineteen hundred twenty-two 6 o'clock P.M. Dawson, New Brunswick^[3]

The following wedding notice is taken from the New Brunswick Times and Transcript.

Pretty Wedding at Dawson, Albert Co.

Miss Hilda Evelyn Steeves and Mr. James Ira Mills United in Marriage. An unusually pretty wedding and one of much local interest, was solemnized at the home of Mr. Michael Steeves, Dawson, Albert County, at 6:30 o'clock on Wednesday evening (Sept. 20th) when his only daughter, Hilda Evelyn, was united in marriage to James Ira, son of Mr. A. M. Mills, Harrisville.

To the strains of Lohengrin's Wedding March, played by Miss Mabel Mills, sister of the groom, the bridal party took their places on the lawn. The bride was given away by her father, Mr. Michael Steeves. Rev. A. D. Bishop, pastor of the First Hillsborough United Baptist church, assisted by Rev. C. P. Wilson, performed the ceremony, in the presence of nearly one hundred guests.

The bride looked charming in a beautiful gown of white duchesse satin, with overdress of silk lace, with juliet cap and orange blossoms and veil of Brussels net. She carried a shower bouquet of red and white carnations with maiden-hair fern. At the conclusion of the ceremony, "Oh Promise Me" was most pleasingly rendered by Miss Audrey Elliott, cousin of the bride, accompanied by Miss Mabel Mills. After congratulations and best wishes, the guests returned to the house, tastefully decorated for the occasion with a profusion of cut flowers and fern, where a dainty luncheon was served.

During the evening the Dawson quartet rendered several selections. These and solos by Miss Elliott added much to the enjoyment of the function.

The bride was the recipient of many lovely gifts, including among them linen, silver and cash. The groom's gift to the bride was a substantial cheque.

Mr. and Mrs. Mills left on Wednesday evening by automobile for Moncton. From there they will go to Halifax and other places of interest in Nova Scotia, returning by way of Digby and the St. John river.

The bride's going away costume was of brown tricotine, embroidered in silk and hat to match.

The bride was a valued member of the Dawson choir. She will be greatly missed both there and in the community at large, where she was deservedly popular. The groom saw four years in overseas service, being one of the first to enlist. He was one of Anderson's nineteenth field battery.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Mills go to their new home followed by the best wishes of their many friends. They will reside in Rexton.^[4]

Family Life

After their honeymoon on the train to Halifax and the Annapolis valley, Ira & Hilda they moved to Rexton New Brunswick where James was employed as the manager of a large farming operation. However, after one year in that position he suffered a nervous breakdown and was forced to leave this position.^[5] They eventually purchased a farm in Dawson Settlement where they raised their family and lived out the rest of their lives. Family members recall that James was haunted by his experiences in the war. Periodically, he would stop whatever he was doing, walk back to the house, go into the bedroom and shut the door. It is more than likely he would have been diagnosed with PTSD.

James and Hilda had five children. James Jr. was in the middle and used to joke that he was always pushing two and pulling two.

The family lived in a small farm house in Dawson Settlement. The address today is 825 Dawson Road, Hillsborough New Brunswick. (Driveway entrance at 45.946369, -64.769347). The house was without indoor plumbing until the 1950's. Typical of that time, it was poorly insulated and provided very minimal protection from the elements.

The children attended the small single-room school house that still stands across the street at 789 Dawson Road (today it is a community center). The family attended the Dawson Settlement United Baptist church (852 Dawson Road).

In addition to the farm, Ira also sold Rawleigh products door to door. He traveled in his car through the countryside making visits to customers far and wide. Meanwhile, Hilda operated a small shop on the West side of the drive to the house (in 2013 the very small shop building was still standing on the left side of the driveway). The shop was a mixed blessing, however, because Hilda allowed neighbours to run a tab, never wanting to send anyone away empty handed. Some of these debts were never collected.

Ira intended for James Jr. to take over the farm. Despite James Sr.'s single minded intentions, Hilda had other ideas and believed in the value of a good education. When James Jr. was struggling in school (having early morning chores before school, and afternoon chores when he came home from school) Hilda decided to intervene. She sent him away to Horton Academy in Nova Scotia (the predecessor to Acadia University). Apparently James Sr. was not happy with this decision, but Hilda was resolute.

When he graduated from Horton Academy, Hilda insisted on traveling to Wolfville Nova Scotia for the graduation ceremony (a journey of approximately 350 km). Hilda had already been diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver and she was in very poor health. When the time came to return to New Brunswick, James Jr. suggested she lie down on the back seat so she would be more comfortable. But Hilda refused saying, "I am so proud of my boy, I want to sit up here in the front seat next to him all the way home." She died shortly after their return to New Brunswick. Jim always cried when told this story.

Ira supplemented the farm income by selling Rawley's products from a small store next to the house, and along a delivery route in New Brunswick.

Ira was a faithful Baptist, attending the church in Dawson Settlement.

Ira died in Amherst Nova Scotia in March 1965, presumably living with daughter Sheila Pipes in his last 3 months. He is buried in Elmwood Cemetery, plot B1030.^[6]

Military Records (WW1)

The Canadian National Library and Archives has been digitizing the records of soldiers from the World War I Canadian Expeditionary Force. This is a link to James Ira Mills' record. ^[7]

Canadian Expeditionary Force Discharge Certificate

- Number: 41561

- Rank: Sergeant
- Name: James Ira Mills
- Enlisted: 8th Battery C.P.A.
- Enlisted in Moncton 7 Aug 1915
- Served in: Canada, England, and France
- Reason for discharge: Demobilization

Description of this Soldier:

- Age: 32 years, 7 months
- Height: 5 feet 11 inches
- Complexion: Fair
- Eyes: Blue
- Hair: Brown
- Marks or Scars: 3 1/2 inch scar along radial border of left thumb.
- Date of discharge: 17 Apr 1919.^[8]

James Ira Mills' regimental number was 41561. This places him in the 40th Battalion according to Library and Archives [Page 26 of the regimental Numbers](#).

Vital Records

Birth Record

- When and Where Born: Oct 26th 1885, Harrisville
- Name and Sex: James Ira Mills Male
- Name of Father: Amasa Miller Mills
- Occupation: Farmer
- Maiden Name of Mother: Amelia Bleakney
- Name of Accoucher: Dr. Bourque.^[9]

Death Record

- Place of Death: Cumberland, Amherst Nova Scotia. Highland View Hospital
- Length of stay: 3 months
- Sex: Male
- Citizenship: Canadian
- Racial Origin: English
- Marital Status: Widowed
- Birthplace: Harrisville, N.B.
- Date of birth: Oct 26, 1886 [sic]
- Age. Years: 78, Months: 4, Day: 18.
- Profession: Retired Farmer
- Spouse: the Late Hilda Steeves (Mills)
- Father: Amasa Mills

- Birthplace of father: New Brunswick
- Mother: Amelia Blakney
- Birthplace of mother: New Brunswick
- Informant: James Mills, Captain
- Residence: Camp Borden
- Place of burial: Elmwood Cemetery, Moncton
- Date of death: March 16th, 1965
- Cause of death: Influenza bronchopneumonia
- Other significant conditions: Arteriosclerosis, hypertension, senility^[10]

Sources

1. ↑ All the Years of My Life. p. 4.
2. ↑ Elsie Mills Hawkesworth. *All the Years of My Life: An Autobiography*. (Edmonton, Alberta. Self Published: 1998)
3. ↑ All the Years of My Life. p. 3.
4. ↑ "Pretty Wedding at Dawson, Albert Co." in the Times and Transcript. New Brunswick, Canada. September 20, 1922. (the newspaper clipping does not have the date attached, so this is the presumed date, one day following the wedding.)
5. ↑ All the Years of My Life. p. 5.
6. ↑ Elmwood Cemetery, Moncton N.B. Cemetery Transcriptions by Mr. Weldon Turner, 1995. Page 185. Available from the New Brunswick Genealogical Society, Inc.
7. ↑ Library and Archives Canada. Records from the First World War. James Ira Mills.
8. ↑ James Ira Mills WWI war documents
9. ↑ Provincial Archives of New Brunswick. RS141A5. Index to Provincial Registrations of Births. Name MILLS, JAMES IRA; Sex M; Date 1885-10-26; Place HARRISVILLE; County WESTMORLAND; Father MILLS, A. M.; Mother BLEAKNEY, AMELIA; Number 111; Code A5/1885; Microfilm F13394
10. ↑ Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics. James Ira Sr. Mills, died 1965 in Amherst, Cumberland County, Registration Year: 1965 - Page: 2403

Major James Ira Mills CD

[CD means 'retired from the military']

Born 25 March, 1929. Dawson Settlement, Moncton, New Brunswick

Married Isabelle Julia (Jackson) Mills 3 Sept 1955, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia

Died 17 Nov 2003, Kanata, Ontario, Canada

Jim Mills was born in Dawson Settlement, the middle of 5 children. All of his siblings were girls; Etsie (Mills) Hawkesworth, Ellen (Mills) Hosford, Sheila (Mills) Pipes and Barbara Mills. He grew up on a small farm South of Moncton, and they struggled through the depression when he was young. This was compounded by his father's PTSD following service in the first world war.

Jim was sent by his mother to a boarding school named Horton Academy in Nova Scotia in order to complete his high school education. After graduation he attended Acadia Divinity School at graduated with a BA of Theology (years later this was upgraded to a MDiv degree). Acadia is the school where Baptist pastors study for ministry.

Upon graduation, Jim served two small country churches in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Eventually he decided to enlist in the military and had a distinguished career as a Protestant Chaplain retiring with the rank of Major. He was deployed to Gaza in 1967 but before they boarded the plane, the 6 day war put an end to that peace keeping mission. One of the highlights of his career was to serve as a peacekeeper in Cypress, 1972

Jim retired from the Armed forces in 1984. He served the church in Winchester Ontario in his retirement.

Obituary Notice

Rev. James Ira Mills Major (Retired) KANATA, ON- Peacefully, on Monday November 17, 2003, at Garden Terrace, Kanata, in his 75th years. Beloved husband of Julia, loving father of Andrew (Karen) of Edmonton and Rev. Jonathan (Janice) of Mississauga and proud grandfather of Wesley, Spencer, Calvin and Robert. Dear brother of Elsie Hawkesworth (Earle), Ellen Hosford (Harold), Sheila Pipes (Harris), and the late Barbara Mills. Also survived by several nieces and nephews. Friends may visit at the West Chapel of Hulse, Playfair and McGarry, 150 Woodroffe Avenue at Richmond Road, Thursday 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 pm. Funeral service will be held at Bromley Road Baptist Church, 1900 Lauder Drive, Ottawa, K2A 1B1 on Friday, November 21, 2003 at 11 a.m. Internment at the National Military Cemetery. We wish to thank the staff of Garden Terrace for their special care during his illness. Memorial donations to the Bromley Road Baptist Church or the charity of your choice would be appreciated by the family. (Source: Ottawa Citizen Obituaries)

Isabelle Julia (Jackson) Mills

Born: 5 Nov. 1934. Halifax, Nova Scotia

Married James Ira Mills Jr. 3 Sept 1955, Bridgetown, Nova Scotia.

Died 11 April 2019 in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Biography

Julia's mother was also Isabelle, so to avoid confusion Julia always went by the name "Julia."

Julia started playing organ in church at the age of 13 at Bridgetown Baptist church, Nova Scotia. She was organist and choir director for 60 years until her retirement in 2007 from St. Gyles Presbyterian church in Ottawa.

Julia put herself through University by working as a housekeeper and nanny for a Professor at Acadia. She graduated with her BA in Music in 1955. Her room mate in residence was Sheila Mills, who set up Jim and Julia on a blind date which led to their marriage in the fall of 1955.

Julia was Jim's constant support through his years of ministry: playing piano and organ, and directing the choir in whatever church or chapel Jim was assigned to.

Following Jim's retirement, Julia played organ at St. Gyles Presbyterian church until 2007.

As Julia approached her mid-70's, it became apparent that she was starting to show signs of Alzheimer's disease. At first, this made her very sad since she had nursed her own mother through Alzheimers in the 1980's and was devastated that she was also heading down that path. Nevertheless, she qualified for a drug trial and Jonathan took her every month to the Bruiere Hospital in Ottawa for an injection for over a year. Since it was a double blind trial, we do not know if she was on the real medication or not, but it did appear to slow the progression of the disease because her condition deteriorated much more rapidly once she moved to Edmonton (Jonathan and Janice accepted an

appointment in Rwanda with Canadian Baptist Ministries in 2014 and Julia was moved to the Rosedale Seniors Home in Edmonton to be closer to Andrew).

She died in 2019 and is buried with Jim in the Canadian Armed Forces section of the Beechwood Cemetery, Ottawa.

Obituary Notice

Julia Mills passed away peacefully with family by her side on Thursday, April 11. Julia is survived by her brothers Leslie and Jim, sons Andrew (Karen) and Jonathan (Janice), and grandchildren Wesley, Spencer, Calvin (Eliza) and Robert Mills; and step-grandchildren William, Katherine, and Krysta Long. Julia is pre-deceased by her husband, James Ira Mills (2003), and her brothers Donald (2011), Neil (1976), and Alan (1955).

Julia was born in Halifax to Isabelle (MacQuarrie) and Ernest Jackson. When Ernest's health failed (asthma) and he was forced to take early retirement, they moved to Bridgetown NS to live on the MacQuarrie family farm. Julia graduated with a degree in music from Acadia University in 1955 and married Jim Mills September 3, 1955.

Jim Mills was a Baptist minister and soon joined the army as a chaplain. Jim's profession led them to many communities including Chance Harbour NB, St. Andrew's NB, Gagetown NB, Borden ON (3 times), Churchill MB, Bridgetown NS, Soest West Germany, Gypsumville MB, Winnipeg MB, Winchester ON, Ottawa ON, Kanata ON, and finally Edmonton AB. She especially loved her time in Europe travelling widely while living in Germany from 1967 to 1970, and then going back for many vacations over the following years.

For Julia, music was always present. She showed great talent for piano at a young age and was encouraged to pursue music by her mother Isabelle and sister-in-law Hester Jackson (Beech). At the age of 13 she started playing the organ at Bridgetown Baptist Church. She graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Music with a specialization in organ performance. An accomplished pianist and organist, she provided the music in the churches and chapels and taught piano students throughout Jim's military career. After Jim retired from the military, Julia blossomed out into musical director positions at a number of churches in Ottawa including Bromley Road Baptist, Fourth Avenue Baptist, and St Giles Presbyterian Church. During these years she prepared and performed the weekly music programs and directed the choirs. At Bromley, she specified and supervised the installation of a new pipe organ, an accomplishment for which she was justifiably proud. Julia's musical career spanned more than 60 years before she retired at the age of 75. Her final postlude at St Giles was Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor. As the last note reverberated through the church she raised her hands in joy; she would never play the organ again.

Over the course of the past few years, Julia's life has been curtailed by dementia. It is a condition that has afflicted many family members including her mother Isabelle, and brothers Donald (2011) and Jim. Throughout her decline she remained positive and happy; she was constantly singing to herself and was the first person to get up and dance at the Rosedale musical entertainments. It was on the day when she stopped singing that the staff noticed and immediately sent her to the hospital. Music was in her heart, and gave her joy, right to the end.

We especially want to thank the staff at Stonehaven in Kanata, Rosedale in Edmonton, and the Palliative Care Unit at the Edmonton General for their excellent care of Julia as she negotiated the stages of her illness. A Memorial Service will be held at Beechwood Funeral, Cemetery and Cremation Services, 280 Beechwood Avenue, Ottawa at 11 am on Saturday the 29th of June. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Alzheimer's Society of Canada.

Children:

James Andrew Mills (changed his name legally to Andrew Mills): born 9 Feb 1958. Living
Married to Karen (Larson) Mills 16 Nov. 1991

Andrew left home at the age of 18 and stayed in Winnipeg while Jim, Julia & Jonathan moved East to Ontario.

After a few years, he went to the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology where he earned a certificate in Plastics technology. He worked for a startup company called Layfield, eventually becoming the new product designer.

He married Karen Larson in 1991. They live in Edmonton (no children).

Andrew retired in 2020

Jonathan Stuart Mills. Born 23 Oct 1962. Living.
Married to Janice (Long) Mills. Born 13 May, 1965. Living

Jonathan completed his BA in Geography from Carleton University in 1984. He later completed his MDiv degree in 1988 at Acadia Divinity College.

Jonathan was ordained to the Christian ministry in 1989, and served many Baptist churches:

- Port Lorne & Hampton, Nova Scotia
- Blythwood Road Baptist, Toronto
- Glen Erin Baptist, Mississauga
- Kanata Baptist, Ottawa
- Jan & Jonathan served 4 years in Rwanda with Canadian Baptist Ministries
- Jonathan concluded his ministry at Immanuel Baptist Church, Toronto

Janice completed her BA / BEd in 1989. She taught elementary school from time to time, but mainly worked in the home raising their four children; Wesley (b. 1990), Spencer (b. 1992), Calvin (b. 1995), and Robert (b. 1999).

In 2003 Janice's brother, Bradley Long, after the sudden death of his wife asked if Jan & Jonathan would take his three children into their home. From that time on, the cousins comprised a family of 7 kids (a literal "7th heaven").