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A PILGRIMAGE TO BALA IN MUSKOKA, ONTARIO

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When I awoke at 6:15 in St. Catharines, Ontario, a pretty good thunderstorm was making itself known. Thunder and lightning and heavy rain were sounding all around our townhouse. My wife, awakened by the storm, said, "You're not going out in this, are you?" Trying to be nonchalant, I replied, "It will probably be over by the time I leave." And to my great relief it was, but the threat of rain lingered much of the day.

Heading out through Hamilton and on towards Toronto on the Queen Elizabeth Way I was very aware that I was the guest speaker at the 4th Anniversary of Bala's Museum at 2 p.m. that afternoon. (The Bala Museum is Jack and Linda Hutton's contribution to making L.M. Montgomery's life in Ontario better known.) The traffic on the QEW and the 403 was comparatively light that morning, but the 401 was starting to slow down. So instead of taking the 401 to the 400, the usual route to the north, I decided to head up the 427 to Highway 27, an old two-lane highway running parallel to the 400. On this particular day (Wednesday, July 24, 1996) it proved a good choice. Highway 27 was very quiet, and sufficiently rural to put one in a "Maud mood", as I drove by farms with bales of hay stacked high, and where horses and colts trotted through the fields.

Before reaching Barrie I moved over to the 400, and regretted being back amid three lanes almost solid with cars. But just after Barrie the highway divided and the traffic lightened. Soon I was seeing signs for "Oro Sideroad", and once again the Montgomery connection clicked. Maud's friend and fellow novelist Marian Keith had set her early novels in Oro Township between Barrie and Orillia. Keith develops scenes of Scottish Presbyterian life in small-town Ontario not unlike Montgomery's tales of old Prince Edward Island. Oro deserved at least a quick look.

After driving down one of the Oro sideroads at random I came to a through street called Ridge Road. The countryside was rugged with pastures rather than cultivated fields and the rocks which made up the stone fences seemed rather larger than those to be seen in P.E.I. I didn't find the plaque to the memory of Marian Keith that I was looking for, but I did find Lake Simcoe, beyond the trees and pastures, stretching into the distance, as it does in Keith's novels. After getting well lost in the cottage country by the shore of the lake I retraced my route back to the highway.

Highway 11 passes Orillia and heads north to Gravenhurst which is itself a beautiful town built between two lakes. From Gravenhurst Highway 169 turns off towards Bala. On the way out of town I saw the historic mail ship Segwun pulling away from the dock. Farther down the highway and around the bend I had another glimpse of the Segwun steaming away on Lake Muskoka. By the time I parked my car and ran down to the shore with my camera it was pulling behind an island.

Highway 169 runs through rocky terrain with small shallow lakes. Perhaps the most remarkable sight is the large numbers of water lilies visible in nearly all the small lakes and ponds beside the road. It was frustrating to see a beautiful pond of water lilies, find a place to stop the car, and discover that it was a good hike back to the scenic spot. The traffic behind me was steady, and the roads did not always provide enough shoulder room to pull off. After her August 1928 trip through northern Ontario Montgomery herself singled out the water lilies as the greatest visual delight, all the more enchanting because their watery surroundings protect them from easy access.

At Bala the scenery changes for the spectacular. Rocky outcrops, lakes, pines, are all around you. As they say of Prince Edward Island, there is a postcard picture everywhere you look. It took a while to find my bearings, but with the help of Linda Hutton's directions I found my way to an old cottage right at the shore of Lake Muskoka. This cottage, I found out later,



has been in Linda's family, the Jacksons, most of the century, and when Linda Jackson-Hutton married Jack Hutton in 1990, it became their home and base of operations.

I arrived just at lunch-time and was invited to join the meal in progress. Besides Linda there were two adults who, I soon found out, were the stars of the little drama that was part of the anniversary celebration. Kathy Aitken is, on most days, the wife of the local Congregational minister, but today she was L.M.Montgomery herself. Kathy has a lively interest in Montgomery, and, as a minister's wife, can identify very well with some of Maud's difficulties in that role. She is especially fond of "The Blue Castle", and with the character of Valancy, who breaks out of the restricted role which her family and society have proscribed for her. The other guest was a sprightly English lady of eighty years who still enjoys Scottish dancing and who today would be "Fanny Pike", the eccentric owner and cook of the "Treelawn Tourist Home". (Treelawn is where Montgomery ate her meals during her stay in Bala.) On other days "Fanny" is Judy DuDeney who spends most of the year in England, but comes to Port Carling, Ontario, for the summer.

Also there was Linda's son John, who in the past has played Stuart, Montgomery's younger son, at these dramatizations, but who now at the ripe age of eleven is playing her older son Chester. We were joined later by Dennis, who will be playing the part of Stuart. As these are non-speaking roles the boys did not have the concerns of the adult players about their lines.

After a hearty lunch we all headed back through town to the Park where "Ewen Macdonald" and a Model T were waiting to take the family through town to the Roselawn Lodge. "Ewen" (Montgomery's husband) is, on other days, Lovern Beaudrie, the proud owner of a 1926 Model T in excellent repair. (Lovern operates a large odds-and-ends store on Highway 11 called "The Junkeroo"). The antique car is also a star of the programme, and attracts as much attention as the actors. It has a maximum speed of about 26 miles per hour, and, being a two-seater, is a little snug for the family of four to crowd into. The Montgomerys actually arrived in 1922 in a Grey Dort, and a Grey Dort was used for the first couple anniversaries, but has since become unavailable.



In the year 1922 Maud Montgomery was still labouring to put behind her a series of traumatic events which began with "The Great War" in 1914, something that had a strong personal impact on her. (In her 1922 letter to long-time pen-pal Ephraim Weber she is still trying to bring him round to her view of the war.) During the war she had become increasingly aware of her husband Ewen's mental and emotional problems, which had only grown worse with time. In 1919 the influenza epidemic had nearly claimed Maud herself, and had taken away her closest confidant Fredericka Campbell, whose loss Montgomery never completely got over. Difficulties with her publisher L.C. Page had escalated into a series of expensive and exhaustive lawsuits, which Page seemed determined to pursue through every possible avenue. There were also the first inklings of trouble with Ewen's congregations, and "Church Union" was beginning to loom on the horizon. Maud had rarely needed a vacation before as badly as she needed one in 1922, and so, as she realized later, she was fortunate in Bala.

While the "Macdonalds" were preparing for their drive to the Lodge, we others went over to the Bala Museum to wait for them. This large house, which the Huttons bought in 1990, had been "The Treelawn Tourist Home" in 1922, and it was here the Macdonalds ate their meals. This was where Fanny Pike presided as cook and waitress. She had a reputation for eccentricity, evidence of this being that she always wore a hat, and that she used an umbrella for a walking-stick. As there was no cook available at Roselawn Lodge that year, the Macdonalds came down the road a hundred yards to "Treelawn" for their meals.

Meanwhile preparations were made for the arrival of the special guests. The anniversary was planned as an old-fashioned garden party. Tables were placed on the lawn for serving lemonade and for selling Montgomery mementoes. Chairs were set out facing the veranda and Jack Hutton was soon playing piano stylings accompanied by clarinet. Just then the clouds that had been in retreat most of the day seemed to disappear completely, providing a warm and bright afternoon. The visitors drifting in showed a preference for the shady seats under the pine trees.

Then at 2:00 p.m. a shiny black Model T parked on River Street beside the Museum and our guests of honour got out. Chester and Stuart seemed especially happy to be able to stretch. After photos were taken the Macdonalds made their way through the lattice gate up to the veranda where they were greeted by Jack Hutton and "Fanny Pike". In the ensuing dialogue Fanny welcomed Mrs. Macdonald to Treelawn, and the minister's wife returned

greetings and told how happy she was to be there. The guests soon found a chair on the veranda to watch the rest of the programme.

Mr. Hutton called on Kathy Gastle and Joanne Wood of the Hamilton "Kindred Spirits" Society to bring greetings to the gathering. Then he called on Kevin McCabe to say a few words about L.M. Montgomery's love of poetry and her interest in Tennyson's poems. I spoke about how poetry was part of the fabric of life in Maud's childhood. Her family had several members who wrote verse and this interest was reinforced by the place of poetry in education. In "Anne of Green Gables" Anne and her friends read "Elaine and Lancelot" in school (a longer poem than today's students would be comfortable with), and acted out the story in a memorable chapter. As I talked about this tale, I was facing the boat that Kevin Sullivan had used in the TV movie version of "Anne" (now on permanent display at the Museum). Both the 1934 movie and the TV movie, however, had changed the poem being reenacted from "Elaine" to "The Lady of Shalott", a similar story which is also more familiar today. Opportunely, Judy Dudeney was able to recite some verses from "The Lady of Shalott" for us, and this pointed to the importance of the memorization and recitation of poetry in former days. I also talked about how Tennyson wrote an echo song ("The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls"), and how Montgomery also wrote a poem about the nymph "Echo", which borrows a phrase from Tennyson's poem.

The programme ended with a special presentation to Linda from Jack. While at the recent L.M. Montgomery Conference in Charlottetown the Huttons had seen a copy of Maud's rarest book, "The Watchman and Other Poems", but has decided that it was too expensive to purchase then. But secretly Jack had in fact bought it and brought it home to present to Linda. Their Museum has one of the best collections of L.M. Montgomery first editions in the world, and now the collection would be complete.

Another special gift which Linda had recently received was a large and exquisite doll representing the "Lady of Shalott" lying back in the boat in which she is floating down to Camelot. The doll and boat are modelled in detail after the painting by Waterhouse, details which extend to the jewellery and the designs on the dress.

After the programme was over and everyone had finished their lemonade and purchased their Maud souvenirs, the guests of honour left. I was privileged to go for a ride with Lovern Beaudrie in the Model T, and then watch him and his brother Ed load it on the trailer. We then headed back to the Hutton's cottage where, amid much talk of Montgomery and Bala, I was the first to don a bathing suit and test Lake Muskoka. It had been a cool spring and early summer, so, as they say up here, "It's warm once you're in." (It was warmer than the ocean water in P.E.I. by a fair margin.) Linda and John Hutton joined me as well as Joanne Wood and her two boys. As I paddled in the water I had a very clear view of two inhabited islands just off the shore, either of which could have been the model for Valancy's island in "The Blue Castle".

Last year (1995) the guest speaker at the anniversary had been Beth Cavert of Minnesota. She had spoken about the very special dream that Montgomery had had in Muskoka, when she daydreamed about spending the summer on an island in the Lake surrounded by family and friends. Cavert had pointed out that the dream which Maud confided to her diary was somewhat different from the dream which she related to pen-pal George Boyd MacMillan. For example, in the diary her friends Bertie and Frede are out on the boat during a storm, while in the letter they are back in the cottage, although Frede plays a special role in going out in the storm with a lantern to help the men find their way back to shore. I noticed in addition that Maud had completely changed the locale of her dream. In the journals she is on a cruise boat in Lake Muskoka sailing by the many islands and it is morning. In the letter she is on the veranda of Roselawn Lodge and it is evening. (She even explains how she was left on her own to dream by saying that she had hurt her foot.) This is a fairly dramatic example of how Montgomery alters her tale according to her audience. In any case, it is quite probable that it was this dream which was the original inspiration for "The Blue Castle", Montgomery's only novel set wholly outside of P.E.I. For supper that night the Huttons treated their guests to a meal at the "Cranberry House", a large restaurant and hotel in Bala. It was once known as the "Swastika Hotel", but with the advent of Adolf Hitler the name was changed quickly, and the swastika decorations were removed. The "Swastika" followed an earlier large hotel in Bala which had burned to the ground, so the owners of the "Swastika" emphasized in their advertizing that their hotel was brick, and, therefore, much less likely to burn down (an angle reminiscent of Disney's "Practical Pig", who built his house of bricks). Plans to have supper at Roselawn dining room had been altered, as a large retirement party was in full swing there. The "Cranberry House" proved a very acceptable substitute, and, although we were told that the seafood was not so good there as Roselawn, the steaks and cordon bleu were fine. I was a



little surprised to see souvlaki on the menu, and it was very good.

That night I slept in the roomy and airy second floor of the Huttons' cottage, where many guests, including Montgomery scholars Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, had slept before. During the night I was pointedly reminded several times of the trains which had brought so many to Bala throughout the early decades of this century. (The train provides a dramatic moment in Montgomery's "The Blue Castle" when Valancy's shoe gets stuck in the tracks, and Barney is barely able to rescue her in time. Linda Hutton thinks that this episode is based on an actual similar occurrence in Bala only a couple years earlier.) In the early morning I heard noises downstairs and, assuming that the Huttons were awake, I went down. A squirrel was sitting on the outside of the screen door watching me, but none of the human inhabitants were stirring. Linda told me later that they had kept a baby squirrel as a pet the previous year.

That day I also learned the story of the cottage more fully. It had been built by Linda's grandparents early in the century, and Linda had spent her summers up here as a child. But, while she was teenager, her father and brother were killed in the airplane her father was piloting, and her uncle later sold the cottage. Some years later, while teaching in Toronto, Linda learned that the cottage was for sale again. She was eventually able to buy it, and spent her first winter up here, wearing a snowmobile suit most of the time, as the cottage was not winterized and had no insulation. Gradually, it was made more liveable on a year-round basis, but the story made me think that Linda is a little like Valancy. (By the way, Linda looks a lot like Judy Garland, and combines the youthful energy of Judy and Mickey Rooney together.)



Jack told me about how they had become involved with the Museum and, more recently, Roselawn Inn. Back in 1990 Jack and Linda were married aboard the Segwun, which is a popular spot for weddings. Unbeknownst to them, a couple weeks earlier Mary Rubio, and friends Jean Little and Barbara Wachowicz had also sailed on the Segwun as part of an exploratory visit to Muskoka in an attempt to find where Maud had stayed in 1922. After the wedding Jack and Linda headed to P.E.I. for their honeymoon. As Linda was an enthusiastic Montgomery fan she tried to convert Jack by reading him "Anne of Green Gables". Actually, Jack thinks, he was more impressed by Maud's autobiographical "Alpine Path", which he picked up and read with interest. While on the island they visited "Green Gables", the birthplace at Clifton, and Park Corner. By the time they returned to Muskoka Jack was a convert.

A few weeks later Mary Rubio wrote a letter to a local librarian asking for information regarding where Maud had stayed in 1922. When Jack heard about this he began making inquiries, and in a very short time he was led to Roselawn Lodge. The original building in which the Macdonalds stayed had burned down in 1941, but "Treelawn", the nearby tourist home, was still standing and was on the real estate market. The house had been deteriorating and there was some danger of demolition. It was Linda's idea to buy it and turn it into an L.M. Montgomery Museum. They did buy it, and with the help and encouragement of friends and well-wishers, including Dr. Rubio, the plan went ahead. Much of the actual restoration was implemented by Linda who obtained period building materials and worked out period colour schemes for the house. They found out that the Pikes' house had originally been one-room on the ground floor with an attic, which was reached through a trap-door. Gradually, more and more rooms had been added on.

That morning Linda took me for a tour of the Museum. The Huttons had restored "Treelawn" to look as much as possible as it had in 1922. The kitchen, where "Fanny" had prepared the meals was very interesting. They had obtained a large and tall wooden "Hoosier" unit which was popular for baking and cooking in the Twenties. The spices and flour are kept in small cupboards at eye level, and there is a counter for mixing and preparing below these. In the same room there was a very fine looking kitchen range and a Frigidaire. Although it would be unlikely that the Pikes would have had electric appliances, these do date from the Twenties, and the Frigidaire is the oldest known working Frigidaire in Canada.



The Museum combines historical items from the Twenties with special exhibits on L.M. Montgomery. For visitors who are not particularly interested in Montgomery the Huttons emphasized historical aspects, while for LMM fans they talk more about the writer and her connections with Bala. Upstairs is the room with the upper walls lined with

first editions of Montgomery's books, along with later printings which show how the images of Anne and other Montgomery heroines have changed over time. Jack points out to visitors how the early pictures of "Anne" show her as a "Gibson Girl", how in the Twenties she was pictured as a "flapper", how in the W.W. II years she looks like a working woman ("Rosie the Rivetter"?), and how in the Sixties she is pictured as a "flower child". Recent editions have gone back to a more realistic portrayal of Anne as a young waif.



In the bedroom across the hall there is a variety of period clothing, including a "flapper" dress, and a Twenties-style blouse. Of interest too are the indications of a trap-door which the Pikes used to get up into their attic. (Later on the house was extended and a staircase was built.) Many items have a special story or significance. The Huttons are very proud to have Maud's own silver tea service, which was a wedding gift from the Cavendish Presbyterian congregation when Maud left Cavendish to go to Ontario as a bride. This was presented to the Museum by David Macdonald, Maud's grandson.

There were more rooms, and more exhibits of great interest both to history buffs and Montgomery fans. Linda and Jack both give tours, and have a jocular rivalry as to which one will get the most compliments from visitors. Regular assistants are Julia Berry, a dyed-in-the-wool Maud fan, and Marilyn, who also help with tours and work in the gift shop. The Museum gift shop has one of the widest selections of Montgomery books and Anne memorabilia anywhere, with special emphasis on "The Blue Castle" and the Muskoka connection.

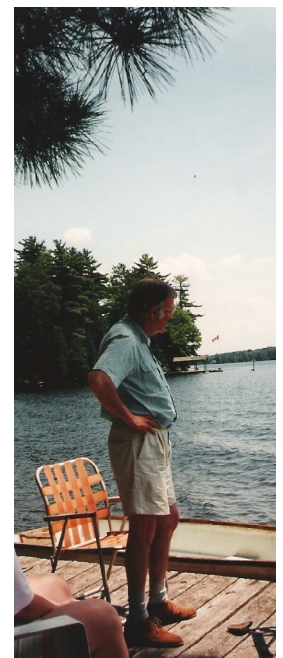
This year the Huttons have a further role which also relates to Montgomery. On February 7, 1996 they became the new owners of Roselawn Inn, an original part of the old Roselawn Lodge. The Roselawn Inn building dates back to roughly 1903, and so was part of the view when the Macdonalds were at the Lodge, although they didn't stay in it. It has eight guest rooms, and, like the rest of the Lodge, overlooks the river.

Linda was off to check on the rooms, and asked if I would like to come. Meanwhile Kathy Aitken had arrived at the Museum and had offered to conduct any tours as needed, so we were off. The tall roomy Inn has been refurbished (something that has kept the Huttons very busy this year). Owning an inn is a new departure for the Huttons, and they have relied a great deal on the helpfulness and experience of former owners Ed, Beverly, and Heather Nation (who still operate the Roselawn dining room next door).

After checking out the Inn, Linda's Aunt Bea and Cousin Jennifer suggested that we go over to the Roselawn dining room for lunch. As Roselawn is well-known for its good food, we readily agreed. A special bonus is that the view from the dining room is roughly the view that Maud would have had from her room at the Lodge. It looks out on the wide Moon River (known in Maud's day as the Musquosh River). Maud would probably not object, however, to the change of name as she particularly admired the silver effect of the moon on the water. The shore slopes gently down through a lawn sprinkled with mature trees to a sandy beach and a small dock. Across the river to the left is a park jutting out into the river, looking rather like an island. Along the rest of the far shore are cottages and houses. Even today there are very few motorboats or other noisy mechanical gadgets and it was easy to relax and dream a bit.

That morning I had got up early and gone out to sample the scenery before anyone else was out and about. In the misty glow it was not hard to imagine "The Blue Castle" sitting just beyond the bay. I walked along the Bala Bay dock and took photos of the shoreline. Near the dock are Bala Falls where the water descends from Lake Muskoka to Moon River. The distant sound of the churning water reminded Maud pleasantly of the waves hitting on the North Shore of P.E.I. Below the falls Moon River widens out and moves peacefully along past Roselawn Lodge. Maud loved the pines at Bala which work their way into nearly every photograph, and also brought back memories of "The Island".

As the sun came out I was reminded of similar vivid colours, the contrast of the bright blue waters and the deep green pines, which I had seen less than a month ago on the gulf shore near Cavendish. As I returned to the Huttons' cottage I heard a loon calling from out on the lake. Yes, Maud and Ewen had chosen their 1922 vacation spot very well.



Jack Hutton

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