

# GLADYS REEVES

Alberta



Gladys Reeves began her career as a photographer by chance in 1905. She was sent by her mother to the Edmonton studio of Ernest Brown to tell him that her sister did not want a job there. Although she hadn't been looking for a job and was only fifteen years of age, she was hired on the spot. She described what the studio was like in the winter:

*No amount of heat could keep the studio warm, and I had to put bricks in the stove to put under my feet while I sat retouching photographs. Mr. Brown came in one day and was very put out because his cigar had frozen in his mouth.*

Gladys Reeves opened her own studio in 1920 when Ernest Brown was forced by lack of finances to close down. She used an 8 X 10 camera with glass plates. In a 1966 interview (filed with the Provincial Archives of Alberta) Gladys Reeves recalled her first studio:

*I started my own studio in 1920. I had the unfortunate position of being a woman. And in those days a woman in business was not recognized. I think I was the first woman west of Portage La Prairie to start a photographic studio of my own. And there were many, many times when I'd think I'd come to the end of my tether and just couldn't go on and then I'd be afraid. They'd say, 'I told you so.' And I'd start in again.*

A fire destroyed her studio in 1929. She lost five thousand prints and albums and the entire contents of her studio. Ernest Brown and Gladys Reeves then began a new studio together. In the 1930s Brown and Reeves operated a museum called 'Birth of the West,' which consisted of thousands of photographs, twenty-two truckloads of dinosaur bones, and Indian artifacts. Eventually, this collection was sold to the province of Alberta.

Gladys Reeves continued to take portraits, and in 1938 she placed in the top ten in an international exhibition of photography in Chicago.

When Brown died he willed his negatives and prints to the province of Alberta. Gladys Reeves, who was the custodian of his work, spent years at the provincial archives cataloguing the collection. She died in Edmonton in 1974 at the age of eighty-four.©

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