

The Artists of *Anne of Green Gables*: A Hundred Year Mystery

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The year 2008 will mark the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Anne of Green Gables*, a big event in the lives of those who love the book and the author, Lucy Maud Montgomery. I, being one of those devoted -- if not fanatical -- fans have been collecting old copies of Montgomery's books for decades. I have always loved the cover art of the old copies published by L.C. Page, Frederick Stokes, Harrap and others, and display many of my old copies as others would display art.

As the 100th anniversary approaches I believe we need to right a wrong, one that seems to have been perpetuated for decades. The original Page edition of *Anne of Green Gables* debuted in 1908, and immediately went into numerous printings. Over the years the cover art has been credited to W.A.J. Claus and M.A. Claus along with the frontispiece and the seven illustrations within the book. For years I have wondered about the truth of this. The illustrations in the book are so very different than the cover, and each of the illustrations is signed in the corner, W.A.J. Claus and M.A. Claus, while the cover is not.

According to the *Lucy Maud Montgomery: A Preliminary Bibliography* published in 1986 by Ruth Weber Russell, D.W. Russell and Rea Wilmshurst, credit for both the seven full-page illustrations and the cover art is given to the Clauses -- and here my search begins.

George Gibbs is credited with the cover art and frontispiece of Montgomery's other early edition books published by L.C. Page: *Anne of Avonlea* (1909), *Kilmeny of the Orchard* (1910), *The Story Girl* (1911), *Chronicles of Avonlea* (1912) and *The Golden Road* (1913) (*Anne of the Island* which came out in 1915 was illustrated by H. Weston Taylor). I have always felt that the cover of *Chronicles of Avonlea*, done by Gibbs, looked amazingly like the *Anne of Green Gables* cover, only reversed. Montgomery eventually ended her affiliation with L. C. Page, publishing her next books with the Frederick Stokes Company beginning with *Anne's House of Dreams* in 1917.

Many years ago in my search for stories and poems by L.M. Montgomery in old magazines, I came across a copy of the *Delineator* from January 1905 that has the very same picture, of a woman in profile, as the cover of *Anne of Green Gables*. Many LMM collectors have seen this magazine and it was on display at one of the last conferences held at the University of Prince Edward Island. The magazine does not credit the cover artist on the table of contents and no one seemed to know who illustrated the cover. So how is it that the cover of *Anne of Green Gables*, published in 1908, was on the cover of a magazine published in 1905? Montgomery hadn't even sent her manuscript to Page until the winter of 1906/1907, and received news in April of 1907 that he would publish the book. Was the 1905 *Delineator* cover done by W.A.J. or M.A. Claus or someone else?



First, who exactly were the Clauses? William Anton Joseph Claus was born in Mainz, Germany in 1862. He immigrated to America and can be found in the 1880 Boston, Suffolk County, Massachusetts census at the age of 18, living with his father, Joseph, a music teacher, and his brother Henry.

By 1890 William was listed in the Boston Directory as an artist and teacher at the N.E. Conservatory in Union Park, Boston. In 1900 he appeared in the Boston census as a lodger living with other artists and art teachers in Ward 10. According to the Boston Passenger lists of 1901, William was returning from Genoa and Naples, Italy aboard the ship *Commonwealth*. No doubt he was in Italy studying art for a time.

As of 1904 and 1905, Claus was listed (in the Boston Directory Supplement) as an artist at the Grundman Studios, which began as The Boston Art Students Association in 1879. It later changed its name to The Copley Society (after one of America's earliest painters) and continues its important role in the Boston art community today. The Grundman building was torn down in 1920 for new development and, after several more moves, finally found a permanent home on Newbury Street in Boston.

In *Who's Was Who in American Art*, William was described as a portrait and landscape painter and a photographer. He was director of the Claus Art School on Monhegan Island, Maine, and was one of the early artists to have a studio there. He exhibited at The Boston Art Club between 1880 and 1908, as well as The Art Institute of Chicago in 1905. Sometime between 1905 and 1908, he married May Austin.

May Austin, was born in Berlin, New York in 1882. According to *Who Was Who in American Art*, she lived in Boston and Provincetown, and studied at The Boston Museum of Fine Arts School. She was a member of the Pennsylvania Society of Miniature Painters. She exhibited at The Boston Art Club, Salons of America, and The Art Institute of Chicago. She also exhibited miniatures at The Pennsylvania Academy. *The New York Times* May 4, 1923 states:

Another triumph not too often achieved is to put an adequate look of intelligence into the minute features. May Austin Claus had done it in her 'Louise.'

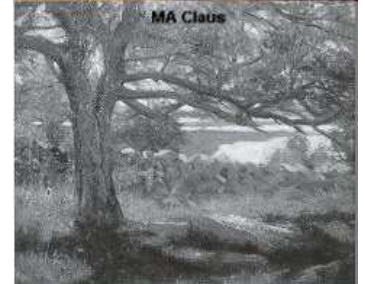
William died in 1926 but I have been unable to find a death date for May. As she was 20 years younger than William, she could have remarried after his death, and so took a new last name, which may be why I was unable to find a date of death for her.



W.A.J. Claus



M.A. Claus



Both William and May were talented artists, with many works to their credit. Since they lived in Boston, L.C. Page more than likely knew of them and their work, and this is perhaps how they came to be chosen to do the illustrations for *Anne of Green Gables*. In all my research, *Anne* is the only book that I can find that they illustrated. Looking at other examples of their work, I found nothing that resembles the cover art of *Anne of Green Gables*. Since George Gibbs did so many covers for Page, could he be the artist for the first *Anne* book?

George Fort Gibbs was born in 1870 in New Orleans, Louisiana. His father, Benjamin F. Gibbs was a US Medical Inspector, and in 1880 the family was living in Washington D.C. George attended the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, but instead of following a military career, he decided to pursue art instead.

George married Maud S. Harrison of Radnor, Pennsylvania, and they settled in Rosemont, a community in Radnor Township where they remained for most of their lives. George was very successful as an illustrator of books and magazines and later as a portrait painter. Because of his early military training he often illustrated for historical and military novels.

In 1905 Gibbs illustrated several *Delineator Magazine* covers. Doesn't the June 1905 cover remind you of the frontispiece of *The Story Girl*?



Gibbs was also an author. He wrote more than forty novels, and numerous short stories. Interestingly, he did not always do the illustrations for his own books. He wrote many romantic adventures and mysteries with such titles as: *The Medusa Emerald*, *The Forbidden Way*, *The Vagrant Duke* and *The Passionate Prelude*. *The New York Times* of November 1915 has a book review of Gibbs' novel, *The Yellow Dove*. The review states:

It is a story of the secret service, of desperate, audacious adventure by land and sea, and in the air—a swiftly moving tale of a gallant gentleman and a girl who proved herself to be his loyal and perfect mate. Scarce a glimpse of the contending armies, or of hospital or refugees or the general devastation is given in the narrative, so those who have long since supped full of horrors need not hesitate to read it.

In 1910 George and his wife Maud had two children; George Jr., age 7 and Theodore H. age 1. He was listed as an artist/author/illustrator. Their daughter, Sarah, was born in 1920, They apparently traveled often as I found them on several ships lists returning from such places as Bermuda and France. In 1930, George's occupation was listed as an author, and George Jr. as a playwright.

In 1934 George's youngest son Theodore, who had become a sculptor, tied for first place in a painting and sculpture competition held by The Alumni of the American Academy in Rome. In September 1941, *The New York Times* contained an announcement, that Gibb's daughter, Sarah, was engaged to be married to William McClure, a naval aviator. Sarah was a poet and author -- a very talented family indeed.

George Gibbs passed away in 1942 at the Bryn Mawr Hospital, after a long illness. Sadly, his son Theodore was killed in France in 1945. Theodore was awarded the Purple Heart and is buried in Epimal, France. Maud passed away in Pennsylvania in 1973.

Now we know a bit about the three illustrators but still have no proof as to who illustrated the first cover of *Anne of Green Gables*. I continued to search the internet, and contacted several libraries and archives, but every notation of the cover illustration credits May and William Claus. Certainly the book credits the Clauses for the illustrations, but it does not specifically say they did the cover art. As I found more and more examples of all three artists' works, I was even more convinced that the cover was done by George Gibbs.

Despite the differences in style, it would be easy to assume that the Clauses did the cover, especially since true scholarship of L.M. Montgomery did not begin until long after LMM, L. C. Page, Gibbs and the Clauses were deceased. Thus, there was no one left to set it right. The assumption became fact and was carried forward to the present day.

I believed that George Gibbs was the artist who did the cover and should get credit for it, but how could I prove it? So far my research had been interesting, but no proof had been found. Finally, after many, many long hours, late nights and contacting libraries and art institutes, I found the proof I needed!

It is 2 a.m. and I am browsing the archives of *The New York Times*, and there it is, just a few lines, but the truth! I found a June 20, 1908 heading, "Boston Gossip of Latest Books." Towards the bottom of the column a paragraph jumps out at me,

Anne of Green Gables, after many announcements, came this week from Messrs. L. C. Page and Company. The heroine, like many a real girl, was delayed by the dress question, a satisfactory cover not being easy to produce, but Mr. George Gibbs has made a portrait which really resembles the pleasing girl of the text, and does not look like all the other pretty girls on the book covers of 1908, so Anne, with her much-deprecated red hair, is now to be seen of men.

The next day I found one more way to truly prove that Gibbs should be credited as the artist. Being a fan of eBay, I had won an original letter written by George Gibbs on March 29th, 1905, and it arrived in the mail. The letter was hand written by George on his own letterhead. In the upper left corner is embossed into the paper, the letter G with a backwards G next to it, making a sort of circle -- where had I seen that before? I went through my collection of magazines and pulled out some *Delineators* from 1905. On the *Delineator* that has the cover from *Anne of Green Gables*, in the lower left corner, is the very same monogram. It also appears on an issue from another month of that year. So, the magazine didn't credit Gibbs on the contents page, but his signature had been there all along!



With this proof it is undeniable that George Fort Gibbs did the cover art for *Anne of Green Gables* and not W.A.J. Claus and M. A. Claus. Gibbs obviously had done the illustration by 1905, as it is on the *Delineator* cover, but he or L. C. Page must have felt that the picture was an appropriate depiction of Anne (maybe it was the only one with red hair that he had done so far). Gibbs certainly had no idea then that *Anne of Green Gables* would be such a success, or you would think that he would have insisted that he be

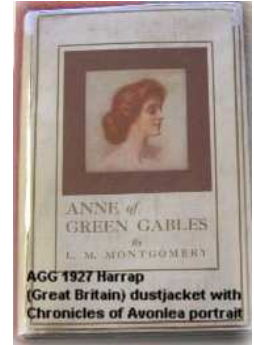
BOSTON GOSSIP OF LATEST BOOKS

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credited for the cover along with the Clauses being credited for the internal illustrations -- or perhaps it was just an oversight on L. C. Page's part. With the book's success, Gibbs seems to have made sure that he was credited with the cover and frontispiece of the rest of the Montgomery books that he illustrated.

It is a bit ironic that George Gibbs, who wrote more than forty novels, is not remembered as novelist. And, although he illustrated many books and magazines, his most famous illustration has not been credited to him. Despite providing the cover of a work that has been enjoyed by fans the world over for 100 years, he was not associated with it. Doesn't it seem time to correct the assumption and give credit to George Gibbs for his beautiful image of Anne, even if it is 100 years late?



Christy added this postscript after she finished her article:

The Penguin Group Canada is releasing a special 100th anniversary edition of *Anne of Green Gables* featuring the original cover art. In a press release announcing this, they had credited the original cover art to M.A. Claus and W.A.J. Claus. I called them and left a message that in fact George Gibbs had done the cover art. They did return my call, and stated that the editor was aware of the error and that when the book is released in 2008 the book will credit George Gibbs as the illustrator of the cover.

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[editors' note]

Montgomery wrote in her journal that L. C. Page had the original painting that was used on the *Anne* book cover displayed in his home library and included a photograph of it in her journal (see page 27 of Volume 2, *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*) but there is no indication of how or when he obtained it or under what circumstances. (A photograph of Mrs. Page in the same pose as the Gibbs portrait is on the same page of the published journal).

In a later journal entry recounting some of the details of a lawsuit with the Page Co., Montgomery noted that Page claimed he selected the book cover from an "old calendar" or picture he had (page 383, Volume 3), a statement she refuted having seen the original in his library. She remembered his referring to it as "our dear Anne." Whether the original portrait still exists is unknown at this time.

It is clear that Page did not commission the portrait especially for the book cover since it had already appeared on the cover of the *Delineator* several years earlier, but he may have commissioned a new portrait of the same image. Page's choice of a mature woman with bare shoulders does not seem to fit the character of *Anne of Green Gables* but it does reflect his appreciation of a beautiful picture.

While the publishers of the January 1905 *Delineator* did not credit their illustrator on the first pages of the magazine, they did so on the last pages. At the back of the magazine is an ad where readers can order the George Gibbs cover. In some of these magazines, owned by collectors today, this page is missing because readers took advantage of the offer in 1905 – and explains why this credit has been overlooked for so long.



Return to the web page of the L. M. Montgomery Literary Society
<http://home.earthlink.net/~bcavert/index.html>

The January cover design is a marvellously beautiful type of the American Girl executed in pastel by George Gibbs. The cut of it above can give you no idea of its rare charm or of the delicate coloring. We have prepared a separate "Artist's Proof" edition of this plate for framing. It is exactly the same as the cover page itself excepting that it has no advertisement on the back. We will mail you a copy rolled in mailing tube, without folding, on receipt of ten cents in stamps to cover postage, etc. The Butterick Publishing Company, Ltd. Butterick Building, New York.

Although the publishers of Gibbs' famous portrait called it "the American Girl," it has become the first and enduring image of a Canadian icon and classic book, *Anne of Green Gables*.

Joanne Wood is the researcher who first located the *Delineator* ad, in her own copy of the magazine, identifying George Gibbs as the cover artist. Joanne's work has appeared in *The Road to L.M. Montgomery: newsletter of the Kindred Spirits Society of Hamilton* and *The Avonlea Traditions Chronicle*.



Credits:

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