

## What Happened to Nate Lockhart?

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Nate Lockhart was one of L. M. Montgomery's best friends in her late childhood and early adolescence on Prince Edward Island. Their close friendship was the envy of their Cavendish School classmates and it was inevitable that it would blossom into young love, but only for Nate – Maud succumbed to young “like,” as was her fate with some of her favorite suitors.

In Montgomery's late fifties, she revisited the letters and her memories of Nate Lockhart and recorded his history in her journals. After writing a long entry about the unwelcome and persistent attentions of Isabel Anderson, an intrusive admirer, she returned to recollections of her long-ago friendship in “another happy time.” The 1932 journal juxtaposition of Isabel and Nate places the last person to write a love letter to her next to the first person to write “... the one whom I love ... is L.M. Montgomery...” (SJI: 16)

Nate's parents were Nathan Joseph Lockhart and Nancy Jane Whitman. Nathan was born at Cow Bay, near Halifax, Nova Scotia in December 1851. He was the younger brother of poet Arthur John Lockhart (Pastor Felix) and grew up in the land on the Minas Basin. Nathan's middle name was in honor of his uncle, Joseph Bezansen who, according to Pastor Felix, died at sea. Nancy was born in October 1850 at Aylesford, Nova Scotia near the Minas Channel. Nancy was a teacher and was descended from early settlers in the Massachusetts Colony who later came to Nova Scotia as Loyalists in 1761. Nathan and Nancy were married in January 1874. Like his father, Nathan was a sailor and left his new wife to go on a voyage to South America nine months after their marriage. Montgomery notes that Nathan was washed overboard near Cape Hatteras (it is called the “Graveyard of the Atlantic” and is near North Carolina, USA). She wrote “... Mrs. Lockhart was expecting Nate's birth and went home to her mother's for it. On the train she picked up a paper and read in it an account of her husband's death!” (SJ4: 168)

Nancy gave birth to a son on February 16, 1875 in Aylesford and named him after his father, Nathan Joseph Lockhart, Jr. Four years later, she married John Church Spurr who was born in Cow Bay in 1846. John adopted Nate and he and his wife had a baby in 1883, Edith May Spurr. A few years after their daughter's birth, when Nate was probably about 10 years old, they moved to Cavendish, Prince Edward Island where Rev. Spurr was placed as the new Baptist minister.



Maud Montgomery liked Mrs. Spurr and became better acquainted with her when she took music lessons in the Spurr parsonage. In 1887 or 1888, Nate received a copy of his uncle's first book of poetry (*A Masque of Minstrels and Other Pieces* – Arthur John Lockhart). This alone elevated him to a “romantic” status in young Maud's eyes because she loved poetry and idolized published poets. After this, Nate started using his Lockhart surname in place of Spurr. Montgomery describes sweet impressions of the freckled boy who was just as ambitious, intelligent and competitive as she was. Montgomery recounts how much fun she had attending the Baptist church on Sunday nights for social reasons and enjoying Nate's glances. She wrote about their common interests, humor, and passion for reading and books.

When Nate turned 15 and declared his love for Maud, she “retreated,” as she called it, even though she tried to persuade herself to love him. As it was, she offered him friendship and, being proud and gallant, Nate backed away graciously. Montgomery left home to stay with her father in Prince Albert for a year and Nate entered Acadia College (Acadia University) at Wolfville in 1891. He played sports (rugby) and earned a BA in 1895 and an MA in 1896. Nate and Maud corresponded during those years and saw each other briefly just a few times. His family left Cavendish in 1896 and he stayed in Nova Scotia to teach. He entered Dalhousie University in Halifax and earned a law degree in 1902. Montgomery had unexpectedly seen him at Dalhousie in 1901 but he did not contact her after that, though she asked him to call on her. Montgomery regretted the loss of his friendship and was hurt that he never wrote to her again, even after her dream of publishing a book, a dream she shared with him, came true.

Nate Lockhart practiced law in Sydney, NS from 1902 to 1906 and became engaged to Mabel Celeste Saunders of Wolfville. Mabel was born in Bridgetown, NS in 1870 and was a graduate of Dalhousie University. She taught school in Nova Scotia and then married Nate in North Sydney on February 6, 1906.

In a published history of Estevan, Saskatchewan, *A Tale That is Told: Estevan 1890 – 1980*, Mabel's family history is described. "Mrs. Lockhart was a direct descendant of Sir William Parsons, the Earl of Ross. She was a daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Walter Welton Saunders, who were descendants of John and Priscilla Alden of Longfellow's *Miles Standish*. Her great grandmother, Catherine Parsons, was born at the Castle of Birr in Ireland. Catherine Parson's father, Col. Parsons, fought in the battle between Montcalm and Wolf [1759] on the Plains of Abraham. Following the battle he remained in Canada, settling in Nova Scotia, then he sent for his wife and family."

Nate and Mabel moved to the young western town of Estevan in 1906. It is located at the south end of Saskatchewan only a few miles from the border of North Dakota, USA. Estevan had no running water but it had electricity until 1:00 am and telephone service until midnight. Nate set up a law practice -- "He was the first agent of the Attorney-General of Saskatchewan in this judicial district when it was originally established and was one of Estevan's first lawyers." When Montgomery achieved her great success with *Anne of Green Gables* in 1908, Nate may have been too busy to acknowledge his old friend. His first son, Hugh Walter Spurr Lockhart, was born on January 11, 1908 and his second son, Alan Nathan Lockhart, was born on November 25, 1908.

It is somewhat unlikely that Nate was not aware of Maud's success in 1908, even though he was located in a frontier town. He corresponded with his uncle, Arthur Lockhart ("Pastor Felix" to whom she dedicated her book, *Emily Climbs*), who became Montgomery's pen pal in 1908. Nate appeared to have retained his passion for books because he used his position as a civic leader to help start the local library in his office on February 12, 1908 at a planning meeting to organize the Estevan Public Library. He served on the board for several years. We would hope that *Anne of Green Gables* found its way to the shelves of the Estevan Library.

Nate was appointed King's Council in 1914. He was a lawyer who represented the government in criminal prosecutions. In 1913 he was the crown prosecutor against a man charged with trying to kill a family by putting "poison in the soup pot, contrary to the Criminal Code of Canada. ... The accused was found not guilty." In 1916 he shared his law offices with E. J. Campbell, W. J. Perkins, and A. J. O'Connor.

Montgomery knew only a few details of Nate's life from Pastor Felix. On December 13, 1921 she noted that she had received a letter from Pastor Felix in which he wrote that Nate's son was killed in a gun accident. He said that Nate "felt it deeply." Alan had died on May 14, 1921 and he was twelve years old. In 1932, when she wrote about it again, she explained her old feelings of hurt because "The boy might have been *my* son – if only I could have loved his father. I have always been sorry I couldn't – because Nate was such a jolly comrade." (SJ4: 172)

Nate and Mabel and Hugh Lockhart lived all their lives in Estevan and Nate was known to his friends as "Judge." He retired in the early 1930s, about the time that L.M. Montgomery was writing about him in her journal. The Lockharts spent their retirement winters in St. Petersburg, Florida until Nate's death in May 1954 at the age of seventy-nine. His wife died in 1966 at the age of ninety-six.



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