

L. M. Montgomery Institute opens

New institute promotes appreciation of author's work

The new Lucy Maud Montgomery Institute, dedicated to the study and promotion of Montgomery and her literary works, was launched in late April of this year at the University of Prince Edward Island.

The project began with a report submitted to the university by professors F.W.P. Bolger, Robert Campbell, Beth Percival, and Elizabeth Epperly. Their recommendations for a Montgomery institute were approved by the university and passed on to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), which provided the bulk of the project's funding (\$21,463.00 annually for three years), enabling the institute to open officially last spring. The launching party at the university drew a crowd of 100 to 250 people and garnered a great deal of local media attention, demonstrating the strong public interest in and affection for Montgomery and her works. "People feel that this [the institute] is long overdue", says Dr. Epperly, the chair of the L.M. Montgomery Institute Committee.

Work on the institute's projects is well underway, overseen by Epperly and by Doctor Claire Fawcett, who was hired as a coordinator and researcher for the institute. Fawcett also heads the institute's "English as a Second Language" school aimed at Japanese students, running from July 31 to August 27 on campus this summer. Fawcett, Epperly, and their associates are conducting interviews with persons linked to Montgomery or her works, and are also soliciting Montgomery-related artifacts. Epperly herself intends to donate a photo album she recently acquired, its photos of Montgomery and her family dating back as far as 1860.

The institute already has access to a wealth of Montgomery materials in the university's P.E.I. Collection. Items in storage include copies of some of Montgomery's scrapbooks, letters, and postcards, and even flowers given to her as gifts, which she kept. Most importantly, the

collection includes first editions of all her novels except *Anne of Green Gables*.

Epperly has access to still more material through the Confederation Centre of the Arts, which has hired her on a contract basis as the curator of the original L.M. Montgomery manuscripts in the Centre's collection. An exhibition of these works is planned, as is a catalogue. A major goal for Epperly and the institute is to create a permanent display space for these manuscripts, but that would require space that the institute does not have. For that matter, the institute has no official office space as of yet.

Though the institute is active, Epperly explains that "in Montgomery terms, the institute is a 'blue castle.'" That is, it does not really exist in the sense that it has no offices of its own, and no funds with which to buy or rent in the foreseeable future. The bulk of the institute's funding goes toward a salary for its coordinator (Fawcett), and Epperly says that the "pitiful bit left [over] from that" will be used to promote an upcoming international symposium on Montgomery to be held on campus June 23 to 26, with presentations by internationally recognized Montgomery scholars.

The institute hopes to eventually gather enough backing to become financially self-sufficient within the next three years, before the initial SSHRC grant runs out.

Beyond space requirements and financial goals, the institute is for now concerned with its chief mission, the promotion and study of Montgomery's works. Montgomery has in recent years attained greater scholarly credibility than she once had, having been dismissed by

Dr. Elizabeth Epperly chairs the L.M. Montgomery Institute Committee.



many in the past as a children's writer or popular novelist. Epperly credits Montgomery's new respectability to the women's movement and "the reassessment of the [literary] canon", specifically a greater appreciation for the significance of Montgomery's impact as an enormously influential presence in the Canadian literary landscape. Epperly hopes to strengthen this presence through the activities of the institute, and despite limited funds and lack of office space the project is well on its way to achieving its goals.

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