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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Case Of Seasickness Gave Us Best Writer

By NEIL A. MATHESON
Provincial - Farm Editor

AN UNUSUALLY bad case of sea sickness in the long ago gave this province its best known writer, Lucy Maud Montgomery. Otherwise she would have gone to Quebec. The story is interesting and I have to thank Mrs. J. E. Dingwell, the former Nellie Rogerson, Midgell for the first tip. Mrs. Dingwell was a close friend of Lucy Maud when they went to Prince of Wales College, 1893-94, and they formed what was known as the College Quartette, along with Ida MacEachern, Summerville who is now Mrs. George Sutherland, 75 Hillsboro Street and Mary Campbell, Darlington who later married Archie Beaton, Winsloe. Mrs. Beaton is dead but Mrs. Albert Middleton of the Towers Restaurant here is a daughter.

Lucy Maud's great, great grandparents, Mr. And Mrs. Hugh Montgomery were on a immigrant ship that was on the way to Quebec when the captain stopped it off Princetown, now Malpeque, and put a boat overside with men to get fresh water to replenish the supply. Mrs. Montgomery had been so terribly sick for so long a time, that the captain took pity on her and put her into the boat along with her husband, so she could get her feet on solid ground for the time the men took to find water and fill the utensils.

BUT GREAT, great grandma Montgomery refused to go back in the boat when the time came for it to leave, she decided to stay on the Island, and she was determined about it. Putting her foot down firmly she said, "Here I am and Here I stay."

That part of the story is true for I found on a visit to her cousin, James F. Campbell, Park Corner that she had told the same story in later life in a series of articles she wrote for a newspaper, the name of which has slipped my memory.

But I couldn't confirm the part of the story that intrigued me: Mrs. Dingwell insists Lucy Maud had said that when her great, great grandmother died, her husband put up a headstone with the inscription at the bottom "Here I am and Here I Stay".

Presbyterian Elders Took Exception?

THE REST of the story is that the old Presbyterian elders took a most serious view of the inscription, and called the widower to task for what might be interpreted as a dangerous departure from the faith of his fathers. I asked Mr. Campbell about it and he said "I don't know, but I would suggest that it was most unlikely."

The Mrs. Montgomery of the "Here I am and Here I Stay" incident was laid to rest on a little knoll that is just across from "The Lake of Shining Waters" at Park Corner, and the sandstone headstone, if there ever was one, had disintegrated, apparently, before the remaining stones were moved to the old cemetery at the historic Geddie Memorial

Church in the time that Chief Justice Thane A. Campbell was premier and attorney-general, 1936-43.

The land on which the old cemetery was located is owned now by Robert Montgomery, I was told.

THE HEADSTONE placed to her great, great grandmother MacNeill was moved to the Geddie Memorial spot, but not the Montgomery stone. I hunted through the old cemetery one day last summer, during one of the heaviest rainstorms of the year, and I got thoroughly soaked as I searched for a Montgomery headstone - they were sandstones as I recall, and a distinctive color - that had been moved from Park Corner. It was later that Mr. Campbell told me that it wasn't there.

I should say here that Mrs. Dingwell tells me it was Mrs. MacNeill, not Mrs. Montgomery, that was put overside in the boat at Princetown, and she recalls too that Lucy Maud had told her the boat was bound for New Brunswick, not Quebec as I have reported. But the newspaper story I saw by the famous writer said Quebec, that's why I am using it, and the name Montgomery was also used in it. Mr. Campbell told me that both of the great, great grandmas, Montgomery and MacNeill, had often longed to return to their home over the seas, stories handed down report that they often walked the floor with their bonnets on their heads demanding to be taken back, but there was no turning back in those days, apparently, when crossing the ocean was a trip of several months duration.

Story Recalled 70 Years Later

I TALKED a few days ago to Mrs. Dingwell and Mrs. Sutherland, the only members of the "College Quartette" still living, and it was interesting to have them recall some of the stories 70 years later. The four had been unusually close friends. They had often gone for strolls together and Lucy Maud invariably entertained them with her stories, often in Victoria Park where the four went for many of their walks.

"We heard most of the stories in 'The Story Girl' before the book was written", Mrs. Dingwell recalled, and both of them assured me the girl who later achieved world fame had always remained loyal to her friends.

TWO OF the quartette named daughters for the famous writer. Mrs. Dingwell named a daughter Alice Maud, she is now Mrs. Gordon Coffin, Morell. The other daughter is Mrs. Middleton who was also named Maud.

Mr. And Mrs. Campbell showed me the "Blue Chest" which Lucy Maud wrote about in one of her stories. It had been Eliza Montgomery's hope chest, and she had left for the Bay of Chaleur area when the romance fell through, leaving orders the chest was never to be opened. And it wasn't until some 70 years later that the lid was lifted in the presence of the then famous writer.

Bolster Slip Brings Back Memories

THE CAMPBELLS kindly showed some of the contents to Mrs. Matheson and me, and the one I remember best is the old bolster slip, or cover, with Eliza's name on it in fine needlework. I had forgotten that there had been such things as bolsters, until the

sight of this one brought back vivid memories of boyhood days in Rose Valley when I slept on one. The bolster was a long, thick pillow arrangement that stretched clear across the head of the bed. The pillows were placed on top of it, and we slept with the head on the two thicknesses.

“Lucy Maud was my father’s first cousin, and my mother’s cousin as well”, Mr. Campbell told me. The writer herself referred to James F.’s father as “Uncle John Campbell” and she wrote several of her books including the Silver Bush novels there, Mr. Campbell told us as we sat in the parlor where she was married, and looked at the organ on which her mother had played the wedding march.

THE “SILVER BUSH” was a grove of Rock Maples that could be seen through one of the parlor windows, and they do give the silver appearance. The present grove is second growth stuff from the Maples in the Silver Bush books.

The beautiful “Lake of Shining Waters”, which is just across a culvert from the interesting old house, sparkles in the sunlight as you look through another parlor window. The ‘shining waters’ description must have been a natural for the imaginative young lady who was brought up at the MacNeills after her mother had died when the child was only 21 months old.

Campbell Home Is Fascinating

I’M WONDERING why something cannot be done to preserve this house in which our most famous Islander wrote so many of her stories which are still selling freely, though the author has been dead for many years. The beautiful setting of the Campbell home is fascinating in itself, it is even more fascinating when seen through the shimmering shadows of history that came crowding in on us as we sat there in the slowly fading afternoon sunlight and shared with the Campbells some of the memories of the past.

Space is getting scarce and there are so many things I want to tell you. James F. recalls for instance that his father often sat on a wintry day and tried to fish some of the contents of the Blue Chest through a narrow crack, with a fish hook on a string.

THE MACNEILLS kept the post office and Rev. Ewan MacDonald - Mrs. Dingwell tells me he was a cousin of Colin MacBeath, Forest Hill who was married to my father’s sister - used to come to buy stamps. He bought only a few at a time, so he could come more often, and in 1911 he married the young lady who he had really been coming to see all the time.

Final Days Spent In “Journey’s End”

LUCY MAUD spent her final days in “Journey’s End”, a house which she built for herself in Toronto, where she and her husband moved in 1935, and she had been looking forward to another trip to P.E.I. when she died April 24, 1942.

She started “Anne of Green Gables” for which she is best known, in the spring of 1904 and finished it in October 1905. It was done on an old typewriter that wouldn’t print the capital “W”, Mr. Campbell told me. After it had been rejected by several editors, the manuscript was lying in an old hat box in a closet when Miss Montgomery

decided to have another look at it on a cold wintry day. She decided it was worth the postage that would take it to still another publisher and that was the key that opened the door to a series of charming stories that a hungry reading world fairly gobbled up. The first Anne book released to the public on June 20, 1908 was received sensationallly; had the manuscript been rejected that time, it is probable that the many stories of Lucy Maud Montgomery might never have been written.