

position. She yearned 'to go and meditate in the Wilderness on a whole lot of ideas, and try to sort them out away from the distractions of ordinary affairs'.²⁴ Her last letter in these volumes was written on 21 December 1931 and echoed this tone of despair. Fred died in September 1932. Mary returned to New Zealand to wind up his estate, and stayed. She sent her resignation from New Zealand, and spent her remaining twenty-seven years living in retirement at Tapu near Thames.

The above has been just a brief synopsis of an interesting career. Mary had always yearned for a warm climate and the simplicity of a cottage near the sea. Her ambition had pulled her in other directions. The desire to return to New Zealand had always been strongest when unemployed or confronted by a lack of opportunity for advancement. As a young woman Mary was full of enthusiasm for her career, for her political ideals, and for life itself. At twenty-five she had tramped alone through the Swiss Alps sleeping out at night, and she continued these solo excursions throughout her twenties and thirties. It was 'the age of the lone woman tramp' she explained to her father. What brought her to the point where she wrote those last despairing letters, and what induced her to give up all those years of study and struggle for a quiet life in a bach on the Thames coast? Only an extensive biographical study could answer these questions. Her letters to her father alone cannot provide the answers. The impression that she had achieved a high professional standing in Britain acquired in the course of reading her letters would have to be tested in other sources—correspondence with her professional colleagues (if it exists) and citations of her published papers. Likewise the empty space after her return to New Zealand—her twenty-seven years of retirement—needs to be filled in. Was the Lawn episode a passing despair or did it lead to a total turning away from her career? Was Mary's failure to find fulfillment in her career due to her own personality and unique circumstances, or was this futile struggle the lot of most women who sought to reach the highest positions in their professions during the years between 1918 and 1935?

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The Frederick Barkas collection is held in the Manuscripts Section of the Alexander Turnbull Library at MS Papers 2491. The volumes in the collection were passed from Fred to Mary, who had them in her possession until her death in 1959. In 1983 they were donated to the Library by descendants of Fred's sister Issie