Chatelaine

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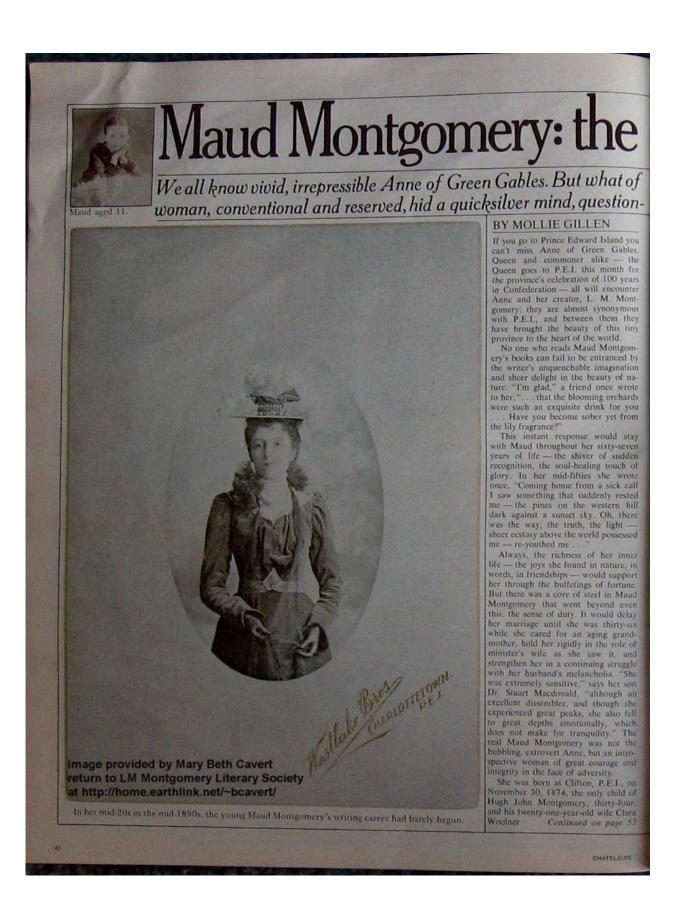
Editor **Doris McCubbin Anderson**

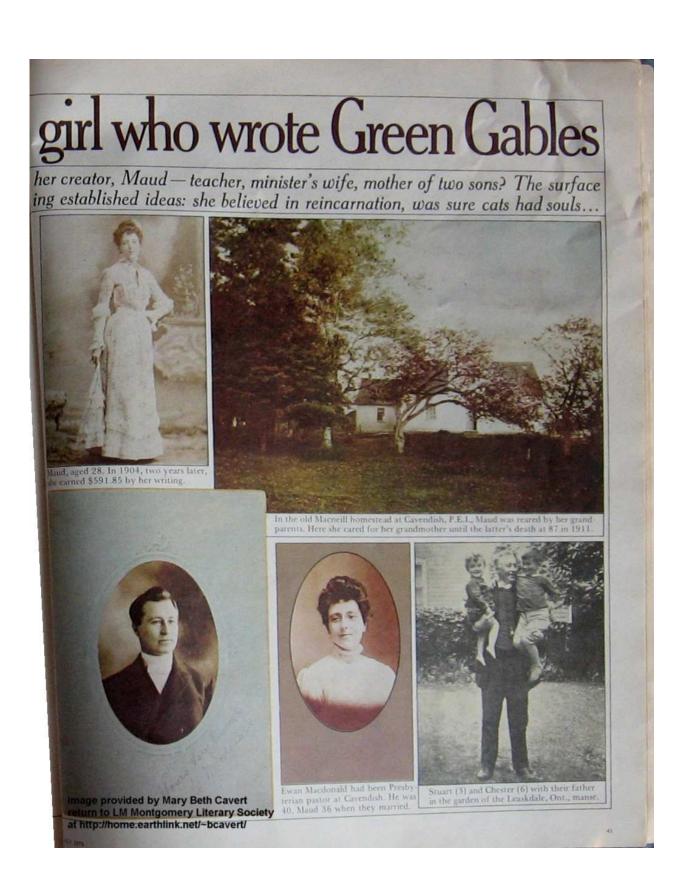


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Maud Montgomery: The Girl Who Wrote Green Gables / Mollie Gillen







Macneill, Maud Montgomery's children and grandchildren are related to half the Island's population. Even young Gracie Firley, who plays the immortal Anne in the Charlottetown production of Anne Of Green Gables, is a cousin in some degree or other of Maud Montgomery's surviving son. Dr. Stuart Macdonald. Dr. Macdonald, a second cousin of the present premier, Alex Campbell, hasn't been back to the Island for twenty-seven

years, except to attend the ceremony in April 1969 when the CNR's four-million-dollar 100-car ship ferry was named for his mother. "How could I go back, except anonymously, with all those relatives?" he asks good-humoredly.

The little Maud Montgomery, her mother dead of tuberculosis at the age of twenty-three in September 1876, her father departed for a new way of life in Suskatchewan, spent her girlhood at the Macneill home-stead in Cavendish — "eleven miles from a railway and twenty-four from

a town, but only half a mile from one of the finest sea-beaches in the world" — with her maternal grand-

world" — with her maternal grand-parents.

P.E.I. archives are full of family names among the magistrates, teach-ers, ministers and legislators of the Island. Mau d's great-grandfather William Macneill served for twenty years in the legislature and was "Old Speaker Macneill" for sixteen of them: her grandfather Donald Mont-gomery (Big Donald) was fifty-four years a legislator, twenty of them in the Canadian Senate.

Family traditions tell how the first Montgomery, Hugh John, came to settle in P.E.I. in 1769. He had been heading for Quebec with wife and family and two brothers. The ship anchored off the Island for water after the long Atlantic crossing, and Hugh John's wife, Mary MacShan, non, intolerably sensick, went ashore with the boat for a temporary excape Once ashore, she announced firmly that nothing would ever make her leave dry land again: Hugh John's pleas and protests went unneeded. He landed there, perforce, and founded the P.E.I. branch of the family. One of his brothers eventually got as far as muddy York, where a descendant's enterprise would make "Montgomery's Tavern" a historic name in Canada.

Though Maud Montgomery has said the Anne books were not autobiographical (in actual incident, perhaps they are not) it's easy to think that Matthew and Marilla Cutbbert, the brother and sister who adopted Anne, were in some respects standins for the grandparents who brought up the young Maud. All the scenes in her books are home-based on her childhood in Cavendish and redolent of her love of homeland.

It is said that she was a solitary child, though she was varrounded by relatives, uncles, aunis, cousins living not too far away — and for three years from the age of seven she had as inseparable companions two little boys her own age, Wellington and David Nelson, who were boarding at her grandparents' home: but if solitary, she was not a lonely child, not with that intense, passionate innellife, with her cager curiosity and effortless dreaming. "I had in my imagination a passport to fairyland" she said. Trees — particularly trees—leaves, shadows, flowers, clouds, kittens — especially kittens — seashells and sea spray, moonight and sunshine, all were the breath of life to young Maud, a magic she shared with two shadowy chortie haunts. "A friend would comment years later. She had a phenomenal memory. She read voraciously from the classics on the Maeneill bookshelves—but not on Sundays, except Pilgmis Progress and sermo

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sites, kine more law, early eard II.

It was a memorable year. "I remember how frightened I was by my first western thunderstorm," she realled fifry years later. "I positively crouched. It seemed as if every simultaneous crash and flash mist rend the house in pieces." Only three weeks after her arrival the first through train steamed into Prince Albert from the CPR main line: at three o'clock on Wednesday, October 22, a large crowd watched the Lieutenant-Governor drive the last spike. In mid-January 1891, Hugh John took his seat as an elected town councilor, appointed chairman of the councilor, appointed chairman of the Board of Works; as well, he was an officer of St. Paul's Presbyterian Church and a member of the Saskatchewan Curling Club (a chill caught while curling caused his death in June 1900).

In February, the ladies of St. Paul's held an entertainment in aid of the new church to be started that summer, and Miss M. Montgomery gave a recitation. In June came a big event in her sixteen-year-old life—an article, bylined Lucy Maud Montgomery, more than two columns of print in the Prince Albert Times, entitled A Western Eden. As usual, what impressed young Miss Montgomery were the scenie beamies of the little town "nestling at the foot of the terraced hills... and beyond it the wast sweep to the forest primeval ... the level grassy meadows — picturesque bluffs which curve around, every few yards, to enclose a tiny blue lake ... the magnificent river that rolls its blue tides freighted with the mysteries of former ages, past its poplar-fringed banks, with the busy little town on the one side, and the unbroken forests of the northland on the other."

The Indian she saw disappointed her. She had half-expected "to see a dusky warrior, clad in all his ancient panophy of war-paint and feathers, spring from [the] shadows, and ring his war-whoop over the waters of the river"; but alas, "the warrior never does appear ... he belongs to an extinct species now." Never-heless, she had great hopes for Saskatchewan..." a

bousands ... Hurrah for Saskatchewan!"

For the next seventeen years, until publication of the book on which ther fame still rests, Maud Montgomery continued her education (Prince of Wales College, Charlottetown, Dahousie College, Charlottetown, Dahousie College, Charlottetown, Oracle with the Halifax Daily Echo, and in June 1902 came back to Cavendish to care for her grand-mother Macneill (her grandfather had died in 1898). And all the time, the wrote wrote poems, short stories, sent them to a host of North American publications. Many came back. Some were published, unpaid. A few sarned subscriptions to the magazines. Around 1895, in Halifax, she actually received three cheques in a seek, totaling \$22.

By 1906 she was thirty-one, still unmarried, still tied to her aging sandmother. That December she sold a story for an amazing \$100—It had also been rejected twice, once by a magazine that pays ten," she wrote smuly to Ephraim Weber, the man who would be a platonic pen-friend for nearly forty years. ("Just think," she wrote at the twenty-five-year mark in 1926, when we began exchanging letters beer wasn't a single 'traffic cop' in 100,1733.



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MONDAYS/10 PM Very Interesting People interviewed by Lorraine Thomson











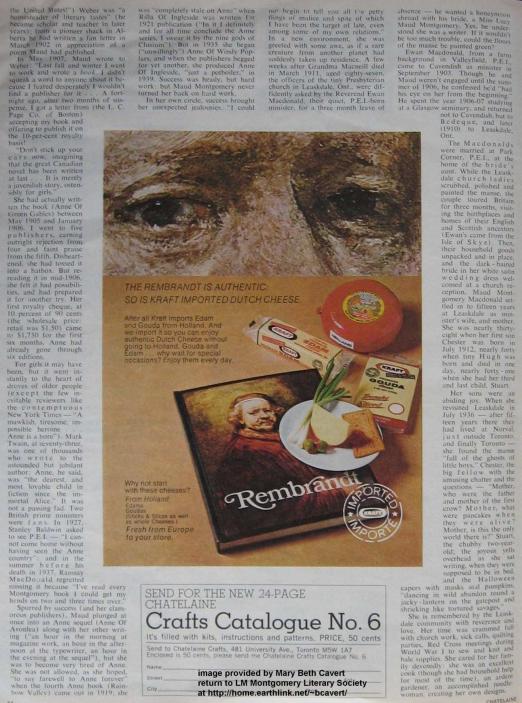


image provided by Mary Beth Cavert, return to LM Montgomery Literary Society at http://home.earthlink.net/~bcavert/

was "the dearest, and most lovable child in fiction since the immortal Alice." It was not a passing fad. Two British prime ministers were fan s. In 1927, Stanley Baldwin asked for see P.E.I.—"I cannot come home without having seen the Anne country": and in the summer before his death in 1937, Ramsay MacDonald regretted missing it because "Tve read every Montgomery book I could get my hends on two and three times over."

Spurred by success (and her clamorous publishers), Maud plunged at once into an Anne sequel (Anne Of Avonlea) along with her other writing ("an hour in the morning at magazine work, an hour in the afternoon at the typewriter, an hour in the evening at the sequel"), but she was to become very tired of Anne. She was not allowed, as she hoped, "to say farewell to Anne forever" when the fourth Anne book (Rainbow Valley) came out in 1919; she

Maud performed her role in the manse with scruplous attention to what she felt was expected from inster's wife, and never devisted from the script, but her congregated might have been astonished by the emphatise and the script have been astonished by the emphatise and the script have been astonished by the emphatise cally unorthodox thought of see. All the script have been astonished by the script of conce, in 1920, she word for string up late at a young farmer's wedding up late at a debt of the consolidation of the script of the



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She had leaned toward a belief in reincarnation for many years. "Oh, yes, it is fascinating to suppose that we go from one existence to another," she wrote from Cavendish in 1906, "with the restful sleep of so-called death between! To me, the idea is a thousand fold [more] attractive than that of the Christian's heaven with its unending spiritual joys." When the body was worn out, "the undying spark within us. seeks and finds another 'robe of flesh' and proceeds to build up another personality." Se believed also that there was life elsewhere in the universe— "It would be absurd to think God would waste so many good She had leaned toward a belief in

waste so many good

Perhaps she should ister. She listed the bor-ing details of a week in 1923: rehearsal for a play being put on by the guild; out to tea; rehearsals; address and gift to departing Wom-on's Missionary Society. Perhaps she should gift to departing Women's Missionary Society member; guild social. She was not a mixer, she wrote furiously—only an excellent imitator of one. She detested mixers, and despised herself because the circumstances of her life demanded that she ane them. The only her life demanded that she ape them. The only really worthwhile peo-ple she ever knew were "cats who walked by themselves, rejoicing in their particular brand of cathood."

of cathood."
She loved cats, but guiltily, because her grandparents had despised them. She found the house haunted for months by fourteen-year-old Daffy, accidentally shot.—"the dentally shot - "the last living link with the old life" sent up from P.E.I. to the Leaskdale manse. A later cat, Lucky, was even more sadly mourned. "I loved other cats as cats. I loved Lucky as a hu-man being . . . what-ever Lucky was, he was ever Lucky was, he was not a cat . . . it was not a cat soul that inhabited (his body)," and she wondered if all the cats she had loved would meet her, purring, at the pearly gates. She revealed much of herself to Weber in her letters, though she wrote once, "Biography is a

herself to Weber in her letters, though she wrote once, "Biography is a screaming farce... I wouldn't want some of my soul moods depicted... for the evil ones would shame me and the good ones would be descerated."

Each return to P.E.I. revitalized her, bringing "a shock of amazement ... Such fields of daisies and clover! Such sunsets and twilights and fir woods, such blue majestic oceans, such provocative alluring landscapes. Oh, I felt that I belonged there—that I had done some violence to my soul when I left it."

She had faith in the young, though perhaps she was a fatalist; at least she did not share Weber's pessimism about his students. "Youth is the same in every century. In some it is

more rigorously repressed than in others — but underneath the repression it is the same — foolish until years teach it bitter wisdom, rebelious until life teaches the futility of rebellion, cocksure until innumerable mistakes have humbled it, selfish and indulgent and hungry — until when — alas, I fear till the grave close over it. We do not change much; we only grow weaker and wearier. . . . To me, much of the education of today is like an inadequate spoonful of wine in a glassful of water And why worry because one jug

children's . . . Everything will go — our financial institutions, our standards of value, our ways of living."
Her role as famous personage grew more demanding, and honors poured in — Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Letters of England, the Silver Medal of the Literary and Artistic Institute of France, Officer of the Order of the British Empire. She was in constant and exhausting demand as a public speaker. She wrote ceaselessly all her life; she published twenty-one works of fiction, innumerable short stories and

illusioned, when she met them, by snobbishness and superficiality in many of the famous people whose writings she had loved and admired. "The gods should not come to earth at all." Her husband suffered periods of deep depression and constantly complained about his health; Maud herself, in younger days, wrote of enduring years of sick headaches and "nervous trouble." The effort to keep a bright face and hide her husband's melancholia from his congregations had proved too much. In 1939 a nervous breakdown kept her in anguish for four months—"a dreadful restlessness obsessed me and I

— "a dreadful restless-ness obsessed me and I had to get up and walk the floor . . I shall never forget the terrible nights." World War II brought deep depres-sion, though her sons were not involved; Chester rejected for short-sightedness Stuar short-sightedness, Stuart deferred (during her deterred (utiling her lifetime) as a medical student. "It is not fair that we who went through all this before should have to go through it again."

through it again."

In the last six months of 1940 she had another dreadful nervous breakdown. "I do not think I will ever recover," she wrote hopelessly to Weber. "Let us thank God for a long and true friendship."
They had met only three times in the whole forty times in the whole forty

She died in April 1942 and was buried in her beloved Cavendish, where she was joined by her husband a year later. One source says she made about \$75,000 from her writing; from Anne under her own copyright, \$22,000 (in 1917 she sold rights to her first seven books outright to Page for \$20,000). Movie rights were denied her, and a lengthy lawsuit with Page, who had issued Further Chronicles Of Avonlea without author-

Avonea without authorization proved a costly hollow victory.

One of her monuments in the National Park at Cavendish. She had resented it at first. "I hated the thought of all those lovely play all those lovely old lanes and woods — en-circled fields where I roved for years being descrated—flung open to the public — but

desecrated—flung open to the public — but perhaps someone who would not care would destroy the lanes. Now they are to be preserved exactly as they are." But in 1940, three years later, she was happy about it . . . "a thing of beauty. They have kept all my old beloved haunts and added new beauties." beauties.

beauties."

Her other monument is Anne Of Green Gables. Whether in book, in movie, in stage play or in musical, whether in English, French, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Japanese, or in Braille, Anne is still reaching the hearts of all who encounter her. END hearts of all who encounter her.

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holds a quart and another only a pint. And that most receptacles are sieves, holding nothing at all! Be wise. Just keep on pouring . . . and be thankful you have something to

She thought the world was on the She thought the world was on the threshold of new and amazing revelation. As early as 1927 she had an uncanny apprehension about the atomic future. "The discovery of a way to release the energy of the atom will be the next epochal thing after the dynamic of Jesus. I hope it will not come in my time, nor in my will not come in my time, nor in my will not come in my time, nor in my

poems, as well, says her son, as "a volume of mediocre verse." Though poetry was her passion, "her own efforts were naïve... She was the first to admit that her writings were not great literature... However, I know that her main source of strength was the knowledge that she came up the hard way by her own efforts.

the hard way by her own efforts, with never in her life violating her personal and professional integrity."

Perhaps the split between her passionate inner life and the bright artificial role of "mixer" became in the end too wide. She found herself dis-